

What is conflict?

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Introduction

- International violence is becoming less problematic than it was during the last century – more intrastate conflicts, than interstate struggles.
- Ethnic conflicts will remain with us as a significant international and security challenge.
- The aim is to clarify the relevant concepts and theories which provide the foundation for any study of ethnic conflict.

The concept of conflict

- This word is derived from the Latin “con-fligo” which means strife.
- “Conflict is a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals”.
- Conflict is “a social situation in which minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at same moment in time an available set of scarce resources.”
- Conflict is a situation in which “actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or express their hostility”.

The concept of conflict

- What is “conflict behavior”?
- The definition suggests that conflict behavior is any behavior that helps the party to achieve its goal that is incompatible with that of the opponent or that expresses its hostility towards him.
- Rational action is based on careful deliberation, judgment and valuing a set of all relevant alternatives, assessing their outcomes correctly, evaluation in accordance with own values and then choosing the action that was the best. Contrary to that, non-rational actions are quick, impulsive and driven by emotions.


The concept of conflict

- Conflict action - conflict behavior.
- If the actions of conflict party are guided by rational considerations, then we speak about conflict action. When we assume that they may be rational or non-rational, we use the term conflict “behavior.”

The concept of conflict

- “coercive” - “non-coercive” action/behavior.
- Coercive action forces the opponent side to what they do not wish to do, by threatening to inflict injury or by actually inflicting it. The term “actual” coercion is used to describe the action if we try to weaken our opponents by injuring them. In this context, it is useful to distinguish between physical violence and symbolic injury. The first one, severe physical violence, can be violent, in sense of hurting or killing the opponents, or destroy their property. It could also have non-violent character, such as depriving opponents of resources they need. Symbolic injury, in the other hand, weakens the opponent by inducing fear, shame, or guilt.
- Not all conflict actions involve coercion

Low
coer-
civeness



High
coer-
civeness

“Pure”
coop-
eration

Promising
a reward

Trying to
persuade

Threat of
coercion

Nonviolent
coercion

Violent
coercion


Noncoercive action *Coercive action*

Figure 2.1. Coerciveness of Conflict Action

The concept of conflict

- “Conflict behavior” is an umbrella term that covers many diverse types of behavior. It can involve rational or non-rational conflict actions and expressions of hostilities and a range of behavior that is highly coercive as well as to behavior that is fully cooperative.

The concept of conflict

- Latent conflict,
- Manifestation of the conflict,
- Escalation,
- Dead-point,
- De-escalation,
- Resolution and
- Post conflict arrangement of relations (peace building).

The concept of conflict

- During the phase of latent conflict divergence of interests are perceived, but the actors are unwilling or unable to clearly articulate the existence of conflict.
- During the manifestation of the conflict at least one of the actors articulates its incompatible interests and intention to protect them at the expense of other party.
- During the escalation of the conflict both conflict parties try to achieve their goals. This phase has four sub-phases: 1. Discussion, 2. Polarization, 3. Isolation and 4. Destruction.

The concept of conflict

- Dead-point is a situation when neither conflict party is able to end conflict in his favor.
- De-escalation –decreasing the destructive power of conflict, a greater willingness to search compromise solutions.
- Resolution and post conflict arrangement, peace building restore relation between the parties, the objective is to restore cooperation and peace.

The concept of conflict

- According to The Uppsala Conflict Data Program:
- Minor armed conflicts - conflicts with more than 25 deaths but fewer than 1000 for the year and for the duration of the conflict
- Intermediate armed conflicts - conflicts with more than 25 deaths and fewer than 1000 for a year, but more than 1000 for the duration of the conflict
- Wars - conflicts with more than 1000 battle-related deaths in one year.

The concept of conflict

- Study of each conflict requires the research of: 1. Background of the conflict (history of mutual relations),
- 2. Type of actors,
- 3. character and nature of involved parties,
- 4. Reasons of conflict and
- 5. Context (the role of external actor).

The concept of conflict

- Projects - to understand why conflicts occur and how they can be terminated.
- Uppsala Conflict Data Program, based at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, in Sweden.
- J. David Singer – Melvin Small – Correlates of War. University of Michigan.
- Minorities at Risk, University of Maryland.
- KOSIMO – Konfliktbarometer, Universität in Heidelberg.

What is ethnic?

- Ethnic conflict is a phenomenon in the international affairs that is almost equally difficult to understand as it is to define. Who fight in the ethnic conflicts, and why do they do it? Why do ethnic conflicts cause cruel violence to civilians? What drives people to inflict such suffering? What is it that makes many an ethnic conflict so difficult to settle?

What is ethnic?

- The origins of the term “ethnicity” go back to the Greek word for nation – “ethnos”. In Ancient Greek this term described a community of common descent, a kinship group linked by ties of blood.
- The term “ethnicus” was also used in order to define “people from elsewhere” and to describe “primitive” or “archaically” non-European non-western societies.

What is ethnic?

- Yet, because of its increasingly politicized nature, and its implications for the relationships between people and between them and the states in which they live, definitions of ethnicity vary greatly and are hotly disputed among academics as well as among politicians. Its political consequences may be intriguing in itself and it is hard to clarify what lies at the heart of ethnicity and if and how its core components relate to ethnic conflicts. In order to achieve some clarity on these matters, it is useful to make some basic distinctions between different schools of thought on ethnicity.

What is ethnic?

- According to the so called primordial school, ethnicity is so deeply ingrained in human history and experience that it cannot be denied that it exists, it should therefore be considered as a fact of life in the relations between individuals and groups who all have an ethnical identity.
- Instrumentalists suggests that ethnicity is a resource in the hands of leaders to mobilize and organize followers in the pursuit of other interests, such as physical security, economic gains, or political power.

What is ethnic?

- Ethnic group - no universally excepted definition.
- In the United States ethnic is a group, which has its own identity and cultural traditions, but is a part of bigger society – that means that ethnic group is associated with minority. In Eastern Europe this term is used to describe society, which hasn't reached the level of “nation” or doesn't have its own state. In communist states the status of nation was recognized only to the people who had its own states, the others were ethnic groups.

What is ethnic?

- Anthony D. Smith - as a named population sharing common myths about its origins, historical memories, and cultural features and is associated with a certain territory and has a sense of solidarity.
- According to Richard Jenkins ethnicity is mainly about collective identification which is based on the perception of cultural differences; ethnicity concerns culture but stems from social, especially intergroup interactions; ethnicity is not fixed and static; ethnicity is collective and individualistic at the same time.

What is ethnic?

- Ethnicity as a neutral term, without any pejorative elements. Ethnicity will be mainly linked to habits, language, origins, collective experiences and group solidarity.
- This means that ethnic within this course will be understood as group who has its own culture and shares perception about their past which have created the sense of solidarity and association to the certain territory.

What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict is a term loaded with negative associations and entirely unnecessary confusions. The most important confusion is that ethnic conflicts are about ethnicity – “ethnicity is not the ultimate, irreducible source of violent conflict in such cases”. Alternatively, ethnicity may provide the mobilization basis for collective action, with violence being used as a tactic. It often forms an important part of the explanation, but we do not know of any conflict than can be explained solely by reference to ethnicity.

What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict is a situation “in which the goals of at least one conflict party are different in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of the ethnic distinctions.”
- This means that we speak about ethnic conflict “when at least one group defining the causes, fault lines, and potential solutions of the conflict along a real or perceived ethnic divide”.

What is ethnic conflict?

- Ethnic conflict are a form of group conflict in which at least one of its parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide
- It involves at least one conflict party that is organized around the ethnic identity of its members.

What is ethnic conflict?

- Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh – ethnic conflicts?
- The term “ethnic conflict” may be quite misleading. Georgia is not fighting specific ethnic groups but “separatists” – that is, people who are challenging its territorial integrity, whatever their ethnic origin”.
- On the other side for separatists the conflicts are about self-determination and reinforcement of their political rights on their ethnic home.

What is ethnic conflict?

- Thus we can claim that the conflicts inside Georgia with separatists were not caused by ethnic hostility. They were rather struggles about the national-state, over status of some specific groups and were caused by contradictions between their national projects.
- Conflicts in South Caucasus were about defending territory, ethnic homes and independence. However it should be said that nowadays mutual relation of conflict parties are ethnically hostile. This can lead us to the conclusion that ethnic animosity was not the cause, but the result of the frozen conflicts in South Caucasus.

What is ethnic conflict?

- While trying to define the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh we should think about if we call them by the nature of their issues (attempts of certain groups to carve out a separate space and status) or by the nature of participants (ethnic groups).
- To what extent ethnic conflicts in South Caucasus are actually about ethnicity and to what extent ethnicity is a merely suitable denominator to organize conflict group in the struggle over political power, territory and independence.

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