What Is Conflict – Towards Conceptual Clarity
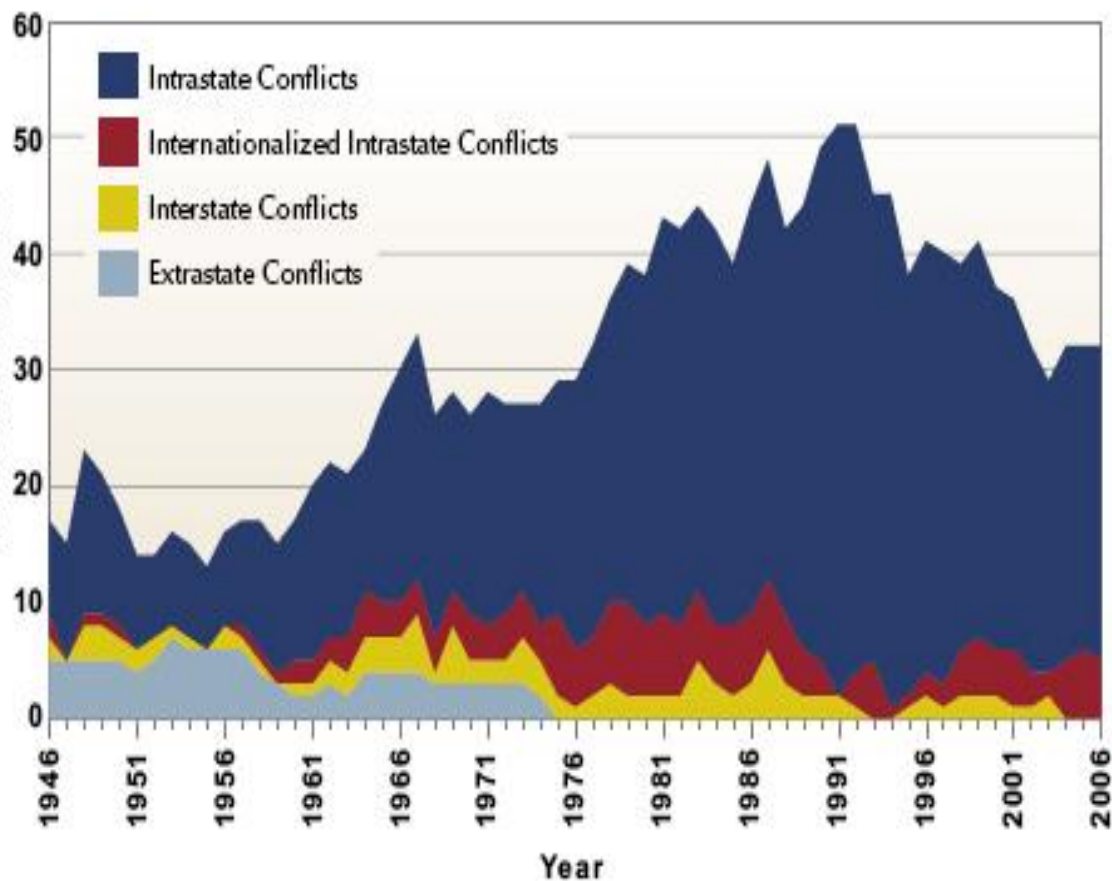
MVZ208 Ethnic Conflicts in South Caucasus

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Introduction

- International violence is becoming less problematic than it was during the last century – more intrastate conflicts, than interstate struggles.

- From 1989 to 1996 there were 69 armed conflicts, of which only five have been between states.

Figure 3.1 State-Based Armed Conflicts by Type, 1946-2006

Legend:
- Intrastate Conflicts
- Internationalized Intrastate Conflicts
- Interstate Conflicts
- Extrastate Conflicts

After more than a decade of uneven decline, the number of state-based conflicts being fought around the world has levelled off.

Data Sources: UCDP/PRIO; UCDP.
Human Security Report Project Dataset

Human Security Brief 2

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".

- In general, conflict is understood in terms of aspirations of conflicting parties to achieve incompatible goals simultaneously.

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."
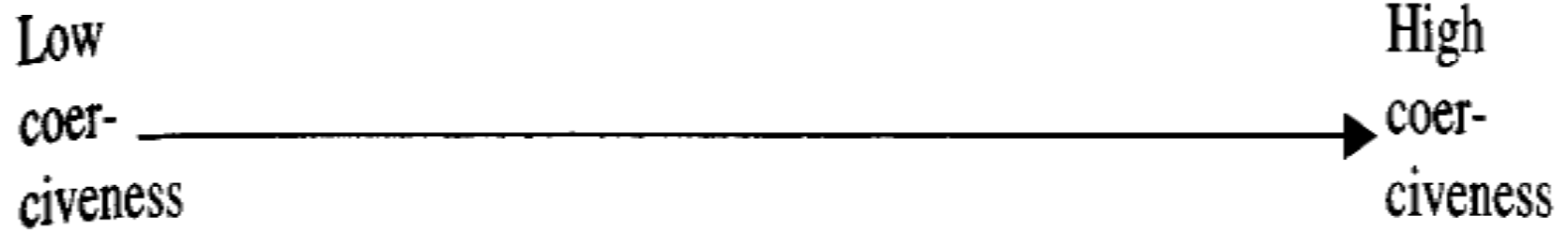
The concept of conflict

- "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.

- Distinguish between physical violence and symbolic injury.
- 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.
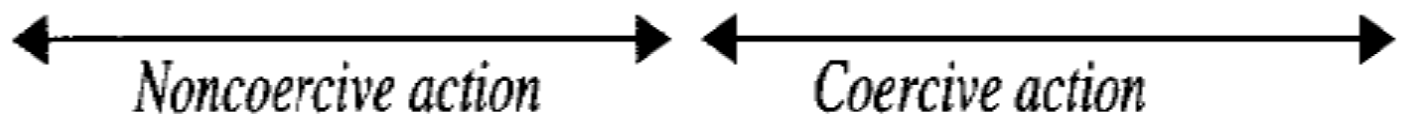
The concept of conflict

- "**Conflict behavior**"

- 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.

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

- *Goals are incompatible* when the action of one party threatens the interests of another party.

- The complexity of conflict depends whether **tangible issues** (like recognition, security, territory, money) are more significant than **intangible aspects** like symbolic meanings that shape values and ideologies, legitimizing a certain conflict behavior.

The concept of conflict

- Donald Horowitz: "conflict is a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals" (Horowitz 1985: 95).

- The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research defines conflict as "the clashing interests (political differences) on national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organization) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their cases".

Towards conceptual clarity

- Peter Wallensteen:
- In order to understand and provide conflict analysis, we have to focus on three major components of the phenomenon:
- 1) actors,
- 2) process (action), and
- 3) incompatibility (issues at stake).

The concept of conflict

- By combining these aspects, we arrive at a most comprehensive analysis of all possible kinds of conflict, which is a "social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources" (Wallensteen 2009: 15).

Typology according to actors

- (1) Extrasystemic armed conflict, which takes place between a state and a non-state group outside its own territory. In the Correlates of War (COW) project, this category is further divided into colonial wars and imperial wars;

- (2) interstate armed conflict, which occurs between two or more states;

- (3) internal armed conflict, in which the government of a state is in conflict with internal opposition groups without intervention from another state; and

- (4) internationalized internal armed conflict, when conflict occurs between the government of a state and internal groups in opposition to and with intervention from an outside state (Havard, Wilhelmsen, Gleditsch 2004: 11).

Typology according to actors

- Civil war–affected states are states in which "it is almost the case that significant elements of actual or potential military power exist outside the control of the central state apparatus" (Giddens 1987).

- Violence is a central feature of such a conflict and the only way to establish the authority of one or the other conflicting party. Under this condition a state uses its military power to suppress rebellions challenging its authority and legitimacy. As a result civil conflict is brutish and nasty, accompanied by killing, which is "to a great extent a matter of national pride" (Misra 2008: 45).

Typology according to actors

- Emergence of new _non-state actors_
- Trends that have increased a range of worldwide arms trades expanded the power of multinational corporations and the growth of trans-border exchange of weapons, drugs, and people, which in turn has contributed to the formation of coalitions that have acquired the capacity to form armies.

Typology according to actors

- first, between states;
- second, between a state and non-state actors outside of the state;
- third, between a state and non-state actors within a state; and
- fourth, between non-state actors taking place outside of the state.

Conflict typology by Process—Violence Intensity

- **The COSIMO** (Conflict Simulation Model) conflict categorization belongs among the most prominent classifications; it has been developed by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research **(HIIK)**, aiming to grasp armed conflict from non-violent, latent conflict to violent war phases.

Conflict typology by Process—Violence Intensity

- Dennis Sandole (1998):
- non-violent conflict is a manifestation of conflict processes during which one party seeks to undermine the goal-seeking capabilities of another conflicting party by non-violent means, as i.e. economic sanctions, exclusion of some groups from access to power, and so on.

Conflict typology by Process—Violence Intensity

- 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.

Conflict typology by Process—Violence Intensity

- Hedley Bull's definition, which has guided research within the field of IR, defines war as "organized violence carried on by political units against each other" (Bull 1977: 184).
- Significant assumptions made by this definition elucidate the following aspects of war: first, it is fought by political organizations (not by any other collective actors, as for example economic corporations); second, war is organized violence with its own rules and norms; and third, war is collective, not individual (Vasquez 1993: 35).
- As the most well-known definition by famous military theorist Carl von Clausewitz claims "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means" (Clausewitz 2008).

Conflict typology by Process—Violence Intensity

- The concept of war has been based on two primary criteria: (*1) a certain magnitude* of battle related fatalities (initially including only soldiers and military staff) and (2*) the status of the conflicting actors*. According to these scholars, the threshold of 1,000 battle-related deaths caused by sustainable organized armed forces differentiate war from other types of conflict (Singer, Small 1972: 8).

Conflict dynamics

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

Conflict dynamics

- 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.

Conflict dynamics

- *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.

Competing goals: typology of issues at stake in armed conflicts

- Academic research focuses on such aspects as religion, ideology, language, ethnicity, resources and markets, dominance, equality, and territory.

- (1) ethnic conflict, (2) conflict over political arrangements, (3) ideological, (4) economic, and (5) territorial cross-border conflict.

Competing goals: typology of issues at stake in armed conflicts

- Each conflict differs on a range of dimension and may include ethnicity, religion, political, economic, and territorial aspirations.

- *The question is how these dimensions interrelate in the whole process of conflict dynamics and how far each contributes to armed conflict.*

Challenges in conflict research

- It is critically significant to think about the dialog between the conceptual and operational level of our analysis.
- The problem remains how to assess the causal impact of one factor in relation to others. One of the possible ways for establishing the relation between operationalization and measurement lies in the case-oriented view.
- The challenge for further research is to explore not only the combination of issues at stake in armed conflict, but also the correlation and causal relationships among these aspects.

Conflict research

- 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).

Level of analysis

Systemic explanations:

-nature of the security systems in which ethnic groups operate and the security concerns of these groups. It is the situation when national, regional and international authorities are too weak to ensure the security of individual groups.

- The notion of *security dilemma* is at the core of a wide range of causal explanation of ethnic conflicts.

Level of analysis

Domestic explanations

-Focus on factors that operate primarily at the domestic level: the effectiveness of state in addressing the concerns of their constituents, the impact of nationalism of nationalism on interethnic relations and the impact of democratization on interethnic relations.

- D. Horowitz, Arend Lijphart stressed the impact of democratization and other domestic political factors have on the prospects for ethnic conflict.

Levels of analysis

Perceptual explanations

Some explanations of ethnic conflict focus on the false histories that many ethnic groups have of themselves and others.

These histories present one's own group heroic, while other groups are demonized. Such belief and perception create big escalatory pressures.

Useful Sources in Conflict Research

News databases

- BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (www.monitor .bbc.co.uk)
- Factiva (www.factiva.com)
- Open Source Center (www.opensource.gov)
- Keesing's Record of World Event (www.keesings.com)
- LexisNexis (academic.lexisnexis.com)

Reports issues by specialized NGOs and IGOs

- Global Witness (www.globalwitness.org)
- Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)
- International Crisis Group (www.crisisgroup.org)
- Integrated Regional Information Network (www.irinnews.org)
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Useful Sources in Conflict Research

Surveys

•Afrobarometer (www.afrobarometer.org)

•Households in Conflict Network – HiCV (www.hinc.org)

•World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org)

General country information

•World Development Indicators (data.worldbank.org)

•UN Data (data.un.org)

•The Quality of Government Institute, Goteborg University (www.qog.pol.gu.se)

•Gapminder (www.gapminder.org)

Conflict data programs

•Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland (www.cidcm.umd.edu)

•Correlated of War (www.correlatesofwar.org)

•Uppsala Conflict Data Program (www.ucdp.uu.se)

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