

Peoples versus States

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**Minorities at Risk
in the New Century**

Ted Robert Gurr



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The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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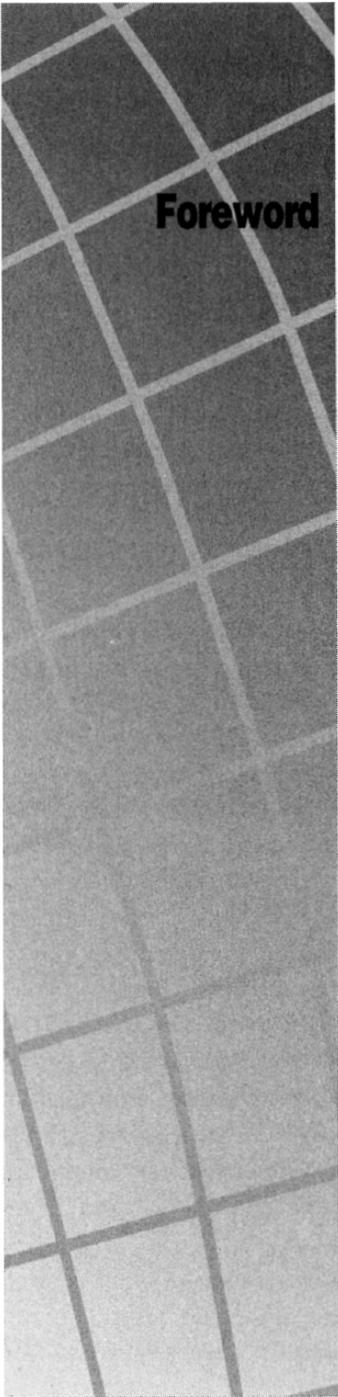
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Foreword

WHEN OUR Grant Program awarded Ted Robert Gurr a grant to work on a sequel to his highly acclaimed *Minorities at Risk*, we looked forward to seeing another volume of conspicuous excellence: compendious, rigorous, insightful, instructive, invaluable. Thus, when Professor Gurr delivered his final draft of *Peoples versus States*, we were impressed but not surprised by the manuscript's breadth, depth, and wealth of data and analysis. What we had not expected, however, was that *Peoples versus States* would be a book with such an encouraging assessment of such a discouraging subject.

Like *Minorities at Risk*, which the United States Institute of Peace published in 1993 to numerous critical plaudits, laudatory reviews, and a substantial readership, *Peoples versus States* surveys the world for signs of conflict between governments and "identity" groups. The nature of those governments varies (from autocracies to democracies and everything in between), as does the core of the groups' identities (ethnic, national, religious, and so forth) and the level of conflict (from party politics and street demonstrations all the way to full-scale, armed rebellion). The focus, however, is always conflict and its consequences.

Conflict, of course, is intrinsic to human society and is often an agent of reform, adaptation, and development. But conflict can also engender destructive violence, and a depressing number of the conflicts featured in *Minorities at Risk* had spawned dreadful violence. Indeed, as that book chronicled with such precision, the late 1980s witnessed a dramatic increase in the

incidence and severity of violent confrontations between security forces and minority groups bent on secession or at least on securing a much greater say in the government of their lives. Wherever one looked—from Kashmir to Kurdistan, Nagorno-Karabakh to Zaire—it seemed that roiling disaffection kept erupting into bloody civil conflict.

So, when we first began to read *Peoples versus States*, we anticipated a similar story of intolerance and discrimination, of repression and rebellion. And, to be sure, the world had not been transformed in the half-dozen years since the publication of *Minorities at Risk*. As the reader will discover in the pages of this book, the twentieth century has bequeathed to the twenty-first literally hundreds of conflicts between contending identity groups or between identity groups and governments. These disputes tend to have deep social and historical roots; fueled by enduring grievances as well as ongoing inequalities, they stubbornly resist resolution. Many have escalated far beyond the level of non-violent protest and diplomatic negotiation. One need only scan a newspaper for, say, January 1, 2000, to find evidence of this global scourge: Chechnya, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kosovo.

But while *Peoples versus States* confirmed our anticipation of widespread and ongoing intrastate strife, it also offered altogether more encouraging news. Despite the persistence of considerable discrimination, repression, and unrest, reports Professor Gurr, the overall trend is toward a decline in violence: “Comparative evidence shows that the intensity of ethnonational political conflict subsided in most world regions from the mid- through the late 1990s and that relatively few new contenders have emerged since the early 1990s.”

Gurr, it should be noted, is not the first to draw attention to this decline. Other scholars have also suggested that the tide of civil wars reached its high-water mark in the last years of the century and is now ebbing, and these observations have been reported even in the press and on television. Gurr’s more considered conclusions, however, carry unusual weight, especially because they are based on unusually strong evidence. With his colleagues at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland, Professor Gurr has developed a database of impressive scope, containing coded information on 275 politically active ethnic and other communal groups. He has also mastered the complex and delicate art of interpreting this data. His conclusions about overall trends are hard to challenge, his explanations for those trends are persuasive, and his predictions as to future sources of conflict demand the attention of policymakers as well as scholars.

Equally heartening are the three reasons Gurr gives in *Peoples versus States* for the reversal in the tide of ethnic war: First: “The shocks of state reformation

in the Soviet sphere and Eastern Europe have largely passed,” closing the windows of opportunity for ethnopolitical activism in that region. Second: “Civil capacities for responding to ethnopolitical challenges have increased, especially in democratic societies. Democratic elites are less likely to rely on strategies of assimilation and repression, more likely to follow policies of recognition, pluralism, and group autonomy.” And third: “States and international organizations, prompted by intense media attention and the activism of nongovernmental organizations, as well as their own security concerns, have been more willing to initiate preventive and remedial action.”

If Gurr’s analysis is correct, we have grounds to be guardedly optimistic about the future. After all, reasons number two and three suggest that the world is slowly learning what to do, and what not to do, in addressing the concerns and ambitions of discontented ethnic, religious, and national groups. A violent, heavy-handed response by governments to ethnonational challenges rarely brings lasting peace (as Russia may have learned in Chechnya). Instead, the keys to channeling identity conflicts into nonviolent forms of expression, and to building enduring stability, are to recognize and accommodate differences at home—something that democracies are constituted to do.

Peoples versus States is, then, an encouraging volume for those who have promoted, applauded, or otherwise supported efforts to resolve intrastate conflicts through dialogue between the protagonists and the active engagement of the international community. Yet, as *Peoples versus States* also makes clear, much remains to be done. The intensity of ethnopolitical conflict may indeed have declined on a global scale, but many individual conflicts are still being contested with ferocity and (as detailed in chapter 7) many more have the potential to escalate or re-escalate into bloody strife. Furthermore, the “emerging global regime governing relations between communal groups and the state in heterogeneous societies” is *not* perfect, has *not* been embraced by many nondemocratic states, and is *not* uniformly effective.

Readers interested in finding out more about specific ethnonational conflicts and the means by which they might be peacefully resolved are encouraged to review some of the other books recently published by the United States Institute of Peace. In the past year, the Institute has published Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah’s firsthand account of Burundi’s intercommunal strife, *Burundi on the Brink, 1993-95: A UN Special Envoy Reflects on Preventive Diplomacy*; John Wallach’s *The Enemy Has a Face: The Seeds of Peace Experience*, a book about the divide between Israelis and Arabs and Wallach’s own innovative youth program that tries to bridge that chasm; and *Watching the Wind* by Susan Collin Marks, which recounts grassroots efforts to prevent racial violence

from derailing South Africa's journey from apartheid to democracy in the early 1990s. Other recent volumes have addressed a wide array of practical approaches to settling intrastate—and interstate—conflict. These include three edited volumes, each featuring a dozen or more preeminent practitioners and analysts: *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World* and *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, both edited by Chester Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall; and *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, edited by I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen.

All of these publications share with *Peoples versus States* the goal of providing policymakers, practitioners, academics, and indeed all interested citizens with timely information and analyses relevant to the promotion of nonviolent solutions to conflicts throughout the world. It is a goal that Ted Robert Gurr has achieved in this impressive, richly detailed, powerfully argued, and ultimately encouraging book.

Richard H. Solomon, President
United States Institute of Peace



Preface

THE TSUNAMI of ethnic and nationalist conflict that swept across large parts of Eurasia and Africa in the early 1990s raised grave doubts about the future of the international system of states and the security of their citizens. The pessimistic tone of scholarly and policy analysis at the time is reflected in book titles with phrases such as “conflicts unending,” “pandemonium,” and “clash of civilizations.”¹ By the mid-1990s armed conflict within states had abated: there was a pronounced decline in the onset of new ethnic wars and a shift in many ongoing wars from fighting to negotiation. Some of my colleagues have referred to this pause as the “short peace.”²

One objective of this book is to document the “short peace” and to analyze the conditions responsible for it. Comparative evidence shows that the intensity of ethno-political conflict subsided in most world regions from the mid- through late 1990s and that relatively few new contenders have emerged since the early 1990s. The exceptions to this generalization are found mainly in Central and West Africa and in South and Southeast Asia. Most protagonists in the ethnic wars that continue at the beginning of the new century are veterans of past episodes of protracted communal conflict, not new contenders. This is true of Hutus and Tutsis in the Great Lakes region, and equally true of the Kosovar Albanians. Their conflicts took dramatic and deadly turns in the mid- to late 1990s, but in no sense are they new.

Three reasons can be suggested for the general decline in ethnic wars. First, the shocks of state reformation in the former

Soviet sphere and Eastern Europe have largely passed. The breakup of old states and the formation of new states and regimes in these regions opened up opportunities for ethnopolitical activism; now windows of opportunity in the postcommunist states have closed. Second, civil capacities for responding to ethnopolitical challenges have increased, especially in democratic societies. Democratic elites are less likely to rely on strategies of assimilation and repression, more likely to follow policies of recognition, pluralism, and group autonomy. Third, international efforts at publicizing and preventing violations of group rights increased markedly after the Cold War. States and international organizations, prompted by intense media attention and the activism of non-governmental organizations, as well as their own security concerns, have been more willing to initiate preventive and remedial action. Public and private pressures also have helped persuade governments in some countries with mixed human rights records to improve their treatment of minorities in ways that vary from cosmetic to substantive.

Events of 1997–99 in Kosovo, the middle belt of Africa, and Indonesia suggest that the “short peace” may indeed be transitory, perhaps only a lull before the onset of new waves of ethnic and other kinds of war within states. The second general objective of this book is to analyze the general preconditions of past and future ethnopolitical conflict. These arguments are documented and elaborated in later chapters.

- The political assertion of ethnic and other communal identities that spawned new episodes of ethnic warfare during the 1980s and early 1990s will continue, for two reasons. The politics of identity are based most fundamentally on persistent grievances about inequalities and past wrongs, conditions that are part of the heritage of most minorities in most countries. Moreover, movements based on identity have succeeded often enough in recent years to justify emulation and repetition.
- The ethnic conflict management strategies favored by Western states and international organizations are not uniformly effective. Democratic institutions and elections in weak, heterogeneous states often provide incentives and opportunities that increase the chances of ethnopolitical conflict rather than channeling it into conventional politics. Internationally brokered settlements and the atmospherics of cease-fires, amnesties, and signing ceremonies that accompany them are sometimes a facade behind which protagonists jockey for political advantage and resources that fuel the next round of fighting.

- The states and international and regional organizations that promote democratic and negotiated management of ethnic tensions often walk away after multiparty elections and settlements. Failure of outside parties to provide sustained political and material resources in postconflict situations all but guarantees the eventual renewal of conflict.

The outlook suggested by this study is conditionally positive. Deadly rounds of ethno-political conflict are likely to occur or reoccur in new, impoverished states with ineffective governments and sharp communal polarities. When they erupt they will pose severe humanitarian problems. However, most such conflicts are foreseeable, they are likely to be concentrated in a few regions—the middle belt of Africa and parts of Asia and the Middle East—and in principle they can be contained and transformed through constructive and sustained regional and international action. The grave risk is that powerful global and regional actors will become so weary of remedial action, and so preoccupied with other issues, that they will give only marginal attention and resources to the management of local conflicts in peripheral regions.

The first specific task of this study is to document the rise and decline of political action by ethnic and other communal groups from 1986 to 1999—the years in which ethno-political challenges rose sharply and then fell. The evidence comes from the Minorities at Risk project's coded information on the status and conflicts of 275 politically active ethnic and other communal groups in the 1990s.³ The virtue of relying on this broad base of information is that it enables us to identify and interpret global patterns and trends and to delineate differences among world regions. It also enables us to test suppositions about the causes and outcomes of ethno-political conflict using information on all relevant cases rather than a handful of case studies. The liability is that some details and qualifications revealed by more narrowly focused case and regional studies are glossed over.

The second task is to sketch a theory of the conditions associated with the political assertion of ethnic and communal identities. Two major arguments are developed. The conditions in which communal identities become salient enough to provide the basis for joint political action are specified in chapter 3. Four characteristics of groups and their immediate political environments explain when and why they are likely to mobilize: *the salience of communal identity* and *groups' incentives, capacities, and opportunities* for ethno-political action. All these factors tended to increase in the 1980s, some because of long-term processes of state building and economic development, others through global and regional transitions—especially the collapse of hegemonic

states and the promotion of democratic institutions in states with traditions of authoritarian governance.

Discrimination and repression against national and minority peoples are a pervasive source of poverty and resentment and provide strong incentives for ethnopolitical mobilization, protest, and rebellion. Chapter 4 examines global and regional patterns of political, economic, and cultural discrimination in the 1990s. It also surveys new evidence on strategies of state repression in the 1980s and 1990s, evidence that suggests that severe repression is substantially more likely to intensify than contain conflicts over contested identities.

Perhaps the most striking finding of this study is evidence of a pervasive shift in public policies toward ethnic contenders in the middle years of the decade. This is the study's second major argument. The shift from assimilation and control to pluralism and accommodation is strongest in democratic societies, old and new, but also evident in some autocratic societies as well. Several kinds of evidence are examined. Chapter 5 shows that the introduction of democratic governance in the 1980s and 1990s usually was followed by a shift in strategies of ethnopolitical action from rebellion to protest. Political and cultural restrictions on national and minority peoples also declined during the 1990s, a shift that was strikingly evident in new democracies. The process of democratization can also prompt extreme nationalism and trigger new rebellions, but these outcomes have occurred mainly when democratization was attempted in newly independent states, not in established states. In chapter 6 we survey the outcomes of more than fifty ethnonational wars fought during the last forty years and find strong evidence of crisscrossing trends during the 1990s: new ethnic wars declined, and there was a striking increase in negotiated settlements, which usually provided for significant substate autonomy.

The third general task of this book is to assess the risks of future ethnopolitical conflicts. Despite the short-term decline in conflict and the ascendance of efforts at reform and accommodation, many of the conditions of future ethnopolitical conflict persist. Chapter 7 builds on the results of comparative analysis to identify some ninety groups that are at medium to high risk of conflict and repression at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The concluding chapter reviews the evidence for an emerging global regime governing relations between communal groups and the state in heterogeneous societies. This regime consists of a set of principles about intergroup relations in heterogeneous states, a repertoire of strategies for institutionalizing the principles, and agreement on civil and international policies for responding to ethnopolitical crises and conflicts. But this new regime of managed ethnic heterogeneity is imperfect. Its proponents are the established democratic

states, mainly those in the global north, and its effectiveness is severely tested by past, ongoing, and future communal conflicts and humanitarian crises in central Africa, Asia, and parts of the Middle East.

This study's broad comparative analysis is complemented by fourteen vignettes of ethnopolitical groups—their grievances, mobilization and political actions, and the prospects for peaceful accommodation of their interests. The sketches are designed to give substance and examples, especially for non-specialists, to generalizations based on comparative data. They are chosen to represent the diversity of the 275 groups included in the study and to suggest the richness of the case study materials used in preparing the Minorities at Risk data set.

Acknowledgments

The Minorities at Risk project monitors and analyzes the status of politically active communal groups throughout the world. It has been based at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, since 1988 and has been supported by grants from the United States Institute of Peace, the National Science Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and International Alert (London) plus substantial institutional support from the University of Maryland at College Park.

The Minorities project is a long-term, labor-intensive study that has depended on the knowledge, skills, and commitment of many graduate assistants. The project coordinators who have played a key role in sustaining the project since the mid-1980s include Monty G. Marshall, Scott McDonald, Shin-wha Lee, Michael L. Haxton, and Anne Pitsch. James Scarritt, my colleague at the University of Colorado in the 1980s, directed a research team that did the first round of coding for Africa. Statistical analyses and graphs for this book were prepared by Minorities project coordinators Michael L. Haxton (1994–96) and Anne Pitsch (1996–present); by Göran Lindgren of the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University; and by Monty G. Marshall, who is now a faculty associate of the Minorities project. Graduate and postdoctoral researchers who prepared the case studies and coded the data used for this book include Pamela L. Burke, Ken Cousins, Michael Dravis, Jonathan Fox, Mizan Khan, Deepa Khosla, Shin-wha Lee, Marion Recktenwald, and Anne Pitsch, and also undergraduates Alex Tanoyue and Ari Wilkenfeld. Ongoing work is directed by Anne Pitsch with Victor Assal, Michelle Boomgaard, Deepa Khosla, and Lyubov Mincheva.

Chronologies and assessments for most groups cover the full decade of the 1990s and are available from the project's site on the World Wide Web, address www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar. A code book, *Minorities at Risk Dataset Users Manual.899*, and a data set consisting of 975 variables for each group are provided on the Web site.

A special note of thanks is due Professor Peter Wallensteen and his colleagues of the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, who provided a supportive setting in which the first draft of this book was completed. Stephen Saideman and Jack Snyder read the draft in its entirety and provided a number of comments that helped guide the revision. Monica Duffy Toft provided useful comments on chapter 7. I also express my appreciation to participants in 1996–97 seminars at the Universities of Uppsala, Lund, and Stockholm and the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and to students in my 1998–99 graduate seminars at the University of Maryland, especially Victor Assal and Robert Tomes, who provided thought-provoking critiques of drafts of some of the chapters. Other useful comments have come from participants in seminars at the World Bank, the National Security Agency, and the Center for International Development and Conflict Management.

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