

## **Introduction**

### **Where History Continues: Conflict Resolution in the Third World**

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As early as 1967, after many years in West Africa, Father James O'Connell wrote about the "inevitability of instability" in what was emerging as the Third World. He concluded that this condition was due to the artificial frontiers of the then-new states, unresolved ethnic conflicts, and an inchoate sense of nationhood itself.<sup>1</sup> Today his analysis remains useful as a general definition of Third World problems, if only because it best defines the venue of hostile conflict along an entire spectrum from local rankling to regional and sometimes even international warfare. At present, in the Philippines, a Maoist guerrilla force occupies or influences a fifth of the archipelago's villages while right-wing factions threaten the government with a takeover. Similarly, fighting still goes on after many years in the Horn of Africa, Peru, and Cambodia, inter alia. And in the summer of 1990, Saddam Hussein began an international upheaval by mobilizing Iraq's forces to intimidate Kuwait into producing less oil and then invaded and occupied that hapless kingdom. By doing so, he demonstrated to the rest of the world that military power readily transforms into political-economic influence in the Third World, at least until an international alliance of major powers reverses the process. In the Third World, history has most certainly not ended.

### **The Third World: Where History Continues**

Currently, the term *Third World* is under review.<sup>2</sup> The widening spread in income between newly industrializing countries (NICs), such as Korea, and subsistence economies, like those of the African Sahel, makes it difficult to identify common concepts under the rubric of a "Third World." Furthermore, the revolution in the European communist world has meant that those systems no longer constitute a "Second World" by virtue of their economic organization. It is premature, however, to place the newly democratizing countries of what was the Second World into the "First World" category. In any event, China remains under the control of a Marxist-Leninist politburo, albeit one with Western ideas for the economy. Perhaps a new definition of a Second World will evolve to include countries with a mid-level economic development and some movement toward democracy, that is, to include most of the NICs as well as the former communist states. Under this new framework, it is true that the Third World would still have an enormous gap in income between the Middle Eastern oil producers and the south Asian states which have roughly one-twentieth the per capita income of, for example, Saudi Arabia. But all such states would have in common a relatively weak political structure that makes them susceptible to upheaval and therefore suitable for the study of the conditions conducive to conflict in a generic sense.<sup>3</sup>

The notion that conflict—along with hunger, malaria, and smallpox—has become unacceptable in the world is a peculiarly Western notion, one that has not yet spread to what we have called the Third World for the past thirty years. Presumably because of the nuclear standoff (rather than some historical lesson), conflict between the superpowers since World War II has either been "cold" (with varying degrees of coolness) or fought out by proxies in the Third World. Indeed, virtually all conflict, and certainly all significant bloody conflict, in this period has been in the Third World. The assumption that this situation will continue was put explicitly by Francis Fukuyama when he conceded that unlike the increasingly liberal developed world, "the vast bulk of the Third World remains very much mired in history and will be a terrain of conflict for many years to come."<sup>4</sup> Which is to say that in nearly three-quarters of the world, history will not be over in the foreseeable future.

### **Conflict in the Post-Cold War Third World**

To be sure, during the Cold War a sense of limits did prevail in Third World conflicts. Superpower competition encouraged potential

belligerents to appeal to their respective patron (and arms supplier), a process that could then be counted on to interest the other superpower and its client. This competition provided a deterrent to Third World conflicts, the lasting success of which can only be surmised. Yet surely there would have been more conflict in the Middle East had the United States and the Soviet Union not constrained their respective friends in the region; in Latin America, had the Soviet Union ultimately not capped its efforts to spread communism; and in Southeast Asia, had the Soviet Union and China ultimately not constrained Hanoi, albeit after the latter had—temporarily, it turned out—swallowed the rest of Indochina.

The end of the Cold War changed all that. It is not surprising that the most ruthless Third World leader, Saddam Hussein, was the first to test the permissiveness of the new era. Indeed, a high-ranking Soviet official made the argument that if his country had been willing to supply military forces to the American-led coalition rather than just bless it, Saddam would surely have been willing to withdraw from Kuwait before President Bush's deadline expired.<sup>5</sup> In any case, the American- and UN-sponsored coalition that restrained Saddam Hussein in late 1990 and defeated him in 1991 had only incidentally to do with Kuwaiti oil and far more to do with the new rules of the postwar world. How will these rules be enforced and by whom? (Or, more realistically, whom will Washington deem friend and ally in enforcing them?)

### **Categories of Third World Conflict**

A useful paradigm of Third World conflict—past, present, and future—divides into at least six convenient categories.

*Colony-colonizer* is the category that stretches farthest into the past and future. Classic cases of colony against metropole (e.g., Algeria versus France or Indonesia versus Holland) are rarer than is generally supposed. This relative rarity highlights the fact that most postcolonial conflict has been more of a sorting-out process and less of an ex-colonizer's policy of divide and conquer. Western European colonizers generally stacked the deck sufficiently in favor of successor local elites to ensure congenial relations for some time to come. The nature of leadership or regime succession was guided by imperial expedience, as was the original division of many Third World peoples at the Congress of Berlin. Alain Rouvez's study of conflict resolution potential by ex-colonizers in Africa—specifically France, Britain, and Belgium—is a reminder of their continuing interest in the region.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most pregnant possibilities for violence lies with the breakup of the Soviet empire. The potential for conflict, both between and within the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, is very great and has already begun to be realized in such places as Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. It is not reassuring that three of these states (Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) are heavily armed with nuclear weapons.

*Post-colonial "sort out"* is perhaps the bloodiest category of conflict, if only because of the 1947 death toll in India and Pakistan. This type of conflict involves states settling scores with precolonial adversaries after the restraining hand of the colonial power has been removed. Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons and the continuing hot conflict in Kashmir are only the most conspicuous examples. Nigeria and Ghana have tested each other by expelling each other's nationals on a grand scale. Thailand's sponsorship of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is another instance of a state testing the postcolonial balance of forces.

*Intrastate-ethnic conflict* is usually responsible for the most casualties, not necessarily because of the innately violent nature of "fraternal" conflict (Ibos and Hausas have never seen each other as brothers) but because wars within the nation-state have a layer of protection from the gaze and interest of the international community.<sup>7</sup> The outside world has difficulty stepping in to stop the carnage. If Nigeria is now a more settled state, at least in ethnic terms, we have only to look at the other large African states to see the possibility of civil war. Zaire, run ruthlessly by Mobutu since 1965, has deteriorated infrastructurally to such an extent that conducting large-scale warfare seems hardly possible. More likely, in a post-Mobutu period, the larger element of the principal Zairois ethnic groups living across the national boundaries (for example, the Bakongo, between Angola and Zaire) will mount irredentist claims on a centrifugally volatile successor government.

*Interstate-ethnic conflict* is not a large category, principally thanks to most Third World governments denying recognition to local and variant ethnic identities. Government reluctance to admit the salience of ethnic and tribal factors allows them to hide ethnic conflicts with neighbors under other categories. The fact is, however, that Ethiopia's long struggle against Eritrea always had consequences for relations with the Sudan. We can see parallel situations developing in the states of the former Soviet Union, notably between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

*Ideological and religious conflicts* appear to be growing. It is true that during the Cold War, ideology was exported by the superpowers

and worked its way into traditional conflicts (although the bloodiest conflict, in Indochina, was in some measure a locally driven, non-ideological affair). Yet the demise of Marxism in Eastern Europe does not mean that ideology has become impotent in Third World conflicts; today, ideas drive conflict in the Third World at an accelerated pace. Although the Iran-Iraq War had many components and sources, religion provided a pretext that fanned it for eight bloody years. If Islamic fundamentalism seems to have peaked, it is surely not spent. And even though Beijing and Moscow have diminished their export of weapons to Third World parties that had fueled ideological conflicts, the wars in Peru and the Philippines and the now-settled war in El Salvador are indisputably ideological.

*Superpower projection* as a cause of conflict has been the focus of a debate that raged in the United States for twenty years: were Third World conflicts East-West driven or internally derived? The more pertinent question should have been: how much of each motivating factor was at issue? Clearly, American policy in the Congo, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and Central America was driven by Washington's Cold War concerns. Yet, just as traceable was the period (mainly under Brezhnev) when Soviet "treaties of friendship" with Third World clients led almost ineluctably to these clients' aggression against others in the regions—particularly in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam—and to a deepened relationship with the Soviets.<sup>8</sup>

Although this category may appear to be dead and buried in the post-Cold War world, residual problems of significant dimensions continue to overhang the Third World. The Afghans are still fighting; India still obtains sophisticated weaponry from Moscow (as does Pakistan from the United States); and Cambodia remains a bloody terrain as a result of conflict in Indochina.

### **Resolving Conflict in the Post-Cold War Third World**

As long as conflict persists, so will efforts at resolving it. In 1988, as the superpowers edged toward a terminal resolution of their international differences, five pairs of Third World antagonists significantly de-escalated their conflicts and moved toward solutions. The superpower role was critical in several of these cases and (presumably) salient in all of them. As a result of these dramatic changes in the world, a new field of activist conflict resolution, defined in terms of practical efforts to settle battlefield disputes, emerged and has been grafted onto the generation-old field of (academic) conflict resolution.<sup>9</sup>

To predict with any likelihood of success where and how conflict resolution might work in the future requires some sense of the past. In this case, however, two significant differences exist between the past and the present. The first difference is that one category of Third World conflict, namely, colony-colonizer conflict, has decisively wound down. Yet the category could remain significant if conflicts develop between Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union that have been properly construed as belonging to the Third World.<sup>10</sup>

The second difference between past and present is the détente between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Most of the conflicts since World War II have had a superpower component, or at least (as in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict) are seen by some players as projections of superpower interests. It appears unlikely that Moscow has the psychic energy to test the United States in the Third World in any major way, although residual antagonisms—for example, in Syria, Cuba, and even the Indian subcontinent—may well drive conflicts for some time to come.

Our primary interest, of course, is how best to resolve conflict in the Third World. Arguably, as a matter of triage, some conflicts ought to be allowed to play out as states try to define their borders and other prerequisites of nationhood. Other quarrels, however, must be halted, owing to their intensity and expanse.

In proceeding through a catalog of present and incipient conflicts, we suspect that the only examples of conflict that are always appropriate for outside pressures toward settlement are the conflicts that are most controllable in the first place. Pressure can be brought to bear on small border conflicts (for instance, between Mali and Burkina-Faso). The larger conflicts, precisely because of the size of each state's investment, are the hardest to control. And yet, for the sake of the region's future, control surely must be attempted. In this sense, the international community's learning curve is sharp; we say "never again" to the prospect of future Iran-Iraq-style wars, given the level of armaments, the near-trillion-dollar costs, and the damage to the infrastructure.<sup>11</sup>

### **Superpower Cooperation**

The likelihood of superpower cooperation is misleading if we look at the nature of present plans and the accompanying rhetoric. Soviet leaders aver that they wish to work with the United States whenever and wherever to end conflict in the Third World. But, historically,

in areas where their friends and clients were on top (as in Angola) they seemed less willing to cooperate (until the incentives grew much greater) than in areas like the Middle East, where they have always wished to confirm their superpower status by riding on American coattails. Even there, the recent case of Iraq shows that however much Moscow wishes to play a constructive international role, it is on a cleft stick. The billions of dollars in arms it supplied to Iraq and the numerous high-level advisers it positioned there must surely account in part for why Moscow was slow to join its fellow Security Council members in applying sanctions to Iraq and then refused to go beyond UN-sponsored sanctions.<sup>12</sup> But Moscow will probably be well absorbed in devolving its own constituent parts during the next decade and will have little energy with which to police its old playgrounds. Its help in decreasing the net amount of warfare in the Third World will more likely occur through a diminution of arms exports than through cooperation with the United States.

### **Mediation by International and Regional Organizations**

One of the greatest results of the Gulf War is the rejuvenation of the UN, which for the first time is playing the role envisaged by its founders. Although its revival is almost exclusively a consequence of the Soviet-American thaw, members may nevertheless expeditiously build on its present capability and enlarge its peacekeeping role for future use, pocketing the gains whatever their origin.

Conflict resolution by regional organizations worked in the past only when major powers provided the infrastructure, for example, in the Congo crisis in the early 1960s. One possible exception is the recent conflict in Liberia. Efforts by the ECOWAS states (those West African states attempting to harmonize economies) to intervene in the Liberian conflict highlight the problems of Third World organizations attempting to settle member states' affairs. Nevertheless, the fact is that for the first time the states of an impoverished region have worked together and on their own to insert peacekeeping soldiers into the middle of a civil war. Even if the outcome is not determined by the ECOWAS states, they have set a precedent that may drive national procurement and military organization in the future. The thirty years since the Congo crisis thus offer one gain. Instead of depending totally on outside intervention to get the internal affairs of a state under control, African states have shown that they can cooperate to impose a sort of settlement on a horrid conflict.

## Arms Control

The most promising road for the future is arms control. Certainly, adversaries spoiling for a fight do not need ground-to-air missiles or Stingers to start a war. Nor is it self-evident that well-supplied arsenals predispose states to war, although a relationship exists. In any case, the accessibility to more and better arms ensures deadlier wars. The Iran-Iraq War proved this once and for all. Justification for arms limitations on that ground alone is sufficient. A large number of Third World states are already armed well enough to engage in wars that will cost dearly in human lives. As *Newsweek* put it after the outbreak of the Persian Gulf War:

Year by year governments like Saddam Hussein's have begun to achieve levels of military power that can realistically confront any conventional force the West can muster. This creeping escalation of military capability is due in part to wide-open arms sales by the United States, the Soviet Union and other developed countries. It is also due to the advent of high-tech weapons like the Exocet missile, which offer highly effective and relatively cheap [about \$250,000] offensive power to any nation that chooses to buy them.<sup>13</sup>

The speed with which several Third World states are moving toward nuclear status is especially frightening, given their self-evident willingness to use the weapons in extremis. But we do not need to await the advent of nuclear proliferation to foresee great dangers. Janne Nolan and Albert Wheelon have recently highlighted just how dangerous missile competition has become in the Third World: fourteen Third World countries (including Israel) currently possess or are at an advanced state of developing missiles, ranging from Saudi Arabia's CSS-2, with its 2,200-mile range, to the Argentine Condor I, with a more modest 60-mile range. The researchers claim that a Scud-B missile, like Syria's, "releasing 1,200 pounds of the chemical VX agent 4,000 feet above an airfield will kill half of the people in a strip .3 mile wide and 2.5 miles long . . . enough to devastate a city."<sup>14</sup> They argue that missiles are "symbols of technical prowess and political prestige, serving today much as battleships did 80 years ago—as the sine qua non of great-power status," which makes the problem still harder to control.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, social scientists created a virtual cottage industry of arms-control literature aimed at the superpowers, whose great size made them the least likely candidates to be persuaded by the literature; little was written in the field of conventional arms control for

the more likely candidates in the Third World.<sup>16</sup> The only formal attempt by the superpowers to achieve some manner of regime regarding arms exports to the Third World ended in failure in Mexico City during the Carter administration. Less formal understandings were attempted, but with little effect.

The case for closer inspection of Third World military programs by interested second or third parties has become stronger in recent years on humanitarian grounds. Clearly, such grounds are unlikely to persuade a number of Third World leaders—Saddam Hussein, for example. Yet, the constriction of funds for both development and investment provides an opening that the international community, along with the major arms suppliers, would be foolish to ignore. With the addition of Eastern Europe and the Soviet republics to the list of competitors for essentially the same investment funds, states have had to compete more vigorously in making their cases to attract such funding. Latin American states, for example, are considered by international lending agencies to be taking fiscal reform far more seriously since they realized they must compete with Warsaw and Prague for the same money.

As a result, international lending agencies are now examining arms expenditures as a criterion for lending. This follows the long-standing American practice legislated by Congress that requires specific justification for granting aid to any country beyond normal ratios of arms spending.<sup>17</sup>

Controlling the flow of arms does not cut off the sources of tension in the world. But if it does nothing else, it restricts the lethality of conflict. Undoubtedly the attempt to achieve meaningful arms control in the Third World will be painful and long. Any arms-control regime must include more than just Soviet-American understandings. It must bring in such secondary (but enormous) arms exporters as France, China, and Brazil. Goals must be set at the UN that go beyond the rhetoric and platitudes of past special UN conferences on this subject, and they must be backed by organizational directives where feasible.

## **Conclusion**

In this short overview we have seen how the underlying causes of conflict persist in the Third World despite the end of the Cold War. In many ways the world has not changed: the anticolonial "revolution" wanes as new sources of tension in the last empire rise. Ideological conflict declines as religiously inspired wars begin. The

superpowers may settle most of their differences at the highest level, but some of their past commitments are difficult to shake.

What *has* changed amid all of this is the capability of the UN to enlarge its role in peacekeeping, which is already proceeding apace and will succeed, contingent on cooperation among the great powers. What *could* change is the arms producers' willingness to constrain themselves from selling arms to potential belligerents. American allies can be offered incentives to decrease arms sales in particular regions. International organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank can enlarge their roles in inspecting defense expenditures of recipient Third World states, even making loans contingent on prudent defense policies. Overcoming the obstacles to successful arms control will require extensive education in and dissemination of past results. But this process is paralleled elsewhere in the decades of superpower negotiations; ideas spread quickly in the modern world.

It may seem ironic to point to arms control as today's most hopeful realm for a diminution in Third World conflict after the Persian Gulf conflict, yet precisely because of that war, fueled by an almost wanton willingness on the part of the major powers to supply arms to that region, this possibility needs to be highlighted and underlined.

## Notes

1. Father James O'Connell, "The Inevitability of Instability," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1967), pp. 181–191.

2. See, for example, Robert J. Samuelson, "End of the Third World," *Washington Post*, July 18, 1990.

3. See Hans-Henrik Holm, "The End of the Third World?" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1990), pp. 1–7 for an argument that the term "Third World" retains meaning.

4. See Kenneth M. Jensen, ed., *A Look at 'The End of History?'* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1990), p. 21. The quotation is of course from Francis Fukuyama's celebrated article, "The End of History?" in the *National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3–17.

5. At a not-for-attribution presentation, May 12, 1991, Washington, D.C.

6. Alain Rouvez, "Conflict Resolution in Africa: The Role of Belgium, Britain, and France," grant manuscript (United States Institute of Peace, forthcoming, 1992).

7. See Walker Connor, "Nation Building or Nation Destroying?" *World Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (April 1972), pp. 319–355.

8. See W. Scott Thompson, *Power Projection* (New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1978) for a study thereof.

9. It is no surprise that the new field is dominated by Americans. A United States Institute of Peace-sponsored conference on activist conflict resolution (Pocantico Hills, New York, April 1990) had, for example, American attendees who had played roles in conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, southern Africa, the Middle East, and even the Soviet Union (where labor leaders received American instruction on collective bargaining).

10. In a 1983 essay, Daniel Pipes asked whether the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union could be considered part of the Third World and concluded that they must be. He presciently ended his essay by arguing that their status "as the last major Third World peoples under European rule will become a vital matter of international concern in the coming years." See Pipes, "The Third World Peoples of Soviet Central Asia," in W. Scott Thompson, ed., *The Third World*, revised edition (San Francisco: Institute of Contemporary Studies, 1983).

11. A United States Institute of Peace study estimated the overall cost of that war—measured in damage to the environment, opportunity-cost in terms of the lives involved, and the diminution of inventories—at almost a trillion dollars. See Gholam Razi, "An Alternative Paradigm to State Rationality in Foreign Policy: The Iran-Iraq War," *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 1988), pp. 689–723.

12. A Soviet official argued in 1991 that the Soviet military was fearful of the effect on its officers were they to see the superior Western equipment and organization in action and said this was a powerful disincentive to join the coalition. Not-for-attribution presentation, May 12, 1991, Washington, D.C.

13. Tom Morganthau with John Barry, "And Now the War of the Future," *Newsweek*, August 13, 1990, pp. 26–28.

14. Janne Nolan and Albert Wheelon, "Third World Ballistic Missiles," *Scientific American* (August 1990), p. 39.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

16. This is not to say that the arms-control literature did not have consequences, but most of the research was asymmetrical at best. For example, the "industry" in effect created a pressure group in support of American arms control. That group was subsequently

exploited by the Soviet Union, which contained no comparable pressures, at least prior to the Gorbachev era. As a result, an exacerbation of the American proclivity to produce arms-control agreements of arbitrary merit to justify funding for further attempts and to keep such pressure groups at high peaks of activity was especially evident in the 1970s.

**17.** Congressional Resolution 620-S calls for the U.S. Agency for International Development to certify to Congress that its aid recipients are not unduly spending their wealth on arms.

## Part I

### Fundamental Sources of Third World Conflict

Economic need is often identified as the principal cause of regional conflict among Third World countries. Grueling resource scarcity and expedient, dead-end choices have contributed greatly to the desperate plight of these countries. The resources that do exist in these countries go toward the purchase of regime security, the oppression of ethnic or religious groups, or national expansion. In other words, the scant resources derived from an already depleted ecosystem are spent procuring arms to enhance a particular regime's standing instead of furthering the public good. Such regime types guarantee the persistence of economic need, and economic need guarantees the continuation of these regime types. Both are balanced precariously on the fulcrum of military prowess.

What would be needed to encourage lesser developed countries to work with and within their resources and to accommodate and employ all the political, ethnic, and religious groups that reside within their borders? Without established indigenous "peacetime" markets and production procedures, the quick return of arms production has tended to offer the most lucrative industry. Arms production and procurement in a context of onerous deprivation and oppressive government seems almost always to inspire among the leadership an extravagant desire for regional hegemony. In such a situation, regional conflict seems inescapable. Only the trigger event is missing.

Yet what actually triggers the violence is less indicative of the nature of the conflict than are the conditions that make conflict unavoidable. In pursuit of the cause and solution to these agitating conditions, the first question must be: which is prior, the aggressive regime or the poor economic condition? If the aggressive regime is the parent of the perilous economy, this leads to another elemental, but also practical, question: if that regime can be tempered, which elements of a more liberal, or democratic, government are *sufficient* and which are *necessary* for a country to break the cycle of violence against its own citizens on the one hand, and against its neighbors on the other?

Alternatively, if the economic condition is the determinative factor, then Third World arms-producing countries are better off than the countries that have not industrialized. They have become not only exporters but likely beneficiaries of foreign capital investment and increased debt forgiveness by international lending organizations. More important, they have joined the industrialized and technological world, introducing high technology, sophisticated research and development, and wider employment opportunities for more people; at the same time, they have also introduced a certain political security and an increasingly sound economic situation. Still, uneasiness persists because of the proclivity of these countries to deal in arms with militant governments or groups, their justification being economic necessity. At each step, perceived or actual economic deprivation provides a cause for violent conflict. How does the cycle end?

The chapters in this section delineate the most urgent problem areas that have led or will lead to conflict in the Third World. Robert Rothstein examines the prospects of democratic government in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment. How much democracy, he asks, is sufficient to improve life and how much is too much and precludes democracy's survival? Ted Gurr surveys the precarious situations of minority groups within unfriendly states. Nazli Choucri considers the foreign aid trap into which so many of these countries fall when they incur economic sanctions for the environmental damage they cause by attempting to shortcut their entrance into twentieth-century industrialization. Finally, Geoffrey Kemp presents the grim, threatening picture of arms production, procurement, and sales by Third World countries.