

Understanding Contemporary Conflict

The historian of great events is always oppressed by the difficulty of tracing the silent, subtle influences which in all communities precede and prepare the way for violent outbursts and uprisings.

Winston Churchill, 1898

HAVING introduced some of the main concepts in conflict resolution theory in chapter 1, described the evolution of the field in chapter 2 and looked at the statistical basis for diagnosis in chapter 3, we begin our survey of conflict resolution in the early twenty-first century by considering the way in which major armed conflict has been analysed within the conflict resolution tradition. Adequate conflict analysis – *polemology*, to borrow the French terminology – has from the start been seen as the essential prerequisite for normative conflict resolution. This chapter, therefore, provides the necessary conceptual basis for those that follow.

Theories and Frameworks

In chapter 1 we introduced some well-known general theories of conflict from the conflict resolution tradition. These models are intended to highlight generic aspects of conflict and conflict resolution. At the other end of the spectrum are specific political and historical explanations of particular conflicts. But at the intermediate level, between generic models and individual explanations, is it possible to find what Vasquez calls a ‘unified theory of conflict’ (1995: 137), sufficient to account for the prevailing patterns of post-Cold War conflict with which we are concerned?

It seems unlikely on the face of it that a single all-encompassing explanation will be adequate for conflicts of different types in all the countries that were listed in table 3.1 (see p. 58). Apart from anything else, since the time when systematic studies were first undertaken in the conflict resolution field it has been recognized that there are

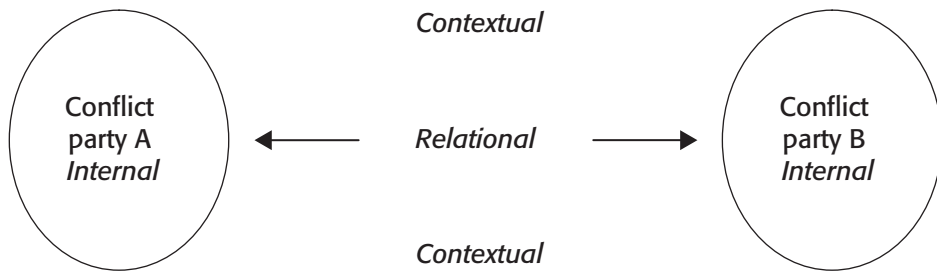


Figure 4.1 Internal, relational and contextual theories of conflict

apparently irreducible discrepancies between major schools of analysis.¹ Using figure 4.1 as a schematic model, it is helpful to see how some of these theories are *internal*, because they locate the sources of conflict mainly *within* the nature of the protagonists (e.g. certain ethnological and anthropological theories), some are *relational*, because they look for sources mainly in relations *between* conflict parties (e.g. certain theories in behavioural sociology and social psychology), and some are *contextual*, because they look mainly *outside* to the conditioning contexts that structure the conflict and in some versions also generate the conflict parties themselves (e.g. certain neo-realist and Marxist theories).²

This was already evident in the thinking of the European theorists of the early modern period. For Machiavelli, conflict was a result of the human desire for self-preservation and power. For Hobbes, the three 'principal causes of quarrel' in a state of nature were competition for gain, fear of insecurity, and defence of honour. For Hume, the underlying conditions for human conflict were relative scarcity of resources and limited altruism. For Rousseau, the 'state of war' was born from 'the social state' itself.

Moreover, different types of explanation are more often than not politically compromised, whether propounded by conflict protagonists or by third parties. This was the case during the Cold War³ and is a common feature of post-Cold War conflicts. For example, in box 4.1 we may note the discrepancy between 'third-party' relational interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict such as the 'internal-conflict' model, and the 'traditional nationalist' and 'traditional unionist' interpretations historically espoused by the main conflict parties. This also shows how 'neutral' outside views, including academic theories of various kinds, can become as politically implicated in the struggle as any others.⁴

Nevertheless, there are explanations of conflict at the intermediate level which offer insight into contemporary conflict and help to situate it in the context of social and international conditions. Here, we will focus on the late Edward Azar's theory of protracted social

Box 4.1 Interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict

- 1 The traditional nationalist interpretation: Britain v. Ireland
The Irish people form a single nation and the fault for keeping Ireland divided lies with Britain.
- 2 The traditional unionist interpretation: Southern Ireland v. Northern Ireland
There are two peoples in Ireland who have an equal right to self-determination, Protestant (unionist/loyalist) and Catholic (nationalist/republican), and the fault for perpetuating the conflict lies with the refusal of nationalists to recognize this.
- 3 Marxist interpretations: capitalist v. worker
The cause of the conflict lies in the combination of an unresolved imperial legacy and the attempt by a governing capitalist class to keep the working class repressed and divided.
- 4 Internal-conflict interpretations: Protestant v. Catholic within Northern Ireland
The cause of the conflict lies in the incompatibility between the aspirations of the two divided communities in Northern Ireland.

Source: from Whyte, 1990: 113–205

conflict (PSC) as an example of conflict resolution analysis from the late 1970s and 1980s, which anticipated much of the current preoccupation with the domestic social roots of conflict and failures of governance. We will then bring Azar's ideas up to date by evaluating them in the light of conflict theories that have come to prominence in the years since his death in 1991.

The Context for an Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Theory

Within five years of Azar's death Holsti was writing that wars of the late twentieth century 'are not about foreign policy, security, honor, or status; they are about statehood, governance, and the role and status of nations and communities within states' (1996: 20–1). It may seem strange, therefore, that '[u]ntil recently, international relations theorists and strategic studies analysts paid comparatively little attention to the causes, effects and international implications of ethnic and other forms of communal conflict' (Brown, ed., 1993: vii). By the mid-1990s it had become suddenly fashionable to focus analysis on 'internal conflicts' (Brown, ed., 1996), 'new wars' (Kaldor and Vashee, eds, 1997), 'small wars' (Harding, 1994), 'civil wars' (King, 1997), 'ethnic conflicts' (Stavenhagen, 1996), 'conflict in post-colonial states' (van de Goor et al., eds, 1996) and so on, and for humanitarian and development NGOs and international agencies to refer to 'complex human emergencies' or 'complex political emergencies'. But this had not been the case during Azar's lifetime. Holsti himself, for example, had continued to focus on interstate war in his 1991 study of armed conflict between 1648 and 1989. It was only by 1996 that he had

changed his emphasis, diagnosing the status of communities within states and the nature of new and weak states as the 'primary locale of present and future wars' (1996: vii). This may not seem surprising in view of the decline in the relative incidence of interstate as against non-interstate war recorded in annual statistical analyses published in the 1990s, as we saw in the previous chapter. But this trend had been evident long before the 1990s, on some accounts reaching back to 1945,⁵ and, although international relations and strategic studies analysts may have paid relatively little attention to the international implications of 'ethnic and other forms of communal conflict' during the Cold War period, a number of scholars in the peace and conflict research field had long been preoccupied with them in their attempts to uncover the sources of what were variously termed 'deep-rooted conflicts' (Burton, 1987), 'intractable conflicts' (Kriesberg et al., eds, 1989) and 'protracted social conflicts'.

It has become popular in recent years for analysts to relate accounts of the evolution of modern warfare to accounts of the evolution of the modern state. The key qualitative turning points are seen to have been, first, the emergence of the so-called sovereign dynastic state in Europe, heralded by Machiavelli, Bodin and Hobbes from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; second, the coming of the principle of popular sovereignty and national self-determination from the time of the American and French revolutions; and, third, the bipolar stand-off at great power level after 1945. The first is associated with the domestic monopolization and reorganization of military force by sovereigns and its projection outwards to create the relatively formal patterns of early modern interstate warfare in place of earlier more sporadic, localized and ill-disciplined manifestations of organized violence. The second heralded the transition to mass national armies and 'total war' accompanying the first industrial revolution and the romantic movement and reaching its climax in the First and Second World Wars. The advent of nuclear weapons and the military stand-off between the Soviet and western blocs rendered major interstate war unviable (with a few exceptions at lower levels). Instead, the prevailing patterns of armed conflict in the 1950s and 1960s became wars of national independence associated with decolonization, and those of the 1970s and 1980s were postcolonial civil wars in which the great powers intervened as part of a continuing geopolitical struggle for power and influence (Howard, 1976; Giddens, 1987; Keegan, 1993). For this reason Rice (1988) has called the prevailing pattern of post-1945 wars 'wars of the third kind' (in contrast to the two earlier Clausewitzian phases), a term subsequently endorsed by Holsti (1996) and others. These are wars in which communities seek to create their own states in wars of 'national liberation', or which 'involve resistance by various peoples

against domination, exclusion, persecution, or dispossession of lands and resources, by the post-colonial state' (Holsti, 1996: 27).

Some detect a further evolution in prevailing patterns of conflict in the 1990s, as it were a third phase of 'wars of the third kind', namely a pattern of post-Cold War conflict which is seen to bear little resemblance to European wars in the era of the dynastic state or to the 'total wars' of the first half of the twentieth century, if anything resembling earlier medieval wars in their lack of differentiation between state and society, soldier and civilian, internal and external transactions across frontiers, war and organized crime (Van Crefeld, 1991). Kaldor characterizes these 'new wars' in terms of political goals (no longer the foreign policy interests of states, but the consolidation of new forms of power based on ethnic homogeneity); ideologies (no longer universal principles such as democracy, fascism or socialism, but tribalist and communalist identity politics); forms of mobilization (no longer conscription or appeals to patriotism, but fear, corruption, religion, magic and the media); external support (no longer superpowers or ex-colonial powers, but diaspora, foreign mercenaries, criminal mafia, regional powers); mode of warfare (no longer formal and organized campaigns with demarcated front-lines, bases and heavy weapons, but fragmented and dispersed, involving paramilitary and criminal groups, child soldiers, light weapons, and the use of atrocity, famine, rape and siege); and the war economy (no longer funded by taxation and generated by state mobilization, but sustained by outside emergency assistance and the parallel economy, including unofficial export of timber and precious metals, drug-trafficking, criminal rackets, plunder) (Kaldor and Vashee, eds, 1997: 7-19).

In fact, both Kaldor and Holsti follow Rice in suggesting that the key turning point in all this was not so much 1989 or 1990, as 1945. For Kaldor, '[s]ince 1945, there have been very few interstate wars' (1999: 29), while for Holsti:

The problem is that the Clausewitzian image of war, as well as its theoretical accoutrements, has become increasingly divorced from the characteristics and sources of most armed conflicts since 1945. The key question is: given that most wars since 1945 have been *within* states, of what intellectual and policy relevance are concepts and practices derived from the European and Cold War experiences that diagnosed or prescribed solutions for the problem of war *between* states? (1996: 14; italics in the original)

Does this suggest that the analysis of interstate war, which has dominated international relations since 1945, is largely irrelevant to post-1945 conflict? Entire tracts of quantitative research over the post-war decades have been devoted to the search for 'correlates of interstate war' which might give a clue to its sources and nature. Analysts

have sought to align measurable features of interstate and related wars such as its incidence, frequency, duration, magnitude, severity, intensity and costs, with empirically verifiable variables, such as structures (e.g. whether the hegemonic system is unipolar, bipolar, multipolar), relations (e.g. patterns of alliances, distribution of relative capabilities, configurations of power and power transition, arms races), national attributes (e.g. levels of domestic unrest, types of domestic regime, levels of economic development), and other aspects of what Mansbach and Vasquez (1981) call the 'paths to war' (e.g. the positive expected utility for decision-makers in initiating hostilities).⁶ This vast enterprise has produced mixed results.⁷ But is it possible that, in terms of prevailing patterns of post-1945 conflict, most international relations and strategic studies experts were looking in the wrong direction? Could it be that, mesmerized by the bipolar stand-off at great power level, analysts subsumed both decolonizing wars of national liberation and postcolonial civil wars into traditional Europeanized conceptual categories, failing to notice the qualitative change that had taken place when prevailing patterns of major armed conflict ceased being intra-European interstate wars after 1945? And was it only with the collapse of the Soviet Union that analysts belatedly realized that the 'new' patterns of post-Cold War conflict were in fact not so new, but had been prevalent, albeit under different geopolitical conditions, for nearly half a century?

We do not want to pronounce on these large questions here, beyond noting that this is the context within which Azar's work should be evaluated, because he had been arguing for a radical revision of prevailing Clausewitzian ideas since the 1970s. He was not alone in doing this, of course. He was heavily indebted to other conflict resolution theorists, notably John Burton with whom he co-published, although we will not try to disentangle credit for contributory ideas here. We should also be careful about unhistorical assumptions about 'new' features of warfare, which can in most cases be shown to have a long ancestry (Newman, 2004). Nevertheless, throughout this period there were still 'Clausewitzian' wars going on (between India and Pakistan, Israel and her neighbours, China and Vietnam, Iraq and Iran), 'mixed civil-international wars' were largely structured by Cold War geopolitics, and at great power level the two main alliances were still strenuously preparing for the possibility, if not likelihood, of a thoroughly Clausewitzian military encounter, despite the nuclear stalemate. It was the latter which largely preoccupied international relations and strategic studies analysts at the time, so that the reconceptualization of prevailing patterns of conflict offered by Azar and other conflict resolution analysts was hardly noticed in the conventional literature.

Edward Azar's Theory of Protracted Social Conflict (PSC)

Edward Azar was born in Lebanon in 1938, moved to the United States as a graduate international relations student, and subsequently specialized in what was at first a mainly quantitative analysis of interstate conflict. His Conflict and Peace Research Data Bank, built up at the University of North Carolina, however, already included internal domestic as well as external international data, and he was progressively drawn to concentrate as much if not more on the former than on the latter, not least as a result of his increasing concern about the condition of his native Lebanon. This was further reinforced by his experience on a number of dialogue and discussion sessions, mainly on the Middle East, including participation in Herbert Kelman's and Stephen Cohen's Harvard University problem-solving workshops. This brought him into the mainstream of the new conflict resolution fraternity, whose attempted reconceptualization of the roots of large-scale contemporary violence he found congenial and confirmatory of his own thinking. In particular, he came to work closely in the 1980s with John Burton, and together they set up the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at the University of Maryland. When Burton moved on to George Mason University, Azar stayed at Maryland, where he died in 1991 (see Fisher, 1997: ch. 4).

For Edward Azar, in a sustained sequence of studies published from the early 1970s (see References for Azar's main publications), the critical factor in protracted social conflict (PSC), such as persisted in Lebanon (his own particular field of study), Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, Israel, Sudan, Cyprus, Iran, Nigeria or South Africa, was that it represented 'the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation' (1991: 93). Traditional preoccupation with relations between states was seen to have obscured a proper understanding of these dynamics. Indeed, in radical contrast to the concerns of international law, the distinction between domestic and international politics was rejected as 'artificial': 'there is really only one social environment and its domestic face is the more compelling' (Azar and Burton, 1986: 33). The role of the state (as also linkages with other states) was to satisfy or frustrate basic communal needs, thus preventing or promoting conflict (Azar, 1990: 10–12).

Drawing upon datasets of PSC compiled from the 1970s at the University of Maryland, Azar systematically developed and refined his understanding of the dynamics which generated violent and persistent

conflict of this kind. At the time of his last writings in the early 1990s he identified more than sixty examples of this 'new type of conflict', which, 'distinct from traditional disputes over territory, economic resources, or East-West rivalry . . . revolves around questions of communal identity' (1991: 93). In the opening chapter of what is perhaps his most succinct summation of a decade and a half's work, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (1990), Azar contrasts three aspects of what up until then had been a prevailing orthodoxy in war studies with his own approach. First, there had been a tendency 'to understand conflicts through a rather rigid dichotomy of internal and external dimensions' with sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists preoccupied with the former ('civil wars, insurgencies, revolts, coups, protests, riots, revolutions, etc.') and international relations scholars with the latter ('interstate wars, crises, invasions, border conflicts, blockades, etc.'). Second, prevailing frameworks of analysis had often been based on the functional differentiation of conflict aspects and types into sub-categories of psychological, social, political and economic conflicts, and into different 'levels of analysis'. Third, there had been a tendency to focus on overt and violent conflict while ignoring covert, latent or non-violent conflict, and on an approach to conflict dynamics in terms of conflict cycles in which the 'termination of violent acts is often equated with the state of peace'. In contrast, a study of PSC suggested that:

many conflicts currently active in the underdeveloped parts of the world are characterized by a blurred demarcation between internal and external sources and actors. Moreover, there are multiple causal factors and dynamics, reflected in changing goals, actors and targets. Finally, these conflicts do not show clear starting and terminating points. (Azar, 1990: 6)

The term 'protracted social conflict' emphasized that the sources of such conflicts lay predominantly within (and across) rather than between states, with four clusters of variables identified as preconditions for their transformation to high levels of intensity.

First, there was the 'communal content', the fact that the 'most useful unit of analysis in protracted social conflict situations is the identity group - racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and others' (1986: 31). In contrast to the well-known 'levels of analysis' framework popularized by Kenneth Waltz (1959), which in its classic form distinguished system, state and individual levels, PSC analysis focuses in the first instance on identity groups, however defined, noting that it is the relationship between identity groups and states which is at the core of the problem (what Azar called the 'disarticulation between the state and society as a whole': 1990: 7), and how individual interests and

needs are mediated through membership of social groups ('what is of concern are the *societal needs* of the individual – security, identity, recognition and others': 1986: 31). Azar links the disjunction between state and society in many parts of the world to a colonial legacy which artificially imposed European ideas of territorial statehood onto 'a multitude of communal groups' on the principle of 'divide and rule'. As a result, in many postcolonial multicommunal societies the state machinery comes to be 'dominated by a single communal group or a coalition of a few communal groups that are unresponsive to the needs of other groups in the society' which 'strains the social fabric and eventually breeds fragmentation and protracted social conflict'. As to the formation of identity groups themselves, as noted in chapter 2, Azar, like other conflict resolution theorists, drew on a rich tradition of research in social psychology and social anthropology to sketch the various ways in which individual needs come to be mediated and articulated through processes of socialization and group identity, themselves culturally conditioned (Lewin, 1948; Kelly, 1955; Sherif, 1966; Deutsch, 1973; Tajfel, ed., 1978).

Second, following other conflict resolution analysts, notably John Burton, Azar identified deprivation of human needs as the underlying source of PSC ('Grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed collectively. Failure to redress these grievances by the authority cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict': 1990: 9). Unlike interests, needs are 'ontological' and non-negotiable, so that, if conflict comes, it is likely to be intense, vicious and, from a traditional Clausewitzian perspective, 'irrational'. In particular, he cites security needs, development needs, political access needs and identity needs (cultural and religious expression), the first three corresponding to Henry Shue's three 'basic rights' of security, subsistence and freedom (1980). Arguing for a broader understanding of 'security' than was usual in academic circles at the time, Azar linked this to an equally broad understanding of 'development' and 'political access':

Reducing overt conflict requires reduction in levels of underdevelopment. Groups which seek to satisfy their identity and security needs through conflict are in effect seeking change in the structure of their society. Conflict resolution can truly occur and last if satisfactory amelioration of underdevelopment occurs as well. Studying protracted conflict leads one to conclude that peace is development in the broadest sense of the term. (1990: 155)

Third, in a world in which the state has been 'endowed with authority to govern and use force where necessary to regulate society, to protect citizens, and to provide collective goods', Azar cited 'governance and the state's role' as the critical factor in the satisfaction or frustration of individual and identity group needs: 'Most states which

experience protracted social conflict tend to be characterized by incompetent, parochial, fragile, and authoritarian governments that fail to satisfy basic human needs' (1990: 10). Here he made three main points. Whereas in western liberal theory the state 'is an aggregate of individuals entrusted to govern effectively and to act as an impartial arbiter of conflicts among the constituent parts', treating all members of the political community as legally equal citizens, this is not empirically what happens in most parts of the world, particularly in newer and less stable states where political authority 'tends to be monopolized by the dominant identity group or a coalition of hegemonic groups' which use the state to maximize their interests at the expense of others. Both through the mobilization of group interests and identities by ruling elites, and through the reactive counter-identification of excluded 'minorities', the 'communal content of the state' becomes basic to the study of PSC. Next, the monopolizing of power by dominant individuals and groups and the limiting of access to other groups precipitates a 'crisis of legitimacy', so that 'regime type and the level of legitimacy' come to be seen as 'important linkage variables between needs and protracted social conflict' (1990: 11). Finally, Azar notes how PSCs tend to be concentrated in developing countries which are typically characterized by 'rapid population growth and limited resource base' and also have restricted 'political capacity' often linked to a colonial legacy of weak participatory institutions, a hierarchical tradition of imposed bureaucratic rule from metropolitan centres, and inherited instruments of political repression: 'In most protracted social conflict-laden countries, political capacity is limited by a rigid or fragile authority structure which prevents the state from responding to, and meeting, the needs of various constituents.'

Finally, there is the role of what Azar called 'international linkages', in particular political-economic relations of economic dependency within the international economic system, and the network of political-military linkages constituting regional and global patterns of clientage and cross-border interest. Modern states, particularly weak states, are porous to the international forces operating within the wider global community: the '[f]ormation of domestic social and political institutions and their impact on the role of the state are greatly influenced by the patterns of linkage within the international system' (1990: 11).

Whether or not in any one case these four clusters of preconditions for PSC in the event activate overt conflict will depend upon the more contingent actions and events of 'process dynamics', which Azar analyses into three groups of determinants: 'communal actions and strategies', 'state actions and strategies' and 'built-in mechanisms of conflict' (1990: 12-15). The first of these involves the various processes

of identity group formation, organization and mobilization, the emergence and nature of leadership, the choice of political goals (access, autonomy, secession, revolutionary political programme) and tactics (civil disobedience, guerrilla war), and the scope and nature of externalities. State actions and strategies form the second main element, with governing individuals and elites at any one time theoretically facing an array of policy choices running from different forms of political accommodation at one end of the spectrum to 'coercive repression' or 'instrumental co-option' at the other. In Azar's view, given the perceived political and economic costs involved in weak and fragmented polities and because of the 'winner-take-all' norm 'which still prevails in multicomunal societies', it is much more likely to be repression than accommodation. Finally, there are the various self-reinforcing 'built-in mechanisms of conflict' exhaustively studied by conflict resolution analysts once the malign spiral of conflict escalation is triggered.

Azar drew on the work of Sumner (1906), Gurr (1970), Mitchell (1981) and others to trace the process by which mutually exclusionary 'experiences, fears and belief systems' generate 'reciprocal negative images which perpetuate communal antagonisms and solidify protracted social conflict'. Antagonistic group histories, exclusionist myths, demonizing propaganda and dehumanizing ideologies serve to justify discriminatory policies and legitimize atrocities. In these circumstances, in a dynamic familiar to students of international relations as the 'security dilemma', actions are mutually interpreted in the most threatening light, 'the worst motivations tend to be attributed to the other side', the space for compromise and accommodation shrinks and 'proposals for political solutions become rare, and tend to be perceived on all sides as mechanisms for gaining relative power and control' (Azar, 1990: 15). All of this intensifies further as political crisis spirals into war, where new vested interests emerge dependent upon the political economy of the war itself, the most violent and unruly elements in society appear in leadership roles and criminality becomes a political norm. At the limit, disintegration follows. With sustained attrition, political structures buckle and collapse, a social implosion which subsequently sucks everything else in.

Azar saw PSC analysis as an attempt to 'synthesize the realist and structuralist paradigms into a pluralist framework' more suitable for explaining prevalent patterns of conflict than the more limited alternatives (1991: 95). We are not claiming here that Azar's analysis is the last word on the subject, nor that he was alone in pointing to the significance of mobilized identities, exclusionist ideologies, fragile and authoritarian governance, weak states and disputed sovereignty as chief sources of major armed conflict (we have only to think of the

Table 4.1 Azar's preconditions for protracted social conflict (PSC)

Relevant discipline	Preconditions for PSCs	Correlates
Anthropology, history, sociology	Communal content	Degree of ethnic heterogeneity
Psychology, biology, development studies	Needs	Levels of human development
Politics, political economy	Governance	State capacity and scales of political repression
International relations, strategic studies	International linkages	Volume of arms imports etc.; cross-border fomentation

work of David Horowitz (1985) and Anthony Smith (1986) in the mid-1980s); we claim only that his approach anticipated many aspects of what has since become orthodoxy, and that his ideas deserve more recognition than they have been given.

A further point is worth making. In terms of 'correlates of war', Azar's ideas were also seen to offer a framework for the analysis of prevailing patterns of war, which differed from what was usual when interstate war was the object of analysis (see the kinds of indicator suggested in Esty et al., 1998). Table 4.1 shows the way in which Azar's 'preconditions' widened the relevance of different disciplines to the study of protracted social conflict beyond what had hitherto been normal in mainstream international relations, and suggests indicatively the kinds of correlate that came into view as a result. Such statistical studies of non-interstate war are still in their infancy, and, as shown in the next section, remain controversial, but Azar's model offered a hopeful beginning.

Have More Recent Theories Confirmed or Discredited PSC?

In evaluating Azar's theory posthumously, we should of course remember that the writing on 'new wars' since his death assumes a knowledge of the post-Cold War world that he did not have. He could not have taken account in his published writings of the impact of the disintegration of the bipolar world or of Zartman's conclusion that: 'More than anything else, it is the uncertainty following the passing of the old order that allows conflict to break out with such abandon at the end of the millennium' (1997: 6). It is possible that Azar might have seen Mearsheimer's 1990 'Back to the Future' article, but, if so, for reasons already given, we can be pretty certain that he would have been unimpressed by its neo-realist interpretation.

Let us consider four more 'global level' interpretations that have become popular since the end of the Cold War and bear ambiguously on Azar's theory.

Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' hypothesis has recently been revived in the wake of the 11 September 2001 catastrophe (1996). Some have interpreted historic Muslim *ressentiment* against the West in these terms (Lewis, 2002), or pitted tribal fundamentalism (jihad) against secular consumerist capitalism (McWorld) (Barber, 2001). Others have been more circumspect (Armstrong, 2001; Shadid, 2002). Although identity groups play a key role in Azar's ontology, they are not 'the broadest level of cultural identity that people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species', which is how Huntington defines a civilization (1996: 43). Azar would, we think, have regarded the latter not as a social *datum*, but as part of the ideological apparatus likely to be mobilized by political interests. He would also almost certainly have opposed Huntington's policy conclusions for western decision-makers.

Another issue area that Azar did not, so far as we know, forefront in his own analysis is that of 'environmental conflict'. This has become more prominent in the literature since his death, but in this case we do not see a contradiction with Azar's theory. In assessing the links between population growth, environmental scarcity and future violent conflict, for example, Thomas Homer-Dixon examines the likelihood of international 'simple scarcity' conflicts over water, forests, fishing and agricultural land, 'group-identity' conflicts triggered by population movements, and 'deprivation' conflicts caused by relative depletion of economic resources (1991, 1994). The latter two are evidently consonant with Azar's theory.

A third major strand of conflict analysis in the 1990s and early 2000s is more critical of conflict resolution. This is the international political economy critique that we mentioned in chapter 1. The central argument is, first, that the 'new wars' in the Third World are not symptomatic of local failures in governance, but are a product of the distortions of late capitalism, and, second, that the way they are now managed by donor governments, international financial institutions, aid and development agencies, and the United Nations perpetuates this. Development is seen to have been co-opted into a global security regime that uses conflict resolution and social reconstruction, as well as the more obvious instruments of international military control, to transform target societies in the image of the interveners in order to pacify the unruly periphery and maintain the status quo: 'the conflict resolution and post-war reconstruction concerns of liberal governance could be seen as the "riot control" end of a spectrum encompassing a broad range of "global poor relief" activities . . .' (Duffield, 2001: 9).

Is this a comprehensive rejection of Azar's analysis of PSC? We do not think so. Duffield's caricature of conflict resolution is just that – a caricature. Azar himself would have agreed – indeed, did agree – with much of the international political economy critique in the form he was familiar with in the 1980s, seeing the prevalence of PSC in the Third World as symptomatic of the distortions of postcolonial economic and political structures. He did not identify conflict resolution solely with 'micro' techniques, such as principled negotiation, facilitative mediation or problem-solving workshops. As Ronald Fisher notes, Azar saw these as important mechanisms for achieving short-term breakthroughs, but emphasized throughout his work that 'long-term development is essential to address fundamental causes' (1997: 97) – for Azar, 'peace is development in the broadest sense of the term'. In the final chapter of his book Duffield argues for a genuine 'cosmopolitan politics' that upholds international law and the search for participatory 'common values', as against the 'liberal governance' imposition of external norms and rules:

Rather than searching for better policy or commissioning more detailed forms of analysis, the real task is reforming the institutions and networks of global governance to address complexity. . . . Reform would require turning rule-based bureaucracies into adaptive, learning and networking organisations. (2001: 264–5)

Azar would simply say 'amen'. The idea of adaptive organization within a cosmopolitan world society is exactly John Burton's notion of 'second order learning', which, as we saw in chapter 2, he regards as essential for human survival.

Finally in terms of global-level interpretations, there is the whole discourse on 'new wars' in which state decay in some regions has been seen to coincide with the end of Cold War control, rapidly reduced costs and increased availability of weapons, and a change in tactics and the function of war, no longer aimed so much at decisive military victory as at perpetuating the economic and other gains associated with the continuance of violence (Keen, 1998; Kaldor, 1999; Reno, 1999). The emphasis is on the way new wars merge into forms of cross-border economic exploitation and criminal networks and are sustained often by the very measures taken to end them (although we have noted above how many or most of these features are far from new). As an analysis of what happens once large-scale violence has broken out, this is a further elaboration of Azar's understanding that PSCs 'do not show clear starting and terminating points' and often become self-perpetuating, capable of persisting at fluctuating levels for years, hardly noticed by the analysts of 'great power war' in his day. If the 'new war' analysis extends to a substantial reinterpretation of the

deeper causes of such wars, however, then this would be much more significant for Azar's theory. So we will address this separately below when we look at theories about economic incentives for war (p. 95).

This short survey of post-Cold War global-level conflict analysis suggests that, having set aside the neo-realist and 'clash of civilizations' accounts, Azar would have found little difficulty in accommodating predictions of future conflict exacerbated by environmental constraints, the global distortions of late capitalism, or the privatization of violence and shifting technologies of warfare. We now turn to three other types of explanation for the prevalence of large-scale violence that have become more prominent since Azar's time, at regional, state and societal levels.

First, we may note those who have focused mainly on cross-border contagion and regional security complexes for explanations of the prevalence or absence of large-scale violence in 'zones of peace and war' (Lake and Rothchild, eds, 1997). Others attribute the contrast between 'zones of war' and 'zones of peace' to the stability of power structures in the various regions. Buzan and his associates, for example, studied 'regional security complexes' in the 1980s (that is, groups of states with interconnected security concerns). They found a spectrum ranging from regions in turmoil (marked by numerous conflict formations), through security regimes (where member states remain potential threats to each other but have reduced mutual insecurity by formal and informal arrangements), to pluralistic security communities (where member states no longer feel that they need to make serious provision for a mutual use of force against each other). They located the main determinants of regional stability in interstate factors: the numbers of state players within a given security complex, the patterns of amity and hostility and the distributions of power (Buzan, 1991: ch. 5). Change within a security complex could thus be measured in terms of four quite simple structural parameters: the maintenance of the status quo, internal change within the complex, external boundary change (states entering or leaving the complex), and 'overlay' – the dominant intrusion of an outside power. Since then, Buzan et al. have offered a more complex model in many ways closer to Azar's ideas.⁸ Here, we suggest, we have an important supplement to Azar's model, and perhaps a qualification in those cases like Sierra Leone after 1991 where it may be external fomentation that is seen as a prime cause of war. This does not, however, contradict the main body of his work.

Another cluster of explanations for 'new wars' in the 1990s has come from those who place their main emphasis on the 'crisis of governance' precipitated by the impact of globalization on 'state decay' (Jackson, 1990; Ayoub, 1995). Brzoska explains how this has been

characteristic of 'holistic' German explanations for new wars, for example, such as those of Munkler:

The predominant cause of internal war, in this line of thinking, is the erosion of the capability of the state to govern. This can be the result of the weakening of the legitimacy of the state or of direct challenges to its monopoly of the use of force. (2005: 109)

We need not linger here, major topic though it is, because this is clearly compatible with, if not confirmatory of, Azar's strong emphasis on the key significance of 'governance and the state's role', including the importance of perceived legitimacy, in precipitating or inhibiting the escalation of PSC. It is also in line with Azar's observation that weak postcolonial states in the Third World are particularly vulnerable. It should be noted, though, that, since Azar thought that 'highly centralised political structures are sources of conflict', he himself advocated 'appropriate decentralised structures' (1986: 33–4). This is at odds with the recommendations of analysts such as Holsti, who advocate, on the contrary, 'the strengthening of states' (1996: xii). The discrepancy may not be as stark as at first appears, however, since Holsti agrees with Azar that 'vertical legitimacy' (political consensus between governors and governed about the institutional 'rules of the game') and 'horizontal legitimacy' (inclusive political community in which individuals and groups have equal access to decisions and allocations) are what ultimately underpin 'the strength of states' (1996: 82–98).

Turning to the societal level and what Azar called the 'disarticulation between the state and society as a whole', the increased prominence of nationalism and ethnicity in explanations for war in the 1990s would certainly have caused few problems for Azar (Esman, 2004). These were the kinds of conflict that he had been analysing since the 1970s. For example, neither van Evera's 'Hypotheses on nationalism and war' (1994) nor Lake and Rothchild's 'Containing fear: the origins and management of ethnic conflict' (1996) contradicts Azar's earlier conclusions. Lake and Rothchild argue that ethnic conflict is neither a result of 'ancient hatreds' nor caused by the sudden 'uncorking' of Soviet repression, but that:

ethnic conflict is most often caused by collective fears of the future. As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. As information failures, problems of credible commitment, and the security dilemma take hold, groups become apprehensive, the state weakens, and conflict becomes more likely. Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, build upon these fears and polarise society. Political memories and emotions also magnify these anxieties, driving groups further

apart. Together these between-group and within-group strategic interactions produce a toxic brew that can explode into murderous violence. (1996: 41)

This is an almost word-for-word replication of Azar's description of the 'process dynamics' of PSC escalation. Azar would have added 'state actions and strategies' (merged by the authors under 'strategic interactions within groups' and 'confidence-building measures') and the interaction between these and 'communal actions and strategies'. He would also have added an analysis of what he saw as the underlying frustrations that formed the 'preconditions' for conflict in the first place.

Finally, we reach what has turned out to be the main frontal assault on Azar's style of PSC analysis in the 1990s – the so-called 'greed versus grievance' debate (Berdal and Malone, eds, 2000). As a somewhat ironic consequence of the neglect of his work, it is not Azar who is criticized by name here, but those who argue in the same way:

Many, if not most, current conflicts stem from the failure of political, economic and social institutions to pay sufficient attention to the grievances and perceived needs of significant groups in the population. (Rasmussen et al., eds, 1997: 33)

In contrast to this, analysts such as Collier explicitly deny that 'grievance' causes major armed conflicts, and look instead to 'greed' – 'economic agendas as causes of conflict' (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001). The argument is based on a claim of statistical refutation – that indicators of need-deprivation do not correlate closely with the incidence of armed conflict in comparison with indicators for economic incentives. The 'proxies' used to capture the economic agenda include: the share of primary commodity exports in GDP, since these are the most easily lootable assets (diamonds, drugs, timber); the proportion of young males between the ages of 15 and 24 in a society, since 'overwhelmingly the people who join rebellions are young men'; and the average number of years of education that the population has received as a proxy for employability and income-earning opportunities outside rebellion and war. These are then compared with 'grievance' proxies: ethnic or religious hatred, economic (horizontal) inequality, lack of political rights, and government economic competence. The conclusion is that 'The results overwhelmingly point to the importance of economic agendas as opposed to grievance':

The combination of large exports of primary commodities, a high proportion of young men, and economic decline drastically increases risk. Greed seems more important than grievance. (Collier, 2000: 110)

We will not analyse the statistical evidence point by point here, but will focus instead on Collier's policy conclusions. The original stark

contrast drawn between greed and grievance has been much softened by subsequent qualification, to the point where, surprisingly, policy recommendations from an 'economic agenda' basis do not differ significantly from those suggested by Azar's PSC analysis. For example, drawing from his joint study with Hoeffler of civil wars between 1965 and 1999 (2001: 147), Collier concludes that, in addition to measures for reducing the risk from an excessive dependence on natural resource exports, 'policies for conflict prevention' should include, first, policies to remedy 'low income and economic decline' and, second, policies to mitigate the dangers of 'ethnic dominance' such as to 'entrench minority rights in the constitution':

This can be done by explicitly legislating either group rights or strong individual rights. . . . The scope for this approach depends upon the credibility of the checks and balances that the state can erect upon government power. Usually states are not strong enough for this degree of trust, and so they can usefully be reinforced by international and regional commitments. (Collier, 2001: 158)

We have seen how Azar's analysis led to precisely the same policy recommendations suggested by his first three PSC 'preconditions': the importance of managing ethnic dominance, countering lack of economic opportunity, and remedying government inability to protect minorities. Collier also stresses the significance of handling the influence of diasporas – Azar's fourth 'precondition' of cross-border linkages. In fact, when Collier turns to policy recommendations for 'postconflict peacebuilding', he explicitly reimports the language of 'grievance' itself, albeit with complex circumlocutions in an attempt to preserve a dubious distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' grievance:

The alternative to continuing the political contest but making the military option infeasible is to resolve the political contest itself. This requires at a minimum that the grievances be addressed, even if though on average they are not objectively any more serious than those in peaceful societies. If, indeed, group grievance has been manufactured by rebel indoctrination, it can potentially be deflated by political gestures. While grievances may need to be addressed objectively, the main purpose of addressing them is probably for their value in changing perceptions. (2001: 159)

In short, the analysis of economic incentives to violence from natural resource predation is, indeed, a substantial addition to Azar's PSC analysis, leading as it does to the classification of factional and criminalized wars in which political agendas play little part – these are already incorporated into our conflict typology in chapter 3 (see table 4.2). This may happen in any war as the self-perpetuating logic of violence takes hold. But it can hardly be seen to replace a PSC approach

Table 4.2 Primary commodity exports and the financing of conflict

Combatant	Resource	Period	Est. revenue
Angola rebels (UNITA)	Diamonds	1992–2001	\$4–4.2 billion total
Sierra Leone rebels (RUF)	Diamonds	1990s	\$25–125 million/year
Liberia government	Timber	Late 1990s	\$100–187 million/year
Sudan government	Oil	Since 1999	\$400 million/year
Rwanda government	Coltan (from Congo)	1999–2000	\$250 million total
Afghanistan (Taliban, Northern Alliance)	Opium, lapis lazuli, emeralds	Mid-1990s–2001	\$90–100 million/year
Cambodia government, Khmer Rouge	Timber	Mid-1990s	\$230–390 million/year
Myanmar government	Timber	1990s	\$112 million/year
Colombia (FARC rebels)	Cocaine	Late 1990s	\$140 million/year

Source: Renner, 2002

as originally claimed – for example, in the kinds of cases that gave rise to Azar’s conclusions such as the conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Spanish Basque country, Chechnya, Sri Lanka or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

More telling in this regard would seem to be those studies since the end of the Cold War that aim to analyse the complex, varied and lengthy processes by which incipient ethnopolitical conflicts do or do not escalate towards violence. Here results are exactly consonant with a PSC approach, as exemplified in the work of Azar’s fellow scholar from Maryland, Ted Robert Gurr. In one way Gurr confirms Collier’s finding that grievance rarely leads to overt rebellion, but he does so within an interpretative context of ‘communal-based protest’ that exactly mirrors Azar’s approach:

[T]he most common political strategy among the 275 ethnopolitical groups surveyed in the Minorities at Risk study was not rebellion: it was symbolic and organizational politics. . . . Equally important, the number of groups using armed violence has been declining after decades of increase. The eruption of ethnic warfare that seized observers’ attention in the early 1990s was actually the culmination of a long-term general trend of increasing communal-based protest and rebellion that began in the 1950s and peaked immediately after the end of the Cold War. (2000: 275–6)

An Interpretative Framework for Conflict Analysis

Given the variety and complexity of the main post-Cold War conflict theories indicated above, we will end our survey of conflict analysis by offering a modified ‘levels-of-analysis’ model, which we think is the

Table 4.3 Sources of contemporary conflict: a framework

	Level	Example
1	Global	Geopolitical transition, North–South economic divide, environmental constraints, weapons proliferation, ideological contestation
2	Regional	Clientage patterns, spillover, intervention, cross-border social demography, diaspora
3	State	
	<i>Social</i>	Weak society: cultural divisions, ethnic imbalance
	<i>Economic</i>	Weak economy: poor resource base, relative deprivation
	<i>Political</i>	Weak polity: partisan government, regime illegitimacy
4	Conflict party	Group mobilization, intergroup dynamics
5	Elite/individual	Exclusionist policies, factional interest, rapacious leadership

most helpful framework for locating relevant interpretations and for specifying appropriate conflict resolution responses. Instead of Waltz's 1959 'system', 'state' and 'individual' levels (still used by most contemporary accounts, such as Crocker et al., eds, 2001: Part 1), we recommend a five-level model, comprising two 'international' levels (global and regional), one 'state' level divided into functional sectors, and two 'social' levels (conflict party and elite/individual). The relative emphasis accorded to these levels will shift according to the interpretation being considered or the conflict being analysed (see table 4.3). Azar's 'international linkages' can be recognized at global and regional levels, his 'communal content', 'deprivation of needs' and 'governance' at state level (social, economic, political sectors), and his 'process dynamics' at conflict party and elite/individual levels.

Global sources of contemporary conflict

Having looked at some of the main global-level theories in the previous section, we will confine ourselves here to noting the synergy between them – another reason why the sources of contemporary conflict are so difficult to handle. Geopolitical readjustment at the end of the Cold War ended some conflicts fuelled by superpower rivalry, but precipitated others, both along the perimeters of the former Soviet Union and in parts of the world where simplifying bipolar structures were suddenly removed. This phase may now be coming to an end in the Balkans (although not in Central Asia and particularly the Caucasus). In its place the three interlocking factors of the North–South divide, environmental constraint and the proliferation of new technologies of

Box 4.2 Arms exports and conflict

Some \$176 billion worth of weaponry was exported to the Third World between 1987 and 1991. Keith Krause (1996) notes three theoretical models of the relation between arms exports and conflict, each of which carries a different policy prescription. Weapon availability can be seen as: (a) an independent variable causing conflict, (b) a dependent variable following conflict, or (c) an intervening variable acting as a catalyst in conflicts caused by deeper factors. He favours the third alternative. In fact, many post-Cold War conflicts have been fought with small arms rather than heavy weapons (Boutwell et al., eds, 1995). Moreover, the recipients have increasingly been sub-state groups (Karp, 1994). On one estimate, the trade in small arms has been worth some \$10 billion a year (*The Economist*, 12 February 1994: 19–21). Indeed, in many cases, as in Rwanda in 1994, the worst massacres have been perpetrated with machetes.

war are seen to have become more prominent: ‘the combination of wealth-poverty disparities and limits to growth is likely to lead to a crisis of unsatisfied expectations within an increasingly informed global majority of the disempowered’ (Rogers and Ramsbotham, 1999: 749). Some see, in addition, a global ideological struggle between religious fundamentalism and secular modernity which draws on these tensions and transmutes them into new forms of conflict. Lowering over this is the threat that rogue states, terrorist groups and criminal networks could gain access to weapons of mass destruction.

Regional sources of contemporary conflict

The end of the Cold War and the ‘regionalization’ of world politics have highlighted the importance of the regional level of explanation. As noted in chapter 3, conflict data show clear regional differences in contemporary conflicts. This confirms those studies that emphasize the importance of overspill from one area to another, or where a common precipitating factor has generated violent conflicts in a vulnerable region; for example: the Great Lakes area of Africa (identity/secession conflicts and refugee movements), West Africa (factional conflicts following the breakdown of postcolonial states), the Caucasus (identity/secession conflicts following the collapse of the Soviet Union), Central Asia (identity/secession and factional conflicts following the collapse of the Soviet Union).

The regional effects are both outwards (‘spill-over’, ‘contagion’, ‘diffusion’) and inwards (‘influence’, ‘interference’, ‘intervention’) (Lake and Rothchild, eds, 1997) (see box 4.3 and map 4.1). ‘Internal’ wars have external effects on the region through the spread of weaponry, economic dislocation, links with terrorism, disruptive floods of

Box 4.3 A regional pattern of conflict interventions

A number of Tutsi exiles from Rwanda helped President Museveni of Uganda in his successful bid for power, were integrated into the Ugandan army after 1986, and subsequently defected with their weapons to the mainly Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front forces which eventually seized control of Rwanda in 1994. This led to a consolidation of Tutsi control in Burundi and, in the autumn of 1996, to cross-border action in what was then Zaire against the Hutu militia responsible for the 1994 Rwanda massacres who were being sheltered by President Mobutu. With enthusiastic backing from the Zairean Tutsi Banyamulenge, who had been discriminated against by Mobutu's Western Zairean based regime, this swelled into concerted military support for Laurent Kabila in his march on Kinshasa and eventual deposition of Mobutu. This in turn had a knock-on effect in Angola by depriving UNITA's Jonas Savimbi of Mobutu's support, and encouraging the sending in of Angolan troops to Congo-Brazzaville to help reinstall Denis Sassou-Nguesso as President in October 1997. Meanwhile, similar incursions were beginning to tip the scale in the long-standing conflict in Sudan.



Map 4.1 Regional conflicts in Africa: spill-over effects

refugees, and spill-over into regional politics when neighbouring states are dragged in or the same people straddle several states. Conversely, regional instability affects the internal politics of states through patterns of clientage, the actions of outside governments, cross-border

movements of people and ideas, black market activities, criminal networks and the spread of small arms. There are also evident sources of regional conflict where river basins extend across state boundaries (Gleick, 1995),⁹ or where a regional mismatch between state borders and the distribution of peoples (usually as a result of the perpetuation of former colonial boundaries) lays states open to the destabilizing effects of large-scale population movements (Gurr, 1993; Gurr and Harff, 1994).

The role of the state

At this point we move from a consideration of *contextual* factors at international level to *structural* factors at state level. Wherever its other sources may lie, it is at the level of the state that the critical struggle is in the end played out. Despite predictions of the 'end of the state' under the twin pressures of globalization and what Falk calls 'the local realities of community and sentiment' (1985: 690), the state is nevertheless seen to remain 'the primary locus of identity for most people' (Kennedy, 1993: 134). Clark agrees that the state is still the key mediator in the continuously oscillating balance between forces of globalization ('increasingly potent international pressures') and fragmentation ('the heightened levels of domestic discontent that will inevitably be brought in their wake') (1997: 202). Given the juridical monopoly on sovereignty still formally accorded to the state within the current international system, all conflict parties are in the end in any case driven to compete for state control if they want to institute revolutionary programmes (Type 2 conflict), safeguard communal needs (Type 3 conflict), or merely secure factional interests (Type 4 conflict). Even in 'failed' states this usually still remains the ultimate prize for the warring elements. And the same applies to the various forms of contemporary terrorism. Unlike classic interstate wars, or lower levels of domestic unrest, therefore, the major deadly conflicts with which this book deals are defined as such through their becoming integral crises of the state itself, problematically cast as it still is as chief actor on the international stage and chief satisfier of domestic needs. It is the interconnection between three sectors here that is critical – social, economic and political – and, in addition, at a certain level of escalation two other sectors come into play: a law and order, and security. It is useful to bear these in mind when looking at prevention (chapter 5) and post-war reconstruction (chapter 8).

In the *social sector* we are concerned with the major types of social division around which conflict fault lines may develop. In recent years the debate between those who emphasize the 'vertical' (ethnic) roots of conflict and those who emphasize the 'horizontal' (class) roots (Munck, 1986) has been further complicated by the advent of other

revolutionary ideologies such as Islamist and Hindu nationalist movements (but also Jewish, Christian and even Buddhist). On the other hand, others again have noted the inadequacy of western preoccupations with class and ethnicity in determining the social roots of conflict in parts of the world, such as Africa, where social life 'revolves, in the first instance, around a medley of more compact organizations, networks, groupings, associations, and movements that have evolved over the centuries in response to changing circumstances' (Chazan et al., 1992: 73-103). According to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, forty-nine of the fifty-three Commonwealth states are ethnically heterogeneous, and, as John Darby notes, given complex settlement patterns and the mismatch between state borders and the distribution of peoples, 'ethnic homogeneity, on past evidence, is almost always unattainable' (Darby, 1998: 2).

In the *economic sector* once again there is some measure of agreement that protracted conflict tends to be associated with patterns of underdevelopment or uneven development. This is a much discussed topic, with some evidence, first, that, *contra* certain traditional theories of social and political revolution, there is a correlation between absolute levels of economic underdevelopment and violent conflict (Jongman and Schmid, 1997; Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2001; Collier et al., 2003);¹⁰ second, that conflict is associated with over-fast or uneven development where modernization disrupts traditional patterns, but does not as yet deliver adequate or expected rewards – especially where this is associated with rapid urbanization and population growth with a resulting increase in the relative numbers of untrained and unemployed young males (Newman, 1991); and, third, that, even where there are reasonable levels of development in absolute terms, conflict may still be generated where there is actual or perceived inequity in the distribution of benefits (Lichbach, 1989). In all three cases mounting discontent offers fertile recruiting ground for ideological extremism and racial exclusionism.

For many analysts it is the *government sector* that is the key arena, since social and economic grievances are in the end expressed in political form. Three main patterns may be discerned here. First, conflict can become endemic even in established liberal democratic states when party politics become ascriptively based and one community perceives that state power has been permanently 'captured' by another, and is therefore driven to challenge the legitimacy of the state in order to change the situation, as in Canada, Belgium, Spain (Basques) or Northern Ireland (Lijphart, 1977; Gurr and Harff, 1994: ch. 5). This has also been a feature in a number of non-western countries, such as Sri Lanka (Horowitz, 1991). Second, conflict is likely in countries where authoritarian regimes successfully manipulate the

state apparatus in order to cling to power and block political access to all those not part of their own narrow patronage network, eventually becoming little more than exploitative 'kleptocracies' as in some post-Soviet Central Asian and postcolonial African states. Here politics has indeed become 'zero-sum' and change can only be effected through a direct challenge to the incumbent regime. Third, there is what seems to be the growing phenomenon of 'failed' or 'collapsed' states (Helman and Ratner, 1992-3; Zartman, ed., 1995; Rotberg, 2004), which, in the absence of adequate means for raising revenue or keeping order, succumb to endemic and chaotic violence. In a report on Africa presented to the UN Security Council in April 1998, Secretary-General Kofi Annan concluded:

The nature of political power in many African states, together with the real and perceived consequences of capturing and maintaining power, is a key source of conflict across the continent. It is frequently the case that political victory assumes a winner-takes-all form with respect to wealth and resources, patronage, and the prestige and prerogatives of office. Where there is insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important, and the stakes become dangerously high. (Annan, 1998)

Finally, we should note how, at a critical stage in conflict escalation, it is the *law and order* and *security sectors* that become increasingly prominent. This is the moment when domestic conflict crosses the Rubicon and becomes a violent struggle for control of the state itself. The two clear indicators are, first, in the law and order sector when the legal system and the civilian police come to be identified with particularist interests and are no longer seen to represent impartial authority, and, second, in the security sector when civil unrest can no longer be controlled by non-military means and armed militia emerge. At this stage, as Barry Posen has noted, the 'security dilemma', familiar to analysts of international relations, now impacts with devastating effect on the inchoate social-state-international scene (1993). Once this genie is out of the bottle and armed factions are organized and active, it is very difficult to put it back again. Gurr is one of those who has charted what is usually the ten-or-more-year period between the manifest onset of conflict and its escalation to military confrontation – the crucial window of opportunity for preventive measures.

Group mobilization and inter-party dynamics

Having outlined some of the *contextual* and *structural* sources of contemporary conflict, we move on to consider *relational* sources

at conflict party level. Here Ted Gurr (1993, 1995, 2000) shows how national peoples, regional autonomists, communal contenders, indigenous peoples, militant sects, ethnoclasses and other groups tend to move from non-violent protest, through violent protest, to outright rebellion in an uneven escalation that takes many years in most cases. This is the time-lag that gives major incentives for the proactive prevention of violent conflict, as discussed in the next chapter. Goals variously include demands for political access, autonomy, secession or control, triggered by historical grievances and contemporary resentments against the socio-cultural, economic and political constraints outlined in the previous section. New threats to security, such as those felt by constituent groups in the break-up of former Yugoslavia, and new opportunities, often encouraged by similar demands elsewhere, will encourage mobilization, and the nature of the emergent leadership will often be decisive in determining degrees of militancy. When it comes to demands for secession, usually the most explosive issue, a history of past political autonomy, however long ago, is often critical.

Elites and individuals

Turning, finally, to the elite/individual level, we will not dwell on the complex arguments about the relative significance of 'agency' or 'structure' in explication of social and political change (itself a lineal descendant of earlier debate about the relative roles of 'great men' and 'vast impersonal forces' in history). The importance of leadership roles seems self-evident if comparison is made between, say, the effect of Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman in Yugoslavia, and F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. For Human Rights Watch, communal violence is rarely the product of 'deep-seated hatreds' or 'ancient animosities', as promoted by those with an interest in doing so, and those who like to suggest as a result that they are 'natural processes' about which little can be done:

But the extensive Human Rights Watch field research summarized here shows that communal tensions per se are not the immediate cause of many violent and persistent communal conflicts. While communal tensions are obviously a necessary ingredient of an explosive mix, they alone are not sufficient to unleash widespread violence. Rather, time after time the proximate cause of communal violence is governmental exploitation of communal differences. (Human Rights Watch, 1995: 1-2)

Brown agrees that the academic literature 'places great emphasis on mass-level factors' but is 'weak in understanding the role played by elites and leaders in instigating violence'. Most major conflicts, in

Table 4.4 Proximate causes of internal conflict

	Internally driven	Externally driven
<i>Elite-triggered</i>	Bad leaders (23)	Bad neighbours (3)
<i>Mass-triggered</i>	Bad domestic problems (7)	Bad neighbourhoods (1)

Source: from Brown, ed., 1996: 582, 597.

Figures in brackets allocate numbers from Brown's list of 'major active conflicts'

his view, are triggered by 'internal, elite-level activities – to put it simply, bad leaders – contrary to what one would gather from reviewing the scholarly literature on the subject' (Brown, ed., 1996: 22–3) (see table 4.4).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a framework for the analysis of contemporary conflict that draws on Edward Azar's account of protracted social conflict, and then updates it via a 'levels of analysis' approach at international, state and sub-state levels. This framework is not a theory of conflict, but a model for locating the chief sources of contemporary conflict. The possibility of a revival of interstate war is by no means ruled out, but more unruly multilevel conflict seems likely to remain the predominant pattern for the immediate future.

Although the theories reviewed in this chapter may seem confusingly various, the main conclusion to be taken from it for the rest of the book is relatively simple. Given the complexity of much contemporary conflict, attempts at conflict resolution have to be equally comprehensive. Although peacemakers striving to maximize humanitarian space and the scope for peace initiatives in the middle of ongoing wars (chapter 6) or aiming to bring the violent phase of conflict to an end (chapter 7) usually have to work within quite narrow power constraints, long-term peacebuilders who aspire to prevent violent conflict (chapter 5) or to ensure that settlements are transformed into lasting peace (chapter 8) have to address the deeper sources of conflict. This is clarified in the hourglass model in chapter 1 (figure 1.3). Here is the framework within which conflict resolution would also seek to address threats generated by criminal greed (see chapter 5) and political terror (see chapter 11). This is likely to involve *contextual* change at international level (for example, via more equitable and accountable global and regional arrangements), *structural* change at state level (for example, via appropriate constitutional adaptations and the promotion of good governance – including state-building in

critical cases), *relational* change at conflict party level (for example, via community relations and reconciliation work), and *cultural* change at all levels (for example, via the transformation of discourses and institutions which sustain and reproduce violence). It is to these themes that we now turn.

Recommended reading

Berdal and Malone (2000); Brown, ed., (1996); Collier et al. (2003); Duffield (2001); Kaldor (1999/2001); Martin (2003); Reno (1999).