Conflict Transformation from Ethnic Movement to Terrorist Movement:
Case Studies of Tamils in Sri Lanka and Urban Sindh in Pakistan

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Case studies of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM, National Refugee Movement), now Muttahid Quami Movement (United National Movement).
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**Introduction**

One way of defining conflict transformation is as the process of moving from conflict-habituated systems to peace systems. But there is another dimension: not always do conflicts get transformed successfully into peace systems. Mostly, they are transformed into more violent and terrorist movements. Conflict transformation can take the following forms, as explained by Vayrynen.¹ (1) *Actor transformation:* internal transformation in major conflict parties or the emergence and recognition of new actors. (2) *Issue transformation:* a change in the political agenda of the conflict, downplaying the importance of original conflict issues and emphasizing shared concern for new issues. (3) *Rule transformation:* a redefinition of the norms actors are expected to observe when dealing with each other. (4) *Structural transformation:* profound changes relating to the entire structure of interactors, actors, and social conditions.

It is important to note that often, ruling regimes tend to ignore that certain administrative decisions as short-term political goals to ensure smooth running of their governments may lead to building up of grievances, which eventually result in grouping of discontented elements raising their demands and showing their solidarity and attachment with the ethnic identity. The irony is that ruling regimes do not realize it, or if they do, it is often too late to prevent it becoming a political agenda escalating into full conflict, leading to its transformation into a terrorist/violent movement.

The problem of urban Sindh provides a pertinent case to study. Sindh—particularly urban Sindh—is a multi-ethnic society, where Mohajirs (Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan during and after Partition in 1947) have been the majority community in Karachi and had an active role in the bureaucracy in the first few years after Partition. As Pakistan drifted into martial law under Ayub Khan, the Mohajirs started feeling isolated. The expansion of the manufacturing sector in Karachi saw an influx of other communities from the rest of the country into Karachi for better jobs. It began diminishing the Mohajirs’ majority. But the Mohajirs’ biggest grievance was the implementation of regional quotas on population basis in government jobs and educational institutions. This step was taken as a deliberate policy to trim the representation of the Mohajirs, and Mohajir political involvement diminished as a new politics of student violence focusing on local or ethnic problems emerged.

The case of Sri Lanka is also an appropriate example of such a situation when, in the late 1970s, Tamil youth rose up, demanding their due share and protesting against the Sinhalese discrimination against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, leading to acts of violence. The Tamil–Sinhalese problem (which still exists) could have been controlled had it been dealt with properly by not formulating policies that were very blatantly pro-Sinhalese at the expense of the Tamil minority. The problem got aggravated when the issue of injustice or discrimination was handled by force instead of appropriate political reforms in the administrative structure.

However, ethnic and ethno-nationalist processes can be very negative. These are often the sources of very deep-seated conflicts. They occur in countries having weak or illegitimate political regimes, where the groups concerned adopted violent strategies or terrorism to assert their collective identities when they encountered authoritarian and repressive responses. If their conditions overlie adverse economic and social conditions, there is a very high probability of coercive politics and violent conflict. Internal conflicts, therefore, need to be studied seriously.

Transformation of conflict into a terrorist movement may occur when ethnic movements based on various grievances get transformed into violent movements, and when the original structural sources (economic, social, political, military and cultural) of the conflict are changed in some way or other.

Conflicts can be transformed by normal socio-political processes (e.g., administrative changes through time) by the local administration, by one political party, and by political intervention. Too often in the past, conflict transformation was conceptualized largely as a political problem. It has to be studied as a social and economic problem as well, if sustainable structural change is to occur.

Conflict transformation can take place at any stage. If preventive peace building does not take place at the first sign of trouble and problems remain unaddressed, then transformational processes may take the form of early warning and may turn into violent movements. As conflict escalates, transformation occurs in violent forms.

As such, we need to look for signs of transformation, at home first and then abroad. These signs of transformation of conflicts include assigning priority to the poor, division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, inequalities in economic distribution, power-sharing, and so on.

Problems and conflicts need early response. These are then relatively manageable. We need to not only devote more attention to early warning of potential problems, but to also develop the will to start the process.
Peace and conflict theorists have the responsibility of promoting peace education and peace research and principles so that individuals everywhere can develop a critical orientation to orthodox ideas and relationships, and deal with their conflicts non-violently and generatively. In today’s world, peace and security have become everybody’s business. But can we develop a web of interdependent relationships, which will enable the application of reason to problems and their non-violent resolution? The answer lies in enhancement of the relationship between the state and the people and between community and civil society, and promotion of dialogue between all sorts of identity and interest groups.

**Division of Research**

This study consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, bibliography and appendixes. Chapter 1 gives the conceptual framework for conflict prevention and how to deal with certain problems which different communities (specially minority communities) face because of administrative, political, and economic biases based on ethnicity.

Chapter 2 defines conflict: What exactly do we mean by conflict, and how can it be differentiated from dispute or disturbance? Certain misconceptions are also discussed to clear ambiguity in understanding the term ‘conflict’. An attempt is also made to examine how small administrative blunders get transformed into disputes, and from disputes to terrorist movements, creating problems for the peaceful coexistence of different communities within and outside the country. The nature of these disputes and the potential to develop into ethnically-based violent conflicts is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses on the stage when a small dispute gets transformed into a large-scale conflict where organized political movements often develop into violent movements striving for either politico-economic autonomy or separation. What makes political/ethnic parties resort to violent means? It also gives an analysis of the fact that the use of violence aggravates conflicts. Contemporary politics is replete with examples where violence had the most negative impact on the overall political problems between or within the states. Here, we deal with the case of urban Sindh in Pakistan in detail.

Chapter 4 provides an insight of an intra-state conflict leading to an inter-state conflict. The ethnic problem between Tamils and Sinhalese and the role of India in the conflict is discussed. The case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka is discussed analytically.

Chapter 5 deals with a basic question: Can administrative blunders leading to grievances be managed before their transformation into ethnic and terrorist movements?

The conclusion focuses on the overall findings of the study on the basis of the facts. Recommendations are made which can be taken into consideration to prevent states from deteriorating into violence.

**Time Limitation**

The time period for this research is from the 1970s to 2007 for both the case studies, since the regional quota system was introduced by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, former prime minister of Pakistan and the acts of violence by Tamil youths in Sri Lanka came to the forefront in the media leading to ethnic mobilization because of lack of proper governance denying the existence of the problem, and the use of coercive means, degenerating into a full-fledged ethno-violent/terrorist movement.

**Hypothesis**

*In multi-ethnic societies, the administrative blunders by the government (through deliberate policies of denying the existence of the conflict) encourage an escalation and open conflict which may lead to furious, fanatical, violent transformation of an ethnic movement into a terrorist movement when dealt with by force.*

**Questions**

1. What encourages the ethnic minority group within the multi-ethnic state to mobilize itself on the basis of ethno-politics?
2. Can internal low-intensity conflicts be managed before political and ethnic mobilization of the community?
3. What are the factors that influence and support ethnic movements to get transformed into terrorist movements?
4. Can ethnic movements remain non-violent and strive politically to achieve their goals?

**Objectives**

1. To conduct an in-depth study in order to understand as to how and why economic deprivation (very often) and lack of proper distribution of resources lead to discontentment within the society.
This dissatisfaction of an ethnic group finds manifestation in organized movements. These ethnic movements can take the shape of terrorist movements when suppressed politically or forcibly.

2. To study various aspects which create the environment for such movements.
3. To examine the gravity of this trend by studying the case of urban Sindh in Pakistan, and the Tamil liberation movement in Sri Lanka.
4. To examine the possibility of conflicts being managed before their transformation into ethnic and terrorist movements.
5. To enquire why states/movements resort to violence.

Methodology

In this research study, clearly-defined formal methodologies of analyses and interviews were appropriately applied. Historical, analytical, and scientific approaches were followed according to the requirement. A number of primary and secondary sources have been consulted. Archives and documents were consulted for the facts and data related to Mohajirs’ population, etc. Regarding the Tamil problem, officials of the Sri Lankan government and some other key players were interviewed for their views. Research institutions in Pakistan and Sri Lanka were consulted to provide information. So far as secondary sources are concerned, the published material on conflict resolution, prevention and transformation was consulted. Also, the literature and previous work relating to ethnic problems and conflicts arising because of mismanagement and/or mishandling by the administration in particular regions like Latin America and Africa was consulted to build the argument. An effort has been made to seek balance, in the sense that competing sides of an issue are given fair treatment by making the arguments objectively.

The research questions in this study are analysed from a wide variety of perspectives and those views synthesized into a coherent whole; in other words, this study is not just an analysis of ethnic problems or terrorism, but the correlation between the two, and the dimension which is different in this study is examination of the role of the ‘insignificant’ local policies which are not given any importance by the local administration which later become the source of discontentment and frustration among the ethnic minorities within the state. Thorough and accurate documentation was carried out by the author to make it acceptable in the research community. The arguments are logically consistent, and the line of reasoning transparent; that is, traceable from premises to conclusions. Judgemental interpretations are also made in this study for the reason that not all that is of value in research and analysis can be logically derived from facts or data. It is important that judgemental interpretations be sound too, if accurately supported by evidence. To the extent possible, alternative interpretations have been considered and evaluated carefully.

Note

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Conceptual Framework

The concept behind this study is that of conflict prevention and management before its violent transformation into a terrorist movement. The idea is to study and analyse the reasons why ethnic communities feel deprived; why in a certain situation people belonging to certain groups feel that they are being mistreated and are not being given their due share. That question, if answered properly by the government, can solve many problems and these small and scattered ethnic groups, which are a natural phenomenon all over the world, would not become big problems for the multi-ethnic states.

The concept of conflict prevention has guided this study. Governments should not wait for frustration and discontent among the (ethnic) minorities to become serious internal political and social problems. Democratization, decentralization, good governance and equality are the ideas on which State policies should be based in multi-ethnic societies.

Prevention as a theoretical concept is concerned with predictability. Conflict prevention techniques are often confronted with the problem of the building of a society and the practical feasibility of the strategy. When used as a political instrument, prevention should take account of the way power and interests are defended and of the ultimate question: the desirability of intervention in the conflict. It is very important for the states confronted with violent ethnic conflict to consider the moral side of the problem also, meaning that conflict prevention should not only be to maintain the status quo (situation before the eruption of the conflict/or mobilization of the ethnic community) but to have a permanent solution to prevent future eruption of conflict. The moral consideration is also an important factor for the employment of the methods in the resolution of the conflict, i.e. how the conflict should be handled. Conflict prevention cannot be reasonably carried out if the intention is only to get some sort of solution for a short term. If violence is stopped by the administration, that does not solve the conflict, particularly if the violence is controlled by a more violent and militaristic approach; then, in fact, the conflict has become strengthened by hatred and aggression against the regime.

An effort has been made to argue in this study that resolution of an already-ripe conflict is no answer to the problems of ethnic groups waging armed struggle against their government. How the process of resolution takes place and what factors are taken into consideration, and, most importantly, what method is applied to resolve the conflict is the essential element in conflict resolution. Here, it is also argued that conflict prevention should not be assumed as a technique to be applied to prevent a conflict from further escalation or becoming violent (although in some cases it can be done), but generally, conflict prevention should target the cause rather than the symptoms. The government in a multi-ethnic state should adopt appropriate measures to prevent emergence of conflicts resulting from primacy of one community over another. The thinking in developing countries—and particularly in South Asia—has been to ‘get rid of the problem’ instead of addressing the root issues causing tension between the communities.

Conflict prevention strategy implies long-term development. The factors responsible for the situation need to be tackled, not just its victims. This should continue to be the case even when those whose rights are being violated are left with no alternative but to turn to the use of violence as a last resort to enforce a substantial improvement in their lot. In other words, conflict prevention must primarily serve the needs of the population, and not to stabilize a political regime or form of government, which is a common practice in most developing states.

Here, the concept of transformation, which is often assumed as change towards a positive situation, is discussed in a different perspective. No doubt, there are always possibilities of transformation of conflict from violence to peace, from disagreement to agreement, from confusion to solution, but there are also possibilities of further deterioration, from political mobilization to violent demonstrations, from a political party to a terrorist organization believing in no rule of law but only violence to achieve its objectives.

Applying the techniques of conflict prevention can halt conflict transformation from an ethnic movement into a terrorist movement. Both the case studies in this research prove that the conflicts deteriorated because no conflict prevention technique was applied; hence, the transformation took place from a purely ethnic movement (demanding rights, or equal share on the basis of their ethnic background) to a violent terrorist movement. In the case of the Muttahid Quami Movement (MQM), conflict prevention can still be applied, because the party has not taken up violence as the only method of expressing its opinion and demanding its rights; it is still part of the political process, so the transformation from an ethnic movement to a terrorist movement can be avoided.

In the case of Sri Lanka, conflict transformation from an ethnic movement to a terrorist movement took place when the Sri Lankan government refused to acknowledge that there was a problem in the
north-east province. There was total denial on the part of the government to recognize the feeling of discontentment and deprivation among the Tamil population. That was not the end of it: the transformation was completed when the government decided to use force against the Tamil separatists, who had by then declared their secessionist agenda due to lack of any consideration of their problems by the central government. Of course, outside help from India too played an important role in the political mobilization and military training of the separatists’ groups, but the opportunity to use violence and wage a violent war against the innocent people belonging to both Tamil and Sinhalese communities was indeed provided by the immature policies of the successive governments.

The policy of deliberate ignorance by the government to the conflict ignited the ethnic groups to mobilize and register their protest through acts of violence and terrorism which, of course, cannot be justified by any definition.

In order to analyse and evaluate the causes of conflict and what strategies can be adopted to prevent them before they develop into full-fledged violent conflict within the state, it is important to identify and recognize that deep-rooted conflict is a reflection of: long-held feelings of alienation in multi-ethnic societies; power inequalities and asymmetries that range from perceived religious and racial inequality to economic asymmetries; ethnicity, which can reflect power inequalities as well as alternatives to failing states; interpersonal and psychological dimensions of conflict that reflect the consequences of perceptions and misperceptions; structural sources of conflict that reflect the effects of institutional and organizational behaviour; future multi-centrism that may well lead to conflict based upon fragmentation of interests and authority.

Numerous policy initiatives can be taken into account to handle such complex issues of ethnic mobilization of minorities and transformation into a terrorist movement, as, for instance, developing more effective systems to anticipate conflict, providing greater awareness about the importance of pre-negotiation settings, developing analyses on post-negotiation implementation criteria, developing typologies of appropriate peace processes and preferred outcome analyses, and providing analyses on the interface between the perpetrators of violence and civil authorities.

In the field of conflict prevention, management and resolution, the end of the Cold War opened up a vast window of opportunity for creative theory building and responses, and from there onwards, the principle of conflict prevention got academic importance and practical relevance that paved the way for recognition of conflicts among and within the groups in a state and how to handle them before they actually create political instability.

Not only does this save lives and resources, but early attempts to prevent and resolve conflict are also much more likely to be successful than after violence has caused loss of life and property, increased bitterness and hatred, and hardened positions irretrievably. Conflict prevention has clearly arrived as an important part of the new security agenda. But it has also become a mantra, often without appreciation of its difficulties and drawbacks.

A Preventive Diplomacy Toolbox of Policies and Instruments for: Preventing Violent Conflicts; for Development and Governance Approaches

- Policies to promote national economic and social development
- Preventive economic development aid (in conflict-prone states or areas)
- Preventive private investment (in conflict-prone states or areas)
- Economic trade (with conflict-prone states or areas)
- Economic integration (to achieve interdependency)
- Economic reforms and standards
- Society-to-society bilateral cooperative programmes (in social, cultural, educational, scientific, technological, or humanitarian affairs)
- Promulgation and enforcement of human rights, democratic and other standards
- Military-to-military consultations (regarding military professionalism and role of the military in society)
- National governing structures to promote peaceful conflict resolution
- Power-sharing, federalism, federation, confederation, autonomy, partition, secession, trusteeship, protectorates (internationally sponsored)


There can be no conflict prevention (to be more precise, prevention of conflict escalation), without
The range of options for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts—both inter- and intra-state—are numerous and varied, whatever the explanation for South Asia’s apparent unwillingness or inability to take advantage of these. It is important to note that all the techniques depend on the will and consent of the states concerned. These form a menu from which the states may willingly choose after consulting the parties to the conflict concerned. To that extent, despite the availability of new external tools, the future of South Asian security lies, as ever, in South Asian hands.

It is usually assumed that prevention of conflict within states will utilize the same techniques as preventing conflicts between states. Conflict prevention in civil war situations, in fact, needs to be considered with a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict, including the economic, social, religious and political, and how these might be addressed at all levels not just at the leadership level, which may or may not be representative of the society as a whole.

There is also the question of timing or ‘ripeness’ for conflict prevention in internal conflicts: for instance, premature intervention for the resolution of internal conflicts runs the risk of creating more trouble than it prevents. Outsiders may have different (sometimes contrary) motives for their involvement. They may even have usually inadequate understanding of the society concerned and may, therefore, offer potentially dysfunctional proposals and techniques.

This research study is based upon the conceptual framework that provides that conflict prevention requires the will and consent of the parties involved in order to be effective. Though outsiders may provide assistance and incentives, only the involved parties themselves can ultimately make peace. A great deal of work is now being done to study, experiment with and refine conflict prevention techniques, determine a coherent intellectual and practical framework for such activities, and establish institutions to carry them out.

Four broad areas of conflict can be considered as the test of effective conflict prevention or resolution for governance structures and systems: deep-rooted conflict, power inequalities and asymmetries, ethnic conflict, and multi-centrism in a fragmented world. Several studies on conflict prevention suggest practical steps for developing governance structures and systems to resolve or prevent conflict. However, the steps between developing structures and systems and actually bringing contending forces ‘to the table’ have many gaps. This is particularly the case when dealing with power inequalities and ethnicity.

The following ideas can be taken into consideration in order to understand the nature of conflict in multi-ethnic societies.

**Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the Context of Good Governance**

This study is an attempt to understand how and why administrative blunders, indecisiveness and ignorance of the existence of a conflict can lead to problems between the majority and minority groups in multi-ethnic societies. An effort has been made to evaluate and study common patterns and processes in conflicts in all social arenas, from the local community to the international system and the involvement of other actors in internal conflicts to increase the understanding of this complex and universal phenomenon. It is very important to analyse how civil society responds to the problems of certain groups. If the majority is happy with the system that affects the minority culturally by threatening its culture or language, religion or economics, it would create problems and not be desirable by an ethnic group. The principle of good governance works on the basis of sharing the feeling of all the groups irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or economic status. Guarantee of human rights does not mean that the government is not involved in human rights violation; it means that proper importance is given to all segments of the society. Of course, no ideal system can be established in a state, particularly if that state is a developing one: the key to handling such a problem is to make the group feel that importance is being given to it. It is also important because if the government delays initiative for talks or negotiation, outside actors get the opportunity of intervening. The problem with a developing state is that unless and until a group is influential and strong enough to call a strike or kill people or create any kind of civil disturbance, the government does not take any action or initiative to respond to its grievances. For the state, asking the group to come to the table for talks and giving an ear to its problems is considered giving too much importance to such ‘insignificant groups’. But when these ‘insignificant’ groups become ‘giants’, then their governments try to restore ‘peace’ at a very high price.

It is mentioned in this study that proper recognition should be given to even the minute problems faced by ethnic minorities. (Of course, small problems need small initiatives.) One way of preventing conflict is to tackle human rights abuses before they fester and become major societal problems and
erupt into armed conflict.

**Democratization**

Democracy has a major role in the prevention of a conflict becoming a violent conflict. Based on the assumption that democratic states are less likely to go to war against each other and that they do have internal mechanisms to alleviate conflict within their societies before it reaches a critical stage, democratization is widely recognized as a conflict-prevention mechanism.

Democracy constitutes the natural framework for the exercise of human rights and is a precondition for the establishment of lasting peace and harmony in a multi-ethnic society, as long as it is accompanied by equitable economic and social development. The consolidation of democratic processes is, therefore, one of the main components of any conflict-prevention technique.

The participation of all citizens at all levels is a prerequisite for the establishment of democratic structures and processes. In most internal conflicts, lack of participation of the masses is one great cause of discontentment and dissatisfaction. Democratization of the society in a multi-ethnic state is one important technique of conflict prevention. Increasing participation of women and young people in democratic governance, the dissemination of information and training on the functioning of democratic institutions to leaders (parliamentarians, local elected officials, and civil servants) and to citizens assumes importance. The public service media can also be utilized for the purpose of conflict prevention. The media can provide time and space for dialogue and debate, particularly among young people on subjects related to peace, human rights and democracy. Religious and community leaders can participate in the framework of activities by encouraging dialogue between different communities.

**Basic Human Needs**

Basic human needs theory concerning the nature of conflict prevention and resolution has endured as a major paradigm for more than half a century. In essence, the origin of this theoretical construct owes much to Maslow’s 1954 work in which human motivation is based upon an ‘hierarchy of needs’, moving from basic physical requirements up to psychological requirements such as recognition, attainment, and fulfilment. Failure to satisfy such needs leads to frustration, which in turn can result in aggression and lead to the formation and outbreak of conflict.

John Burton, one of the core contributors to the ‘world society’ perspective of conflict, viewed the relevance of basic human needs theory upon conflict in this way. After observing major powers being defeated in wars with small nations, and central authorities, failing to control religious and ethnic conflicts within their boundaries, it became clear to me that conflicts of this kind were not generated primarily or even at all by shortages of material goods, or even by claims of territory. The power of human needs was a greater power than military might. The conditions that explained conflict and, therefore, suggested means towards its resolution, were frustrated human needs not human lawlessness or character deformities. Needs theory moved the focus away from the individual as miscreant and aimed it at the absence of legitimization of structures, institutions and policies as the primary source of conflict; conflicts are not just interests but also human needs.

The detection of conflict has become increasingly acceptable strategy in the international community for the purpose of making possible the use of preventive instead of reactive measures. The reason for this development may be the increasingly fast and inexpensive means of communication and the growing and more sophisticated means of gathering, processing and analysing information. This increasing capacity to gather and analyse accurate information on the source of conflict gives the international community, policy makers and NGOs increasing chances of acting in a conflict-preventive manner. The state’s power monopoly over its territory and its inhabitants is open to debate. The rising number of internal conflicts has ensured that internationally recognized juridical principles such as sovereignty and non-interference have come under review, and intervention on humanitarian grounds is now something which can be talked about. Conflict prevention is significant because of the fact that a national problem can very quickly become a regional one. Neighbouring countries may not only confront flows of refugees, but may also be actively dragged into the conflict. The rising cost of conflicts and the limited success of peace-keeping and peace-enforcing operations have led to a growing realization, internationally, that prevention is better than cure. This recognition is there, but the concept is under threat of being undermined without being able to demonstrate its efficacy. The international community, which includes the states, international and national organizations, consider conflict prevention very important, without really appreciating exactly what is contained in such a system. The current rapid, accelerating, and sometimes unpredictable political, economic and social changes create enormous challenges for political and governmental institutions. In developed and developing countries, the state is increasingly being compelled to redefine the role of government in all spheres of social and economic activity.

In the case of Pakistan, issues of economic deprivation and marginalization of political power
deepened the myth about Mohajir ethnicity during the late 1980s and early 1990s. During both the terms of the Pakistan People’s Party rule during 1972–77 and 1988–90, Mohajir politics in urban Sindh was heavily charged with violence and rejection of all other communities threatening their legitimate interests. However, during the 1990s a fundamental change took place in the dynamics of the politics of Sindh. Instead of the ethnic factor, politics in Sindh began to be influenced by Mohajir–state confrontation. The acts of repression against the MQM during the second Benazir Government (1994–96) were directed more against the power of the State than native Sindhis. Even after the dismissal of Benazir’s Government, the MQM’s struggle with State authority continued.

As far as the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka is concerned, the rise of Tamil militancy has to be understood in the context of the nationalist politics of the newly-independent Ceylonese state. For the first time, an island-wide, unified administration was established in Sri Lanka during the British colonial period and English became the language of the government. The small English-speaking, local elite who developed in this period (from both the Sinhala and Tamil communities) continued to hold power after independence and ruled in much the same vein as their colonial predecessors. English remained the language of the government, while the vernacular-speaking majority saw little change, despite the hopes of cultural and political transformation that independence had offered.

In Sindh (Pakistan), contradictions in the structure of civil society encouraged state interference in provincial affairs. For a long time, the Urdu-speaking community had an alliance with the Punjabi settlers of Sindh against native Sindhis in Karachi and elsewhere in Sindh. The Muttagi Quami Movement–Altaf (MQM–A) which was engaged in a violent conflict with the state forces during the early and mid-1990s continues to be locked in violent battles with its splinter faction, the Mohajir Quami Movement–Haqquqi (MQM–Haqquqi) for the control of urban areas. Several killings on either side were reported in 2000. The MQM (A) leadership continued to accuse the establishment of using repressive tactics to demoralize the Mohajir community and branding them as terrorist and criminal Sindhis. For the Urdu-speaking leader, Sindh nationalism was detrimental to the ideology of Pakistan and was never to be supported. However, with the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 and the emergence of an overt Punjabi–Pathan nexus, the myth of a strong, centralized Pakistan for the Mohajir community began to evaporate. It was only during the 1980s that the Urdu-speaking community of Sindh followed an approach different from that of the state.

The state tried to deal with the issue of Mohajir discontentment by using force, particularly against the MQM, by promoting division within the MQM, and by encouraging Punjabi and Pathan settlers against the MQM. Since the state was not dealing with the problem politically but by force, the end result was more insecurity and ill-will against the state.

From the creation of Pakistan till the present, we witness a transformation in Sindhi–Mohajir conflict specifically; this transformation is from a very active conflicting situation to passive conflict. The conflict in urban Sindh has both the tendencies of more cooperation, and at the same time violence as the solution to the problem. We also observe a kind of rapprochement between the two contending parties in urban Sindh. The focus of confrontation has now moved from Sindhi nationalists to all the elements which have vested interests and have been exploiting the masses for their own benefit. The element of mistrust and suspicion between the Sindhi/Punjabi establishment in Sindh and at the centre respectively and the Mohajirs still exists. However, the mistrust and suspicion prevailing between the Sindhi/Punjabi establishment and Mohajirs cannot hinder the process of conflict prevention in Sindh. Both state and non-state actors need to play active roles in the prevention and management of the urban Sindhi problem in the short and long term. Here, the role of the government is crucial. If the government encourages ethnic harmony and tries to balance both the communities and does not prefer one against another or use one against the other or does not use force as the first resort, the urban Sindhi problem would not turn into a serious violent dispute and the aggrieved party (here, the Mohajirs) would not bank on terrorist acts for survival.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the passing of the Official Language Act of July 1956 calling for ‘Sinhala Only’ was a major step towards defining Sri Lanka as primarily a Sinhala state. By this legislation, Sinhala became the sole official language, with clearly deleterious implications for the employment prospects of Tamil-speakers. The denial of official status to the Tamil language was met with an intense non-violent protest campaign and the first of several outbreaks of anti-Tamil riots, particularly in the south and east. Now here we find the first administrative blunder by the government ignoring the rights of a very strong minority and forcing its members to organize themselves politically. But when the Tamils mobilised themselves politically and launched movements for their rights in the 1970s, force was used by the government to curb their activities: what happened next is well-known. The political-ethnic movement took the shape of a full-fledged terrorist movement demanding rights and counteracting the suppressive policies of the government by violent attacks throughout the country. After the first non-violent agitation by the Tamils against the government in 1949 by the creation of the Federal Party to press claims for Tamil self-determination within the Sri Lankan state, Prime Minister
Bandaranaike and Federal Party leader S. J. V. Chelvanayakam agreed on a pact in 1957 offering devolution of power to the Tamil-speaking regional councils and recognition of Tamil as a national minority language. The pact also contained a government promise to reconsider the citizenship status of the up-country Tamils, and pledges against future resettlement programmes in the north and east. However, the Sinhala nationalist opposition to the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam pact was so strong that it was publicly abrogated by Bandaranaike in April 1958.

This was to be the first of several betrayals of the agreements on Tamil grievances. Now this could have been the best conflict prevention technique in case of the Tamil–Sinhala problem. The Tamil community might not have reacted in a violent manner, but the state administration blundered and ignored the discontentment of the Tamil community whose frustration led to the launching of a Tamil political movement rooted in terrorism against the opponents.

Managing ethnic or sectarian violent conflicts and finding a solution to them is not an easy task, given the complexities of multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies all over the world today. Individuals and group differences do not disappear easily. Instead, these are only becoming sharper and deeper with the pace of development and competition. If mutually acceptable arrangements can be arrived at for power-sharing or regional autonomy at the local level, conflicts will not get prolonged. Neither would these result in the wastage of human and other resources of the nation. But for this, a few conditions must exist. There must be mutual respect for other parties and their demands as part of confidence building measures. Unless each side views its opponent as honourable and regards its demands as legitimate and negotiable, relations cannot improve between the groups, and fears and gaps cannot be prevented from widening.

Thus, one can say that the colonial legacy, misgovernance with distorted economic policies, violation of human rights, corruption and crime, and the involvement of neighbouring states have caused most of the violent conflicts in the world today, where ideology, religion, or ethnicity have been used as pretexts in the competition for power. The weakness of the state system has always been a crucial factor in changing the nature of conflicts into violent ones.

In this study, an effort has been made to address this weakness and to debate possible solutions in such complex situations. The principle of democratization failed in some states, but in other states, it worked, e.g., India. Had India not been a democracy since its inception, it would have become a hub of ethnic confrontations and disputes. That does not mean that ethnic communities in India have forgotten their past or their ethnicity, or they are so overpowered by economic prosperity that they do not need to think about their ethnic background, but a channel is provided to every individual of the society or any ethnic group to express hatred, anguish and animosity against the state. There is no bar on political affiliation and mobilization; in other words, if Indian society is not providing economic prosperity to its citizens, it is also not blocking the way to express their discontentment, and not preventing them from being part of the political process. This is the basic idea behind this study: it does not argue about providing an ideal state structure in order to avoid violent conflict; the concept is to provide an ear to the aggrieved parties that works, and also prevent the conflict from getting transformed into violent terrorist means of communicating grievances.

Again, India is not an ideal state, nor does its example here prove in any way that no violence has ever occurred in India in the name of ethnicity and religion, but the only point here is to prove that some sort of a safety valve is always needed to release the pressure that builds up in multi-ethnic societies. The emphasis in this study is on formulation of internal policies by the state vis-à-vis its ethnic groups which can provide them a sense of participation in the political and economic processes. This step would work as a policy for prevention of future conflict among the majority and minority ethnic groups in a state. The only criticism of this process of conflict prevention could be that there is unwillingness on the part of those responsible for formulating policy; an existing conflict is of much greater value than a potential conflict that might never erupt. And even if the will does exist, policy makers often appear to be so preoccupied with existing crises that there is little room for conflict prevention. Among other obstacles which need to be removed are inflexible bureaucracies, and situations where there is too great a distance between the ‘conflict zone’ (territory) and the ‘central authority’ (place of response).

Notes and References

3. Ibid.
The Genesis of Conflict and its Violent Transformation

Conflict may be defined as arising from mutually incompatible goals between two or more parties where an effective coordinating or mediating mechanism does not exist. The parties in this case are states, or as is more often the case in the contemporary world, communities within states. The words ‘ethnic’, ‘religous’, ‘tribal’, or ‘factional’ do not adequately explain why people use violence to achieve their goals, specially since a wide range of mechanisms exists in every region of the globe to address political and cultural grievances and offer alternatives to violence. Indeed, to label a conflict simply as an ‘ethnic war’ can lead to misguided policy choices: it helps build a wrong impression that ethnic, cultural, or religious differences inevitably result in conflict, and that the only way to avoid conflict is to suppress differences. We have seen time and time again in this century that suppression itself too often leads to bloodshed.

Why, then, does mass violence break out? A number of factors help create conditions prone to warfare: the political and economic legacies of colonialism or the Cold War; illegitimate governmental institutions; problematic regional relationships; social cleavages derived from poorly-managed religious, cultural, or ethnic differences; widespread illiteracy, disease and disability; lack of resources such as water and arable land; and political repression, cultural discrimination and systematic economic deprivation. New global political and economic forces exacerbate these factors. While some conflicts are new, many others are, in fact, chronic states of violence traceable to long-standing antagonisms. When exploited by political demagogues, criminal elements, or self-aggrandizing leaders, such conditions are ‘ripe’ for violence. Indeed, it is possible to identify a number of factors that increase the risk of violent conflict.

Dan Smith, in his work on armed conflict, maintains that violent conflicts are not a result of ethnic diversity alone, but ethnic identity sometimes provides grounds for political mobilization. ‘Relative Deprivation’ theory (Gurr, 1970) offers an explanation, which is based on the contrast between groups’ expected and actual access to prosperity and power. The approach is closely related to ‘Group Entitlement’ theory (Horowitz, 1985), which places more explicit emphasis on ethnic factors which accompany the economic and political (see also Gurr, 1995). However, ethnic diversity does not in itself seem to be a cause of war. If it were, the most war-prone states would be the most ethnically diverse, which, in fact, is not the case (Smith, 1997: 30). Indeed, it may well be that ethnic and religious fractionalization even reduces the risk of violent conflict (Collier, 1999), perhaps because it encourages divergent groups to learn the skills of living together despite diversity. When this learning process fails, however, ethnic diversity may turn out to exacerbate conflict and increase the likelihood of serious escalation, precisely because it offers fertile material for political mobilization. A prime example here is the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

Talking about the ‘other factors’ responsible for violent conflict in multi-ethnic societies apart from the obvious ethnic factor is the economic condition. Smith argues that economic conditions emerge as the most important explanatory factors. Even in poor societies, leaders are usually competing with one another for control of the available economic surplus, small as that may be. When the available surplus is small, as in poor societies or where there has been a catastrophic slump, competition for it may be particularly intense, and a violent escalation will very likely result. The terrible violence in Liberia from 1989 to 1997, the war in Sierra Leone since 1991, decades of warfare in Angola, and the cycles of massacre and brutality in Burundi and Rwanda are among the many examples highlighted by this approach. To sum up his ideas, Smith outlined the following reasons.

- Poor economic conditions are the most important long-term causes of intra-state armed conflicts today.
- Repressive political systems are also war-prone, specially in periods of transition.
- Degradation of renewable resources (specifically soil erosion, deforestation, and water scarcity) can also contribute significantly to the likelihood of violent conflict, but are, in general, not as central to the problem as political and economic determinants.
- Ethnic diversity alone is not a cause of armed conflict, but parties to a conflict are often defined by their ethnic identities.

Ishtiaq Ahmed disagrees with Dan Smith, brushing aside the role of economic discontentment in ethnic conflict. He writes that an explanation like economic deprivation being the root cause of separatism is not adequate. In the case of Pakistan, the Urdu-speaking minority enjoyed more economic opportunities compared to other communities. It can be discussed as a case of rising expectations (a greater political role) of the Urdu-speaking middle class and intelligentsia rather than economic
exploitation. Similarly, the Tamils in Sri Lanka demanded a more extensive political role in the country, which created a justification for political/ethnic mobilization of the community. Religion as the primary factor of identity-based ethnic movements is also unsatisfactory, because in urban Sindh both Sindhis and later the Punjabi establishment and Mohajirs belong to the same religion but are sharply divided on linguistic lines. So in other words, it is the state which is the crucial actor and the major ‘irritant’ in the perceptions of the separatists. The state’s role is quite controversial in this regard. According to Ishtiaq Ahmed, ‘...the state has not only failed to protect its citizens from such attacks but has itself been the perpetrator of many such crimes’.5

The Carnegie Commission Report endorses the aforementioned point that ethnicity alone is not important enough a reason for violent conflicts, but neither is economic disparity alone.

Problems giving rise to deadly conflict are more complex. Other factors that heighten the likelihood of violence include despotic leaders, weak, corrupt, or collapsed regimes, sudden economic and political shifts, acute repression of major ethnic groups or other portions of society, politically active religious elements that promote hostile and divisive messages, and large stores of weapons and ammunition. Identifying these factors as risks for violent conflict may help us understand how to prevent the outbreak of mass violence. We do not need to know precisely what it is about the interplay among the various risk factors to know that their conjunction holds a high probability for violence or that the greater the number of factors, the greater the likelihood of violence.6

The focus of this chapter is to define conflict, identify the causes of ethnic mobilization, examine the factors that cause violent conflict and the role of ethnicity in the birth of conflict, how much this particular element of ethnicity alone is responsible for the emergence of conflict and its transformation into a violent conflict. When the groups in a multi-ethnic society become aware of the contrasts and feelings of frustration manifest themselves, conflict follows. A crisis situation forms; tension becomes acute and self-intensifying. Depending on how the government acts, this crisis can easily be averted, as at this stage there are many possible preventive measures. At this stage, prevention primarily means keeping the situation of conflicting aims under control in order to prevent escalation of violence.7

The real problem in such a situation arises when the government involved denies the existence of the crisis or remains indecisive. Repression and other forms of forceful policies may also produce this effect. Acting severely eventually provokes a reaction from the oppressed actors.8 During the pre-violent stage, there is occasional, isolated and short-lived physical violence. At the violent stage, organized, lasting violence covers large stretches of the territory. In the final stage, there is a face-to-face showdown in order to establish a different political and/or social structure throughout all or parts of the territory on a permanent basis. At that point, the conflict is of such an extent that its existence cannot be objectively denied by anybody. At the point when the confrontation turns into open warfare, conflict prevention is, of course, out of the question. Any intervention from that point is geared towards enforcing a freeze in the conflict or of containment. This sort of containment is superficial and temporary. When these remedies fail to do away with the social faultlines which lie at the root of the conflict, the conflict continues to smoulder and may flare up again at any given moment. In this respect, this sort of conflict does not come to an end.

In a different scenario, a period of chaos does not necessarily lead to an all-out, lasting catastrophe. There are examples where all parties ultimately become exhausted and see compromise as the only means of ensuring their survival. Uganda may serve as an example since, after Amin’s regime, the war with Tanzania and the civil war against Obote, the parties saw peace as the least-bad solution. But that situation cannot be recommended, and for the proponent of conflict prevention, waiting for complete exhaustion is disastrous, as it can go against all the parties, and one of the parties to the conflict may wipe the other off the map.

The defensive, destructive and obstructive aspects of conflict become entangled with one another in every crisis. Conflict is acute where change is swift, and here the vested interests and sentiments of the old order stand out against eager pressure from the new.

Ethnicity and religious behaviour are forms of consciousness that often represent appropriate responses to the chaotic conditions of modern life. They provide richness to the human condition, which the impersonal forces of modernity cannot handle. But it is evident also that most present-day conflicts and wars tend to be fuelled by particularistic values and identities. This calls for an exploration of policy options that could deal with problems of ethnic and religious conflicts as well as political violence.

When ethnic groups feel isolated and alienated from the political and economic system, they express their anguish and discontent by mobilizing themselves politically, tilting towards violence. These also represent a critique of development. Large numbers of people in the developing world have not seen improvements in their lives in recent decades. In some countries, living standards have actually deteriorated to alarming levels.

Inability or unwillingness of states to prioritize social concerns and invest in the collective provision of services through programmes which transcend group interests are key. Where common concerns are
not met, there is growing reliance on non-state actors (in most cases, ethnic and terrorist organizations having bases outside the state) for leadership and decisions, further weakening state capacity and increasing its vulnerability to those who seek change through violence. Existing social divides get exacerbated through political manipulation in the states which do not promote national unity and acceptable and inclusive forms of power-sharing due to unrepresentative forms of governance.

Unequal distribution of limited resources and ineffective economic regulation reinforce existing social tensions and lead to heightened disparities of wealth and to oppression.

The competition for scarce resources in such situations leads to further aggravation of the tension between the ethnic communities. Property rights, jobs, educational policy, language rights and other development allocations confer certain benefits on individuals and groups. When these resources are scarce and/or directed favourably towards certain sections of the society, moves towards attaining them begin in organized groups on the lines of religion, caste, class and such other divisions of the society. In societies where ethnicity is an important basis for identity, group competition is often formed along ethnic lines, though this need not be the case always.9

Policies of economic development need to be sensitive to problems of marginalization, social inequalities and political disequilibrium for development itself to be sustainable.

It is interesting to note that most of Europe escaped political violence and ethno-religious and racist conflicts in the decades when their welfare programmes and economies were sound, and governments and societies identified themselves with the problems of the weak.

Western Europe, in particular, used social democracy to contain the ‘spectre of revolutionary violence’, which instead became a Third World problem with more limited forms of urban terrorism.

This is not to suggest that development that is focused on the disadvantaged will inevitably eliminate violence. Such development may need to be rooted in the cultures and traditions of the people it seeks to uplift for it to be sustainable.

Bearing in mind the need to address the general crisis associated with current patterns of development, more specific policies may be needed for countries that are divided by ethnic and religious cleavages. The main issue here is of equity. Many ethnic conflicts or grievances can be traced to the way different opportunities accrue to groups in the social economy; discrimination and/or inequalities in jobs/incomes, asset-holdings and social services cause multi-group tension.

The major redistributive policies attempted in most plural societies have been based on proportionality and affirmative action. The first type seeks to ensure that jobs, political appointments, educational opportunities and public investment programmes are distributed in ways that reflect population ratios. This involves the use of quotas, subsidies, and special funds for disadvantaged groups.

The second type (though similar to the first) seeks primarily to redress imbalances created by discriminatory practices, often of a historical nature. In this case, quotas, subsidies, special funds and other forms of redistributive mechanisms may be used to reach the disadvantaged population, but the aim is not to create an ethnic balance.

In countries where ethnic inequalities are sharp (as in Sri Lanka) proportionate and affirmative action may be pursued as a single policy. In countries such as Pakistan, proportionality is emphasized in certain areas of public life, such as cabinet posts and key public-sector appointments, but no specific group is targeted for special upliftment.

Most plural societies leave the question of ethnic balance in public policy to the discretion of office-holders and employers, and the issue is often a source of tension and acrimony. Countries that have enacted affirmative action policies include the US, and to some extent Australia and Canada.

Implementation of policies of affirmative action proportionality is often fraught with a number of difficulties. Such policies seem to work best when an economy is growing and redistribution doesn’t lead to a sense of economic loss by dominant groups.

Redistributive policies face additional problems of entitlement and monitoring. Favoured groups may come to see such policies as a permanent right rather then a temporary solution. Under such conditions, recipients may not be sufficiently motivated to close the ethnic gap, or may continue to insist upon special treatment even when the gap has been substantially reduced. Such policies are also susceptible to corruption and patronage, specially under conditions of poor administrative infrastructure and monitoring capabilities.

Benefits may go to special clients of patrons rather than to needy individuals in disadvantaged communities. In a number of cases, such policies often end up promoting the interests of the middle classes rather than those of the poor, specially when the implementation of the policy is top-down. Privileged groups may continue to use the poverty or ethnic backwardness of others as an argument for maintaining the policies even if the poor do not benefit from them.

As social inequalities widen within targeted backward groups, disadvantaged individuals within
those groups may become intolerant of ‘ethnic strangers’ within their neighbourhoods. Redistributive policies are essential in bringing about reconciliation, a sense of national belongingness, and political stability in unequal plural societies, but they will need to be carefully formulated and monitored if they are not to fuel the conflict they seek to prevent.

What Causes an Ethnic Movement to Become a Violent Conflict?

Richardson and Sen observe in their study on ‘Ethnic Conflict and Economic Development’ that:

violent conflict between rival ethnic groups sometimes breaks out spontaneously, but ‘ethnic conflict’ is mostly a struggle between rival organizations seeking to maintain or gain control of state power. To understand ethnic conflict we must understand the role ethnicity plays in mobilizing, structuring and managing such organizations. Further, we must understand how leaders use ethnically divisive strategies to mobilize political support.10

In typical scenarios, leaders of a dominant ethnic group gain office and then use State institutions to distribute economic and political benefits preferentially to their ethnic brethren. Discrimination against subordinate group members, often portrayed as less deserving human beings, accompanies this preferential treatment. When force is needed to impose discriminatory practices and quell subordinate group resistance, it is exercised by police officers and soldiers recruited almost exclusively from the dominant groups, who often view themselves as ‘ethnic soldiers’.11

Discrimination can only be endured for a specific period of time, but a sense of shared deprivation strengthens identification with the group, providing a basis for political mobilization along ethnic lines. The level of violence and radical approach intensifies with the excess of severe and inflexible policies. As a result of such policies, political conflict with expression in violence, social and economic inequalities become apparent.

Ethnic groups often express themselves for political and social mobilization with violence as the only choice. Protracted ethnic conflict is, more often than not, a negative sum game in which both dominant and subordinate groups lose. Lebanon, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia and the Punjab (East) are just few recent examples of conflicts where the long-term costs of discriminatory policies to almost all involved far outweighed any conceivable benefits. In view of this history, why do dominant groups’ leaders choose to implement discriminatory practices in the first place? Also, why do they so often underestimate the probability of a violent subordinate group response and their capacity to deal with it?12

Historical legacies of mistrust, a mentality of victimization and feelings of shared deprivation contribute a lot to the attitude of ethnic groups. People tend to accept extremist viewpoints and express their grievances through violent means. The long-standing beliefs and attitudes in multi-ethnic societies and the role of the leaders play important roles in this regard.

Recollection of historical legacies of mistrust are part of every ethnic conflict. In Sri Lanka, the schoolchildren are told of the Buddha’s pledge that Lanka would be a special haven for Buddhism and reminded of the pivotal clash between the Sinhalese Prince Dutugemunu and the Tamil King Elara that re-established Buddhist-Sinhalese dominance on the island.

The leaders of ethnic movements, whether they are the ones pursuing discriminatory policies (as in the case of Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese majority) or the ones facing suppression because of their race or language (the Mohajirs in Pakistan), always expect to be considered as victims. This feeling of victimization which justifies their movements is always there.

Ethnic leaders want a share in power to ensure their group is never oppressed. The examples of South Africa and Sri Lanka illustrate this. Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese majority, viewing itself as victims, resented the favourable treatment given to the Tamils under colonial rule and by conservative post-Independence governments. They felt discriminated against by government language policies that placed their language, Sinhala, in an inferior position and made it difficult for them to communicate with public officials. They feared the Tamils would make common cause with their ethnic brethren in south India’s populous state of Tamil Nadu. Throughout Sri Lanka’s ancient history, Tamil invasions had been either a threat or a reality. In the words of historian K. M. De Silva, the Sinhalese were a ‘majority group with a minority complex’. This attitude fuelled political support for Sinhalese nationalist leaders such as Sirimavo Bandaranaike and J. R. Jayewardene, whose policies convinced many Tamils that there was no alternative to secession.13

Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic differences do not always translate into open conflicts, and some of those that are not threatening to the social and political order are overlooked, as mutually accepted mechanisms exist to regulate them. Others are not only difficult to manage, but sometimes turn violent, create widespread instability and lead to loss of life. Although many ethnic conflicts erupt spontaneously, most need political entrepreneurs or mobilizers, a network or organization, and a discourse to activate them.
Ethnic mobilizers always compete for the loyalties of their putative followers. All individuals in a group may not subscribe to an ethnic cause, either because they value other relationships, or their commitment to the conflict is fuzzy. Ethnicity may overlap with social class or status in deeply-divided societies where structures of discrimination block social mobility for specific ethnic groups.

Most ethnic conflicts in the world are for internal autonomy where ethnic groups pursue their claims within an existing state structure. The aim is not to create an alternative state, but to either capture the existing state, or improve access to it. Frustration of this goal may, however, lead to demands for secession or autonomy. Indeed, several separatist movements start from a position of competition for the existing state and graduate into full-fledged separatist and terrorist movements.

Some ethnic groups have separatist tendencies. They provoke conflicts. These may take two forms: secession, and internal autonomy. The LTTE demonstrate this. The Tamils of Sri Lanka face similar types of discrimination from the dominant groups in their country. The LTTE rejected the policy of Sinhalese as the official language in Sri Lanka, the adoption of Buddhism as the state religion, and discrimination in educational opportunities, job allocation and government appointments.

Under conditions where conflicts are not exactly between two groups, ethnic minorities make alliances and arrangements to achieve their goals. A number of conflicts in countries with large populations and ethnic groups tend to take this form. In Hyderabad (Pakistan) and Karachi, the Sindhis have been locked in conflict with the Urdu-speakers or the Mohajirs for control of the regional government and economic opportunities in the two Pakistani cities. The Sindhis claim these cities as their own, but they have been dominated by the Mohajirs since they left India in 1947 to settle in Pakistan as the founders of the new Muslim state.

Ethnic leaders may be able to mobilize individual workers, students and professionals to support their political programmes outside the state structure. Ethnic mobilizers are generally well-versed in the cultures and traditions of their communities; they offer services and protection to some of those in need, and pose as the custodians of community interests. If they find any competition, the bargaining could be just as violent as in separatist conflicts.

From Political Mobilization to Terrorist Movement

Historical legacies, a victim mentality, feelings of deprivation and ethnic-bashing leaders all contribute to a climate that encourages political mobilization along ethnic lines.

Intolerance of compromise and commitment to attaining ‘ethnic rights’ by using violent force distinguish such groups. Workers and hardliners blindly follow the leaders, who maintain military-style discipline and propaganda that reinforce ethnic stereotypes.

A large number of people may become convinced that taking up arms is not only legitimate but may perhaps be the only way to secure the necessities of life. In other words, they feel that they are in an unjust situation and must, therefore, decide to rectify it.

However, large numbers of people do not make such decisions spontaneously. They mobilize politically, as leaders win their hearts and minds as well as their loyalty and commitment, and as they are persuaded and exhorted into war. Sri Lanka’s LTTE, Ireland’s IRA and Pakistan’s MQM are examples of such cases in multi-ethnic societies.

When an ethnic group becomes a terrorist group, it becomes very difficult to defuse conflict through non-violent means, i.e. talks or negotiation. The conflict becomes more complicated. Militant groups try to destroy any middle ground where compromise might be possible. For militant leaders, it is ‘victory or death’. There is no political solution other than the success of their case.

Ishtiaq Ahmed writes:

Group tension and conflict in modern multi-ethnic societies underlie political separatism. Ethnic tension has been growing the world over in the post-war period, but towards the closing decades of this turbulent century it has displayed increasing malignancy. Among the protracted historic movements, the Irish and Basque national movements have from time to time taken the form of terrorist outbursts. The ugly nature of the contemporary ethnic revival should not, therefore, be construed to mean that ethnically diverse societies are destined to end up in violent conflict and disruption. Ethnic diversity is almost universal and has existed throughout history. Most of the time, human societies have managed to maintain the ethnic peace, though usually by imposing severe restrictions and disabilities on defeated and subordinate groups.14

In Pakistan, the ethnic conflict in the southern province of Sindh between native Sindhis under Z. A. Bhutto’s quota system in the 1970s and later with the Punjabi establishment and Urdu-speaking migrants from India (Mohajirs) is the most recent major identity-based conflict in the country to take place. The bitter Sinhalese–Tamil civil war in Sri Lanka has created deep cleavages among these groups.15

The factor which has made the whole situation worse is the element of violence. Ethnically mobilized movements have a propensity to express their frustration through violence. In South Asia, extremism is found everywhere and the elements responsible for such attitudes are in abundance. These
include poverty, illiteracy, population increase, unemployment, corrupt governments, easy access to arms, and outside interference.

The need of the hour is to see under what circumstances ethnic movements take a separatist or secessionist direction. The mechanism that is used as a tool to ensure the smooth result-oriented operation both by the state and the movements is very important and needs to be studied. We also need to know as to how violence helps the movement in gaining attention from various quarters, and what measures can be taken to avoid a violent approach and persuade peaceful settlement of disputes.

State Policies and Ethnic Movements

K. M. De Silva and S. W. R. de A. Samarasinghe, in their edited volume, *Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflict* (1993) say that once ethnic conflicts become violent, they are exceedingly difficult to resolve.16

The moment violence is used, an ethnic movement becomes a terrorist movement. In most cases, use of violence is not an initially-intended policy of the movement, but is resorted to when something is imposed. It is the general inability and obstinate reluctance on the part of the dominant group that actually sets the stage for the use of violence. There have been examples when the action on the part of the state elite not to entertain the demands of minorities and the subsequent use of suppression and force to subdue them provides no option to the ethnic groups but to resort to violence in self-defence. Here, it can be argued that use of violence for any reason is not justified, but the point is that ethnic groups get transformed into terrorist groups when they see that their survival is only possible when they have power, and they express their power by harming the lives and property of members of the dominant group just to make them feel how they feel when their life is threatened or their property is attacked. So there is this psychological dimension also which shows that human nature always works as a retaliatory force. Once you are attacked physically or emotionally, there is bound to be retaliation. In most cases of terrorism, the groups do not really want to harm anybody, but they want their work done in the right direction.

Therefore, it would be wrong to claim that subordinate groups have a natural tendency to opt for violence and force to back their demands. Most of the time, it is state terrorism that sets the stage for subordinate groups to employ the same in their life-and-death struggles.

The 'ethno-terrorist' groups do not have a monopoly of violence. In fact, investigations would reveal that state violence is much more organized and diabolic. A state, in order to get rid of the 'terrorist' at times harms innocent people, but all its acts are protected by the international community in the name of preserving the nation state and protecting innocent people. Unless the international community tries to come up with an objective assessment of the nature of violent ethnic conflicts among the groups affected by the use of force and unequal policies, this propensity to engage in violence will continue on both sides.

To summarize the above points, it would be better to conclude that it is not ethnic diversity as such that is a cause of (violent) armed conflict, but rather ethnic politics (by the leaders of the ethnic parties). It is the injection of ethnic differences into political loyalties (in fact, questioning the loyalty of the ethnic group) and the politicization of ethnic identities that is so dangerous (and perhaps the major cause of violent conflict).17

Notes and References


4. Ibid.


11. Ibid., p. 87.
12. Ibid., p. 90.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 3.
17. Smith, op. cit., n. 3 above, p. 11.
Shift from Small Dispute to Large-Scale Conflict: Case Study of Urban Sindh

The partition in 1947 of British India into the Muslim state of Pakistan (with two sections, West and East) and largely Hindu India was never satisfactorily resolved. A third war between these countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan seceding and becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh. A dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir is ongoing.

The major ethnic groups in Pakistan are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pukhtoon (or Pashtun or Pathan), Baloch, Mohajir (immigrants from India at the time of Partition and their descendants), while the religious composition is Muslims 97 per cent (Sunnis 77, Shias 20), and Christians, Hindus, and others 3 per cent.

Linguistically, Pakistan is divided into four basic regions or provinces, which are inhabited by major ethnic groups, viz., Punjabi, Balochi, Sindhi, and Pukhtoon. The linguistic composition of the state is Punjabi 48 per cent, Sindhi 12 per cent, Siraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10 per cent, Pashto 8 per cent, Urdu (official) 8 per cent, Balochi 3 per cent, Hindko 2 per cent, Brahui 1 per cent, English (official and lingua franca of the Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski and others 8 per cent.

The country encompasses remarkable ethnic diversity. From the start, Pakistan has had difficulty finding the right balance between national unity and the rights and identities of minority ethnic groups in its national life. The political institutions have always been weak and have not really played any substantial role as compared to the army, which has unfortunately been very actively participating in the political life of Pakistan thanks to inability and dishonesty on the part of the politicians. Pakistan, being ethnically diverse and culturally pluralistic, has been ruled by regimes that applied irrational and illogical policies to maintain the country’s status quo.

The balance between developing a unifying sense of nationhood and recognition of the identity and rights of Pakistan’s various regions has been elusive. Punjab has traditionally dominated the politics of Pakistan as it has the army. Other provinces and ethnic groups tend to define their identities in opposition to Punjab. Sindh has major economic importance, having Karachi as the capital, and being Pakistan’s major port and industrial centre. Within Sindh, there is a major ethnic divide between the Mohajirs and the Sindhis from rural Sindh. The other the two provinces, Balochistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), have very weak administrative control by the government of Pakistan. In the 1970s, Balochistan faced very suppressive policies of Z. A. Bhutto and the movement that emerged due to this was crushed forcefully. The basic demand of the protest movement was that Balochistan was not getting its proper share in the economy.

The ethnic divide has also affected the development of political parties. The various Muslim League factions have dominated Pakistani politics and are Punjab-dominated parties. The Bhutto-led PPP is strong among Sindhis; in the southern part of Punjab province, Z. A. Bhutto managed to get a dominant role because of the linguistic differences between south and north Punjab. The Awami National Party is strong in NWFP, the Karachi-based MQM has been involved in the politics representing the rights of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India.

The real issues through which the country’s ethnic diversity will continue to affect its national life are different. The first is regional inequality, both in economic opportunity and in the representation of different ethnic groups and provisions in government services including the Armed Forces. The second is resource allocation, not only of the government’s funds, but also of the natural resources. The most talked-about example is the proposed dam on the River Indus at Kalabagh, consistently sought by Punjab, which needs water and power for irrigation and industry, and just as bitterly opposed by the NWFP, Sindh and Balochistan, for the environmental and economic damage it would do to these three minority provinces.

Ethnic Politics in Sindh

Between Partition in August 1947 and April 1951 when the borders between India and Pakistan were open, six million non-Muslims moved from Pakistan to India and eight million Muslims moved from India to Pakistan, especially to Karachi. By the 1951 Census, close to 55 per cent of the population of Karachi was Mohajir. During the first decade after Partition, the Urdu-speaking newcomers, along with the Punjabis, were dominant in Pakistan’s political and bureaucratic arenas. One account of important political offices during 1947–58 shows both Punjabi- and Urdu-speaking refugees holding 18 out of a total of 27 offices of governor general/president, prime minister, provincial governors, and chief ministers.
More than sectarian and religious intolerance and economic disparities, it is the combination of defiant pluralism and stubborn administrative machinery that has contributed to the growth of ethnic strife in Pakistan. Seeing the regime as vulnerable and lacking any policy initiative on strife-torn Karachi, the MQM intensified its militancy. Karachi (‘Bhutto’s Waterloo’) by early 1995 had become ungovernable with a daily death toll of 10–15, largely due to ethnic violence. Gradually, the conflict turned into a civil war between the security forces and the MQM. Benazir Bhutto and the London-based leader of the MQM, Altaf Hussain, supported by hawkish elements in their respective organizations confronted each other in the worst showdown in Karachi’s history with more than 1,200 citizens killed by mid-1995. Such polarization presented a most serious threat to the Pakistani state and civil society but both contenders seemed uninterested in breaking the logjam. Karachi bled while the country needed a new Jinnah to steer it towards a new consensus.4

Pakistan as a state could not manage to consolidate its status. The administrative definition under the British continued through a number of political and administrative measures, and further sheltered by linguistic differences resulted in the emergence of regional identities.

Since Pakistan opted to maintain the pre-1947 status quo with a clear preference for its administrative divisions rather than favouring a redefinition based on changed realities, these regional identities, helped by centralist policies, anchor ethnic identities. The ethnically discretionary composition of the state itself betrayed official efforts at national integration, and further momentum was provided by migration, urbanization, archaic means of communication, trans-border support, a weakening of the civil sector, and the monopolization of scarce resources by non-development sectors like defence, leaving little for the rest. The regional elite, joined by an ambitious middle class in its disenchantment with the centre (in this case, largely viewed as Punjabi-dominated), took to reorganization of regional identities. The colonial legacy of uneven development in diversified regions and an emphasis on administration rather than consensus-based governance, ad-hocism in place of planned egalitarian policies, and the ascendancy of so-called ‘strong men’ over institutions multiplied ethnic dissent.5

The Dispute and Shift to Ethnic Conflict

Mohajirs experienced relatively slow progress in the political and economic areas during the 1960s and 1980s. The young MQM supporters blamed the ‘quota system’ for lack of economic opportunities while the elders blamed the federal system for lack of a political role.6 Since 1949 Pakistan has instituted complex regional and special interest quotas for recruitment to federal, provincial, and semi-governmental posts. Similar quotas with myriad variations have also been applied to the admission policies of educational institutions.7

According to Prof. Ghafoor Ahmed, deputy chief of the Jamat-i-Islami (JI), Pakistan, the quota system enforced by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for Sindhis served the interest of the elite class of interior (rural) Sindh; the lower and middle-class Sindhi did not get any benefit from that system.8

The 1970s brought some tough realities for the Mohajirs under Bhutto. His policies were perceived as anti-Mohajir and pro-Sindhi: Sindh was given 19 per cent share in the federal bureaucracy. For recruitment in the federal and provincial bureaucracies and admission in educational institutions, further allocation was made based on rural (60 per cent) and urban (40 per cent) ‘domiciles’ in Sindh. The domicile, a document that determines an individual’s place of residence, became a dreaded piece of paper for many Mohajirs. The rural–urban quota actually divided the province on ethnic lines. Had Sindh been an ethnically homogeneous province, this policy would have been considered a genuine step for the development of the province. But given the pluralistic situation, it was a deliberate policy to give preference to one community over another for political gains. This politically-motivated administrative step inflamed the feeling of deprivation among Urdu-speaking residents of the province.

The matter could have been dealt with through just administrative measures, but due to ignorance and politicization developed into a complicated ethnic problem and led to mobilization of the Mohajir community towards a politically-organized movement.

The decline in the Mohajir share of jobs and admissions was relative to that of Punjabis, Pathans, and Sindhis. While the upper- and upper-middle-class Mohajirs continued to do well, it was the middle- and lower-middle-class Mohajirs who were affected by the quota system. ‘Because the criterion for favoured status (domicile) is largely ascribed and not based on need or achievement, it follows that the quota favours the relatively well-off candidate from both backward and developed regions.’9

‘The real problem of Karachi,’ says Kunwar Khalid Yonus (MQM Member of the National Assembly), ‘is influx of people from rural areas all over Pakistan.’ According to him, it is the deliberate attempt on the part of the establishment to change the demography of urban Sindh, particularly Karachi.10

Critics of the MQM argue that the Mohajirs do not have any basis for claiming discrimination or oppression since they continue to be ‘over-represented’ in key sectors of Pakistani society: the
bureaucracy, management positions in the private sector, the print and electronic media, medical and legal professions and educational institutions. Nisar Khoro, PPP Minister for Planning and Development of Sindh (1993–96) is of the view that Karachi being the backbone of the country could never be ignored. It has always been the priority of the government to take care of the city. He further opined that Mohajir demands have no grounds as the city is much more developed and privileged than the rest of the country. ‘The MQM,’ Khoro said, ‘doesn’t want to be part of the political system and they have a different agenda.’ MQM leaders and members claim the contrary, that they were never given the chance to play their role even when they were part of the coalition governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. They think that the process of marginalization and alienation started by the establishment soon after the MQM came to the forefront as representative of the Urdu-speaking community living in urban Sindh. Dr Farooq Sattar, MQM Mayor of Karachi during Benazir’s Government in 1988, believes that from day one the successive governments, apprehensive of the MQM’s popularity, had adopted different strategies against the MQM. He referred to the media campaign to malign the image of the MQM as a political party by declaring it a terrorist group.

The MQM supporters also allege that the administration pursues a policy of divide and rule and the defected members of the MQM who were expelled for various reasons by the party were helped and supported by those at the helm of affairs and encouraged to form another political party for the Mohajirs (the MQM–Haquiqi). There was also an infiltration of elements in the MQM who played an active role in distorting the MQM’s image and instigating Mohajir/Pukhtoon and Mohajir/Sindhi riots in Sindh.12

The MQM capitalized on the situation in urban Sindh because the Urdu-speaking community was dissatisfied and had many grievances and the Mohajirs were looking for a way to release their frustration. It provided that outlet, and as a result became the sole representative of urban Sindh. Urban Sindh’s problem is not lack of importance, but the Mohajirs feel that gradually they were being deprived of opportunities and resources which they were entitled to. This is a classic case of relative deprivation.13

A majority of Urdu-speaking Mohajirs see a wide gap between what they get and what they feel they are entitled to because of their parents’ generation’s contributions to the Pakistan movement, their deeply-ingrained sense of cultural superiority, and their educational achievements. The MQM addressed this sense of ‘relative deprivation’ effectively, and thus became an extremely successful example of collective mobilization of ethnic loyalties.14

However, the Mohajirs didn’t opt for a strong advocacy because of economic factors only. This hypothesis was tested on the basis of a sample survey of 6,261 households in Karachi carried out in 1986. The survey covered planned (pakki abadis, i.e. permanent settlements) as well as unplanned areas (katchi abadis, i.e. temporary settlements, or slums) in the city and elicited information on a wide range of housing and socio-economic variables. No direct questions relating to ethnicity were asked. A question on language spoken at home was asked. For the purpose of this study, the language variable was used as a proxy for ethnicity. Five ethnic classifications were constructed along provincial lines: Mohajir, Punjabi, Pukhtoon, Sindhi, and Balochi. Mohajirs included those speaking Urdu and Gujarati; Pukhtoons included those speaking Pushtu and Hindko; and Sindhi includes those speaking Sindhi and Kacchi. Analysis of the data with respect to housing conditions, access to utilities, income, literacy and employment confirmed that Mohajirs were better off as compared to other ethnic groups in Karachi in all respects, except employment. Sindhis and Balochis were worse off in almost all respects.15

The survey revealed that over two-thirds of Mohajirs lived in planned areas, while over half of Punjabis, over two-thirds of Pukhtoons and Sindhis, and three-fourths of Balochis lived in katchi abadis. As far as the type of residence is concerned, the survey revealed that over half of Mohajirs lived in pakka (permanent, proper) houses and less than 2 per cent in katcha houses. As regards other ethnic groups, the majority of households lived in semi-pukka houses. The distribution ranged from 59 per cent in the case of Balochis to 82 per cent in the case of Pukhtoons. The highest number of Sindhis (8 per cent) lived in katcha houses (Table 1).16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Planned Area</th>
<th>Unplanned Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohajir</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pukhtoon</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindhi</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balochi</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The surveys conducted suggest that Mohajir identity or political mobilization was not a result of economic disparity alone. It was only one of the factors responsible; a major motive behind political mobilization of the Urdu-speaking community in urban Sindh was lack of political role in the mainstream politics. In just over a decade of the emergence of Pakistan, the migrant leadership had lost political control. Their bureaucratic control was also eroding. As migrant civil servants retired, largely Punjabi entrants replaced them. The challenge to business leadership soon followed.

Table 2 profiles the control of the presidencies of two key trade bodies, the Federation of the Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and the All-Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) over the five decades. Migrant business leadership had controlled the FPCCI throughout the 1950s, but lost it for the first time in the 1960 elections following the 1958 coup. Migrant control of APTMA also declined in the 1960s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>FPCCI</th>
<th>APTMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mohajir</td>
<td>Non-Mohajir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>zero</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MQM’s Senator Nasreen Jalil says that the MQM never got a chance to get any law passed in the provincial assembly. The MQM mostly boycotted the Sindh Assembly sessions during the PPP government’s tenure, but that did not prevent the assembly from conducting its sessions and passing legislation. The sense of ‘political redundancy’ appears to be the main factor behind urban Sindh’s disturbed politics. The constitutional and electoral system in the country does not provide much space for smaller/regional political parties to act politically; they either disappear or resort to violence in order to get their demands fulfilled.

The feeling of ‘political redundancy’ and the loss of economic leverage led to the perception among the Urdu-speaking community of urban Sindh that they did not have any role to play in the present system. When such a situation occurs, it is an indication of the community moving towards insurgency and militancy. Table 3 gives a picture of the share of Mohajirs in the civil services and the administration in 1994.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Non-Mohajirs</th>
<th>Mohajirs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chief Secretary</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Additional Chief Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Additional Secretary</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Member, Board of Revenue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Divisional Commissioner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>IG Police</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>IG Prisons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>DIG Police Range</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other DGs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Senior Superintendent of Police</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Assistant Commissioner</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Regional Administrator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Assistant Commissioner/SDM</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to prevent deterioration of a society, it is important to apply a conflict prevention approach to resolve problems which could lead to conflicts. The quota system, creating a hurdle for the economic opportunities for Mohajir youth, or a political system based on the old colonial system depriving Karachi from its due share according to the demographic status needs to be reconsidered. Constitutional reforms are the need of the hour. MQM leader Dr Farooq Satar says, ‘The system (political) and structure is inherently flawed. If the system remains unchanged, the result would not be in the interest of the country.’21

The language controversy in the early 1970s further alienated the Mohajirs from Bhutto’s Government and later with successive PPP Governments. To redress a long-standing grievance, the Sindh Assembly passed a bill in 1972 elevating the status of Sindhi language in the province. The new law required that Sindhi be taught as a second language for those students not receiving their instruction in Sindhi, and made it mandatory for provincial government officials to learn Sindhi within a specific period. This produced a strong reaction by most Mohajirs. ‘Serious linguistic riots broke out over the issue in 1972 and some refugees proposed cutting a “Mahajaristan” out of Sindh, reinforced by Biharis brought from Bangladesh.’22

The Mohajirs’ alienation from Bhutto’s PPP led them to participate in the PNA for the 1977 election and later support Zia-ul-Haq’s martial law. But that support did not last long: Gen Zia’s decade-long rule solidified Punjabi dominance. ‘In ethnic terms the Pushtoons clearly emerged as the junior partners of the Punjabis in the military and bureaucracy. The share of the Mohajirs in the civil bureaucracy was further reduced under Zia.’23

One very small dispute between the Urdu-speaking community and the transporters (mainly Pathans) in Karachi suddenly became a major test case for the city administration. Lack of interest and an indifferent attitude towards Mohajirs’ problems, be it the transport problem or loss of life of an individual in an accident made it very clear to the Mohajir community in Karachi and other cities of Sindh that the administration did not care about the well-being of the Urdu-speaking community. A deliberate attempt was being made to marginalize the community. The frustration was demonstrated in 1983 after the death of a Mohajir college student hit by a mini-bus owned by a Pathan transporter. Widespread ethnic violence erupted within two days between the Urdu-speaking population and other communities from the rest of the country residing and earning in Karachi. Interestingly, traffic jams and reckless driving were reported in the 1980s as one of the main reasons of ethnic tension in Karachi.

The Urdu-speaking population of Karachi did not have any platform to voice their grievances. The mainstream national political parties including the JI never raised ethnic issues or problems specifically faced by the Urdu-speaking community in Karachi.24

This lack of political participation, quota system and cultural pressures led to the creation of the All-Pakistan Mohajir Students’ Organization (APMSO) by those young Urdu-speaking Mohajirs who had experienced injustice from the authorities either in admission or jobs. Critics, however, feel that the creation of APMSO and later MQM was the brainchild of the prominent Urdu-speaking elite who were scared of the Punjabi dominance and hence looking for a platform to safeguard their interests. Mohajirs’ rights were nobody’s concern.25

This platform, although propagated as the only alternative available to the people of urban Sindh, might have served the interests of those who had supported its creation, but it failed to deliver any good to the Urdu-speaking people. In fact, a non-stop violent conflict started with the inception of the
Muttahid Quami Movement (previously the Mohajir Quami Movement) because it threatened the status quo in Pakistan, and, according to some analysts, by declaring itself a political party for the whole of Pakistan with middle-class leadership, the MQM was actually challenging the prevailing State structure. In order to crush any such movement which could weaken the existing system of government and challenge the establishment (feudal, military and bureaucracy) force was applied by the state as an instrument of control, hence Operation Clean-Up was launched on 19 June 1992.27

Operation Clean-Up
Lack of political participation among the Mohajir community brought extreme results. On the one hand, Mohajirs got the MQM as their mouthpiece; on the other hand, State authorities started using force and repressive measures to control them. In such an atmosphere, other nationalities in Pakistan were also involved in creating their own alliances to protect their rights. It is indeed interesting to note that the communities which were accused by the MQM of suppressing the rights were also party to such alliances, as the Punjabis and Pukhtoons established the Punjabi–Pukhtoon Ittehad (PPI).

The MQM became the real power-broker in provincial and national coalitions led by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, respectively. After the dissolution of the PPP Government in August 1990, an interim government led by Ghuilam Mustafa Jatoi held the elections that returned Jam Sadiq Ali to office, the interim chief minister of Sindh who forged an alliance with the MQM, ML, nationalist, and some PPP dissidents. The Nawaz Sharif Government was not really having a good time with the MQM, but the provincial administration of Jam Sadiq Ali cooperated with each other, but the intelligence agencies became alarmed at the granting of arms licences to the MQM workers by a political administration. Another important factor that created a hue and cry in Islamabad was the influence of MQM senior vice chairman of the MQM Salim Shahzad over appointments in law enforcement agencies.28

The MQM was not really anticipating a military crackdown and was caught unprepared when the army launched Operation Clean-Up in June 1992. Altaf Hussain was clearly under the impression that the operation was to be against dacoits, kidnappers and other criminals.29

The army promised that it would use a policy of even-handedness in restoring law and order in Sindh, but by 19 June, when the dissident MQM faction of the MQM took over the party’s offices, it became clear that the MQM was one of the main targets of the army’s operation.

The Haquiqi faction was led by Afaq Ahmad and Amir Khan who were once the close associates of Altaf Hussain. Both of them were declared criminals and the MQM wanted the government to arrest them but they managed to slip out of the country. It is no secret that the army saw a possibility of getting rid of Altaf Hussain by patronizing the Haquiqi faction. The constant scuffling between the workers of the two groups each claiming to be the real political movement for the rights of Mohajirs created a law-and-order situation in the major cities of urban Sindh. Most of the workers of the MQM (A) went underground because of fear of arrest and torture by the police authorities. The police was given a free hand to take any action in the name of securing law and order. The Rangers and police started arresting almost every person who had some little contact with the MQM or with the party workers. False cases were also filed and hundreds of young boys just disappeared. The police declared that these boys were killed during encounters. The term ‘encounter’ was used very frequently during Operation Clean-Up. According to Dr Farooq Sattar, ‘Operation Clean-Up was actually direct persecution of the Mohajirs; they were declared anti-state and terrorist under the anti-terrorism act (ATC 1997).’30

As for robbery and other crimes, it was quite understandable that 5,000–10,000 workers belonging to the lower-middle class were underground out of fear of persecution for indefinite periods to resort to such crimes for survival.31

From 1992 till 1999, there was an unannounced ban on the political activities of the MQM. That affected the communication system between the party high command and the workers. As a result, misunderstanding, immature or wrong decisions were taken by the workers, which had nothing to do with party policy. ‘Violence has never been the MQM’s policy, but if there were some instances where young people claiming to be MQM’s workers resorted to violent approach, it was entirely their own decision and the party had nothing to do with it,’ Sattar said.32

The medical trip of Altaf Hussain to London in 1993 that turned into self-exile paved the way for other factions like Haquiqi to convince people that the MQM (A) was there no more and it was Haquiqi leadership which would take care of the Urdu-speaking community of urban Sindh.

Whether it was the inability of the political leadership or the imprudent policy of the army, the launching of Operation Clean-Up and background support to MQM (Haquiqi) turned out to be counterproductive. The mess that the army wanted to clear got further exacerbated and led to the creation of a number of violent groups which had no clear political vision. They just wanted to snatch
what they claimed to be their rights through violence for they believed that they had a right to take care of their own areas. The fight goes on, and the consequences of the ill-conceived government policies and decisions will haunt us for years to come.

Use of Violence by the MQM

The MQM is accused of using and favouring violence in the city. Critics believe that the matters which could have been settled while the MQM was the coalition partner of the PPP and Muslim League were not settled deliberately and the MQM always broke the alliance and joined opposition forces. They also believe that by doing so, the MQM wanted to get the sympathy of the masses and suggest that their party was not given a proper chance to work for the people and actually run a government. The question often asked is: Why did the Mohajirs organize themselves on ethnic lines, and after doing so, suddenly start resorting to violence and were then declared terrorists by the government? Their resorting to violence and challenging the existing system was criminalized, no doubt, but what about the policies of the government, the state-sponsored terrorism which is often targeted against those who are not actually the culprits? Further, can we say that the state is solely responsible for transforming the Mohajir’s political movement into a militant movement; is the MQM a terrorist movement as its opponents allege it to be, and if so, was it a terrorist organization from the very beginning; is the MQM an internationally-declared terrorist movement?

To answer these questions, it is important to first discuss the use of violence or militancy or terrorism by ethnic and political movements.

A number of ethno-religious movements which advocate social change through militant action do not seek to undermine the foundations of a state’s legitimacy. Such pressure groups or political parties indeed use existing laws to mobilize support for their cause and to apply pressure on the state. But militant action can lead to violence, some of which an organization may condone. This could take the form of spontaneous riots, or violence that is orchestrated by more militant members in the course of a lawful demonstration, picket or sit-in. In this first type, violence is used to demonstrate the seriousness and commitment or anger at a state’s insensitivity to what a group may regard as reasonable demands. Because such movements do not opt out of the political system, violence is generally not allowed to escalate to the point where the movement begins to lose public sympathy and allies. This kind of violence occurs in all societies. How often it occurs and the extent of the damage it causes may depend upon the level of a society’s institutional development. Low institutionalization or consensus may generate a sense of weakness among actors and a propensity to resort to violence as they miscalculate the intentions and capabilities of others. Under such conditions, violence may even be provoked by officials of the state to clamp down on militants.

No violence-prone group describes itself as terrorist, however brutal or senseless its violence. All violence strikes terror in victims and society, even if those who perpetrate it are seen as freedom fighters or liberators in some contexts. Describing one type of political violence as terrorist and another type as emancipatory or legal—and, therefore, legitimate—is obviously subjective. By provoking the state to engage in a crackdown and violate its own laws and principles through excessive use of force in the end still may not ensure security. Society may be forced to rethink the moral foundations of the state and the fundamentals of the state’s policy.

Though it has been proved through economic survey reports that economic deprivation was not the only problem behind ethno-nationalism in urban Sindh, the problems of marginalization, social inequalities and political disequilibrium were enough to create a feeling of alienation among the masses. Development alone cannot eliminate violence, for it needs to be rooted in the cultures and traditions of the people it seeks to uplift. Bearing in mind the need to address the general crisis associated with current patterns of development, more specific policies may be needed for countries that are divided by ethnic and religious cleavages. The main issue here is of equity. Many ethnic conflicts or grievances can be traced to the way different opportunities accrue to groups in the social economy: discrimination and/or inequalities in jobs, incomes, asset-holdings, and social services. In a number of cases, such policies often end up promoting the interests of the middle classes rather than those of the poor, specially when the implementation of the policy is top-down. Privileged groups may continue to use poverty or ethnic backwardness of others as an argument for maintaining the policies even if the poor do not benefit from them. As social inequalities widen within targeted backward groups, disadvantaged individuals within those groups may become intolerant of ‘ethnic strangers’ within their communities. Redistributive policies are essential in bringing about reconciliation, a sense of national belonging and political stability in unequal plural societies, but they will need to be carefully formulated and monitored if they are not to fuel the conflicts they seek to prevent.

The case of urban Sindh demands institutional changes and policies to ensure that groups do not feel alienated from vital political processes that shape their lives. Since many ethnic conflicts revolve
around questions of statehood or competition for the control of the state, it would seem logical to rethink the state itself in the light of the plural nature of countries in the world system.

The questions raised at the beginning of this section are answered in the light of the above explanation. So far as the question about the responsibility of the state in transforming the MQM into a militant organization is concerned, it is, to some extent true. Operation Clean-Up by the governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif proved one thing: that if the MQM had failed to control those elements responsible for criminal activities, the intelligence agencies and the government had also failed in seriously attending to the problems that the MQM as a political party was facing. The MQM maintains that the officials did not really give importance to the list given by the MQM to the government of those MQM workers who were involved in criminal activities. This strengthens the impression that the establishment actually wanted to destroy the MQM’s image before its voters and the international community. The state, which is often responsible, escapes responsibility and can continue to plead sovereignty and the sanctity of its borders under international law even when it engages in unlawful and unjust acts against its peoples. The changes necessary to stabilize ethnic conflicts and relations require a reorientation and reorganization of the character of the existing political and administrative system.

States need to grant much autonomy, rights and freedoms to the various ethnic groups and individuals that constitute their society, and the state itself needs to embody the varied identities of such groups in its relations with society and the international community.

The MQM’s critics say that the government policies had nothing to do with the MQM’s militant approach. Ms Benazir Bhutto has been highly critical of the MQM as a militant organization believing in terrorism and violence. She was adamant that a political solution through dialogue with the MQM could only come about when they abandoned armed struggle and reverted to peaceful politics within the parameters of the democratic system. Rasool Bux Palijo, President of the Awami Tehrik35 says that urban Sindh’s problem is just like an ordinary court case.

The government needs to deal with it like that. There was no need of Operation Clean-Up against them as this contributed to the MQM’s importance among the voters and in the international community by making them victims of state terrorism. MQM from A to Z is a terrorist party.34 Prof. Ghafoor of the JI says, ‘MQM has independent objectives, it has fascist tendencies.’35 As far as the structure of the organization is concerned, it is highly centralized and is commonly termed as fascist by its critics. Though the MQM has talked much about the drug and transportation mafia being responsible for ethnic conflicts in Karachi, its own organization has mimicked a mafia-like structure. Its pamphlet on training workers lists four essential elements of a strong movement: (1) ‘blind faith’ in the leadership; (2) elimination of individuality; (3) strong sense of common purpose; and (4) complete knowledge of, and agreement with the ideological basis of the organization.36

One of the MQM’s objectives was to completely control urban Sindh by becoming the patron of the Mohajirs. It is criticized for forcibly collecting contribution (chanda) from businesses and citizens (others call it bhutta, i.e. extortion). Newspapers contain a lot of material on the MQM’s extortion techniques and threats to those who were against it. The organization is accused of intimidating journalists and boycotting newspapers having an anti-MQM approach to silence criticism by the Karachi and Hyderabad press in particular.

Violence in urban Sindh has taken a more ominous turn since April 1994, with 62 policemen and 500 civilians killed,37 most of them targeted and not the result of ethnic rioting. In December 1994, Mohammad Salaluddin, editor of Takbeer, an Urdu weekly magazine affiliated with the JI and highly critical of the MQM, was killed as he left his office. The assassination created a fresh cycle of revenge killing, and within a week an editor of a pro-MQM newspaper was among those killed. In the first few months of 1995, Shia–Sunni sectarian violence caused several hundred more deaths and some former MQM (A) and MQM (H) activists were alleged to be associated with this terrorist activity in Karachi.

To answer the third question, whether the international community thinks of the MQM as a terrorist party, it is important to note that the MQM’s status in the international community is very controversial. While the MQM blames the government for image distortion and victimization of its workers, successive governments in Pakistan projected it as a terrorist organization and maintained that the international community should understand that protecting criminals was not the right policy.

The MQM’s leader, Altaf Hussain, says that a strategy was designed to raise the terrorist bogey in Karachi. Accordingly, Hakim Saeed38 was murdered and governor’s rule was imposed, Article 245 invoked and the army deployed. Thus, not only was democracy slain but also sanctity of the judiciary. The high court was bypassed by establishing military courts. He said the government used Hakim Saeed’s murder to impose governor’s rule in Sindh, but no action was taken against the murderer of known religious scholar and chairman of the Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, Maulana Abdulla on the same day. Neither was governor’s rule imposed on the Punjab. The MQM believes that while the Haqiqi terrorists were provided a licence to kill the MQM workers, the same one-sided killing of the MQM
workers under the supervision of official secret agencies was declared a ‘fight between two groups’. Even the extra-judicial killings of innocent MQM workers at the hands of the police, Rangers and secret agencies were termed as ‘police encounters’. The world was told that an operation was on against criminals and no extra-judicial killing was underway. Under the preplanned policy of criminalization, the people were made to believe through media reports that no terrorism or murders were going on in other parts of the country and only Karachi was burning. For this purpose, murders because of personal vendetta and family feuds were termed as ‘terrorism’ and Karachi was portrayed as a city of violence. The Karachi incidents were spiced up in an unusual manner as terrorism so to justify the launching of a large-scale state operation by the security forces, imported from Punjab and other provinces, and the Mohajirs were made hostage in their own streets and localities. Once the democratic order was tuck away, supra-legal and ultra-constitutional actions were taken with impunity, Altaf declared.39

The above statements by the leader of the MQM serve to appreciate that the groups should have a sense of representation and participation in the political life of their society. Although violence in Karachi has dropped considerably since the brutal 1996 crackdown against the armed opposition by the MQM, clashes continued between the MQM and federal security forces. In August, in a misguided effort to quell the violence, the Nawaz Sharif Government enacted the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), a hastily-conceived law suspending constitutional safeguards and giving increased power to the police and other security forces. In February 1997, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif swept the national and Punjab assembly seats in elections triggered by the November 1996 dismissal of Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP). The grounds for Bhutto’s dismissal included corruption and human rights abuses committed in the course of the crackdown on the MQM in Karachi. A judicial inquiry into extra-judicial executions of some MQM militants began in June; its report was due in October. The change of government did not herald an end to human rights violations in Karachi. At least 400 persons were killed in the city between January and November 1997. They were the victims of extra-judicial executions by police and federal security forces or retaliatory killings by the MQM. Several children were counted among the victims.40

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By and large the image of the MQM in the international community is that of a political organization pursuing an anti-establishment agenda. However, the state, no matter whether it is a military government or a democracy, does not want to change the structure of its bureaucratic administration and military establishment. The state structure that is controversial needs to be altered taking into consideration the needs of the other communities. The international community does not support the MQM openly. However, by steps like providing a safe haven to self-exiled MQM leader Altaf Hussain in Britain, allowing him to get a British passport and establish the MQM’s international secretariat there to operate all over the world clearly show that the world has not declared the MQM a terrorist organization despite the filing of criminal cases against its workers by the Government of Pakistan. Had there been some pressure from the international community not to provide a platform to the MQM, the Government of Great Britain would have not been in a position to ignore pressure from the international community not to help the MQM operating from their land.

The solution in the present circumstances is to begin a process of decentralization of the state and devolution of political and economic power to the provinces and further on to the local entities. A sense of participation in the political system is important for the masses, both majority and minority. If on the one hand, the majority should have a say in the decision-making process, on the other, the minority should not be ignored. Ignorance of minorities creates frustration.

MQM–Musharraf Power-Sharing in Urban Sindh: 2002 Elections

Ever since the MQM came to power as a result of the October 2002 elections, the city has been a victim of a serious rift between the MQM and JI. The wrangling between the two has continued for some time, but development work continues in the city. The administration of Gen Pervez Musharraf opted for a policy of cooperation and accommodation with the MQM, offering them not only governorship of the province of Sindh but share in main ministries as well. It seems that it was a deliberate idea of Gen Musharraf’s Government to bring the MQM into mainstream politics not because of their past performance or just because they have a strong vote bank in urban Sindh, but to avoid any confrontational politics that would disturb the smooth running of the policies at the centre. The MQM has since then controlled the city and managed to provide much-needed support to Gen Musharraf in all kinds of political crises. Having the PML (Nawaz group) and PPP in opposition and Muttahid Majlis-e-Mahas (MMA) Government in NWFP and Balochistan, both the MQM and Gen Musharraf’s regime found the best option in cooperation rather than confrontation. For almost eight years now, political pundits predicted smooth sailing for the MQM as it seemed to everybody that ethnic politics had taken a back-seat and having control of the city if not the province had somewhat calmed down the
politics of agitation by the MQM until the bloody day of 12 May 2007.

Abuse of State Power: Minority in Power yet Insecure, 12 May 2007
On 12 May 2007, Karachi saw the worst kind of violence after many years. But this time, the reason was not a confrontation between the centre and the MQM, but the arrival of the chief justice of Pakistan who challenged his forced resignation and refused to step down. On 12 May, he was supposed to address the Sindh Bar Council. The MQM, supporting Gen Musharraf, announced that it would hold its rally for national solidarity on the same day. Nothing wrong if it had been just a case of holding rallies on the same day. The problem began when the chief justice was not allowed to proceed with his rally to the Sindh High Court Building from the airport. While opposition parties and lawyers were all set to welcome the chief justice, they encountered resistance from the city administration. The failure to proceed led to serious clashes between the MQM city administration and opposition parties and the result was the most inhuman display of bloodshed in broad daylight captured by cameras and watched by the whole world.

The MQM has often justified its militant politics in the past as a reaction to the oppressive policies of successive governments and vendetta and genocidal policies against the Urdu-speaking community in urban Sindh. But this time, there was no ‘pogrom’ going on against the Mohajirs. They were the managers of the city administration, having very good relations with the centre. The show of violence while in power put the MQM in the same category of authoritative regimes that cannot tolerate opposition of any kind. This unfortunate incident forces us to question the validity of ethnic politics. Parties when in minority demand political solutions to their problems, but once in power pursue the same policies of confrontation rather than accommodation.

Since its creation in 1985 during the military regime of Gen Zia-ul Haq, the MQM has had a reputation for violence. Opponents have long accused it of using fascist tactics. But since it was inducted into a power-sharing arrangement in 2002, it seemed to have mellowed. Indeed, throughout the Lal Masjid crisis in Islamabad, it has displayed a consistently secular stance.41

But 12 May 2007 was a reminder that the party has not changed its basic principle of use of force in crisis; it also shows that opposition to MQM power in urban Sindh would not be tolerated and any arrangement that poses any threat to its absolute power would be discarded and opposed politically and violently.

This raises an important question: If militant ethnic groups resort to violence because they are pushed to the wall, what justifies their violent tactics once they are in power? If the MQM in this particular case did it because the Central government had asked it to do so, is the party so naïve that it was used by others? It seems that fear of losing their power base led them to resort to such an illogical step. It has tarnished the MQM’s image and ruined years of efforts that the party tried to put in to prove that, if provided, it could become part of mainstream politics by governing the province well.

Notes and References
1. It is often argued that Urdu is the mother tongue of only 8 per cent of Pakistanis, hence it cannot be the national language of Pakistan. The answer is that no doubt Urdu-speaking Mohajirs are only 8 per cent of the population, but the language is spoken and understood by the majority of Pakistanis, even it is not their mother tongue. It is also one of the few things besides religion which was an important factor for national cohesion.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 686.
6. This system was introduced in the 1970s by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the prime minister at that time. The real reason behind it was to consolidate his votes in rural Sindh. The system provided more opportunities for rural youth in the educational institutions and an enhanced share in the federal and provincial services and other government jobs. The quota system was initially introduced for 20 years and was supposed to be abolished in the 1990s, but the parliament, under Nawaz Sharif’s second term as prime minister, extended it for 20 more years. This unique and discriminatory system is exercised only in Sindh. The urban youth in the cities like Karachi and Hyderabad, though capable and deserving, could not get admission in professional colleges and obtain jobs in the federal and provincial government just because there were fewer seats for them, and rural candidates were given the seats even if their marks were below average.
8. Interview by the writer on 10 Nov 2001 at Prof. Ghafoor’s residence in Karachi.
10. Interview by the writer on 3 Nov 2001 at Khalid Yonus’s residence in Karachi.
11. Interview by the writer on 15 Nov 2001 at Nisar Khoro’s residence in Karachi.
12. Interview by the writer on 18 Nov 2001 at Dr Farooq’s residence in Karachi.
16. Ibid., pp. 177–78.
17. Ibid., pp. 169–70, 181.
18. Interview by the writer on 13 Nov 2001 at Senator Nasreen Jalil’s residence in Karachi.
21. Interview by the writer on 18 Nov 2001 at Dr Farooq’s residence in Karachi. He was a mayor of Karachi and member of the coordination committee of the MQM.
22. Wright, op. cit., n. 2 above, p. 199.
24. Prof. Ghafoor Ahmed, Naib Ameer (Deputy Chief) of the JI admitted that the JI was not in a position to do politics on ethnic lines, i.e. raising a voice for Mohajirs in urban Sindh because it would have restricted the JI to being an ethnic instead of a national party (interview, 10 Nov 2001, Karachi).
25. Mohammad Yosuf, advocate, spokesman for the Pakistan People’s Party, says that not only intellectuals but prominent Shi’ite scholars and intellectuals also played very important roles in the creation of the MQM; they were scared of orthodox Sunni dominance in the city and wanted to have a liberal, progressive, political forum. These individuals were Akhtar Rizvi, Prof. Karar Hussain, Raees Amrohvi and Syed Mohammad Taqi, to name a few.
26. Iqbal Yosuf of the PPP says that Mani Shanker Aiyar, former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, in his book Pakistan Papers has written that Dr Alia Imam, Raees Ahmed Amrohi and Aga Hasan Abidi (of the BCCI) supported the young Mohajirs and helped them in floating this idea of Mohajir identity (interview by the writer in Nov 2001 at Iqbal Yousuf’s residence in Karachi).
27. MQM’s Senator Ishtiaque Azhar in his interview to Rashid Jamal in Sindh Khoon Kab Tak Buahaye Ga? (Urdu, ‘How Long Will Sindh Bleed?’), Feb 1993, p. 93, said that Operation Clean-Up was started against the MQM because the establishment did not want to have such a force in the country which could work for the rights of the people of Pakistan. The MQM was about to declare itself a political party for all the oppressed communities of Pakistan, but before its announcement, the operation was launched against MQM workers. The operation, it may be noted, was initially started against dacoits.
30. Interview by the writer of Dr Farooq at his residence on 18 Nov 2001 in Karachi.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Interview by the writer of Rasool Bux at his residence on 2 Nov 2001 in Hyderabad.
34. Ibid.
35. Interview by the writer of Prof. Ghafoor Ahmad.
37. Haq, op. cit., n. 7 above, p. 1003.
38. An Urdu-speaking Mohajir, founder of Hamdard University, a well-known social figure.
39. Ibid.
Sri Lanka, an island reputed to have had a peaceful transition from a ‘model colony’ to a stable, developing state achieving international praise for its excellent quality of life and democratic institutions became an awful example of ethnic conflict in recent years. It was a ‘country of concentration’ for several aid donors, and after 1977, for increased private foreign investment. All this turned into a nightmare when the civil war started which killed innocent Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, brutalized civil society and gave rise to intolerance.

The history of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is the history of emergence of consciousness among the majority community, the Sinhalese, which defined the Sri Lanka society as Sinhala–Buddhist, thus denying its multi-ethnic character. The growth of this consciousness impinged on the minorities in Sri Lanka to the extent that they started feeling alienated within the society.

The Sinhalese dominated the country from about the fifth century B.C. and succeeded in establishing a kingdom with its centre in the north-central province of the island. The term ‘Sinhala’ was first used to indicate the royal family of the island, then extended to cover the royal retinue, then further extended to include the people; this social process dating back to about the sixth century A.D. is simultaneously the process of the ethnic consolidation of the Sinhala people.1

Religion also played a dominant role in ethnic consolidation. Buddhism, introduced from India in the third century B.C., became the religion of the Sinhalese. It also became the state religion. Hinduism remained the religion of the Tamils. Apart from the conversion of a section of both Sinhalese and Tamils to Christianity during the colonial period, the congruence between Sinhalese and Buddhists on the one hand, and Tamil and Hindu on the other was absolute. Social and economic developments during the early colonial period under the Portuguese and then Dutch and British contributed towards the consolidation of the Sinhala community in the central and south-western parts of the island and of the Tamil community in the north and on the eastern seaboard.2

With the development of tea plantations in 1815 by the British colonial rulers, the majority became permanently domiciled on the plantation. The question of their citizenship rights became an issue that subsequently soured relationships between India and Sri Lanka.

Economic developments during the British colonial period were mainly in the central and western areas of the island. This left the Tamil community in a disadvantaged position. They sought to overcome this by moving in large numbers to employment in the state services, in the private sector, and by entering the learned professions. This process was helped by the growth of educational facilities in English in the Tamil regions, particularly in the Jaffna peninsula. Again, large numbers of Tamils migrated to the southern and central regions for purposes of employment but the Tamil traders also established themselves in this region.3

The opening of plantations in the nineteenth century transformed the economy of Sri Lanka and created opportunities for indigenous entrepreneurs to make large fortunes. The Sinhala bourgeoisie found its expansion constrained in various areas. The main import and export trade was dominated by the British and Indians and retail trade throughout the country by Muslim and Hindu traders. Sinhala traders could not break into these areas because of lack of access to finance, which was controlled by British bankers or south Indian traders. Sinhala workers found themselves confronted with migrant workers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu as well as with workers of indigenous minority groups. The situation was further complicated because of the subsequent political and constitutional developments.4

Political and Constitutional Factors

The British government had nominated members to the legislature on the basis of ethnicity: Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burger (descendants of Dutch rulers who married local women). The agitation by the Sinhalese initially rejected ethnicity as a basis of representation and served to bring together the emerging bourgeoisie of all ethnic groups into a common front. Even though this constitutional agitation did not penetrate far down to the population, it nevertheless presented a picture of ethnic harmony when Sir Ponambalam Arunachalam, a Tamil, became the first president of the main political organization, the Ceylon National Congress, in 1919.

The movement for political and social change launched by the political reformers of the early twentieth century was primarily intended to expand the scope and powers of the legislative council by extending representative government based on a limited male franchise. It was conducted by the new stratum of merchant capitalists and professionals who fought for the representation of this new class
interest in the political institutions.⁵ The largest political party in independent Sri Lanka, the United National Party (UNP) emerged as an umbrella party from the colonial era. It was similar in some respects to the Indian National Congress. Like its Indian counterpart, the UNP represented a union of a number of groups espousing different personalities and ideologies. In late 1947, when the party won the country’s first general election, the UNP attempted to establish an anti-communist, intercommunal parliamentary form of government. Prominent nationalists, such as D. S. Senanayake and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike (the country’s first and fourth prime ministers, respectively) led the UNP. The party’s internal differences gradually worsened, however. The first and most serious break came in July 1951, when Bandaranaike’s left-of-centre bloc seceded to form the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the first major non-Marxist political movement to oppose the UNP.⁶

The UNP tried to stay in power by adjusting to the Sinhala nationalistic current. It even went back on a pledge to make both Sinhala and Tamil official languages by agreeing to the policy of ‘Sinhala Only’. But these moves were insufficient. In 1956, the UNP was voted out and a coalition led by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike came to power in a landslide victory. This coalition represented mainly Sinhala bourgeois and rural elements and its dynamism was supplied by the Sinhala intelligentsia, including Buddhist monks and teachers. It was populist and radical in its policies, and one of its first acts was to replace English by Sinhala as the only official language. Since English (the language of the ruling class) had been spoken and understood by only 6 per cent of the population, the move to Sinhala was democratic and egalitarian, but it had the unfortunate effect of alienating the Tamil-speaking part of Sri Lankan society.⁷

Although conflict on the present scale might not have been anticipated at Independence, the signs were already there that Ceylon’s constitutional structure would be a source of considerable inter-group friction. Of most relevance were the fears expressed by the Ceylonese Tamil political leadership that the unitary constitution would not give the minorities adequate protection against the potentially discriminatory consequences of majoritarian Sinhalese rule.⁸

Prior to Independence, the Tamil leaders had called for constitutional protections to allay these fears, specifically demanding that 50 per cent of parliamentary seats and cabinet posts be reserved for minorities. Once this was rejected, the Tamil leadership called for a federal constitutional structure and for self-determination for the Tamil people within this framework. The Federal Party, formed in 1949 after the government had disenfranchized the up-country Tamil population, became a key voice in Tamil politics for well over two decades.⁹

The Federal Party was unable to pursue its aims successfully because of a parliamentary system dominated by parties which primarily represented Sinhalese interests. Worse still, as Sinhala Buddhist cultural revivalism attained a new momentum in national politics in the mid-1950s, it brought with it policies which significantly disadvantaged the Tamils. As a consequence, Tamil leaders came to propose increasingly radical solutions to the Ceylonese (later Sri Lankan) ethnic problem.¹⁰

### The Ethnic Divide in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a diverse nation; Sinhalese make up 74 per cent of the population and are concentrated in the more densely-populated south-west. Tamils of Sri Lankan origin form around 12 per cent of the population and live in the north and the east. Indian Tamils, a distinct ethnic group, are 6 per cent of the population (Table 4). They were brought into the country in the nineteenth century by the British to work in the plantations. They tend to live in south-central Sri Lanka. Despite having delivered the key primary product on which the Sri Lankan economy was built, up-country Tamils have suffered civil and economic repression throughout their history in Sri Lanka. To date, they have not directly associated themselves with the struggle for Tamil self-determination. Their primary political organization remains trade unions, which focus on economic and franchise issues. Other minorities include Veddas, Muslims (both Moors and Malays), and Burgers, who are descendants of European colonial settlers. Most of the Sinhalese community is Buddhist, most Tamils are Hindu. Most of the Muslims practice Sunni Islam.¹¹

### Table 4 Population Composition of Sri Lanka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (000s; 1994)</th>
<th>Main Ethnic Groups (1981)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>17,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74% Sinhalese, 13% Ceylon Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% Muslim, 6% up-country Tamils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Province (WP)</td>
<td>4,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Colombo, Gampaha,</td>
<td>85% Sinhalese, 6% Muslim, 6% Ceylon Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalutara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
North-Eastern Province (Jaffna, Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi) 2,645 65% Ceylon Tamils, 18% Muslim, 13% Sinhalese

Southern Province (SP) (Galle, Matara, Hambantota) 2,330 95% Sinhalese

Central Province (CP) (Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya) 2,261 64% Sinhalese, 20% up-country Tamil, 8% Ceylon Tamil, 7% Muslim

North-Western Province (NWP) (Kurunegala, Puttalam, Sabaragamuwa [SAB], Ratnapura, Kegalle) 2,107 90% Sinhalese, 9% up-country Tamil

Uwa Province (UVA) 1,735 87% Sinhalese, 9% up-country Tamil

North-Central Province (NCP) (Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa) 1,086 91% Sinhalese, 7% Muslim

Source: http://www.c-r.org/acc_sri/background.htm

Problem between Sinhalese and Tamils Begins
The language divide was yet another issue which promoted disharmony. In fact, the language policy (Sinhala Only Act, 1957) reduced the position of Tamils in state services and increased the access of the Sinhala-educated to prestigious jobs. Insistence on knowledge of Sinhala as a necessary requirement quickly reduced the Tamil intake and by the late 1970s, Tamils were seriously under-represented in terms of ethnic percentages in the state services. However, there are certain quarters that believe that it was not just a matter of under-representation: that the Sinhalese were actually a majority suffering from a minority complex, and the Tamils were, in fact, a minority having a majority complex. For years, the Sinhalese, even though a majority, remained a very low-profile group and lacked self-confidence to make their presence felt. This inferiority complex became intense when the British left Ceylon and Sri Lanka emerged on the world map.

The British colonial policy of divide and rule sowed the seeds of renewed tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities after Independence in 1948. Tamils, being well-educated, were given a disproportionate number of top jobs in the civil service by the British. Once the Sinhalese majority held sway, its politicians sought to redress the balance with populist but discriminatory policies against Tamils. In 1956, the victory of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike on the platform of Sinhala nationalism led him to declare Sinhala to be the country’s official language. He also announced a number of other anti-Tamil measures. This election gimmick turned out to be a great mistake which Bandaranaike realized later and tried to do away with by signing different ‘peace pacts’ with the Tamils like the 1957 Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact, and the 1966 Tamil language (special provision/regulation, etc). Communal tension and violence increased from 1956 onwards as Tamils became increasingly frustrated. Gradually, deliberate attempts were made to reduce the number of Tamils in the Armed Forces and government services, which further disillusioned the Tamils, and the Tamil ethnic movement evolved reactionary measures against Sinhala nationalism manifested through government actions.

The Sinhala-educated rural elite were key players in mobilizing nationalist sentiment and defeating the UNP Government in the 1956 general election. They asserted a close identification between the Sinhalese people, the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Buddhist religion, and sought redress on two key fronts: to remove the barriers to opportunity created by the formal status of English, and to correct what they saw as an unfair advantage enjoyed by Ceylon Tamils. According to Dr Vernon Mendis, the Sinhala Only Act was capitalized on by the Tamils because it irritated them. By imposing Sinhala as the state language, the government of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike damaged the employment prospects of many Tamil-speaking people.

Tamil Identity and Sinhala Language
Throughout Sri Lanka’s modern history after Independence, the language issue remained a major grievance for Tamil speakers. Although legislation providing for ‘reasonable use of Tamil’ was passed in August 1958, the regulation for its implementation was not created until 1966, and even then was not implemented. The new republican Constitution of 1972 reiterated the inferior status of Tamil, declaring Sinhala the only official language.
The status of Tamil changed under the 1978 Constitution, which incorporated the provisions of the 1958 Tamil language legislation and the 1966 Tamil language regulations. Following the Indo-Lanka Accord in July 1987, the 13th Constitutional Amendment of 1987 further enhanced the status of Tamil, making it an official language alongside Sinhala and English. Even today, however, monolingual Tamil speakers remain at a considerable disadvantage in their dealings with the state and in commercial and business life outside the north-east. Despite the efforts of the official language commission, government language policies have often remained unimplemented. Many state institutions, for example, still issue forms in Sinhala only, or in Sinhala and English.15

Tamil Mobilization and Non-Violent Protest: 1956–1975

Given the growing unrest among the Tamils with the Official Language Act, the Federal Party, which emerged as the representative of the Tamil community, asked for a federal political structure which would give Tamils a degree of autonomy in the areas inhabited by them, as well as adequate representation at the centre.

The Tamil ethnic group sought to counter discriminatory policies of the Sri Lankan government at the centre by raising demands at the political level by adopting a non-violent approach. In fact, it was a constitutional battle that the Tamil groups intended to fight. Before Independence, the Tamil Congress had unsuccessfully asked for balanced representation: 50 per cent seats for the Sinhalese, and 50 per cent for the combined minority ethnic groups. Later, the Federal Party, in the late 1950s, made four main demands to the government: for a federal constitution; equality of status for the Tamil and Sinhala languages; granting of citizenship to the up-country Tamils; and an immediate halt to government-sponsored Sinhalese resettlement in what were seen as traditional Tamil-speaking areas. The Federal Party threatened a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience if their demands were not met.

After significant non-violent agitation, Prime Minister Bandaranaike and Federal Party leader Chelvanayakam signed a pact in 1957 which offered devolution of powers to Tamil-speaking regional councils and recognition of Tamil as a national minority language. The pact also contained the government’s promise to reconsider the citizenship status of the up-country Tamils, and pledges against future resettlement programmes in the north and east. Sinhala nationalist opposition, specially by the UNP to the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact was so strong that it was publicly abrogated by Bandaranaike in April 1958. This was to be the first of several betrayals of agreements on Tamil grievances. Bandaranaike was later killed by a monk in 1959.

During the campaign for the 1960 general elections, the Federal Party again raised its demands, and the SLFP promised to implement reforms within three months on the basis of the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact. The two parties eventually entered into an electoral pact. On winning an outright majority, however, the SLFP ignored its agreement. Indeed, from the beginning of 1961, it instituted Sinhala as the language of administration throughout the island and didn’t offer any substantive concessions to Tamil speakers.

Repeatedly frustrated by the government’s failure to act on its agreements, the Tamil politicians stepped up their campaign of civil disobedience and non-violent protest. In the south, such actions often provoked ‘counter-civil disobedience’ by the Buddhist monks and other Sinhala activists, which heightened ethnic tension and polarization.

In the north, the civil disobedience campaigns were met with a growing security presence and increased threats to personal liberty. In February 1961, the Federal Party launched its biggest campaign throughout the north-east to protest against the implementation of Sinhala-only legislation. It had already called on the Tamil government employees not to study Sinhala. It now requested not doing any business in Sinhala and asked the Tamil people to correspond with the government in Tamil only. For several days in February 1961, protesters blocked access to the main administrative buildings in Jaffna.

It is clear that due to betrayals on the part of the SLFP and non-fulfilment of the promises made by the SLFP to the Tamil’s Federal Party, the whole situation turned into an ethnic conflict and the Tamil politicians started looking at everything under the perception that the government was trying to marginalize the Tamil community. Had the government fulfilled its promises after winning the elections, the Tamil politicians might not have reacted by organizing themselves ethnically. In response, Prime Minister Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike declared a state of emergency and troops were sent for the first time into the area to regain control. In July, the government quickly closed the Federal Party’s Tamil Arasu (state) postal service, which had issued its own stamps through Jaffna district post offices. All Federal Party MPs were detained for the next six months.

Now here we find the blunder made by the government. Instead of giving some concessions and fulfilling some demands, if not all, it completely turned its back to all it had pledged, to handle the
situation by using force, causing further deterioration. Such administrative decisions, though not perceived by the then government to be of such far repercussions, laid the ground for Tamil mobilization on ethnic lines. Later, decisions like this provided an excuse to Tamil politicians to justify their demands for autonomy in the beginning, and later ask for a separate state for Tamils.

In 1965, the Federal Party tried again to reach a negotiated agreement with the UNP. The Senanayake–Chelvanayakam Pact was signed in March 1965, similar to the Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact in content. The Federal Party agreed to join and support a coalition ‘national government’ under Senanayake. Again, however, the government failed to make good its promises. It did not implement the Tamil Language Regulations that it had published in 1966. In 1969, soon after the adoption of a draft bill providing for new district councils under opposition pressure, the Federal Party withdrew from the government altogether.

Politics of Confrontation and Administrative Blunders

The demands of the Tamil people had by this time become a major factor in Sinhala politics. However, the deteriorating situation was treated as a small dispute, which eventually turned into a monster and the government was unable to handle it. The Sinhala political hegemony was also becoming institutionalized. The republican Constitution of 1972, while proclaiming Sinhala as the official language, declared that Buddhism had the ‘foremost place’ in Sri Lanka, thus almost affirming a Sinhala–Buddhist state.

It is precisely this history that persuaded the Tamils that coexistence with the Sinhalese in a single polity was no longer possible. The established political party of the Tamils, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), was already demanding a separate state and using parliamentary democratic processes towards obtaining it. Some Tamil youth, dissatisfied with the non-violent policies of the TULF, formed groups which took up arms to champion their cause. It led to a protracted and bitter war in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. During the course of the war, the state security forces reportedly resorted to severe excesses, attacks on civilians and serious violation of human rights, while the armed groups in turn resorted to brutal killings of both the Sinhala civilians and those Tamils thought to be ‘informers’.

In 1970, Srimavo Bandaranaike returned to power as prime minister of the new United Front coalition government. A new constitution was adopted in May 1972 heralding the birth of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Entrenching Sinhala Buddhist ideology, the constitution afforded Buddhism the ‘foremost place’ in the state and confirmed Sinhala as the only official language. It also marked a new era in Tamil politics. From 1956 to 1972, Tamil leaders had responded to the Sinhala–Buddhist domination of politics by asserting federalist demands and resorting to civil disobedience campaigns. The 1970s, however, saw the emergence of considerably stronger tactics and demands.

In the early 1970s, increasing numbers of Tamils felt as if they were secondary citizens, as language and education policies in particular threatened the future of many Tamil youths. The two main political parties in the south, the UNP and the SLFP, had both reneged on pacts with the Tamil leadership while in government and kindled communal flames when in opposition. In short, a deepening distrust of Sinhalese politicians and national politics had clearly developed.

Tamil Politics Become Violent

As a consequence of these developments, a new militancy grew up within Tamil politics. In May 1972, the Tamil United Front (TUF) was formed. It included the main representatives of both Sri Lankan and up-country Tamils. The TUF’s demands expanded on those made earlier by the Federal Party. These reflected Tamil concerns at the growing ‘Sinhalization’ of the state, but they still fell short of allying for secession. Then, in May 1976, the TULF was established. No longer was there a call for decentralized government in a federal state. In a resolution adopted on 14 May 1976, the TULF declared that all attempts to cooperate with governments had failed, and that only through a separate Tamil state could Tamil historical grievances be met.

The TULF won dramatic victories in the 1977 general election in the northern and eastern constituencies. While the strength of popular support for Tamil secessionism was confirmed, the means for attaining independence remained contested. The TULF continued to seek an accommodation with the government through parliamentary politics, but it constantly risked failure and popular disillusionment. Another option appeared to be offered by small groups of more militant Tamil youth that believed that only through armed force could they achieve independence. These youth groups were not satisfied with the non-violent policies of the TULF. They formed groups which took up arms to champion the cause.

The Tamil youth became violent with the introduction of the new education policy. By 1976, the
impact of new government policies on access to higher education was increasingly felt. Under the earlier entrance system, students were granted university admission on the basis of competitive exams marked on a uniform basis throughout the island. As Jaffna Tamil students, in particular, scored well in the exams, the proportion of Tamils admitted to universities was significantly higher than their proportion in the population.18

After 1970, the government sought to increase access for Sinhala students by introducing an entrance system under which the number admitted in each language group was proportionate to the number who had sat for the exam. The effect of this policy was that Tamil-speaking students had to get higher marks for university entrance than their Sinhala-speaking counterparts, but many who would have gained entrance under the previous system were denied university education altogether.

This ‘standardization’ system did not last long. In 1972, it was changed to a ‘district quota system’ to compensate for the fact that within each language constituency, certain groups had access to considerably better educational facilities. The district quota system was to benefit disadvantaged students in rural areas in particular. Up-country Sinhala, Muslim and east-coast Tamil students would all benefit, but Jaffna Tamils were to perform better than others because of their higher overall educational attainment.19 This system provoked intense protest in the north where Tamils were in majority, which was in turn strongly resisted by the state. The leaders of militant Tamil separatism initially emerged from the generation of Jaffna Tamil youth disadvantaged by the education policies of the 1970s.

Frustrated and disappointed with the government and the Tamil leadership’s association with the ruling party, the new generation of Tamil militants started harassing them. In July 1975, they claimed their first successful assassination, gunning down Alfred Duraiyappa, Tamil mayor of Jaffna and president of the Jaffna SLFP branch.20 Soon, however, their confidence and expertise grew and they began to attack state targets, including police stations and army installations. The 1980s were to witness a dramatic intensification of armed conflict in Sri Lanka.

**Escalation of Armed Conflict**

After winning the 1977 election, Jayewardene formed a new UNP Government. He promised to address Tamil grievances. The first and most significant step he took was abolishing the district quota system for university entrance, although access to higher education remained a sensitive issue. In 1978, through a second republican constitution, he became the country’s first executive president. Under this constitution, Tamil language rights were incorporated for the first time.21 However, the Tamil militancy and resentment increased when the president was found extending new powers to security forces in the north, and suspending certain constitutional safeguards against human rights abuses. Hence, on the one hand, the Sri Lankan government was giving concessions and powers to the minorities, but on the other, rules and regulations to tighten security and check the movement of ethnic groups were introduced by giving more powers to security forces in the north. These actions on the part of the government paved the way for Tamil militancy.

In July 1979, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was passed. This enactment, together with a declaration of emergency in the north, marked a new, more intensive phase in security operations. Reports of human rights violations committed by the security forces increased, exacerbating resentment among Tamil civilians and fuelling a soft corner for the militants.22 Surrounded by increasing tension and militarism, the turning point in the conflict came in July 1983, when anti-Tamil violence in the south erupted on a scale never seen before. Violence broke out after the LTTE ambushed and killed 13 soldiers near Jaffna.23 It was for the first time that an attack of this scale had taken place. Retaliatory attacks commenced against Tamils in Colombo after the arrival of soldiers’ bodies for a mass funeral. It soon spread elsewhere. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands of homes and businesses destroyed. In the north, the security forces went on a killing spree.

Instead of offering restitution and redress to the victims, the government introduced constitutional amendments banning advocacy of secessionism, even by peaceful, political means. TULF parliamentarians, who were elected on separatist slogans, had to forfeit their seats. The constitutional path for Tamil nationalists’ aspirations was effectively blocked and they were left having no option but to support separatism armed with violence.

The intensity of the conflict, which escalated in 1983, sparked off countrywide attacks on the Tamils. This event resulted in a mass exodus of Tamil refugees to India. Consequently, India got involved in the internal problem of Sri Lanka, which became internationalized to some extent by Indian involvement.

**Ethnic Movement Transforms into Terrorism**

After July 1983, the Tamil militant recruitment increased dramatically. According to Liz Philipson, a
visiting fellow at the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics: The Sri Lankan conflict gradually became more violent following increased repression and human rights violations, and the war is generally cited as having begun in 1983. The violence engendered by the war is permeating deeper into northern and southern society and the island revisits its own history with increasing frequency and fatalism as each attempt to find a settlement to the conflict erupts in a greater frenzy of violence. Military victory is not within the grasp of either side but breaking these cycles of deepening violence is an extraordinarily difficult and complex task in this entrenched conflict.25

Here, it is important to note that the Tamil nationalism that developed in response to Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism was not explicitly religious. Instead, it took on the character of a civil religion. As one Tamil separatist writer puts it, 'The original link between Tamil ethnicity and [the] Hindu religion has come to be severed.'25 As such, ethnic identity became the mainstay of Tamil nationalism, replacing Hinduism as the focal point of Tamil popular religion. By appealing to the common characteristic of a fragmented group, Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka appealed to the entire ethnic group regardless of religion in the same way as Hindu nationalism in India united people across ethnic lines. The separatist movement in general and the LTTE specifically, by avoiding formal links with Hinduism, gained the support of Tamil Christians, and even some Christian clergy. The LTTE became a civil religion for the Tamils with its violent approach.26

Violence caused a shift in thinking within the Tamil community. Faced with systemic discrimination and violent repression by the state it had to react, either with passivity and submission, or with defiance and resistance. The Tamil youth saw violence as a quicker, more effective and more glamorous means towards their goal.

The then secretary general of the TULF explains the Tamil leadership’s lack of interest in non-violence and the shift from non-violence to violence. ‘We are attached to a program of non-violent agitation, but I envisage a stage sooner or later when we are going to have to fight it out.”27 Eelam Web, a pro-LTTE Internet website, notes that Gandhi was leading a majority against a minority, namely, the British colonial government, whereas the Tamils were a minority seeking justice from the majority. The Federal Party, then the dominant Tamil party, attempted to unify Tamils politically under a banner of non-violence during the satyagraha (non-violence) campaign. But according to Eelam Web, some of the Tamil leadership questioned the relevance of Gandhian non-violence in this scenario. Instead, they founded an underground militant group called Pulip Padai, which sought a separate Tamil state. Pulip Padai, which distributed leaflets advocating militancy, declined after 1965, but Eelam Web traces the seeds of the 1970s militancy to leadership developed by its student wings.28

Two events occurred in 1971 that encouraged the Tamil militancy that was to follow. One was the first Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP, People’s Liberation Front, a Sinhala party) insurrection by Sinhalese militants in the south of Sri Lanka, which, though it ended in failure and violent government repression, inspired Tamil students to use similar means. The second event was the Indo-Pakistan war, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, raising hopes that violence might produce similar results for Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. The combination of violent repression by the government and what they perceived as the success of armed resistance elsewhere in South Asia motivated many Tamil students to support militarism. Thus, they began armed resistance to what they saw as oppression by the Sinhalese people.29

With this background and mindset, various armed groups consolidated bases in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where they received the support of the state government. The central Indian government also sought increasingly to influence Sri Lankan policy on the Tamil issue and its intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), provided arms and training to the militants.30

Justifying armed struggle, LTTE leader Prabhakaran said:

It is the plight of the Tamil people that compelled me to take up arms. I felt outraged at the inhuman atrocities perpetrated against an innocent people. The ruthless manner, in which our people were murdered, massacred, maimed and the colossal damage done to their property made me realize that we are subjected to a calculated program of genocide. I felt that armed struggle is the only way to protect and liberate our people from a totalitarian Fascist State bent on destroying an entire race of people. [Talking about the conditions that influenced him to join the militant ranks, he said] From the (sic) very young age I was told of horrifying stories of brutal atrocities committed against the Tamil people. During my student days I felt the racial discrimination directly. In my early youth I had a clear picture of the nature of State oppression, which was engulfing the Tamil nation. I then realized that to redeem our people one must organize an armed resistance movement. That is how I founded the Tiger movement and got involved in the armed struggle.31

The rise in Tamil militancy responded to state violence, and, in turn, provoked increasingly ferocious crackdowns. Despite enhanced powers under the PTA and emergency rule, the security forces often acted altogether outside the law. Arbitrary and retaliatory killings of Tamil men in custody became a regular occurrence. As Tamil youths became increasingly vulnerable to gross violations by the security forces due to their ethnicity, more and more took to arms. Meanwhile, the militants—and particularly
the LTTE—also launched attacks on civilian targets, sometimes killing large numbers of Sinhalese villagers.

The year 1984 saw a serious escalation of the armed ethnic conflict. By the end of 1985, four strong groups had emerged among the militants. They were the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and the People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). It was around this time that the TELO leader Sri Sabaratham declared in their tabloid, published in London: ‘Let us concentrate our forces for a concentrated struggle to achieve liberation.’ He added, ‘in unity lies our strength’.32

By mid-1985, the armed militants had gained the upper hand in the Jaffna peninsula and they brooked no dissent within the Tamil community, appearing to maintain their hold through intimidation and killing. At the same time, considerable violent rivalry developed between the groups themselves. In mid-1986, the LTTE attacked members of TELO, and after a week’s fighting, the LTTE emerged as the dominant force in Tamil militant politics. Soon after, the EPRLF suffered a similar fate when scores of its cadre were killed. From then onwards, the LTTE continued armed warfare against the Sri Lankan state, and did not allow other Tamil groups or political parties to operate in areas under its control.33 The Sri Lankan government’s repressive policies against the Tamil separatists resulted in more clashes between the LTTE and the security forces. It had two demographic consequences. One was the exodus of over 100,000 refugees from the northern regions of the island to Tamil Nadu in south India; these were primarily civilians who had become victims of the government’s drive against Tamil militants. It is well-established that the Sri Lankan security forces often turned against Tamil civilians in their attempt to flush out the militants.

The second consequence was an exodus of Tamils living in southern parts of the island amidst the Sinhalese to their ‘traditional homes’ in the north and east. Paradoxically, as it may seem, the violence of July 1983 convinced many Tamils that they could be safe and secure only in their own areas, despite the presence and operations of the army there. These moves immediately strengthened, on the one hand, the notion of a Tamil homeland in which the Tamils would have their own state, and on the other, it established a close link between the Tamils of Sri Lanka and the Tamils of India, resulting in the Sri Lanka Tamil issue becoming the major issue in Tamil Nadu politics.34

The Tamils of Sri Lanka and their leadership found a safe haven in Tamil Nadu, south India. Tamil Nadu was extremely conscious of the culture and tradition of Tamil people all over the world.

In July 1985, the Sri Lankan government made yet another political mistake not recommended in multi-ethnic societies, though a constitutionally-required step for the solidarity of the state. The Sri Lankan Constitution had been amended, by what is popularly known as the Sixth Amendment, to require all legislators and public officials to take an oath of allegiance to the unitary Sri Lankan state and to renounce all demands for secession and separatism. The TULF members of parliament refused to take this oath and were deemed to have vacated their seats. They then fled to India and began to express their grievances to the Tamil Nadu and Indian governments. The militant groups had been using south India as a base even earlier, but this situation became somewhat formalized after July 1983. Then all the militant organizations established their offices, information centres, and military camps in Madras (now Chennai) and other parts of Tamil Nadu from which their military operations were planned.

Intra-State Dimension of the Conflict

The repercussions of military operations against Tamil militants (which turned out to be against Tamil civilians also) were very bad. Hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils left Sri Lanka and took refuge in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In 1983, when Sri Lankan security forces were busy in capturing the ‘Tamil militants’, the ruling party in Tamil Nadu was the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), and its leader, M. G. Ramachandran, took up the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. It accorded a measure of state patronage to the TULF and militant leaders as well as Sri Lankan refugees. It also mobilized public opinion by first organizing a statewide stoppage of work (a bandh), protesting against the oppression of Tamils by the Sri Lankan government. A resolution was passed in October 1983 in the Tamil Nadu State Assembly condemning the violence by Sri Lankan security forces. It urged the United Nations to intervene in the pursuit of a peaceful solution.

Even though the AIADMK’s support for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause stopped short of support for a separate state, the Sri Lankan Tamil issue became a focal point in the internal politics of Tamil Nadu itself.

It has sometimes been said that it was the pressure emanating from Tamil Nadu that forced the Indian central government to intervene in the matter. The Tamil Nadu government was no doubt concerned at seeing the divisive issue being settled, but it is now apparent that the central government of India was
also motivated by reasons of national security as much as the pressure from Tamil Nadu.  

Despite its direct support to the militants, the Indian government did not share Tamil separatist objectives, not wanting to fuel separatist tendencies in Tamil Nadu and other Indian states. It wanted Tamil grievances to be addressed through devolution within a unitary Sri Lankan state, but believed that strong pressure had to be applied on the Sri Lankan government to achieve this. Apart from this, India did not like Sri Lanka’s tilt towards Pakistan; the Sri Lankan Army being trained by Pakistani forces was enough to annoy India. This was the time to check changes in Sri Lankan foreign policy. Indian military presence in Sri Lanka, according to some analysts, was to keep an eye on Sri Lanka’s changing moves and was not really support for the Tamil cause. Another important and alarming development was Sri Lanka’s pro-US trade policies, allowing several American multinationals to operate in Sri Lanka.

In a preliminary attempt to broker a favourable settlement, the Indian government convened the first official peace talks in July-August 1985 between the warring parties in Thimpu, Bhutan. Five Tamil militant groups and the TULF were represented in a joint delegation, while both Sri Lankan and Indian government representatives also attended. The Tamil delegation articulated the principles which any agreement would have to fulfill to meet their aspirations, but there was no constructive discussion and no agreement was reached.

A number of informal mediation initiatives by the Government of India had begun very shortly after July 1983, much before the first official peace talks in July-August 1985. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi offered India’s good offices in order to facilitate a political solution and this was accepted by Sri Lanka. G. Parthasarathy, a well-known Indian diplomat and adviser to Indira Gandhi visited Sri Lanka, discussed issues with leaders of the government and political parties, including the TULF, and by an all-party conference in January 1984 which, however, ended inconclusively in December 1984. This ended India’s first mediation effort. Indian mediation efforts were primarily concerned with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil parties and groups. During 1984 and 1985, while negotiations towards a peaceful solution were proceeding rather desultorily, the military conflict intensified, claiming ever more civilian casualties on both sides.

The agreement between India and Sri Lanka in August 1985, which allowed trying to settle the problem through devolution and greater autonomy for the Tamils while an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) would disarm the rebels, led to a backlash among the Sinhalese population. Sinhalese nationalism began to grow and opposed the accord with India, undermining the government’s position.

Many attempts in 1986 to solve the conflict proved abortive. The 1986 meeting between Indira Gandhi and Jayawardene resulted in proposals which included the exclusion of Amparai (a mainly Sinhala district) from the eastern province so that the province would demographically have a Tamil majority. In addition, there was to be a strengthening of the institutional linkages between the northern and eastern provinces and a second stage of constitutional development when the two provinces could come together, provided the people so decided. These proposals were finalized by 19 December, but proved inadequate in the eyes of the Tamil militant groups, particularly the LTTE, which had by then become the dominant group. Massive violence erupted in the streets of Colombo: a car bomb exploded at a busy bus station in Colombo at the end of April 1987, killing 113 people.

People reacted furiously and the government, facing popular outrage, launched an ‘all-out offensive’ on the Jaffna peninsula and by the end of May captured a large part of it at great cost in terms of life, property and the massive dislocation of inhabitants in these areas. It was at this stage that the Indian government intervened directly and decisively.

Due to military operations in Jaffna, people left their homeland and took refuge in Tamil Nadu. This factor alone was enough to attract attention of the international community. India took advantage of it and started sending ‘humanitarian relief’. When a flotilla of boats carrying relief supplies was turned back by the Sri Lankan Navy, India dropped relief supplies by air and then began negotiating with the Sri Lankan government for further supplies. The Indian government was now in a position to talk to the LTTE (as providing humanitarian relief had an impact on Tamil groups in Jaffna) and the Government of Sri Lanka was also looking towards India due to international pressure and the economic burden. In this scenario, it became clear that India had moved from the position of mediator to that of direct participant with separate and specific interests of its own because both the parties to the dispute were willing to have Indian support to resolve the dispute.

India’s controversial role in the Tamil ethnic conflict was due to the fact that India did not want the status quo within the region to be changed. The provisions, which said, ‘agreed to meet some of India’s concerns’, included items such as:

1. an early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that such presence will not prejudice Indo-Sri Lanka relations;
2. Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any
country in a manner prejudicial to India’s interests;
3. the work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm will be undertaken as a joint
venture between India and Sri Lanka;
4. Sri Lanka’s agreement with foreign broadcasting organizations will be reviewed to ensure that any
facility set up by them in Sri Lanka is used solely as a public broadcasting facility and not for any
military or intelligence purpose.

In other words, the agreement ensured that Pakistani, Israeli and other influences on the Armed
Forces of Sri Lanka were removed, that Trincomalee would not be used in a way injurious to India’s
interests, that the tank farm would be under India’s partial control, and that the US and West German
broadcasting facilities would not be used to spy on India.

In undertaking to ensure the due implementation of all terms of the agreement, India was also able to
station its troops in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka as a peace-keeping force.

India’s intervention in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka began with a mediatory role. The conflict
became an important factor in Tamil Nadu politics and it was important to minimize Tamil separatist
tendencies. Sri Lanka’s shift from the non-aligned movement to the Western capitalist bloc had become
an irritant in India’s eye. It is, therefore, concluded by many that India’s security interests played a
larger role in the accord with Sri Lanka than the actual resolution of the ethnic conflict. Prabakaran,
the leader of LTTE, openly declared that he had no alternative but to acquiesce in the agreement, even
though it sacrificed Tamil aspirations and hopes to India’s security concerns. The Sinhalese did not like
the agreement for the reason that Jayawardene, in order to accommodate Indian security concerns,
seriously compromised Sri Lanka’s sovereignty and independence.

Successive Sri Lankan governments failed to perceive the danger that the ethnic conflict, if not
handled properly and if suppressed by force, could not only undermine the democratic process but also
result in intervention by India. The presence of Indian troops and Indian intervention created ill
feelings among all the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Indian intervention no doubt aggravated the problem
within the society, but in the final analysis, the Sri Lankan government is responsible for not solving
the problem satisfactorily. It was the Sri Lankan government’s failure to sort out its own problems. It is
very important to be sensitive to the problems faced by minorities and other ethnic groups in multi-
ethnic societies, as an insensitive attitude on the part of governments encourage external intervention.

The presidential elections of December 1988 brought a change in Sri Lankan policy towards Indian
involvement. The new UNP president, Premadasa, began negotiations with the LTTE in April 1989.
Both the UNP and LTTE agreed on withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. Indian troops began to
withdraw in September 1989, and as they moved out, the LTTE got control of the north-east. The
North-East Provincial Council (NEPC) was dissolved by the central government and fierce fighting
ensued between the LTTE and the Tamil National Army recruited by Indians and the NEPC. In this
process, thousands of members and supporters of non-LTTE Tamil groups fled to India or were killed.
With India out of the picture, the agreement between the LTTE and the Premadasa Government broke
down, and a process of killing and violence restarted. Over 600 policemen who were serving in the
temporarily-merged north-eastern province were made to surrender and almost all of them were
subsequently murdered by the LTTE.

Constitutional Attempts to Resolve Armed Conflict
in Sri Lanka

After years of fighting and armed hostilities between Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE, several
attempts were made to institute a constitutional set-up between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil
nationalists. These initiatives failed to bring any far-reaching solution to the ethnic problem. The
constitutional proposals remain the most viable solution to the problem in Sri Lanka.

Among the initiatives, the most-talked-about one was the 13th Amendment of the Constitution. It
gave effect to the devolution provisions of the controversial Indo-Lanka Accord signed in July 1987. It
was clear that the Sri Lankan government signed this agreement under great pressure from India.
However, it had to face criticism within and outside Sri Lanka on this accord.

The 13th Amendment sought to devolve power to the newly-instituted provincial councils throughout
Sri Lanka. Central control remained the key feature of the Constitution and made no real contribution
to the devolution of power to the local people of the provinces.

The main reason behind the failure of the 13th Amendment was lack of political will at the centre.
However, it seems that constitutional provisions were also flawed. Because of this, the Tamil political
parties rejected the 13th Amendment and demanded more substantive devolution of power.

The Premadasa–LTTE Talks
Although Premadasa was himself opposed to the IPKF and tried to work out some formula to help ease tension in the north-eastern region, one unfortunate consequence of the talks was that they frustrated attempts to implement the 13th Amendment in the north-eastern province, for which its provisions had primarily been designed. Premadasa was essentially a centralist, but his efforts to continue dialogue with the LTTE made him unwilling to support the NEPC, which was dominated by the elected representatives of the LTTE’s Indian-backed rival, the EPRLF. From its inception, the NEPC was unable to exercise its power. As the Indian forces departed and the LTTE took control of the north, the provincial council’s chief minister and other EPRLF leaders fled to India, where many were later assassinated by the LTTE.

The People’s Alliance Government
As a result of the 1994 parliamentary elections, the People’s Alliance (PA), a coalition of centre-left, left, and minority-based parties dominated by the SLFP formed the government. The new government took immediate steps to initiate dialogue with the LTTE. However, the differences between the government and the LTTE began to soon emerge. The crucial difference was that the government, in contrast to the LTTE, took a multitrack approach to negotiations. While it was willing to discuss confidence building measures such as the lifting of embargoes, the rehabilitation of the north and the restoration of electricity supplies, the government was also keen to move forward on the framework of a political solution. Many explanations have been proffered for the breakdown of the negotiations: that the Sri Lankan government was not serious about restoring ‘normalcy’ to the civilians living in the north; that both the LTTE and the military used the interregnum of ‘peace’ to regroup and rearm; that the LTTE leadership was unwilling to contemplate an openly democratic process leading to the solution of the ethnic conflict; and that the government sought merely to establish a favourable impression in the international community to secure economic assistance. What is clear is that in unilaterally trashing the peace process the LTTE damaged its own credibility and enhanced that of the government, both nationally and internationally.

Waging a War for Peace
With the collapse of the peace agreement, anger in the south strengthened militaristic attitudes and the argument that the LTTE was an organization simply bent on secession. While President Chandrika Kumaratunga continued to hold that a political solution was necessary to redress the grievances of Sri Lanka’s minorities, she also decided that the LTTE had to be weakened militarily and dislodged from its stronghold in Jaffna. A new government strategy termed ‘war for peace’ was born. Here, we find that, knowing the importance of a political solution, the government, in its efforts to dislodge LTTE, embarked on a completely wrong set of policies which actually helped the LTTE to become a monster.

The December 1995 operation and further military operations in April and May 1996 consolidated government control and strong army contingents were dispatched to secure and help administer the peninsula. Widespread fears that the final assault on Jaffna would cause massive death and destruction were not realized, however, largely because the LTTE retreated as the army approached, forcing almost the entire civilian population to relocate with it. The operation started by the government to clear the main supply route to Jaffna turned into 15 years of war. In short, while re-establishing its presence in Jaffna, the government had become deeply enmeshed in the very conflict it had previously sought to end.

The war since 1995, however, much justified by the government, did not make any progress as far as peace is concerned, but has served to create a range of other problems. It has affected the Sri Lankan nation economically and politically, but at the same time the human cost cannot be ignored. Generations have been affected by this conflict and children would not be able to come of the trauma caused by the war.

The political reforms to deal with this problem include the famous devolution plan, which was mentioned in the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987 with some amendments. The most controversial amendment was reformulation of the Sri Lankan state from a unitary entity to a ‘united and sovereign republic with a Union of Regions’. It was stipulated that constitutional change would require the people’s approval, as expressed through a referendum, as well as the usual two-thirds parliamentary majority. Nothing concrete came out of this proposal, and with that the LTTE launched another set of operations against the government. The LTTE launched three significant attacks in July 1996: one against a minister, the second on an army camp, and the third was a bomb explosion on a commuter train in the suburbs of Colombo.

With these attacks, the LTTE adopted a strategy of striking at military, economic and cultural targets throughout Sri Lanka. The bombing of the sacred Temple of the Tooth in Kandy in January 1998, during the country’s 50th anniversary celebrations outraged Sinhala opinion the most, leading to a
formal ban on the LTTE and the hardening of the government’s militaristic stance. Since May 1997, most LTTE resources have been channeled into frustrating army attempts to establish control of the main Vavuniya–Jaffna highway in the north and to destabilization campaigns in the east.

All efforts on the part of the government to solve this conflict failed because the government failed to convince the Sinhala majority to come out of a majority complex and protection of their culture and heritage. Nobody can harm a culture or civilization if the community is intact and believes in its own traditions and culture, but that does not mean that the majority, in preserving its own traditions and culture, tries to eliminate the minorities. This is what happened in Sri Lanka. In an effort to protect their culture and heritage, the members of the Sinhala community became very aggressive, and while defending themselves, at times their actions appeared to be very offensive to other communities, especially Tamils, because they were the main competitors. The reassertion of majoritarian interests at the expense of minorities actually backfired.

The People’s Alliance Government’s strategy of a ‘war for peace’ turned out to be problematic. With protracted political deadlock, the government appeared unduly disposed to pursuing the war while abdicating its responsibility to revitalize the peace process in the face of setbacks and LTTE intransigence. The lack of government resolve in pursuit of peace was made particularly apparent by its reluctance to build a Sinhala consensus on the need for negotiations as well as a constitutional reform package.

**Ceasefire Agreement**

The Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) signed on 22 February 2002 between the UNP and the LTTE is not really a final agreement to reach a solution of the two-decade-old conflict. But it was expected to lead to a solution because of the points addressed in the document. Though more than five years have elapsed, the conflict not only remains hot but is becoming more violent. The main concern of the Tamil population was that they were being discriminated against: the agreement says that the problem of discrimination on the basis of language, race and religion would be solved through proper representation of the Tamil people in their areas. Humanitarian issues associated with the CFA address several day-to-day problems faced by the Tamil people by ensuring free movement of people and goods. The point in the agreement that all ‘Sri Lankans’ would be given equal rights to move freely throughout the country regardless of their race, sex, language or religion is the gist of the agreement. Previously, that point had been a source of controversy, where it was assumed that since Sri Lanka had been declared a Sinhala state with Buddhism its state religion, other communities could live, but could not demand equality on any grounds, Sinhalese Buddhists being given priority in all cases.

The 2002 CFA recognized that civilians who are not directly involved in the conflict suffer the most. The agreement requires both parties to the conflict to take confidence building measures and try to bring normalcy in the areas under their control. The LTTE were asked to disarm themselves, and LTTE cadres could carry arms only in the areas under their control. The government recognized the control of the LTTE in certain parts of the north and east, and was to withdraw from using any form of force to control the area. Soon after the agreement, it was expected that the entire administration would be given to the LTTE in the areas under their control to fulfil their demand for autonomy in Tamil-majority areas. Though the agreement had a monitoring provision which allowed Norwegian mediators to see if the agreement was implemented or violated by any party, however, nothing could prevent the violation of the agreement from both sides. The main bone of contention was how to accommodate the LTTE within the central polity.

As a homogeneous Tamil-majority area, the north was more likely to accept the LTTE as the administrator of the area taking full control of that province. But the east was less likely to accept LTTE monopoly over the governance of the east. The disturbances in the east are most probably fuelled by the anti-LTTE parties who do not want them to monopolize the entire north-eastern province. These anti-LTTE militant groups helped the Armed Forces in their operations against the LTTE. There is an element of insecurity in the military as well, which used to control the north and east excluding the areas under LTTE control; even the unarmed LTTE cadres were being controlled by the army. With the CFA, the LTTE cadres were allowed to work publicly in the east as well, which was not possible before the agreement. Initially, after the agreement, the LTTE did not adopt reactionary policies, as it was not in its own interest to do so. The LTTE have a bad reputation of jeopardizing peace agreements in the past, which is why they have always been targeted to show some sort of flexibility in order to become a part of mainstream politics, which it never has.

The most important gesture the LTTE gave after the signing of the peace agreement was permission to human rights groups to do vigilance in Vanni District. Amnesty International visited the place, met government and other political leaders in Colombo, and recognized the LTTE’s positive approach
towards human rights. Given the bad track record of human rights violations, it was a reversal of its old image. It was thought that the LTTE were either trying to change their image, or had realized that the time had come to deliver on their commitments through political means, as violence had not given anything to anybody but brought a very bad name to the Tamil community.

The LTTE, being a terrorist organization, believing in snatching its rights through violent means if not achieved easily, were expected to confront a situation where their willingness to become part of the political process would be critically evaluated—and it did happen. They are still not ready to give up their strategy of monopolization of power in the north and east. Democratic forces, if allowed to work in these provinces, would not accept it easily, and this would create the real tussle between the LTTE’s militant mindset and democratic and rational forces.

According to the Human Rights Watch report, the CFA brought a respite from hostilities, but not an end to serious abuses. From 1 February 2002 through 31 December 2006, the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) reported over 4,000 violations of the CFA, many of which involved targeted killings and other violence and intimidation against civilians, with the vast majority being committed by the LTTE. Members or suspected members of anti-LTTE Tamil political parties, which were required to give up their arms under the CFA, were particularly subject to attack.

Revolt inside the LTTE may have come as relief for the government, which would never want to see the LTTE gaining ground, but it led to instability in Sri Lanka’s mainstream politics in early March 2004. A fierce confrontation started between the LTTE’s chief military commander in the east, V. Muralitharan (known as ‘Col Karuna’), and the Vanni-based LTTE command. The reasons for the split are unclear, but Karuna accused the leadership of discriminating against Tamils in the east—his traditional stronghold.

The Karuna split offered the government a new opportunity to confront the LTTE. As military hostilities resumed in 2006, the Karuna group began cooperating with government forces in the east and helped intelligence operations against the LTTE. Under the CFA, the LTTE were allowed to open political offices in government-controlled areas and to travel freely. These offices gave the LTTE’s intelligence wing free rein to increase its strength by targeting underage recruits, extorting money from businesses, and eliminating members of other Tamil groups. In November 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected the fifth president of Sri Lanka. Unlike his predecessor, he was more doubtful of the ceasefire’s benefits, as was the Sinhalese-nationalist constituency he catered to in the south.

Resumption of major military operations in April 2006 started a new phase of the conflict and confrontation between the government and the LTTE. As a result of military action by the government, the LTTE responded with a counterattack on the government-controlled, mostly Muslim town of Mutur.

Since March 2007, a string of fireworks and mortar duels accompanied by aerial bombing by the Sri Lankan military in the districts of Mannar and Vavuniya in the north has been inflicting heavy casualties on both sides.

In its 2007 report, Human Rights Watch mentioned LTTE leader Prabhakaran’s November 2006 annual ‘Heroes Day’ speech in which he declared that the CFA was effectively ‘defunct’. Following a 7 May 2007 attack on the LTTE stronghold of Killinochchi, government defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said the government would breach the terms of the 2002 CFA if necessary to safeguard national security.

Officially, the CFA remains in place, as neither side wants to be blamed for its failure. But the military realities on the ground reveal that it exists only in name. Its formal existence allows for the continued presence of monitors of the SLMM, although the monitors have largely withdrawn to a base outside Colombo from which they undertake short missions to the field.

The dilemma is that even during the peace process, the LTTE were unable to change their perception as a terrorist organization. Not one of the countries that had banned the LTTE made any move to lift that ban. Even during the zenith of the peace process between 2002–04, the LTTE kept up their programme of assassinating their political opponents and forcibly recruiting children into their cadre. Although several LTTE delegations visited foreign countries on exposure tours, they failed to make the crucial shift towards a political organization that no longer used violence as an instrument of political achievement.

The LTTE need to consider a complete shift of approach, one that accords with the best interests of the Tamil people. The Tamil community wants a political solution based on justice, power-sharing built on consensus rather than unilateral decision imposed by force. Presently, the Sri Lankan government is headed by a leadership whose background and experience of the LTTE has made them think otherwise. Instead of an increased likelihood of an escalated cycle of violence and revenge that will further dehumanize the social and moral fabric of the country, the government and LTTE need to address the political root causes that gave rise to the conflict as a matter of priority, and find that the
military conflict becomes much easier to resolve.52

**Present Scenario: Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE**

The Sri Lankan government seems to be clinging to the policy of confrontation despite international mediation and pressure against human rights violations. According to the National Peace Council, the killing of LTTE political wing leader and chief negotiator S. P. Thamilselvan in an airstrike in Kilinochchi is likely to lead to more severe escalation of the present phase of war. It deepens the crisis of violence that confronts the country and serves to remind us of the tens of thousands of lives that have been lost, including a large number of democratically elected leaders of the government and other political actors. Although some of those killings seemed very significant at the time they took place, none of them led to a solution to the conflict, but only served to generate more hatred and determination to retaliate and fight back.53 The National Peace Council emphasized that an escalated cycle of violence and revenge would further dehumanize the social and moral fabric of the country. Conflict can never be resolved by killing of the leaders in ethnic conflict.

More than two generations of the people of Jaffna have been given the message by politicians and separatists that the Sinhala majority is the aggressor and has been trying to annihilate the Tamil minority. There is no communication between the north and the south, which has actually created the misunderstandings. The LTTE cadres have been trained under a one-point agenda, viz., hatred. It is the Sinhala majority, in other words, the central government of Sri Lanka which represents the Sinhala majority, to devise such a strategy that provides some space to other communities and show its willingness for negotiations and talks. The military should not act as if it has occupied the north and east provinces. If the military can help people get rid of the JVP’s extremism in the south, why can’t it work like that in the north-eastern province? Why this attitude of ‘ethnic strangers’ in the north-eastern province? Because the army is 99 per cent Sinhalese? It is important for the military to win the confidence of the people of the north-eastern province. It should not act like invaders occupying an area inhabited by another race. Military operations must produce appropriate military, political and psychological effects; in low-intensity conflict, it is possible to win every battle and lose the war.55

It is an obvious and well-recognized fact that there is no military solution to an essentially political problem. When the struggle is for political rights, its solution cannot be achieved by battle. A military victory cannot guarantee permanent solutions. In situations like the Sri Lankan conflict, the military’s role should be to facilitate the negotiation process and help the government take charge of the situation when the culprits are caught and made to surrender. The application of force is justified on the pretext that this would exhaust the separatist group and eventually they would have to come to talk. But if total sacrifice is the keyword in an organization, then the military operation can exhaust the soldiers as well, increasing the desertion rate in the army.

In most cases where the governments were faced with such problems, new political structures were created to accommodate the people’s desires for political autonomy. The government at the centre offered chief ministership or other high-profile portfolios to the political leaders of the separatist groups to make them join the mainstream politics of the country, preventing any separatist move from their side.

A minimum degree of trust, faith and confidence between the contending parties is necessary for negotiations to be sustainable. A major obstacle to negotiated peace in Sri Lanka is the inability of the government and opposition parties to work together on conflict resolution. Over the years of Sri Lankan independence, opposition parties have almost always mobilized populist sentiments against government peace initiatives, scuttling any chance of substantial political reform.

Another important factor in this conflict is that the government, the common Sinhalese, and many Tamils and Muslims have very different views of the conflict than the LTTE. No efforts have been made to remove the misunderstandings and to make the issue comprehensive. Initially, the Tamil political parties presented the problem as one of addressing minority grievances with, at most, substantial devolution of power and parity of status between Sinhalese and Tamils. The LTTE, however, views the conflict as the war for a Tamil homeland, a confrontation between two ‘nations’, a struggle for the right of self-determination.

The most important factor which brings great apprehension as far as the LTTE’s role in the political process is concerned, is that of their agenda. The question in the minds of Sinhalese and Tamil (non-LTTE supporters) and Muslims is whether the LTTE will ever compromise their stated goal: a sovereign, independent nation state of Eelam. Experience has proved that due to the wrong policies and stubbornness on both sides, the peace processes proved to be a complete failure. In the present scenario, the UNP Government will have to be very patient and the Sri Lankan people will have to show that they can accommodate former separatists in order to maintain Sri Lanka’s integrity.
Division of a state cannot be a viable solution in ethnic conflicts: many states have been created on the basis of ethnicity and division of territory has been carried out, yet the changing of geography could not really solve the problem of equal distribution of resources and power-sharing. India was divided on the basis of religious identity in 1947 into India and Pakistan; in 1971, Pakistan was divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh on the basis of ethnicity (the Bengalis felt discriminated); and the recent example of East Timor’s independence from Indonesia. Can the division of a state guarantee solution of the problem? The need is to formulate such policies which accommodate small minorities within the state structure, giving them full rights, and political space to get them integrated in the society.

Notes and References

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
7. Jayawardhana, op. cit., n. 1 above.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
12. Mr Jehan Perara of the National Peace Council said this in an interview to the writer at his residence in Colombo on 12 Mar 2002.
13. Dr John Gooneratne, Coordinator, Peace Agreement, during a talk with the writer on 9 Mar 2001 at the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
14. During a talk with the writer at Bandaranaike Diplomatic Training Institute on 4 Mar 2002, Dr Mendis said that the Tamils have never had economic problems as a community. They were fully represented in all walks of life. But when the Tamils, especially the LTTE, took up arms and started a violent movement, the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga did not take any meaningful step.
15. Mr Anandasarangaharee (TULF) in an interview to the writer on 9 Mar 2002 at his office in Colombo, said that due to the Sinhala Only Act, Tamils in the north-east and Jaffna faced great problems. Their children did get a chance to get education in their mother tongue and they also got opportunity to get admission in educational institutions on quota basis, but all the paperwork was done in Sinhala language. When the Tamils received documents/papers from the government in the north-east and Jaffna it was always in Sinhala. These poor people did not have the slightest idea as to what was written in the documents. This paved the way for corruption, and this had the most drastic effect on the Tamils. The local governments in the north-east and Jaffna should have allowed issue of letters or documents coming from Colombo in the local language but it was never done. This created frustration among the Tamils and a feeling for their right to their own language.
16. Mr Frank De Silva, Director, Institute of Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka, said in an interview to the writer on 11 Mar 2002 at his office in Colombo that the Tamils were conscious of their nationalism even before the independence of Sri Lanka and it manifested itself in various forms. In universities, administration, public service, banks, education, etc., the Tamils had a prominent place under the British beyond their numerical proportion. When the majority (Sinhala) community asserted itself after 1956, the Tamils felt deprived, although the Sinhalese never consciously tried to deprive the Tamils. (He meant to say that the Tamils earlier had a disproportionate share in the public sector which was later reduced, but they were getting their share according to their population.)
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. How Alfred Duraipah, elected mayor of Jaffna, was systematically stalked and killed can be gauged by the following sequence of events. (1) In Feb 1971, bombs were thrown at his residence in Jaffna; (2) on 11 Mar 1971, a bomb was placed in his car; (3) on 27 Aug 1972, bombs were thrown at a carnival organized by Mr Duraipah at the Duraipah stadium in Jaffna; (4) on 17 Sep 1972, bombs were thrown once again at the stadium; (5) on 19 Dec 1972, bombs were thrown at his residence; (6) on 27 Jul 1975, Mayor Duraipah went to the Krishna Temple at Ponnalai in his car. As he alighted, three terrorists rushed towards him and shot him with revolvers, killing him on the spot.
23. Nissan, op. cit., n. 8 above.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. In an interview to Newsweek on 11 Aug 1986, Prabhakaran said that India was helping Tamils ‘…purely on humanitarian grounds. There is genocide going on in Sri Lanka. India knows we are fighting against genocide and trying to protect our people.’ When asked about the charges of opponents that India was abetting ‘terrorists’ by giving the LTTE sanctuary, while New Delhi blames Pakistan for training Sikh terrorists, he replied, ‘There is a fundamental difference here. Our people are facing genocide whereas the Indian Army is not committing genocide in Punjab.’ See ‘The Eye of the Tiger’, Newsweek, 11 August 1986: http://www.tamilnation.org/ltte/vp/interviews/8608newsweek.htm
33. The violent acts were to eliminate political opponents who could provide leadership to the Tamil people and rally them against the terrorists.
34. Jayawardhana, op. cit., n. 1 above.
35. Ibid.
36. The reason for not supporting Tamil separatist groups in Sri Lanka was due to India’s own fear that this would lead to a separatist movement in Tamil Nadu, and India was already occupied with the Sikhs in East Punjab. It was, therefore, not affordable for India to support any such group in Sri Lanka. Though separatist groups did get support from India, there was a consistent policy of not supporting one particular group. In this way no single group would be strong enough to lead the separatist movement. However, this does not mean that India was not involved in helping the separatist groups in other countries where it had no fear of repercussions as, for instance, RAW’s involvement in interior Sindh (support to Jeay Sindh), and close links with the MQM in urban Sindh in Pakistan.
37. It is often objected that with the humanitarian relief, large amounts of weapons and ammunition were also smuggled to Jaffna and the northern province, which helped the warring parties. This ‘trade’ was between the underworld mafia in Tamil Nadu and the separatist groups, especially the LTTE, and funds for this purpose were generated from the expatriates abroad, extortion, and other crimes. This made Indian involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict really controversial. The issue of third-party mediation and as to what extent it should be done became debatable.
38. India reached an agreement with the Government of Sri Lanka in 1987, in which were given, first, the modalities were agreed upon of settling the ethnic conflicts through devolution of power to a Tamil region combining the northern and eastern provinces; second, the guarantees and obligations of the Government of India with regard to implementation of the accord; third (in letters exchanged along with the agreement), the undertakings given by the Government of Sri Lanka to India which are not related to the ethnic conflict, but concern India’s security interests in the region.
41. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
45. Samuel, op. cit., n. 42 above.
46. For major violations of the ceasefire agreement, see Appendix 2.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
54. The growing ethnic divisions in the country and the deployment of the armed forces against the Tamil population in the Northern Province tended to discourage young Tamil males from pursuing a career in the military. By 1985, almost all enlisted personnel in the armed services were Sinhalese: http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-13282.html
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Conflict Management Before its Violent Transformation

Conflict management is literally defined as efforts to contain, and, if possible, reduce the level of violence used by parties engaged in violent conflict and to engage them in communication looking towards settling the dispute and terminating the violence.

Conflicts can be managed before they get transformed into ethnic and terrorist movements. There can be many ways to manage the conflict in the earlier stages.

The following five steps can be taken to prevent the conflict before it becomes difficult to manage. These may be taken up when conflict is still a dispute and has not really become a movement, or is yet to take a really negative direction, i.e. terrorism. Policy makers should avoid taking drastic steps in the name of conflict resolution by simply suppressing it. The important things are to analyse the conflict, show personal experiences on the media, have media interviews, and give other additional information regarding analysing conflicts which can help evaluate the conflict. Once a general understanding of the conflict is achieved, the groups/government machinery involved must analyse and select the most appropriate strategy. In some cases, it may be necessary to have a neutral facilitator to help move the groups towards consensus. The appropriate strategy in violent ethnic conflict can include Collaboration, Compromise, Accommodation, and Avoidance as mechanisms to initiate the conflict-resolution process.

Collaboration as a technique is important in a conflict when concerns for others are important. It is also generally the best strategy when society’s interest is at stake. This approach helps build commitment and reduce bad feelings. The drawbacks are that it takes time and energy. In addition, some partners may take advantage of others’ trust and openness. Generally regarded as the best approach for managing conflict, the objective of collaboration is to reach consensus. If governments take into consideration the needs and grievances of minority groups to protect the interests of the country, the possibility of groups having feelings of deprivation would be less, and the lesser would be the chances of organized groups resorting to violent means to get their demands accepted.

Compromise results from a high concern for the interest of the majority group along with a moderate concern for the interests of other groups, i.e. minority groups. The purpose is to achieve temporary solutions, and to avoid destructive power struggles. One drawback is that the ethnic group can lose sight of important values and long-term objectives. This approach can also distract them from the merits of an issue and create a cynical climate. In the case of the Tamils, successive governments were not really ready to make compromises as far as dealing with the LTTE was concerned. For them, holding talks with the LTTE meant legitimizing their status. Similarly, with the urban Sindh problem, successive governments have had many agreements with the MQM, but when it came to discussing the matter of give and take, they appeared to be stubborn and inflexible. On the other hand, the MQM has not really come up with very clear demands and not let it known to the governments what kind of compromises it wanted them to make.

Accommodation as a conflict management measure appears to be the only viable solution to the problem in some situations. In this, the ethnic group’s interest is given more importance than the government’s policies. This strategy is generally used when the issue is more important to the other group. It is a goodwill gesture. It is also appropriate when the government recognizes that it had thus far been dealing wrongly with the ethnic group, and that different strategies can be taken up to deal with the problem. The recent ceasefire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government shows the initiative taken by the government to give up policies of confrontation and concentrate on accommodating the aggrieved party, viz., the Tamils, and especially the LTTE, which was previously declared a terrorist organization. In the case of Pakistan, no real effort has been made to accommodate the Mohajirs, and especially the MQM. Government–MQM pacts were signed several times and the MQM remained in coalition with the government in power, but when it came to actually implementing the promises the government made during elections, the government showed little interest. Mostly, the MQM was allowed to share power in urban Sindh (including Karachi) but the power-sharing was only in generic terms. No practical steps were taken to accommodate the Mohajirs’ demands in the programme. In fact, whenever the MQM expressed its disillusionment, it was branded as secessionist and working on an anti-state agenda.

Avoidance is a technique governments in developing countries and particularly in South Asia have been using by not giving due importance to the conflict. This has been the most common policy approved and practised by the ruling elite. The government gives little attention to the ethnic group and tries to sidetrack it as much as possible. This happens when the issue is trivial, or other issues are more pressing. It is also used when confrontation has a high potential for damage. Successive governments
of Pakistan and Sri Lanka deliberately practised this technique. Not realizing the gravity of the problem, they thought it better to avoid the crises. They remained indifferent. This indifferent attitude created more problems for the state because both Pakistan and Sri Lanka are multi-ethnic societies, and lack of interest on part of the governments made the minorities feel that their rights were not safeguarded and they had failed to get any attention through peaceful political means. This paved the way for a violent approach. If a few strategies are adopted before the government applies force to control the groups using violence, it can help prevention of the dispute between the government and the ethnic group and its transformation into a terrorist movement can be avoided.

It is possible to prevent the conflict from aggravation, and it can be done if actions are taken before a political dispute between parties becomes an active violent conflict. Conflict prevention strives to intervene before threats to use force or coercion are made, or before resort to significant armed force or political dispute between parties becomes an active violent conflict. Conflict prevention strives to control the groups using violence, it can help prevention of the dispute between the government and the ethnic group and its transformation into a terrorist movement can be avoided.

Conflict prevention techniques can be applied at two points in a conflict’s life history: 1. Conflict prevention aims at keeping a conflict from escalating when there has not been a violent conflict in recent years, or before significant violence signals possible escalation to sustained violent conflict. 2. When there has been a recent violent conflict but peace is being restored, conflict prevention aims at avoiding a relapse or reignition of violence.

In both the case studies discussed here, no conflict prevention techniques were applied, and due to that it became difficult to manage the conflicts. The policies adopted, whether deployment of the Sri Lankan Army in the north, east and Jaffna, or Operation Clean-Up in urban Sindh (especially Karachi) from June 1992 onwards, the policies of the governments in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan caused yet more violence. These policies played a role in escalating the conflicts and their transformation into violence; had there been some sanity in the decision making, the conflicts could have been managed to prevent further escalation. However, unless the main causes of conflict in both cases, viz., denying the existence of the conflict on ethnic majority–minority power-sharing and indecisiveness on the part of successive governments contributed to the ethnic problem in both countries.

For the management of violent conflicts and prevention of transformation of ethnic conflict into terrorist movements, a wide range of techniques, methods and programmes can be used. These policy tools are methods to prevent or mitigate a conflict and to build peace. The tools can be implemented through different organizational channels: actors outside a region in conflict, some national governments, and local sponsors. The tools vary in the aspects of conflicts they address and in their effectiveness and efficacy in achieving results.

For ethnic conflict to be resolved, economic and social measures, political development, governance, communication and education can be undertaken. If proper policies are made, they can have a far-reaching impact. Important steps can be taken, like decentralization of power, judicial/legal reforms, police reforms, establishment of war crimes tribunals/truth commissions.

The most important areas where governments of multi-ethnic states need to take measures are: (1) political development, and (2) governance. The case studies which have been covered by the present research are exact illustrations of the problem where power was not decentralized. Measures for decentralization of power can help reduce the possibility of escalation of violence in the society, hence averting transformation into ethnic conflict, because problems in power-sharing often give birth to terrorist movements. In the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka and the Mohajir problem in Pakistan, the administrative policies often made by the centre ignored the wishes of the people living in other parts of the country and caused discontentment and deprivation among the minority provinces and other administrative units (in Pakistan’s case, Karachi city). In the case of Sri Lanka, many of the fair and just policies had to be withdrawn because the successive governments caved in to the political pressure of the Sinhalese majority and did not wish to give up the political support of the majority Sinhalese politicians in the south.

The central state power may be decentralized through administrative arrangements such as devolution, deconcentration, regional autonomy, and federalism, separating groups into distinct political units, each responsible for specified functions. Decentralization is designed to create a political environment in which power to access political, economic, and social resources is distributed between the central government and lower levels of government.

Political groups and parties can be given more autonomy to pursue their interests and govern their own geographical territories or those under their influence by assuming some of the powers of the central government. Federalism, a form of decentralization, distributes power between the central government and lower levels in a regulated manner (through the Constitution or other means), making politics less threatening, and, therefore, encouraging joint problem solving.

In multi-ethnic societies like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, decentralization is important to create a fairer
political ground, to protect group and individual human rights, to establish checks and balances to central power, to avoid winner-take-all political competition, and to prevent political violence among rival groups. By dispersing limited powers to lower levels of government, decentralization schemes may reduce conflict by giving current and prospective leaders at the lower levels greater power and incentives to cooperate.

In order to deter a state’s internal use of coercive power against political opposition, less control by the centre can help, specially if combined with other steps at political liberalization. Decentralization can mean formal recognition of the legitimacy of ethno-regional claims to power, which encourages moderate behaviour, easing tensions and possible resort to violence and secessionist activities. Decentralization can increase non-dominant group representation in local and regional governments and reduce national ethnic conflict.

Designing a decentralization effort begins by analysing the current distribution of power and its effects, followed by negotiations among possible power-takers and consultation among actually or potentially conflicting groups. Open and frequent negotiations between the central government and regions or political groups are crucial both prior to and during decentralization planning and implementation. Changes in political institutions, including regional governance arrangements and economic, electoral and military powers may be effected.

The central government can establish provinces or states and grant them legislative and executive powers, entitling them to an equitable share of national revenues as determined by the national legislature, and permit them to levy taxes and surcharges within limits the legislature sets.

A constitutional amendment granting limited regional autonomy may be needed in situations where the sources of conflict are ethnicity or regional strife. A design which creates relatively autonomous sub-regions, along with other institutional mechanisms, could help reassure ethnic minorities of their ability to participate in decisions they regard as important.

Policy Measures to Prevent Violent Conflict
Gurr’s study of minorities at risk shows how long the time-lag usually is between the first manifestations of organized protests and the onset of violent action, a matter of years in most cases, with an average of 13 years in liberal democracies. There is clearly plenty of time for remedial action if it is undertaken seriously.3

Hugh Miall calls for a distinction between the levels of preventive strategies between light and deep preventive intervention.4 The policy options that can help preventing the crisis include official diplomacy (mediation, conciliation, fact-finding, good offices, peace conferences, conflict prevention centres); non-official diplomacy (private mediation, message-carrying and creation of back channels, peace commissions, problem-solving workshops, conflict-resolution training, round tables); and peace making efforts by local actors (talks facilitated by church/temple/mosque, debates between politicians, cross-party discussions). In situations where the local government fails to handle the crisis and chances of deterioration of conflict become more obvious, a more powerful yet friendly government can help by mobilizing regional and global organizations, by influencing the media, by taking economic measures like sanctions, emergency aid, conditional offers of financial support) and military measures (preventive peace-keeping, arms embargoes, demilitarization).

Richard Ponzio writes:
In countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, policies which favour certain groups over others should be avoided. It not only affects the masses, but provides grounds for mobilization of the deprived masses on the basis of their ethnicity. Ponzio observes:

the specific qualities of selected policy influence the implementation outcomes by establishing who experiences the costs and benefits of altered policies or institutions and under what conditions and timing are they likely to react to state action. When attempting to carry out institutional and policy change, it is necessary to distribute costs and benefits so that societal interest to support rather than oppose particular measures is mobilized. Admittedly more problematic narrow-objective interest groups are likely to emerge in the wake of proposed changes, and given the potential for conflict and the high stakes involved, different kinds of resources will be needed to overcome resistance or lessen the risks of introducing change.5

The view that change of the system of governance can be and needs to be managed is gaining currency today in intellectual circles. Presenting the examples of four recent UNDP–supported governance reform projects in Mongolia, Georgia, China and Thailand, Joy and Palmlund suggest that
reform efforts must address the changing roles of the state and civil society, and that external technical cooperation should support an indigenous process of self-reorganization.\textsuperscript{7} In exploring the requirements of effective management of change, specially where change is aimed at developing participatory democracy, the studies on Thailand and Georgia observed that the civil society and private business play leading roles in securing improved government responsiveness to public demands.\textsuperscript{3} Participatory democracy is important in multi-ethnic societies; power-sharing helps the communities which feel deprived; it also helps the minority communities to feel that they are part of the society. This helps preventing the discontentment growing into ethnic mobilization of the particular group which can later resort to violence.

The peace-building strategies could be more effective in promoting mutual understanding and appreciation among individuals, groups and nations. Formal and non-formal education, including knowledge, skills and attitudes for peaceful management and resolution of conflict are required. Support may be extended for the production and development of educational materials on peace, human rights and democracy, training in conflict prevention, management and resolution at all levels.

Likewise, support can be offered to the local media in order to strengthen the democratic processes and shape the image of the other based on the values of culture. The media should be encouraged to enhance images compatible with a peaceful environment and to participate in education for peace, human rights and democracy. Research and innovation on the endogenous and participatory methods of conflict prevention, management and resolution can also help.

Democracy constitutes the natural framework for the exercise of human rights and is a precondition for the establishment of a non-violent society, as long as it is accompanied by equitable economic and social development. The consolidation of democratic processes is, therefore, one of the main components of any peace-building strategy. Although it is based on universally recognized principles, it is for each society to find the best democratic system, which takes into account its social and cultural background.

Thus, we can say that despite the serious nature of conflicts, it is possible to make efforts to increase cooperation among parties to a conflict and deepen their relationship by addressing the conditions that led to the dispute, and fostering positive attitudes and allaying mistrust through reconciliation initiatives and building or strengthening the institutions and processes through which the parties interact. Conflict prevention tools like decentralization, power-sharing, democracy and police and judicial reforms can be used to reduce the chances of violence or to consolidate the cessation of a violent conflict to prevention re-escalation. Conflict prevention or preventive diplomacy are appropriate tools if tension rises to a point of confrontation, and crisis management becomes necessary when a dispute reaches a point of crisis with outbreaks of violence.

Notes and References

1. At times, it was just disagreement between the government and the MQM. Earlier, when the MQM started its movement, it focused on the quota system. Later, when they got a share in the government in 1988 and in 1990, they did not really press upon the issue of quota or the problems faced by the Mohajir students and professionals. Mostly, the MQM complained that the government was not giving due importance to their representatives in the cabinet. Because of this attitude, their movement suffered a lot, resulting in party problems, workers’ personal problems, the MQM’s inability to go to certain areas which were controlled by their opponents, and the MQM (Haquiqi) became the main issues during their time in government.


8. Ibid., p. 112.
Conclusion

The study demonstrates that no single policy is sufficient to address the problems of maintaining social order, political stability and participation in ethnically plural societies. At the same time, no ethnically plural society may avoid using the policies of devolution and power-sharing in the long run if it is to enjoy political stability and an acceptable level of social cohesion. However, such policies may have to reflect the historical experiences and social structures of individual societies and have to be based on social foundations of civic and common citizenship rights. A policy that is based exclusively on ethnic group rights is likely to freeze relations between groups, promote ethnic chauvinism, entrench group privileges, punish individuals who seek to straddle or transcend group politics, and frustrate social interactions based on individual interests.

The most important step that can be taken is related to institutional changes and policies to ensure that groups do not feel alienated from vital political processes that shape their lives. Since many ethnic conflicts revolve around questions of statehood or competition for the control of the state, it would seem logical to rethink the State itself in the light of the plural nature of countries in the world system. In both the case studies in this research, the ethnic groups felt alienated because of lack of ability to participate in the political process. Deliberately or otherwise, such policies were made which minimized their role in the politics of their respective countries.

In order to avoid such situations, it is important to examine three points. First, the role of the State in determining a society’s core identity and sense of independence; second, a state’s preference for a unitary character in handling increasingly diverse and interdependent populations; and third, the need for appropriate institutions to allow diverse groups of people to coexist, interact, and, if they so wish, integrate within the same geographical space.

A healthy system of ethnic relations also needs a sound policy on public education and culture. Many conflicts are sustained by stereotype myth or prejudices fed into discourse at household, neighbourhood or national levels. Such myths may be based on: feelings of superiority; on beliefs that ethnic groups are fundamentally different, and, therefore, cannot solve their differences through peaceful means; on assumptions that some groups are inherently aggressive and have a hidden hegemonic agenda; or that some groups are unreliable, parasitic, or distrustful of outsiders. Stereotypes generate feelings of fear and hatred, which may entrench ethnic boundaries and weaken the reins of moderation when conflicts break out. Many ethnically plural societies have tried to institute national programmes of education with a common curriculum to encourage the growth of a national world view, establish special unity schools that admit pupils from a cross-section of ethnic groups, and develop national youth service programmes that oblige participants to serve in regions other than their own. At the local level, many ethnic groups have various mechanisms for dealing with cultural differences, which help to check conflict. In a number of cases, it is argued that such policies often end up promoting the interests of the middle classes rather than those of the poor, specially when the implementation of the policy is top-down.

As social inequalities widen within targeted backward groups, disadvantaged individuals within those groups may become intolerant of ‘ethnic strangers’ within their neighbourhoods. Policies are essential in bringing about reconciliation, a sense of national belonging, and political stability in unequal plural societies, but they will need to be carefully formulated and monitored if they are not to fuel the conflicts they seek to prevent.

Ponzio observes:
An open sharing of ideas and information before, during and after decision making and implementation processes is essential for a pro-people governance framework. [He further says:] In a genuinely transparent society, the free expression of ideas and access to information can be utilized to progressively promote, rather than hinder, cultural diversity and social integration.1

Closely linked to transparency is the fundamental issue of whether leaders and other entities who claim to serve the interests of the people should be held responsible for their decisions and conduct. Throughout South Asia, excessive levels of corruption and public mismanagement are crippling economies, destroying livelihoods, and undermining people’s faith in structures and processes of governance. The trend may only be reversed, and the high human and economic costs curtailed, when people assert their sovereign democratic rights by assuring that their elected representatives are honest, competent, and responsive to their needs. In the developing countries, a complex set of deep-rooted causes covering social, political, economic and administrative systems, including the often-excessive role of the State, bureaucratic approaches to resource allocation, and weak accountability and enforcement provide opportunities and incentives for corrupt practices.2

The solution of the problems faced by Pakistan in urban Sindh and by Sri Lanka in the north-eastern province lies in a new governance framework, which responds to the needs of the whole population and
not just the dominating group in the society. The harmony in a multi-ethnic society largely depends on the equal treatment by the government towards its smaller provinces or minority groups. Governance does not strictly fall under the purview of the State, but civil society and the private sector also play important roles in the human development process. It is, however, debatable as to what extent the civil society is responsible for the problems faced by the ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society.

The case studies covered by the present work clearly show that there was distrust and egocentrism on the part of the successive governments, which contrived ill feelings among ethnic minorities and even the civil society. The media, judiciary and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could not play their roles effectively. The state, as such, appears to be the main factor responsible for every transformation taking place in the society.

In the final analysis, the following recommendations may be made.

Decentralization of power is essential in multi-ethnic societies. It is especially appropriate for national-level ethnic conflicts. Central state power should be decentralized through administrative arrangements such as devolution, regional autonomy and federalism that separate groups into distinct political units, each responsible for specified functions. A greater share in development coupled with arrangements such as devolution, regional autonomy and federalism that separate groups into distinct national-level ethnic conflicts. Central state power should be decentralized through administrative transformation taking place in the society.

The state, as such, appears to be the main factor responsible for every part of the successive governments, which contrived ill feelings among ethnic minorities and even the civil society. The media, judiciary and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could not play their roles effectively. The state, as such, appears to be the main factor responsible for every transformation taking place in the society.

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In the final analysis, the following recommendations may be made.
if the group has failed to achieve a majority. The civil society can play an important role in managing
conflict by providing minority ethnic groups with a political voice, which is otherwise not available in
the majority-dominated official political process. It can lessen the risk of violent conflict or terrorism to
destabilize the government by giving citizens alternative non-violent avenues to influence the
government, allowing citizens to undertake overt and peaceful political activities rather than participate
in or support armed opposition. Civil-society building is part of the process of democratizing a
country’s political system, and, as such, is more effective at preventing rather than mitigating conflict.
Civil-society building encourages political stability, and is, therefore, most relevant to pre- and post-
conflict stages.

Lessons Learned

Decentralization and empowerment of local government are the basic requirements for managing
ethnic, regional, and religious differences and are important prerequisites for genuine democratization.
Devolution of power creates a wider space within which broader participation in political life can be
expected and arrangements for greater power-sharing can be evolved. A genuine process of
decentralization helps produce locally-owned decision-making and development capacity, critical to
mitigation of conflict over divisive issues such as use of resources. Decentralization can help build
confidence among minority interests within the state. It can establish a basis for positive interaction
between former adversaries. Effective decentralization must go beyond administrative decentralization.
Successful decentralization depends on the performance of negotiators, endorsements for
decentralization by the political elite, and political leaders maintaining political credibility in each
region after decentralization takes place.

It is important to exercise caution when promoting any political changes which involve constitutional
reform, and to consider how ethnic issues will be affected by the changes. Successful decentralization
of power requires that the central government, opposing groups, and donors organizing the
arrangement understand the essential issues of conflict.

Notes and References

1. Richard Ponzio, ‘The Crisis of Governance in South Asia: Solutions’ in The Problems of Good Governance in
South Asian Countries: Learning from the European Political Models, ed. Naveed Tahir, Karachi: University of
2. Ibid., p. 250.
3. Ishtiaq Ahmed, in his book State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia (London: Pinter Publishers,
1996), p. 299, writes:
The role of politics in the realm of authoritative decisions of state, governments, and elites and so on needs to be
put into perspective. Of course structural constraints and historical contexts circumscribe the freedom of action
and restrict the options available in a given situation. Proceeding from a realistic position on South Asia
regarding the power of the states to maintain territorial integrity, it seems that most cultural groups will in any
event have to seek solutions within the existing territorial framework. This applies particularly to the vast
number of smaller ethnic groups, religious sects and so on, which, although they may be the most deprived in an
objective sense, have no chance of winning an armed battle against the state.
For details on cultural and regional autonomy, see pp. 301–2.
4. Ibid.
Power-sharing alleviates tensions in a divided society by offering an alternative to simple majoritarian
governance in which minority ethnic groups may be permanently excluded from power. Power-sharing
provisions are proportional representation, reserving legislative seats for minority parties, and providing losers
with an incentive to work within the system rather than to opt out and confront the government.
5. Deficiencies in the judicial/legal system can exacerbate inequitable political or economic situations. Disparate
 treatment by authorities can undermine the confidence of non-dominant groups that the system will redress their
grievances, leaving no alternatives to violence. For example, where access to and transparency of the judicial
system is limited to those who speak an official language, ethnic groups which speak a different language are left
outside the legal system. A functioning judicial/legal system is important for sustained democracy. In some
conflict situations, ‘dealing effectively with the injustices of the past is critical to breaking the culture of impunity
that provides incentives for violence’.
6. In Sri Lanka’s case, war crimes tribunals and truth commissions can contribute to reconciliation after
particularly abusive and violent periods by recognizing the victims and what happened, and reinforcing the rule of
law and deterrence to future violations. When combined with judicial reforms (which can be applied in Pakistan’s
case), a necessary precondition (a truth commission) can help break cycles of impunity and provide a public forum
for discussion regarding the fate of the guilty. A properly functioning judicial process is needed to contain counter-
violece and revenge killings, including of returning refugees, in the aftermath of widespread atrocities.
Appendix 1

Sri Lankan Academicians and Politicians Interviewed during 1–12 March 2002

Academicians
Dr John Gooneratne
Member, Secretariat for Coordinating of Peace Process

Dr Jehan Perera
National Peace Council

Dr Norbert Ropers
Director, Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies
Sri Lanka Office

Dr Vernon Mendis
Director-General, The Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Dr Lorna Dewraja
Director, The Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Mr Frank De Silva
Director, Institute of Strategic Studies
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Prof. Laksiri Fernando
Faculty of Political Science, University of Colombo

Prof. Sumanasiri Liyanage
Department of Political Science, University of Peradeniya
Sri Lanka

Politicians
Dr Jayalath Jayawardene
Rehabilitation/Resettlement Minister, UNP

Mr Anandasanghara, TULF

Mr Tilak Karunaratne
Secretary General, Sinalaurumaya

Ms Indrani Triyagolla
Head of Sinhala Women’s Organization, Member of UNP

Mr Betty Weerakoon
Former Minister of Justice

Mr Kingsley Wickramaratne
Advisor to Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka

Politicians/Officials/Journalists from Urban Sindh
Interviewed

Senator Nasreen Jalil, MQM (A)
Dr Farooq Sattar, MQM (A)
Kurwar Khalid Yonas, MQM (A)
Prof. Ghulam Ahmad, JJ
Nisar Khorro, PPP
Rasool Bux Palejo, Awami Tehrik
Iqbal Yousuf, PPP
Ibrahim Khan, News International
Ali Hasan Brohi, Home Department, Sindh
Appendix 2

Fig. A1 Map of Sri Lanka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A1 Ceasefire Violations by GOSL and LTTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ceasefire Violations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of (ruled) violations committed by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of (ruled) violations committed by the LTTE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A2 Most Common Violations Committed by the GOSL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feb 2002–Apr 2006</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile acts against the civilian population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other measures to ‘restore normalcy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other restrictions of movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of private property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of new positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities at checkpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative acts by parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confiscations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement in zone of separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction of adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing of weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not related to CFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restriction of movement for SLMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Army, Air Force and STF actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to vacate public buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Naval action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to vacate places of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving military equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage between Jaffna and Vavuniya on A9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table A3** Most Common Violations Committed by the LTTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child recruitment</td>
<td>1,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction of adults</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction of children</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other measures to ‘restore normalcy’ (e.g., flag hoisting)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative acts by parties</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile acts against the civilian population</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced recruitment of adults</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assassinations</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement in zone of separation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving military equipment</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restriction of movement for SLMM</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of private property</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing of weapons</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confiscations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal carrying of arms</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of new positions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other restrictions of movement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (separation of forces)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities at checkpoints</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive naval actions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied access to specified military areas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abductions, military-related</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment of weapons</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Army, Air Force, STF action</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District with the most number of GOSL violations</td>
<td>Jaffna 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District with the most number of LTTE violations</td>
<td>Batticaloa 1,073 and Jaffna 846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District with the least number of GOSL violations</td>
<td>Trincomalee 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District with the least number of LTTE violations</td>
<td>Trincomalee 261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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