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Contemporary inter-state armed conflicts: factors and processes involved

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Armed conflicts are a scourge plaguing mankind and understanding its causes and dynamics is essential to trying to prevent and manage this terrible phenomenon. Therefore, the following questions are key to understanding these conflicts: What are the causes of war and armed violence? What are the factors that influence the existence and perpetuation of armed conflict? How do the study and analysis of different elements and processes involved in the (re) production of violent clashes allow us to ponder on the conditions for conflict prevention and management?

Based on a review of academic literature that seeks to reflect on the different causes and dynamics of internal conflicts, this paper addresses synthetically and incompletely, due to the complexity, a few key factors and processes connected to the outbreak and perpetuation of these conflicts. These factors and processes were divided into two groups. The first group is composed by those factors connected to economic aspects intrinsically related to the dispute for natural resources, their scarcity and environmental degradation. Next, ideological, religious and ethnical elements will be addressed. This division's purpose is merely to methodologically facilitate the analysis because, in fact, as will be seen in the conclusions, armed conflicts have complex origins and dynamics and factors from both groups are generally present and inter-connected in all conflicts, usually permeated by the fragility of State institutions. Finally, the last part of this paper presents a summary of conclusions on prevention, resolution and transformation of this kind of conflict.

Economic Factors, Natural Resources and the Environment

The relationship between armed conflict and the environment remains a reason for disagreement in international politics. In the international arena, the different views that developed and developing countries have on the environment do not contribute to solving the problem. The latter consider that developed countries have historically established their economies disregarding environmental preservation and, now, use environmental proposals as barriers to hinder developing countries' economic growth. On the other hand, there are those who consider that environmental degradation and illegal exploitation of natural resources should be of concern of the international community and a goal to be achieved by global coordination. According to Buzan (1988), environmental conflict is related, in a subordinated way, to ethnical conflict or to political eruptions and, although movements to securitize the environment are, primarily of a global nature, the issue has been more successful at a local level.¹ Therefore, although there is a more current view on the relationship between environment and security that tries to elope the state-centered logic and seeks to change the referent object for Humanity, the matter has had greater prevalence locally and possibly regionally.

Terriff (1997) considers that environmental problems may influence or not a conflict's development and that, although it might affect one region, it will not necessarily affect another. The relationship between environmental degradation and violent conflict may be direct or indirect and, in both cases, it is associated to scarcity of resources. Environmental change may be the cause, but usually it is only one of many factors of the conflict. There is a relation between population growth, consumption habits and the environment: human activities and the environment are closely related and, in order to mitigate environmental problems, appropriate policies should be established, considering that economic aspects, population changes, decline in agriculture and weakness of institutions are factors that contribute to the likelihood of conflict.² For Terriff the influence of environmental factors is, therefore, dependent on other variables. However, once conflict erupts, it will always have a destructive impact on the environment, indirectly due to military operations and population displacement or directly, when the environment is intentionally used as a weapon or means to hamper the enemy.

Homer-Dixon (1991) analyzes two types of conflicts where the relationship between environmental degradation and scarcity of resources is indirect.³ In the former, the population movement caused by environmental problems may contribute to a conflict of ethnic nature in which those displaced groups establish in areas where other groups already live. The refugee migrations, for example, may exacerbate the intra-state and inter-state conflicts. In the latter, the lack of arable land and environmental

¹ BUZAN, Barry, WAEVER, Ole and WILDE, Jaap. *Security: a new framework for analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988, pp. 91-92.

² TERRIFF, Terry. *Environmental Degradation and Security*. In: SHULTZ, Richard, Jr; GODSON, Roy; QUESTER, George (Ed.). *Security Studies for the 21st Century*. Washington, Brassey's, 1997, pp. 253-267.

³ HOMER-DIXON, Thomas F. *On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict*. *International Security*. Volume 16, Number 2, Fall 1991, pp. 76-116

degradation can contribute to the decline of the economy, the impoverishment of the population and the weakening of social institutions, generating intrastate conflict. Developing countries are the most susceptible to environmental problems, because they, sometimes lack political, financial and technological conditions to generate effective policies that contribute to alleviate the problems caused by exploitation and environmental degradation. However, conflicts exacerbated by environmental problems may also affect developed countries, either by migration or by the regional instability they can cause.⁴ Anyway, the solution to the environmental issue is complex because the policies to be adopted must take into account political, economic, cultural and religious aspects. Therefore, environmental issues continue to contribute as one of the sources of conflict both domestically and internationally. However, the relationship between environmental changes and conflict is typically indirect and related to the lack of resources.

Billon (2005) also considers that there is a relationship between resources and conflict. For him, the resources not only shape the economic and political contexts that contribute to conflict in countries dependent on natural resources but their exploitation can be characterized by a high degree of conflict that can help prepare the conditions for larger scale conflicts or trigger their outbreak. The possession of resources, the favoring of a political and economic elite and the unequal distribution of income that derives from these resources are important sources of conflict because they create political, social and economically instability. These factors are intensified by the lack of democratic governance and strong institutions and the dependence on one source of income susceptible to price changes out of the country's control. For the author there is also a relationship between the types of resources, their location and mode of operation and the duration of conflicts. Resources easily exploited by insurgents, and whose ratio great value/low weight is significant, as is the case of diamonds, hinder the end of conflicts. Finally, he considers that it is a duty of commodity markets and companies who trade these resources to promote better governance in countries with which they trade. At the same time the author defends the need to implement international instruments to ensure transparency in negotiations for access to resources in order to systematically connect the exploitation of resources with the ability of States to build strong domestic institutions responsible for providing public goods equally. Industry, government and civil society must therefore work together to make the changes needed to transform resources into a benefit and not a "curse".⁵

According to the United Nations Environment Programme's 2009 report, as of 1990, eighteen armed conflicts were at least partially financed by the exploitation of natural resources. However, the report concludes that the relationship between the environment, natural resources and conflict is multidimensional and complex. Countries that

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Billion believes that although there is evidence to prove the "resource curse," in which countries that possess rich natural resources are not always able to develop economically and socially, there is also evidence to suggest that there is no deterministic relationship between the amount of resources and conflict. However, natural resources can generate the context in which the country's vulnerability to armed conflict is strengthened, especially in Africa (BILLION, Philippe. *Fuelling War: Natural resources and armed conflict*. Adelphi Papers 45:373,7-10, London, Routledge, 2005, pp. 7-83).

depend on the export of a few commodities may be more vulnerable to conflict. In turn, social injustices, environmental degradation and the attempts to control natural resources contribute to the irruption of conflict. Once the conflict settles, natural resources can influence the conflict on strategic considerations for the control of certain areas that allow the exploitation of those resources to finance the armed struggle. Attempts to establish an agreement are influenced by the perception of those who believe that peace will be disadvantageous to them, either through the loss of privileges or the loss of income generated by the exploitation of natural resources. The report concludes that there is an imperative need to incorporate factors related to the environment and natural resources in peacekeeping operation strategies. Other proposed measures are: to strengthen the United Nations' (UN) ability to detect and act preventively against the outbreak of conflicts in countries vulnerable to factors related to the environment and natural resources; establish sanctions during the conflict, which should be a basic tool to stop trade in conflicts where natural resources play an important role; and encourage the international community to help States develop ways to use the income from natural resources to strengthen the economy after the war in order to prevent the resurgence of conflict.⁶

While studying the importance of political economy in civil wars, Ballentine & Nitzschke (2003) concluded that access to natural and financial resources are neither the primary cause nor the sole cause of the separatist and non-separatist conflicts they analyzed. For them, in all cases examined there was no direct relationship between abundance of natural resources and high risk for conflict. In fact, these factors interacted, in varying degrees, with the political and socio-economic inequalities, disputes between ethnic groups, and the security dilemma generated by weak and inefficient governments. Therefore, they suggest that the analysis of models based on "reductionism of resources" or models that favor dichotomies like "rebel-centered versus state-centered" or "greed versus grievance should be avoided.⁷ For the authors, there should be emphasis on the analyses that highlight the complex interrelationship between the political and economic dynamics and consider both the actions of the rebels and the persistence of violent factors and processes resulting from the institutional failure of states, including their monopoly of the legitimate use of force.⁸

Ballentine & Nitzschke (2003) also consider that there is a direct relationship between the capacity of combatants to self-finance and the complexity and duration of hostilities. Different resources affect the conflict and benefit contenders differently depending on the operation mode and the State's action. Resources such as drugs and alluvial diamonds are more likely to generate non-separatist enduring conflicts because they easily generate revenue for combatants. Resources such as oil, gas and minerals,

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *The Role of Natural Resources and Environment in Conflict*. Nairobi, Kenya, 2009, p.5.

⁷ Humpreys considers that there are several mechanisms that permeate the relationship between natural resources and the eruption and duration of a conflict. Thus, he considers that it is not possible to assert that "civil war is a typical result of greed". (HUMPREYS, Macartan. *Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms*. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Vol.49. No.4.2005. pp.508-537)

⁸ BALLENTINE, Karen and NIETZSCHKE, Heiko. *Beyond Greed and Grievance: Policy Lessons from Studies in the Political Economy of Armed Conflict*. New York, International Policy Academy, 2003, pp.3-4.

whose operation is more complicated, tend to be associated with conflicts with a separatist nature, which are more related to an elite's political and economic privileges, social injustice and unequal distribution of income at the expense of other ethnicities.⁹ Moreover, the insurgent's illegal economic activities are often interconnected with international criminal networks. However, the authors consider that the illegal activities should be penalized but not the insurgents, which are different from common criminals due to the political objectives that guide them. To alleviate the issue of resources, the authors also suggest an international regulatory regime that favors greater control over transactions with commodities. However, they acknowledge that this type of control faces difficulties in achieving significant results and that regulatory regimes can have adverse and non-intended humanitarian effects on the population. Thus, when establishing regulatory regimes, policy makers must distinguish between groups that exploit armed conflicts seeking profit and those involved in the war economy to ensure their family's livelihood.

For Ballentine & Nitzschke (2003), however, the critical factors that allow the occurrence of this type of conflict are economic mismanagement combined with inequality and social injustice; repressive and elitist political systems; ethnic disputes and the weakness of the state, which enables the emergence of security dilemmas and facilitates the development of insurgent movements. Therefore, it is critical that preventive policies are adopted in order to reduce poverty and social inequality and strengthen state institutions. To try to resolve ongoing conflicts, in addition to the abovementioned measures, a strategy must properly integrate, in the domestic field, political and economic incentives to military pressure on the insurgents, and seek support in regional organizations and ad hoc alliances in order to mitigate regional and global economic, social and political interconnections related to the conflict.

Humphreys (2005) believes that countries dependent on agricultural commodities are in a more fragile position on the possibility of conflict, regardless of other natural resources. The lack of industrial development and a stronger internal market contribute to the social and economic weakness of the country, since, in his view, a vibrant internal market increases the communion of interests of sectors of the population that rely on existing financial and commercial transactions between them. Thus, a preventive policy would be the diversification of economic activities and industrialization. For him, the hypothesis of a weak state has a high explanatory value, and policies should be directed so that revenues from natural resources be devoted to economic development and the benefit of the population and that the actions of extractive industries are more controlled domestically and externally. Policies to avoid that certain sectors capture this income or to cut the cash flow of rebels should be complementary. On the other hand, the study found "strong evidence" that conflicts related to natural resources are more likely to end or to end earlier through a military victory than through negotiations between contenders.¹⁰

⁹ Ibidem, p.1. The authors use the term "lootable", for those that can be easily "stolen" and "unlootable" for those that cannot be so easily "stolen".

¹⁰ HUMPREYS, op.cit., pp.508-537.

Another economic factor related to conflict are remittances by the diaspora, which have an ambivalent impact. On the one hand, they can help families survive or improve their financial situation, which can prevent them from supporting the outbreak or the development of an armed conflict; on the other hand, when these funds are captured by insurgents, they constitute a financial source that helps promote and prolong armed conflict, as was the case of the Tamil Diaspora remittances to the conflict in Sri Lanka. Thus, the economic role of the diaspora should be analyzed in order to establish measures to help reduce their effect on conflicts without harming the population that uses the financial resources for their livelihoods.¹¹

In summary, it can be said that economic factors, natural resources and the environment are directly interrelated and influence conflicts. There is a direct relationship between a country's economic fragility, natural resources and conflict, as demonstrated by the number of wars that have plagued non-developed countries. Countries dependent on a few export commodities are usually more prone to economic problems due to dependence on commodity prices in the global market. Resources shape the economic and political contexts, contributing to the conflict in these countries, especially when the income earned by their trade are used to favor an elite at the expense of the population. Therefore, natural resources cannot be considered a "curse". On the contrary, they constitute an advantage for countries that possess them. The problem is mainly related to the misapplication of the proceeds from their trade. Furthermore, these countries have weak States¹², with fragile institutions that are not able to provide the population with security and basic public services and where corruption and fostering prevail contributing to political and social instability. Hence, civil society is not coherent or capable of influencing the necessary political and social changes. At the same time, industrial fragility and the lack of a vibrant domestic market contribute to increasing social tensions and reducing internal cohesion, facilitating the breakdown of social ties and the outbreak of violence.

Similarly, sustainable economic development is difficult to be achieved because poverty presses the most vulnerable portions of the population, particularly with relation to land and scarcity of resources, leading to environmental degradation as a means to sustain their livelihood. Population displacement caused by environmental factors can, then, exacerbate ethnic conflicts. Thus, the environmental factor is usually related to the scarcity of resources and to the economy, therefore these three mutually

¹¹ BALLENTINE and NIETZSCHKE, op.cit, pp.9-11

¹² Gross analyzes failed States both in relation to Weber's classic definition of State, which emphasizes coercive capacity, as in relation to the non-coercive capacity of providing public services, concluding that five factors are considered important causes to the existence of failed States: poor economic performance, lack of social synergy, authoritarianism, militarism and environmental degradation caused by population growth. (GROS, Jean Germain. Towards a taxonomy of failed States in the New World Order: decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.17, n13, pp455-471, 1996, p.457). Although not all authors agree with the last two factors cited by Gross, they coincide regarding the relationship between failed States and a State's inability to provide essential public services, including security, and to promote economic development and social justice, thus creating a favorable environment for armed conflict. ROTBERG, I Robert, (Ed.) *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*. Brooking Institution Press / World Peace Foundation, 2003, p. 1-24; CARMENT, David. *Assessing state failure: implications for theory and policy*. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No.3 pp. 407-427, 2003. RICE, Susan E. and PATRICK, Stewart. *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*. Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 2008 p.9. *Foreign Policy*. *Failed States Index 2008*.

exacerbating factors are a cause of conflict, although the last two have a more significant influence than the others, as a trigger to conflict.

There is a strong relationship between combatant's ability to auto-finance and the complexity and duration of hostilities. This funding ability is also associated to the type of natural resources and the easiness of exploration and trade, with a tendency to relate separatist conflicts and the the resources that are most difficult to exploit, such as, oil and gas, for example. However, critical factors that admit the existence of this type of conflict are repressive and elitist political systems; a poorly managed economy combined with social injustice and inequality; ethnic disputes and a weak State, which allow the emergence of security dilemmas and facilitate the insurgent movement's political and military development. Therefore, analyses that favor dichotomies should be avoided and approaches that favor the complex interrelation between political, economic, social and environmental dynamics and that include aspects related to the bankruptcy of the State and of society in the prevention or in termination of armed conflict should be emphasized.

Ethnic political-ideological and religious Factors

The political-ideological factor as a cause of armed conflict has reduced its force after the end of the Cold War. With the end of the economic support provided by the great powers, the insurgent's ability to explore natural resources has helped extend this type of conflict, which is usually driven by a combination of structural factors that include social injustice, lack of land for the peasants, poverty, government corruption and the perpetuation of a politically and economically privileged elite.¹³ After the September 11 attacks, some analysts visualize the return of ideological conflict on other terms, associating ideology with religion. In this context, for example, the term "Islamofascism" has been coined, based on the view that movements like al Qaeda consider that the US and its way of life represent an ideological threat to be reckoned with.¹⁴ However, this view has been challenged by other authors who believe that religion and culture are more important factors than the ideological aspect.¹⁵

While studying the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Sri Lanka, McTernan (2003), believes that religion is an important factor, but recognizes that it is not the main or only cause. According to him, these conflicts involve the phenomenon of "double minority", in which the majority community suffers from a complex of being minority by being close to countries that profess the same religion as its opponents. He believes that the international community, in its considerations to achieve peace, cannot ignore the religious factor, and the dynamics of fear and terror, that shape and sustain these conflicts.¹⁶

¹³ BALLENTINE and NIETZSCHKE, op.cit

¹⁴ BALLENTINE and NIETZSCHKE, op.cit

¹⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. Religion, Culture and International Conflict after September 11. In: CROMARTIE, Michael. Religion, Culture and International Conflict: A Conversation. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005;pp.1-5.

¹⁶ MCTERNAN Oliver. Violence in God's Name: religion in an age of conflict. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003,p.77.

Huntington (2005) considers that during the last decade of the twentieth century, culture has replaced ideology as a source of identity and antagonism in world politics; and that religion had a great resurgence in all societies, helping shape identities, especially in the Islamic world. According to him, there was an increase in civil wars over conflicts between States. In the former, the conflict between communities is associated with religious cleavage, often also coupled to an ethnic division. He believes that although religion may be the major cause in some conflicts, in most cases it is only one of the causes, and that there is, however, a direct relationship between religious divisions and difficulties to reach a political commitment through peace agreements. ¹⁷

Fox (2004) examined the relationship between ethnic violence and religious nationalism, studying ethnic conflicts and revolutionary wars between 1945 and 2001, showing that since 1980, religious and ethnic factors contributed significantly to the growth of the most violent conflicts compared to those where the religious factor was absent. Thus, for him, data do not support Huntington's thesis that conflicts between civilizations based on different religions occur because of the end of the Cold War. Similarly, the figures showed that ethnic-religious conflicts usually have occurred within the same society, which contradicts Huntington's vision of a "clash of civilizations", although Huntington recognizes the important role of religion in internal conflicts over the last decades.

Fox considers that religious fundamentalism usually takes the form of religious nationalism, and that the preservation of traditional values binds to the preservation of the nation or the State as a defender of those values. Thus, fundamentalists try to secure control of government when their followers are in power or seek autonomy from the State when it is ruled by members of another ethnic group. Thus, "in practice, the distinction between religion and ethnicity as the basis for nationalism is rarely clear." ¹⁸ The results of the study undertaken by Fox show that, from 1980, separatist conflicts of religious nature are more violent than other separatist conflicts and have a strong impact on ethnic conflicts. However, the author acknowledges that other variables such as type of regime, economic development, repression and mobilization have an impact on the level of rebellion. According to him, the religious factors appear when nationalism in the form of separatism is already present. Thus, nationalism, in his view, would be the main cause of ethnic conflict and religion an extremely strong exacerbating factor. ¹⁹

Lake and Rothchild (1996), based primarily on the rational choice theory, argue that ethnic conflicts are usually caused by collective fear of the future, rooted on insecurity among communities. This feeling creates strategic dilemmas that have the potential for triggering violence. Ethnic activists and politicians interested in promoting these factors in their favor, use this fear to polarize society. According

¹⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. op. cit.

¹⁸ FOX, Jonathan. The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001. *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol. 41, No. 6 (2004). Pp718-719.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp.723-729.

to the authors, the State's weakness is precondition for the occurrence of violent ethnic conflict. Although the State may seem presently objectively strong, legitimacy and the State's ability to remain strong in the future are elements of strategic dilemma faced by the group that feels threatened. .²⁰

According to them, the competition to control the government and the competition for resources, related, for example, to property rights, employment, access to education and government contracts, is at the heart of ethnic conflicts, when some groups are privileged over others. However, competition for preference policies is not sufficient to trigger violence. Information deficiencies increment distrust between groups, and credibility issues related to the fulfillment of agreements between the rival groups, generate the security dilemma.

According to Lake and Rothchild, unpredictable scenarios, fueled by incomplete information about the intentions of the Other and the fear related to the possibility of becoming victims in the future, increase both the perceptions of insecurity and the risk of disruption of direct violence. This feeling of ethnic rivalry is commonly manipulated by political groups that, although do not share extremists' beliefs, take advantage of the situation to earn power or maintain a certain status quo that is favorable to them. The action of these actors contributes to social polarization, reinforcing the security dilemma. However, it should be noted, social polarization and the role of these actors are not the main or only cause of ethnic conflict. In addition to several structural variables are strategic interactions within and between ethnic groups that produce fear of the future, in which conflicts arise and eventually perpetuate.

Thus, the State plays an important role in non-violent interaction between different ethnic groups. Confidence-building measures undertaken by local elites – demonstrations of respect, division of power, elections, regional autonomy and federalism – are the most effective democratic instruments to maintain peace in ethnically divided societies. However, these measures are more important to conflict management than to its resolution. If the State fails to end the conflict, the intervention of an external actor to the conflict may be required, either through non-coercive interventions such as mediation – that seeks to achieve a result of mutual gain (win-win) between parties to the conflict – or with the use of force when a consensual resolution of the conflict is impossible. Here, the authors point out the limitations of external intervention, which, according to them, do not seem to solve strategic dilemmas that produce fear and ethnic violence. Finally, they propose three actions for the international community to contribute to the reduction of ethnic conflict: managing and providing reliable information for ethnic groups and block, as possible, the communication channels of groups that encourage ethnic hatred; support economically and politically weak States; and after the negotiation of a peace agreement, focus on the implementation of the necessary measures to create stronger State institutions capable of mediating and promoting peaceful relations between ethnic groups.²¹

²⁰ LAKE, David A. and ROTHCHILD. *Containing Fear: the Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict*. *International Security*. Vol.21, No.2, 1996; pp.41-43

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 44-75.

If Lake and Rothchild examined ethnic conflict through the prism of rational decision, Arfi (1988) analyzes this phenomenon from the perspective of the constructive theory, stating that neither rationalism nor hypotheses based on ancient hatred can satisfactorily explain this type of conflict. For him, it is the reconstruction of ethnic groups' social identities that causes fear and ethnic violence.²² The change in these identities, potentiated by profiteer ethnic and political activists, and shaped by historical memories and ethnic cleavages, destabilizes the balance between the groups, generating fear and insecurity. Therefore, unlike Lake and Rothchild, who considered that the three strategic dilemmas were necessary conditions for ethnic conflict, Arfi considers that the security dilemma generated by switching to an aggressive social identity is the single cause that leads to ethnic violence.²³ Arfi proposes establishing a bridge between the approaches of rational and structural choice, emphasizing from a constructivist view, how social identities are not fixed and how their changes may impact on relations between momentarily rival ethnic groups. Thus, non-violent patterns of interaction and cooperation between different ethnic groups may also be socially constructed. Therefore, Arfi proposes that containment strategies that favor violent ethnic divisions not occur through coercive measures, but through measures that allow the construction of narratives, memories and intersubjective meanings that favor ethnically tolerant social identities.²⁴

Rose (2000), analyzing situations where a State or empire collapses and groups within them face a situation of "emerging anarchy", believes that an ethnic conflict is most likely to occur when the security dilemma is intense, and affirms that the perception of the intensity of the dilemma is the independent variable, and war and peace are dependent variables. Therefore, he proposes that measures be taken to help reduce the perception of the intensity of the security dilemma.²⁵

In summary, according to the authors, ideology seems to be giving way to ethnic and religious factors as causes of the post-Cold War conflicts. However, despite Huntington's view that culture has replaced ideology, it is difficult to say that, to the extent that inequalities and social injustice persist, the ideological factor may not re-surface in the future with greater vigor. On the other hand, the internal wars now have greater prevalence in recent decades, and the importance of religion in armed conflict has been growing since 1980, hence, before the end of the Cold War, and usually associated with ethnic factors. For many authors, religion exacerbates ethnic conflict, increasing the frequency of violent clashes and hindering the establishment of sustainable peace agreements. According to Fox, religious factors appear when nationalism in the form of separatism is already present. Thus, in this view, nationalism would be the main cause of ethnic conflict and religion acts as an extremely strong exacerbating factor.

²² Social identity is defined as a set of meanings that the actor attributes himself while considering the other's perspective. (ARFI, Badredine. *Ethnic Fear: The Social Construction of Insecurity*. Security Studies. Vol8. No.1 (1988); p.198.)

²³ ARFI, Badredine. *Op cit.* pp.151-153.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp.197-203.

²⁵ ROSE, William. *The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses*. Security Studies. Vol.9, No 4(2000) 1-51.

The studied literature states that the dynamics that lead to ethnic conflict seem to be associated with insecurity and fear, which, from the logic of the security dilemma, increases the likelihood of an armed conflict.²⁶ So, for authors graded on a rationalist theoretical approach, collective fear of the future, associated with the realization that the State will not guarantee the safety of its nationals, creates strategic dilemmas favorable to the outbreak of violence. In this view, strategic dilemmas are necessary conditions for ethnic conflict. Strategic interactions within and between ethnic groups produce fear of the future in which conflicts arise.

In the constructivist view, it's the change in social identities that affects interethnic interactions. The construction of an aggressive social identity in relation to other ethnic groups generates the security dilemma, which is the only cause leading to ethnic conflict. Approaches guided in a constructivist perspective highlight the important role played by ethnic activists and political profiteers in manipulating ethnic differences and in interpreting and disseminating biased historical memories and ethnic myths, although social polarization and the role of these actors only contribute to ethnic conflict. In this perspective, the institutional failure of the State contributes to the worsening of ethnic tensions to the extent that it is not able to stand as a strong and legitimate mediator able to reverse the social, discursive and symbolic processes that building and fuel the security dilemma.

According to Kaufmann (2004), ideological and ethnic conflicts have different dynamics. The main difference lies in the flexibility of loyalties, which is more fluid in ideological conflict and much more inflexible in ethnic conflicts. The ideological loyalties are much easier to be modified, while the ethnic identities are more rigid because religion, culture, degree of kinship and sometimes language determine them. Although ideological and ethnic conflicts develop security dilemmas, they are different in nature. In ideological conflicts, the survival of the opponents does not depend on victory, because change in position and accommodation are easier. In the case of ethnic conflict, individuals cannot change their ethnic identities and in an intense socially polarized environment, it is much more difficult to accept that the group's security depends on the ethnic opponent.²⁷ Moreover, as seen above, when the religious factor is present in ethnic conflicts, it exacerbates this type of conflict, both regarding the degree of violence, as its duration. So in terms of prevention and conflict management, building a tolerant social identity is a goal that must be pursued long before there is social polarization and violent clashes.

As seen in the study of the causes of conflicts, it is difficult to point out a conflict that has only one cause. Conflicts are multifactorial and to understand them you need an approach that takes into consideration political, economic, social and environmental

²⁶ There are two levels to the dilemma of security: first and foremost, the dilemma of interpretation "on motives, intentions and capacities of others" in an atmosphere of uncertainty; and secondly, the dilemma of the response, related to the most rational way of reacting after having resolved the interpretation dilemma. (BOOTH, Ken and WHEELER, Nicholas J. *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*. Palgrave, New York, 2008, pp.3-6.)

²⁷ KAUFMANN, Chaim. Interventions in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars. In: ART, Robert J. and WALTZ, Kenneth N (Ed.). *The Use of Force; Military Power and International Politics*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, USA, 2004, pp.396-398.

dynamics. The first three factors have had a greater influence in the establishment of conflict. Political, economic and social factors are often closely intertwined. The so-called “failed States” are usually weak in these three fields and factors that materialize this weakness usually exacerbate each other. Although the state is only one of the actors in the national political scene, its inability to provide security, economic development and social justice hinders or even prevents the peaceful management of political rivalries, especially when ethno-religious cleavages are present.

Conclusion

All the factors and processes discussed above tend to converge to a key issue on the prevention and resolution of intrastate conflicts, as was well summarized by Ballentine & Nietzchke in the following expression: “*bringing the State back in.*” The emergence and perpetuation of armed conflict should not be explained as direct causality since contemporary intrastate conflicts have their origin in a set of “triggers” that interact in a weak state governance context.

In this case, as indicated by the literature, the prevention and management of armed conflicts linked to competition for resources must undergo, above all, through a process of strengthening political, economic and social institutions. Conflict resolution practices must therefore go beyond a “rebel-centric approach” and move towards the analysis of the State’s role, considered both as an institution to be built and strengthened and as a key player in the politics of armed conflict (Ballentine & Nietzchke, 2003: 16). As stated in the European Union’s overall strategy in 2016, increasing the State’s and society’s resilience seeking to strengthen institutions and promote social justice is essential to the prevention of conflicts.

The resolution of violent conflict must be based on initiatives that seek not only the reduction of direct violence, but also of indirect violence, including poverty, social inequalities and different unrealized human needs.²⁸ In the case of disputes over resources, prevention and conflict resolution policies should be directed at ensuring that income deriving from the exploitation of natural resources is evenly distributed among the population. At the same time, greater regulation and control of the mining industry, whether national or multinational should be sought, even if it faces resistance in the context of a market economy. In the context of ethnic conflicts, sustainable peace building processes must necessarily involve the strengthening of State institutions considering parameters of political equality between ethnic groups and the establishment of space for dialogue and reconciliation.

When armed conflicts are perpetuated, in addition to the continuation of the above measures, conflict resolution strategies can combine political and economic incentives

²⁸ GALTUNG, J. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. Author(s): Johan Galtung. Source: Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

to military pressure on the insurgents. In this case, States can seek military and strategic support from regional organizations and through *ad hoc* alliances in order to mitigate regional and global economic, political and social interconnections related to the conflict. However, according to Humphreys, in conflicts related to the exploitation of natural resources, military action is important, and they are more likely to end or end faster through a military victory than through negotiations between the disputants,²⁹ although recent studies have indicated that mediation in this type of conflict is easier than in those of ethnic or ideological nature.³⁰

In the case of ideological and ethnic conflicts, strategies for prevention and conflict resolution should have different emphases. In the first, political, economic and social inequalities are usually the main goals of the insurgents and thus programs to reduce these inequalities are more important, relatively, than military actions. In relation to ethnic conflicts, where control of the territory is fundamental, military action is more important, and the political, economic and social programs are, relatively, less important.³¹ The case of Sri Lanka, where military operations developed in a certain way to achieve a decisive military victory over the insurgents, who were well organized and fighting since the 70s, seems to confirm this view.

And what would be the role of the international community? It is clear that it must participate in this effort to reduce intrastate conflicts and that the United Nations' ability to detect and act preventively against the outbreak of such conflicts must be strengthened. When international conflict management is needed, the international community needs to think of ways to intervene that are guided by the needs of societies in conflict and find support in them, both by government and non-governmental actors. The practice of international interventions in a context of a failed State shows that the international community should not expect that local societies easily engage in conflict management processes led by external actors, such as the UN itself. This does not mean, however, that external agents cannot play a positive role in the development of State capacity-building and empowerment of societies in conflict.

In short, the recognition of the multiplicity of causes for violent clashes in intrastate conflicts must not only affect academic analysis, but it should also encourage the search for comprehensive approaches to the role of international actors in the prevention, during crisis and in post-crisis stabilization, considering the actions necessary for the local, regional and global levels, as the European Union's recent position shows.³²

Apart from the mistake of ignoring the specificity of societies in the defining and implementing conflict management tools, it is also necessary that the international community resist the temptation to replicate in diverse contexts, a unique and rigid

²⁹ HUMPREYS, *op.cit.* pp.508-537.

³⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Addressing the Role of Natural Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding*. UNEP, Nairobi, 2015

³¹ KAUFMANN, *op.cit.* pp.398-404.

³² EU. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. June, 2016.

solution, guided by a pre-determined political logic that is not permeable to local demands. It is also necessary that the processes of conflict resolution are flexible, both in terms of the expected results and in relation to the time set for them to be executed.

In the case of peacekeeping operations, although it is clear that the United Nations needs to improve its “exit strategies” it is necessary that deadlines for the implementation of state reconstruction strategies in a post-conflict context be connected to targets set by the mandates of the missions and not by a pre-set schedule. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the existing suggestions for peace operations to incorporate in their mandate the surveillance of the implementation of regionally and internationally recognized governance regimes, and other specific regulations designed to control the predatory and illegal exploitation of natural resources. In this respect, peacekeepers should have more direct and extensive activities of monitoring both the so-called “smart sanctions” as defined by the Security Council under Article 41 of the UN Charter, as the much longer and structured efforts, such as during the regime established by the Kimberley Process, a joint initiative between governments and civil society to stem the flow of diamonds used by rebels to finance their activities against a legitimate government.³³ According to a UN report, twenty countries that were affected by armed conflict recognized that natural resources are an important factor to achieve the State’s stabilization and strengthening, and that actions to internally improve the governance of these resources should be accompanied by international community measures to combat their illegal exploitation.³⁴

One point that directly affects the success of conflict management processes and the reconstruction of fragile States, refers to small arms trade. The rapid growth in the volume of these weapons in intrastate conflicts points to the need to adopt more effective methods to control the entrance of such weapons in the context of countries in conflict and at the same time, establish more precise mechanisms not only related to disarmament, but also to the reintegration of ex-combatants.

Finally, an essential aspect to be considered by the international community in the context of its intervention practices is the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacekeeping. Since the late 1990s the UN Security Council has progressively expanded the agenda now known as “Women Peace and Security.” Resolutions from this body show the need to give visibility to women in armed conflict, considering the specific impacts on this group, their resilience practices amid armed violence, and recommend various ways in which States can reduce gender inequality, improving the participation of women in various national contexts, including the processes of mediation and conflict resolution and other practices related to peacemaking.

³³ Kimberley Process. Disponível em: <https://www.kimberleyprocess.com/>. Acesso em 13 ago. 2016.

³⁴ United Nations Environment Programme. Addressing the Role of Natural Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding. UNEP, Nairobi, 2015.

The ideas and approaches presented briefly here indicate that the international community should, through its various mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflicts, constantly search for more accurate and innovative ways both to analyze how multiple interdependent factors are the cause and participate in the perpetuation of armed conflicts as to understand and remedy the effects caused by these factors on individuals and communities from different parts of the world, especially from the Global South. Only based on good conflict analysis tools and on approaches and conflict resolution concepts that are appropriate to the local situation, the international community can address the different political, ethical and operational dilemmas surrounding interventions aimed at consolidating a sustainable peace in contexts of violence and extreme fragility.