

REVIEW ESSAYS

The Habituation of Ethnic Conflict

Halperin, Morton, and David J. Scheffer. *Self-Determination in the New World Order*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1992.

Brown, Sheryl J., and Kimber M. Schraub. *Resolving Third World Conflict*. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1992.

Rothman, Jay. *From Confrontation to Cooperation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.

The issue of minority rights has been slowly growing in importance for the international community since the 1940s, but it was the end of the Cold War that propelled it toward the top of the agenda. Since 1991 the new status of minority rights has been confirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities, CSCE reports following its meetings at Copenhagen (1990), Paris (1990) and Geneva (1991), and the Council of Europe's European Convention for the Protection of Minorities (1992). The violence following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia has demonstrated that self-determination guarantees neither homogeneity nor peace. So the central question addressed by Halperin and Scheffer is an important one: is it possible to clarify through international law those circumstances that might justify the right of a minority to self-determination?

The book's most useful contribution to the debate is its classification of principles for the management of the growing demands for self-determination. These include a requirement of putative new nations to meet UN standards for admission adhere to international law and guarantee good conduct toward minorities. These are thoughtful and thorough, but perhaps should have been matched with a classification of circumstances under which accommodation within existing boundaries offer a more peaceful and fair future. The assertion is made in passing that "a group claiming a right to self-determination must come to understand that if it seeks the assistance of the United States and the world community, it first should seek accommodation within existing state boundaries," but no guidance is provided about how such accommodation might be reached and monitored. Self-determination is often a screen for an unattainable ethnic homogeneity. In the 'new world order' new minorities are likely to emerge even when a high level of ethnic uniformity and independence has been achieved by former minorities.

The authors do not shirk the problem of enforcement. "Self-determination is not a self-regulating process; nor is it necessarily a peaceful endeavour." What if the burgeoning self-determination groups decide to ignore the principles and criteria agreed to by the international organizations? Following a sequence described by Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, they urge a range of requirements from

anticipating trouble spots, through the application of agreed principles, to the application of increasingly punitive sanctions, including military force.

Even if one quibbles with the detail, the authors' main contribution is to isolate two important agenda for the next decade — what should be the establishing criteria for self-determination, and what responses are needed by the international community? These are important questions, and are well presented, but the book is weakened by an unconscious paradox. While building much of their argument on the collapse of the Cold War, the authors find it hard to look beyond a world governed by the remaining superpower. Despite its title, the main concern of this book is how American policy, not the policy of the United Nations and other international bodies, has been affected by the changes and what its future role should be. Time and again the issues identified in the book are addressed primarily to US policy, assuming, for example, that American standards of democracy is a universally accepted aspiration. "American ideals and self-interest merge when the United States supports the spread of democracy around the globe." "A more timely and sophisticated US treatment of self-determination needs to be understood by Americans as a key component of the nation's support for democracy abroad." Nothing surprising about that, perhaps, but it is a rather conservative vision of the 'new world order' of the title.

The final section of Brown and Schraub's *Resolving Third World Conflict* — "the United States and Third World Conflict" — may also seem to reflect a willingness to subordinate world order to American interests. In fact this collection of papers from a conference hosted by USIP in 1990 is valuable, if necessarily somewhat overtaken by events. It was reasonable then, before the Russian minorities in the newly-independent countries of the Soviet Union had begun to emerge as a problem, to be optimistic about the decline of post-colonial conflicts, and to envisage the United Nations as a universally accepted peacemaker. We owe a debt to the contributors, however, for anticipating a number of emerging themes, and by presenting them as debatable rather than confrontational issues: the central debate about the relationship between undemocratic regimes and ethnic violence, for example; or the two-edged nature of development assistance on the internal stability in the Third World; or the consequences of the likely international move from nuclear to conventional warfare. Identification and exploration of these and similar issues are the proper province of academics, admirably outlined by Robert Rothstein:

Practitioners want from academics what academics cannot provide: grounded theories that generate precise predictions and focus on variables that the policymaker can control or at least influence. . . . We are better at challenging the conventional wisdom, asking awkward (if sometime unanswerable) questions, and perhaps suggesting a different framework for debate and discussion.

Particularly useful is Ted Gurr's chapter entitled "Third World Minorities at Risk Since 1945," which provides an excellent example of the practical value of

systematic cross-national data analysis. Gurr has been collecting and publishing on minorities at risk for many years, and never has his material been more relevant to policy problems. What it demonstrates quite convincingly is the benefit of comparative analysis in helping to define concepts, and the need to disaggregate data by region, forms of discrimination and conflict profiles before venturing into generalization or forecasting. Even then, major qualifications must be attached to any claim. Gurr's attempt to anticipate ethnopolitical trouble spots in the 1990s is a model of how to strike the right balance.

Jay Rothman seeks to provide an alternative approach to conflict resolution in one trouble spot, Israel, moving away from the interests of leaders to the needs of communities. Rothman's argument was developed during three main case studies — Nazareth and Upper Nazareth, Jerusalem and the Taba district in the Sinai desert — in the first two of which he conducted a series of conflict management workshops. These are supplemented by shorter comparative analyses of the Cypriot dispute and black-white conflict on an American campus, but these are too brief and superficial to add much to the case. The aim is to encourage the participants to disaggregate their differences, to identify interests they hold in common and then to distinguish between those issues each side agrees the other needs to protect, those which can be approached by expanding the approaches and those which can be traded by bargaining or compensation. These options are described as "pieces of peace," and the essence of the approach is not to seek grand solutions but to build confidence through smaller agreements and compromises.

What's good about this? First is that Rothman appreciates the importance of developing theory from a strong empirical base. The main unanswered question, however, is a familiar one to those working with small groups: how does what happens within the groups relate back to the processes which may affect the conflict itself? There is a tendency to jump from macro-theory to micro-practice, but with no clear idea how the insights reached during the exercise might feed back into theory and policy. The author's addition of short case studies on Cyprus and a black-white campus indicates an awareness of the need to generalize from a broader base of specific experiences, but these are insufficiently developed. Perhaps conflict management workshops are justified by the effect of the experience on those attending, but Rothman clearly has broader ambitions. These are not fully realized, but the book provides an interesting case study of Israeli-Palestinian differences, and useful insights into the dynamics of mediation. It will be worth reading his next book.

All three books address a new post-Cold War generation of problems associated with ethnic conflict. Pioneers are inclined to make forecasts, so they run the risk of their predictions being overturned by events. This demonstrates the need for more, not less, forecasting. The problem lies, not in lack of care or judgment by the authors, but in lack of analytical and theoretical tools to confront them. To develop and improve the tools, such risk-taking exercises are essential. They help to identify evolving intellectual challenges and to confront handed-down "truths."

For example, researchers need to address the issue of self-determination and to distinguish between circumstances when it may help to improve ethnic relations, and those when it will worsen them. Another case where the researcher's critical eye is needed is the presumption that democratic regimes are less prone to ethnic violence than non-democratic ones, a comforting premise which may be true but is too often unchallenged. The most striking impression emerging from the three books is a sober, but realistic, acceptance that ethnic conflict can no longer be regarded as aberrational, but as increasingly part of the routine fabric of social intercourse. As Gurr put it, "no one should expect ethnopolitical conflicts to be entirely resolved, even in the most favourable political circumstances At best, conflict resolution means steering such conflicts into political arenas where differences are accommodated in ordered and non-coercive ways."

John Darby

International Programme on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity
United Nations University and University of Ulster

The Politics of Antagonism

O'Leary, Brendan, and John McGarry. *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1993.

Much recent work on Northern Ireland has seriously questioned the long-accepted analysis of the conflict there as being between an underprivileged, indeed oppressed Catholic nationalist minority and a dominant and oppressive unionist Protestant majority. Rather, it has been argued that the conflict is as much, if not more, the result of the continued pursuit by the minority of an ill-founded, old-fashioned, nationalist goal — the achievement of political unity in an independent island. Conflict, in the physical sense, has stemmed from the use, by a minority of the minority, of "armed struggle" or terrorism to pursue that goal.

That is the background to O'Leary and McGarry's book. It is part of a series entitled, "Conflict and Change in Britain — a New Audit," and, allowing for the geographical infelicity, it is a most timely inclusion. Part of the brief for the series is to balance the claims of different commentators, and to place the conflict in its historical and social context allowing intelligent judgements to be made. A careful assessment of the validity of the revisionist analysis is certainly needed.

Part of the revisionist approach has been to question the simple story of the nationalist as victim and the unionist as oppressor post-1921 within the new unit of Northern Ireland. That the Catholic/nationalist minority has been, and to an extent still is, economically and socially disadvantaged is not denied, nor is the charge that the unionist majority often behaved badly toward the minority. What is questioned is that the minority suffered systematic discrimination, were denied the means of