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From human insecurity to international armed conflict

Introduction

Today's globalising world shows a growing interdependence of people. Globalisation can be described as a process integrating not just economy but culture, technology and governance, affecting and connecting people everywhere, both in positive and negative ways. The challenge of globalisation in the new century is to preserve the advantages of global markets and competition, but also to provide enough room for human, community and environmental resources to ensure that globalisation works for people, not just for profits - i.e. that globalisation has a human face.¹

The concept of human security is a central element in the struggle for globalisation with a human face. 'Human security' denotes an ideal situation in which all people all over the world experience security in their daily lives, in that there is protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards.² The condition of human security, which can be translated in a global condition of security in the economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political area, is always under threat, rendering it imperative to acknowledge that daily practice in fact represents a situation of human *in*security. It is common knowledge that human insecurity in many areas may give rise to, or actually implies the existence of, armed conflict.³ Armed conflict arising in the national context has many implications for, and effects on, the international (inter-state) level. As such, it is evident that international armed conflict may very well emerge from conditions of national, or even local, human insecurity in different areas. This paper purports to contribute to understanding the process through which human insecurity turns into international armed conflict and thus to identifying possible (early) stages in this process at which events might be turned towards peaceful resolution.

To this end, a diagram is provided (with accompanying explanations) depicting the different stages of the process as divided into two main phases, viz. from human insecurity towards instability of society and therefrom towards international armed conflict. The purpose of this diagram is not to provide a realistic model of the full complexity of all processes that (may) play a role in the development of international armed conflict. Instead it provides a tool for organising the description of these processes so that meaningful distinctions can be made in the context of specific cases. The diagram is not claimed to be a reliable tool for prediction. Still, we presume that it is adequate to bring more clarity in human security aspects of international armed conflicts in specific cases, and that it may also be used to study the possibilities for prevention of the kind of human suffering described in this paper. The path followed in the diagram is illustrated by the cases of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the violent break-up of the Former Yugoslavia.

¹ See the Overview of the Human Developments Report 1999, 'Globalisation with a Human Face', p. 2.

² See in general Human Development Report 1994 'New Dimensions of Human Security', chapter 2.

³ E.g., the presence of armed conflict as in ethnic clashes and personal violence denotes the absence of personal and political security (i.e. the presence of insecurity in those areas); see Human Development Report 1994, pp. 31-33. See also T. Homer-Dixon et al., 'Environmental Change and Violent Conflict', *Scientific American* February 1993, p. 16: "Scarcities of renewable resources are already contributing to violent conflicts in many parts of the developing world. These conflicts may foreshadow a surge of similar violence in coming decades, particularly in poor countries where shortages of water, forests and, especially, fertile land, coupled with rapidly expanding populations, already cause great hardship."

Phase I: from human insecurity to instability of society

The process by which conditions of human insecurity of people within a nation can turn into an international armed conflict (on the assumption that neither the national government nor the international community take appropriate preventive measures) starts on the individual level. In our analysis, international security is seen as not only concerning nation states with their own interests. International security ultimately depends on the security of individuals, i.e. human security. As was mentioned in the introduction the security of people is always under threat, possibly resulting in conditions of significant human insecurity. In our analysis the process leading from human insecurity to international armed conflict consists of two phases. The first phase describes the process of human insecurity leading to tensions and societal instability within states. The second phase is taken to be the subsequent development towards international armed conflict.

Human insecurity can manifest itself across several dimensions, like environmental insecurity, political insecurity, etc. A condition of significant human insecurity makes people more vulnerable to hazardous natural and social processes. Environmental insecurity, for example, is a consequence of environmental scarcity not met by sufficient ingenuity of a society. This environmental insecurity can lead to migration and expulsion or to constrained economic productivity and elite rent-seeking.⁴ When cropland is scarce, for instance, people can be forced to migrate to areas where they are more vulnerable to floods or the soil is of less quality, which makes them economically more vulnerable. As with elite rent-seeking in this example, levels of human insecurity are generally distributed unequally within a society.

In the diagram (see page 4) it is graphically depicted that human insecurity can be considered to be a cause of the *vulnerability of persons* and the presence of *horizontal inequality*. Both are aspects of the individual level, or stage, in phase I. Closely related to this individual level, where inequalities are perceived by the individuals concerned, is the community level where anxieties become expressed if the perceived inequalities are considered to be unfair. This anxiety may be expressed in different forms, depending on the cultural specifics of the case. The three most common forms are: *civil unrest*, *ethnic tensions*, and *social disintegration and fragmentation*. Civil unrest can arise if the state is considered to be the cause of the vulnerable condition and ethnic tensions are likely to arise if other groups in the society are blamed. Social disintegration and fragmentation may be related to ethnic tensions, but can also arise if there is no clearly defined group that is considered to be the cause of the vulnerable condition of persons.

The third level of phase I corresponds to conflicts which have reached a national scale. The tensions on the community level can lead to the *instability of society*, either directly or via *weakened institutions*. Depending on the assessment of opportunities by groups being at strife with one another, a *coup d'état* may be considered to be a viable strategy; otherwise a more or less steady situation of *internal strife* may result. One must note here that important self-reinforcing feedback is involved between the different levels of phase I (not shown in the diagram). For instance, the diminished strength of institutions (on the national level) is typically seen as an original contributor to human insecurity (on the individual level).⁵

⁴ See T. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 134.

⁵ Homer-Dixon, *ibid.*, emphasises the presence of such feedback loops for the problem of environmental insecurity.

Phase II: the process from instability of society to international armed conflict

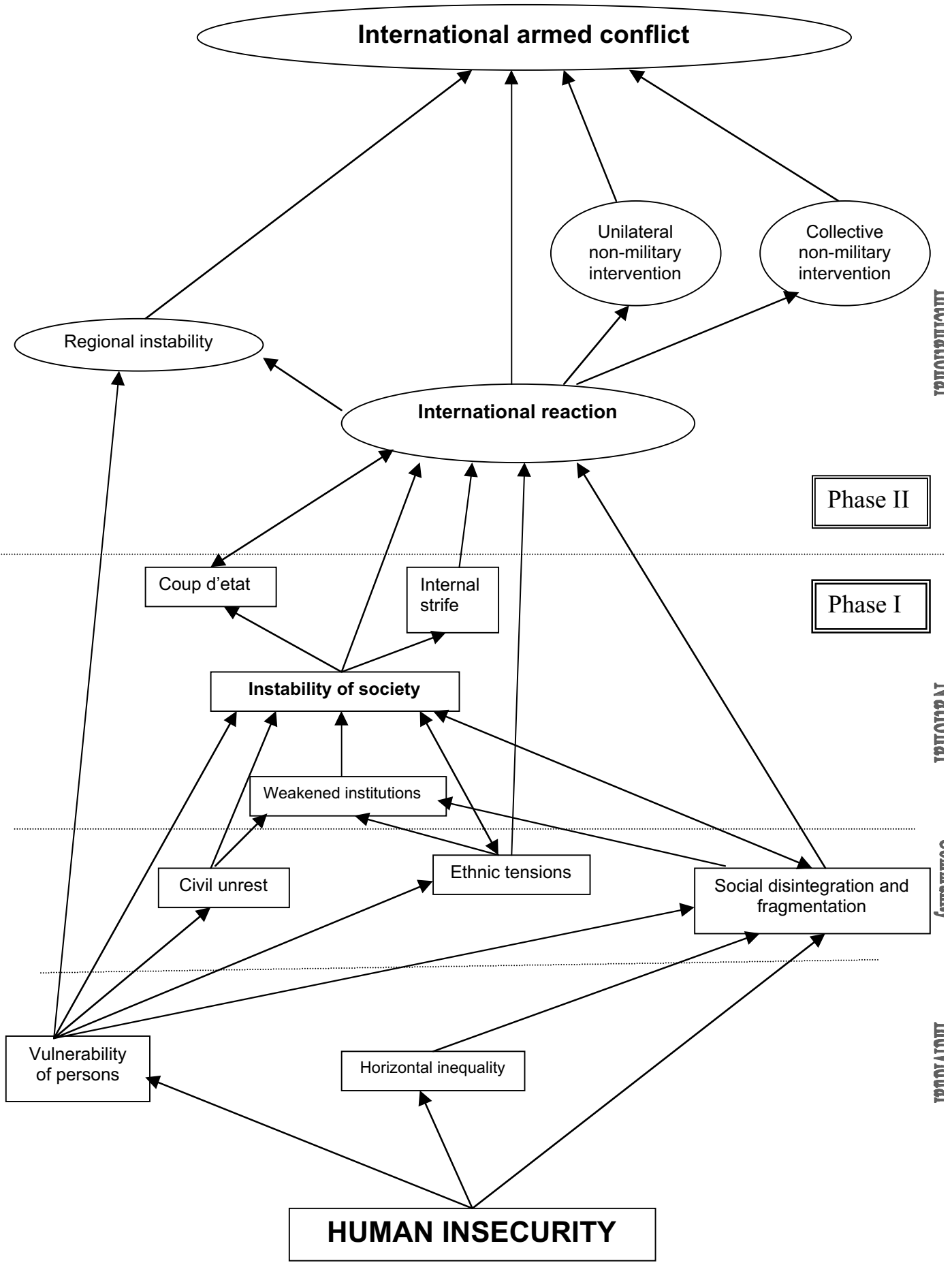
The process from instability of society originating from increased human insecurity towards international armed conflict is illustrated in Phase II of the diagram (see page 4). In the globalising world of today the instability of any given society has external effects affecting other peoples and states. This is most clear with regard to extreme cases of instability of society which end up in military *coups d'état* or *internal strife* (such as civil wars or disrupted societies). But also without (emerging) armed conflict in a state, other states become readily involved. This may first of all be the result of a factual situation, e.g. the spread of a people across international borders ('spill over', as in the case of Rwanda) or newly drawn international borders across disputed territories after the break-up of a state (as in the case of the former Yugoslavia). Also, the states in the region surrounding the unstable society may become involved simply because they perceive the instability of that society by itself as a threat to their security (e.g. through large numbers of refugees crossing the border or guerrilla-activities being organised from their territory). Such fears and perceptions of threat by other states may give rise to hostile *international reactions* affecting the already unstable society. Depending on the extent to which the other states consider the unstable society to constitute a threat to their security, their reactions will vary from *unilateral* and *collective non-military interventions*, ranging from diplomatic and political efforts to economic sanctions, to armed interventions. Since the end of the Cold War, armed interventions have *inter alia* been justified by references to massive violations of human rights, disruption of orderly government and, occasionally, the protection of a democratic system of government in the target state.⁶ As such, instability of a given society may provoke civil unrest or ethnic tensions in other, neighbouring, societies, and thus may cause the process to reinforce itself and may contribute to *regional instability*. It should be noted that the stability of a region may also be directly affected by the vulnerability of persons within a state, e.g. when the danger of civil war gives rise to considerable numbers of refugees even before national armed conflict has broken out.

In many instances, the international reactions, including military interventions, will be *collective* in that they are coordinated within the United Nations or within regional organisations, such as the OAU or NATO. However, in practice also *unilateral* non-military and military interventions take place, mainly by powerful states, even though unilateral military interventions in general violate the prohibition on the use of force in international relations and the principle of non-intervention in other states' affairs.⁷ In all of those situations the hostile situation may end up in *international armed conflict*. A 'common sense' appreciation of what constitutes 'international armed conflict' or 'war' is favoured here, in that both terms comprise international hostilities irrespective of formal declaration or its absence. Thus, international armed conflict is considered to involve (unilateral or collective) resort by states to active and hostile military measures in the conduct of their international relations with intent to the attainment of policy objectives or defence against the same, whether or not a state of 'war' is declared or recognised to exist.⁸

⁶ See H. Leurdijk, 'The Challenge of Intervention on Behalf of Democracy', in: M. Castermans, F. van Hoof and J. Smith (eds.), *The Role of the Nation-State in the 21st Century*, Kluwer, 1998, p. 327.

⁷ See G. Abi-Saab, 'Some thoughts on the Principle of Non-Intervention', in: K. Wellens (ed.), *International Law: Theory and Practice*, Kluwer, 1998, pp. 225-235, and see T. Opperman, 'Intervention', in: R. Benhardt (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Public International Law*, Vol. II, Elsevier, 1995, pp. 1436-1439.

⁸ Cf. H. McCoubrey & N. White, 'International Law and Armed Conflict', Dartmouth, 1992, p. 194.



The Great Lakes region: human security aspects of the 1994 conflict in Rwanda

For an explanation of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda the mobilisation of the Hutu majority by the Hutu elite needs to be taken into account. The possibilities for the elite to maintain elite privileges were threatened in the context of general environmental scarcity, combined with factors like civil war and poor economic prospects for the country. The development from human insecurity to international armed conflict in the Rwanda case is summarised here by mentioning the elements that belong to the different categories identified in our diagram.

PHASE I

Individual level

Vulnerability of peoples:

- Background situation (see box).
- Elite group feeling threatened, enhanced by Arusha Agreements.

Horizontal inequality:

- Political inequality between population groups.
- Ethnic division.

Background: Before the mass killings and population shifts, the Hutu made up 90% of the population of Rwanda. The Tutsi represented about 9% of the population. The Twa constitute less than 1% of the population. The policy of the German colonial government (1898-1916) and the Belgium administration of Ruanda-Urundi after World War I under the tutelage of the League of Nations strengthened the Tutsi ruling class. The independence struggle (1952-1962) was mainly a Hutu revolution. From 1990 to 1992 a civil war took place in the country and international lenders forced the government to implement a structural adjustment policy. The Arusha agreements were concluded in August 1993. The plane of President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda exploded on **6 April 1994**. This date is taken as starting point for further analysis since a situation of human insecurity clearly existed. A systematic killing of mainly Tutsi took place. About 800.000 people were killed in about 100 days time. The Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) responded with an offensive from the north. Members of the former government, army, and militias fled to refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania and have taken control over the camps.

Rwanda faces land scarcity and degradation, demographic stress, limited resources, falling coffee prices and lack of basic education. In 1994 90 percent of the population in Rwanda relied on agriculture. Land scarcity and degradation combined with population growth threatened the food security. The environmental degradation and high population levels contributed to migrations. By the year 1992 one-tenth of the population was displaced by civil war.



Community level

Civil unrest:

Elite strengthening civil unrest.

Ethnic tensions:

Hutu's v. Tutsi's.

Social disintegration and fragmentation:

The population participated in massacres by coercion and/or voluntary.

National level

Weakened Institutions:

- Government's grip on country declining.
- Threatening of the opposition and moderate politicians.

Instability of society:

- RPF v. Government.
- Plane crash causing the death of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi.
- Presidential Guard and militia taking over control.
- RPF v. Presidential Guard and militia.
- Propaganda elite through radio/media.
- Instrumental use of ethnical tensions.

Coup d'etat:

- If the plane crash was an act of violence by the Presidential Guard it would establish a Coup d'etat.
- The take-over of the Presidential Guard and militia further led to internal strife, which in its turn led to a take-over by the RPF.

Internal strife:

- According to RPF: before massacre a 'political' struggle, after start of massacres an 'ethnic' strife.

PHASE II

International level

International reaction:

- Reaction Arusha Agreements: implementation half-hearted.
- No 'worst-case scenario' for implementation of Arusha Agreements or following later events.
- Mandate UNAMIR already weak, but even weakened further by Security Council.
- NGO and UN human rights reports: risk of genocide.
- Too much caution practised by the international community (e.g. UN).
- Pressure on the Presidents of Rwanda before and after the plane crash concerning planning and execution of genocide could easily have been more severe.
- Communication, command and control failures within UN mission.
- Lack of resources UN mission.
- Using withdrawal as a threat although it was the wish of a group of the perpetrators.
- Not referring to the massacres as genocide until late stage.
- Focusing on cease-fire between parties instead of stopping the killings.
- Somalia-trauma.

Regional instability:

- RPF operating from Uganda.
- Refugee camps in Zaire / Congo.
- Aside from migration of refugees, war criminals fled to camps in neighbouring countries and took over control of the camps.
- In 1996 open warfare in Zaire (Congo): massive human rights violations and refugees from Rwanda and Burundi and displaced Zairians caught in the crossfire.

Unilateral non-military intervention:

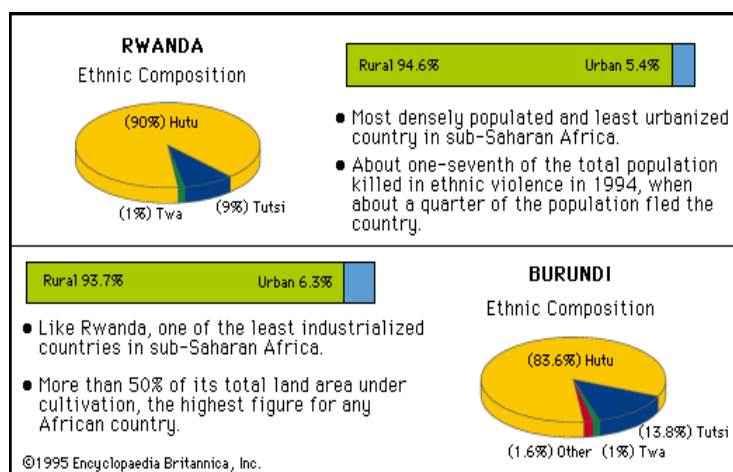
- Belgium colonial past.
- Withdrawal of Belgium.
- Campaign led by Belgium for withdrawal of UN.

Collective non-military intervention:

- UNAMIR.
- The UN forces present in Rwanda to monitor the implementation of the Arusha Accords did not have the mandate to intervene in the massacres. They could only provide shelter and food.
- The (lack of) actions and failures of the UN at many stages most likely have influenced significantly the course of events in Rwanda.
- The international community, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) encouraged (forced) return of refugees to Rwanda and Burundi.
- Operation Turquoise in 1994, establishing a secure area in south-west Rwanda.

International armed conflict:

The high amount of human insecurity concerning the societies of the Great Lakes Region contributed to armed conflict in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda including armed involvement of neighbouring countries. The conflicts have become increasingly internationalised.



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Crisis in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1990-1999

The crisis in the former Yugoslavia, including the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Kosovo-crisis, originated from human insecurity on different levels. The manipulation of these insecurities by Yugoslav politicians, who tried to keep control of power after the collapse of communism, was one of the decisive factors in the conflict.

PHASE I

Individual level

Vulnerability of peoples:

- Background (see box).
- Economic decline through economic system.
- Political and social oppression: deprivation of liberties.

Horizontal inequality

- Economic inequality along ethnic lines.

Background: The multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991-1992, followed by one of the bloodiest civil wars in one of its former republics, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

An artificial state from the beginning of the 20th century, ethnic divisions were harshly oppressed by the founder of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after World War II, Joseph Broz Tito. The 1974 constitution recognised the different republics as 'nations', acknowledging their separate ethnic characters, Croat, Slovene and Serb, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That republic was not regarded as a 'nation', and was considered to be truly multi-ethnic, which was aided by forced population shifts under Tito. Nowadays, in Bosnia, 40% is Serb, 38% Bosniac (Muslim) and 22% Croat. Kosovo and Vojvodina were provinces of Serbia but also contained several ethnic groups, like Albanians and Hungarians. The 1974 constitution had also granted them a certain amount of autonomy.

Although a communist country, Yugoslavia had broken with the Soviet Union and had developed its own communist economic system called 'socialist self-management', investing the power over a company not with the state but with the people that ran it.

When communism collapsed, not democracy but ethnic nationalism became the alternative ideology. Coupled with large unemployment, inflation, foreign debt and an economic divide between North and South, nationalism found fertile ground among the disgruntled people. In a relative short period of time, after deliberate political manipulation and international hypocrisy, war erupted between the 'nations'. After years of 'ethnic cleansing' and failed international peace efforts, fighting in the former Yugoslavia ended with the Dayton Agreement (1995), which divides Bosnia and Herzegovina into a Muslim-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska.



- Political inequality along ethnic/republican lines (Kosovo, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Community level

Civil unrest:

- Rising nationalism as alternative to communism.
- Calls for independence in Slovenia, Croatia, Kosovo and by Croatian Serbs (Krajina).
- Small violent incidents throughout Yugoslavia.

Ethnic tensions:

- Ethnic polarisation.
- Increased ethnic group identification.
- Political unrest in Federal Government over ethnic and nationalist issues.

Social disintegration and fragmentation:

- Declarations of sovereignty by Slovenia and Croatia.
- Declaration of sovereignty and independence by Croatian Serbs of the Serbian Republic of the Krajina.
- Kosovar Albanians demand independence for Kosovo and protest against Serb domination.

National level

Weakened Institutions:

- The Federal Government slowly lost control over the country due to arguments over the Federal Presidency, walkouts by representatives of the republics and seizure of power by the governments of the Republics.

- The role of the Yugoslav Army (JNA) increased as a separate and autonomous force in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia dedicated to the preservation of Yugoslavia.
- Because of the absence of effective federal government, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was in the process of dissolution.

Instability of society:

Because of the ethnic divisions and the dysfunctional federal government, uncertainty about the status quo and movements towards independence, tension and violent incidents plagued the country.

Internal strife:

After Slovenia and Croatia declared themselves sovereign and independent states, no longer part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, war erupted between the breakaway republics and the JNA. Clashes between Slovene forces and the JNA only lasted ten days, but all-out war erupted between Croatian forces and the JNA. When Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence, fighting started between the Bosnian Serbs aided by the JNA and the Bosnian Government, made up of Muslims and Croats.

PHASE II

International level

International reaction:

- EU and OSCE peace efforts, as early as the declarations of independence. EU and US first insisted on Yugoslav unity until it became untenable.
- Peace efforts from the EU later focused on ending the violence.
- Recognition of the new republics was hotly debated and used as a bargaining chip in the efforts to end the violence.

Regional instability:

When Macedonia declared independence and EU recognition was debated, Greece objected to the name of the new republic, Macedonia. Greece feared claims on its territory in the future.

Unilateral non-military intervention:

US and EU imposed economic sanctions at various times to achieve peace.

Collective non-military intervention:

- UN imposed sanctions three months after war had started, which were intensified over the years.
- A United Nations Protection Force tried to assure the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout the conflict, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a limited mandate. UNPROFOR was not mandated to intervene militarily in the conflict.
- UNPROFOR also tried to monitor several cease-fires that collapsed within days.
- In Croatia, relative peace was achieved with the help of a UN peacekeeping plan, establishing United Nations Protected Area's for Croatian Serbs.
- Under considerable pressure, and under US auspices a Nato-led Intervention force (IFOR) served in Bosnia to implement and monitor the military aspects of the Agreement. IFOR was an international peacekeeping force of 60,000 troops and was succeeded by a smaller Stabilisation Force (SFOR) whose mission is to deter renewed hostilities. The UN Security Council appointed a High Representative who is responsible for implementation of the civilian aspects.

International armed conflict

- In a few incidents, Nato war planes attacked Bosnian Serb positions in retaliation of shelling in violation of a cease-fire, and as deterrent for further violations.
- Nato and the WEU were mandated to enforce the maritime embargo and the no-fly zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina, although very limited use of force was allowed.
- The continued oppression by Serbia of the Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo, that led to human rights atrocities, compelled Nato to intervene militarily on humanitarian grounds in 1999. The massive use of force by Nato aircraft was not authorised by a Security Council resolution.
- In the Tadić-case, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, determined that an international armed conflict existed between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the remainder of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from "the beginning of 1992 until 19 May 1992" when the JNA formally withdrew from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have described and analysed the process from human insecurity to international armed conflict with a view to clarifying and identifying the different stages of development of this process. Starting from the assumption that daily life shows a condition of human *insecurity*, it appears from the analysis that the causes of human insecurity gradually affect all levels of society, spreading from the individual level to the community level and producing, on the national level, instability of society in whole. This instability of society (and the internal reactions it may produce, such as a coup d'etat), gives rise to international reactions, including possible resort to armed force by (a collective of) states thus producing an international armed conflict. This course of action can be traced both in theory and in practice, as the case studies of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia show. The case studies also show that usually only at the point where international armed conflict is ongoing or its outbreak is imminent the international community becomes involved.

The international system, traditionally built on the concept of statehood, lays emphasis on the maintenance of international peace and security and has only gradually come to act upon the recognition that international problems in many areas have their origin in domestic conditions. Those efforts, which e.g. take shape in peace-keeping operations guided by the United Nations, commonly suffer from the anomaly of fighting symptoms and thus fail to get a grasp on the root-causes of the armed conflict they were actually meant to resolve. It is clear that if the international community wants to be more successful in preventing the emergence of (inter-) national armed conflict, its policy should *inter alia* be guided by endeavours to minimise world-wide human insecurity, and at the same time by defending the level of human security attained against potential threats.⁹ The international community should be able to contribute more effectively to the early discovery and resolution of controversies in the world before they turn into (inter-) national armed conflicts. To that end, it is indispensable to acknowledge that one of the root-causes of war lies in the process which leads from a situation of human insecurity in different areas of life to instability of society and therefrom to international reactions including the use of armed conflict. Further research will be needed to find out how the analysis of this process may contribute to a more effective policy of the international community towards lowering levels of human insecurity.

⁹ In the 1999 Human Development Report, successful globalisation has been coupled, besides to human security, to ethics, equity, inclusion, sustainability and development; of course, armed conflict may arise as a result of shortcomings with regard to any of those concepts, like disparity within and between nations and marginalisation of peoples and countries.

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