

The Quest for Peace: A Thematic Analysis of The International Architecture for Preventing Violent Political Conflicts

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Abstract

Today, the whole world is starving for peace. This article takes the declared goal of preventing violent political conflicts as a starting point. From Somalia to Syria, from Sierra Leone to Libya, political violence is the plague of our age. At the outset, “we need to consider the concept of violence itself. The most common notion is that *violence entails the use of physical force, usually with the purpose of injuring or damaging the target of the violence*. In the political world, the tools of such violence can range from flying fists and bullets to nerve gas and nuclear missiles” (Danziger 2012). The central actor in violent political conflicts is usually the ‘state.’ Prevention means doing everything to help countries avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on humanity, undermining institutions and capacities to achieve peace and development (United Nations and World Bank 2018). In order to do continually achieve this task, robust mechanisms to prevent future conflict risks needs to be put in place. In an interdependent world, this means that for preventing political violent conflicts there is a dire need for an international architecture which works across countries and refocused on prevention rather than containment. In this paper I propose to do a thematic analysis of the joint United Nations and World Bank Report (2018) on preventing violent conflict in the light of political violence expounded by Danziger (2012). This thematic analysis can enable us to understand both the anatomy of political violence and the international architecture to prevent their future occurrence. This study can make a significant contribution to address the immense challenges facing collective humanity’s contemporary quest for peace.

Keywords: Political Violence, Violent Conflict Prevention, International Tools for Conflict Prevention, Quest for Peace

Introduction

Motivation The first two decades of the third millennium did not leave behind much of a legacy upon which we can build for the future hope of a peaceful world. The sad summary of the last two decades is that we humans are still very prone to political violence. This article defines political violence as “the use of actual physical violence or very serious threats of such violence to achieve political goals” (Danziger 2012). It is tragic to note that the average level of global peacefulness has declined for the fourth consecutive year, falling by 0.27 per cent in 2017. The results of the 2018 Global Peace Index (GPI) find that 92 countries deteriorated, while only 71 improved (Institute for Economics & Peace 2018a). In most countries of the world, conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism. Political terror involves extra-judicial killings, torture and imprisonment without trial (Institute for Economics & Peace 2018b). United Nations & World Bank (2018) report conclude that after decades of relative decline political violent conflict has increased. Since the beginning of the current century, direct deaths in war, numbers of displaced populations, military spending, and terrorist incidents, among others, have all surged. Dealing with a legacy of ghastly incidents of political violent conflicts is one of the greatest challenges facing the international community. Extensive research literature (Böhmelt, T., Bove, V., & Glenditsch, K. S. 2019; Gordon, G. M. & Young, L. E. 2017; Hirose, K., Imai, K. & Lyall, J. 2017; D’Cunha 2017a:

D’Cunha 2017b) proposes that the ability to address this legacy in a comprehensive and inclusive manner, including initiatives to address root causes of conflict, and the potential to develop sustainable peace there is an indisputable relationship. The United Nations & World Bank (2018) accepts prima facie that the states through their national policy and their governance of the multilateral system have the primary responsibility for preventive action. Nonetheless, in today’s unstable international landscape, states are often one actor among many. To keep their countries on a pathway to peace, states are increasingly called to work with each other and with other actors. Adding to the complexity of conflict is the rapidly evolving global context presenting grave risks that transcend national borders. To make a more concerted effort to bring their preventive tools and instruments to bear in an effective and complementary way, places the onus on policy makers at all levels, from local to global.

This article makes two key contributions to the study of peace. First, I highlight the various types of political violence and the preventive tools established by the international community. Understanding political violence in all its manifestations is at the core of understanding how the preventive interventions can or cannot work. My second contribution is methodological. By drawing on the literature on political violence at the national level, this article qualitatively examines the preventive tools at the international level. Hence, this study seeks to improve the way in which local political conflict processes interact with international mediation, peace operations and early warning systems efforts to prevent political conflicts from becoming violent. My key audience for this introductory paper are students of international relations and diplomacy.

Research Design

This research design is based on Thematic Analysis (TA). Most important feature of TA is that it is a useful method for generating unanticipated insights by examining different scholarly perspectives and highlighting similarities and differences. It is also useful for producing a clear and organized final report by summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data (Braun & Clarke 2006; King 2004 cited in Nowell, Morris & Moules 2017:2).

Research Objective

This paper aims to highlight the various components that constitute political violence and international preventive architecture by exploring the most relevant literature and how they both pose challenges to the international community’s relentless quest for peace.

Research Questions

This TA is organized in three main parts as to address three major questions:

RQ1. Which are the different types of political violent conflicts?

RQ2. Which are the different types of preventive tools setup by the international community?

RQ3. And how these tools can effectively prevent political violent conflicts to fulfill the international community’s quest for peace?

Method of Data Collection

All methods of data collection in more or less opportunistic ways can be employed in TA research as it is a highly versatile method. The data collection tools primarily centered on document analysis. This specifically included the latest United Nations and World Bank

report: Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, chapter 7: The International Architecture for Prevention, pp. 231-274 and Understanding the Political World: An Introduction to Political World (11th Ed) chapter 12: Political Violence, pp. 323-356.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Ibrahim 2012) Thematic Analysis (TA) model of data analysis. This involved the three link-stages or streams:

First Stage – Reduction of Data: Data selection, simplifying and transforming are done through this process. Conclusions are drawn and verifications are completed through the execution of the procedure of reduction of data.

Intermediate Stage – Themes Reliability and Validity: From the researcher’s experience, validation is beneficial for the data, especially at the level of themes as it provides accurate and reliable ones for the second level. Further, errors and mistakes are minimized at this intermediate stage of thematic analysis.

Second Stage – Data Display: This stage of data display is purposeful in various ways:

Enhancing the data more clearly for the research by improving the ability to view the collected data.

During the process of analysis to avoid data overload.

Displaying related concepts from different statements so as to make sense of the data collected.

Third Stage – Data-Drawing and Conclusions: The final stage comprises of the following:

The representation of any themes or patterns and especially if similar and contrasting relevance of any statement.

‘Evidence that can be combined’ to be arranged in grouping or establishing categories.

Interrelations among factors and variables are identified.

To explore the validity of the findings so that they fit the theoretical framework of the study by building conceptual coherence and consistency.

TA offers the flexibility for starting analysis of the data during the research at any given time, where there is no link between the result of the process and the data gathered itself. More importantly, it provides the plasticity for approaching research designs in dualistic ways, i.e. Qualitative and Quantitative.

Literature Review

Types of Political Violence

	Target	
Source	Individual/Group	State
Individual/Group	Crime	Riots/Rebellion

	Terrorism Nation-based conflict Class conflict	Separatist violence Coup Revolution
State	Order maintenance Establishment violence	War

Exhibit A: Types of Political Violence (Source: Danziger 2012, p. 327)

Specifying the source of the violence and target of that violence can be easily based on this simple taxonomy of political violence. Either party may be a state or an individual/group. Exhibit A categorizes political violence and helps us to organize and clarify our discussion. Referring to Danziger (2012, chapter 12, pp. 323-356), I will briefly explore them as follows:

State Violence against Individuals or Groups

Given the state’s monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, in many instances the state’s application of political violence seems justifiable. An *order-maintenance* activity is how the state typically describes its own use of violence. Violating its own legitimacy, the agents of the state can inflict establishment violence on its political opponents. In addition, the state can cause great suffering or even death to individuals through its power to withhold access to benefits such as good jobs, shelter and welfare services.

Individual Violence against an Individual

When one individual engages in an act of political violence against another individual. For example, Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria in 1914 and Mohandas Gandhi in 1948 were assassinated by individuals who seemed to be acting alone, primarily on political motives.

Group Violence against an Individual

Most violence in which a person is targeted for political reasons, including assassinations, is committed on behalf of a group, even if the act is performed by a single individual. The terror attacks that has spread like wildfire throughout the world especially in the twenty-first century is usually carried out by organized groups or perhaps even by governments.

Group Violence against a Group

This is also termed as Nation-Based Violence. Nationality groups are increasingly mobilized to demand political autonomy, a process grounded in a deep attachment to the group’s identity. In some cases, groups attempt to establish their own sovereign state based on national identity through separatist violence. For example, the violence in Iraq reveals the deep antagonisms between groups within the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish nations.

Individual or Group Violence against the State

Individual or group political violence directed against the political system can have multiple causes. At one extreme, such violence might be a person’s or a group’s spontaneous outburst of frustration with life conditions. At the other extreme, the individual or group might have such deep-seated hostility against the existing political system that it undertakes a lengthy series of violent actions in order to overthrow the system. In postwar Iraq, after 2003, the

violent resistance to the U.S. military and its allies is also characterized by scholars as native opposition to foreign occupation.

International Tools for Prevention of Political Violent Conflicts

Post the Second World War and the establishment of the U.N., the international community has developed tools for preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and relapse of political violent conflicts. While historically linked to international multilateral institutions, such tools are increasingly, if unevenly, shared with regional and sub-regional organizations. The following sections taken from (United Nations and World Bank 2018: 231-262) provide an overview of a number of effective instruments through which states provide support through multilateral frameworks for prevention, highlighting the evolution of policy, practice, and the extent and potential for greater convergence between international political, security, and development actors.

Early Warning Systems (EWSs)

Early Warning Systems (EWSs) can play a significant role in the international field of conflict prevention. EWSs are practical tools relying on qualitative and quantitative data on medium- and short-term risks, with the intention of directly informing or supporting preventive actions. Research has shown that EWSs are accurate in providing information in the short term but are inadequate in the long term. To analyze data from different sources and channel this information into more coordinated action, some countries have developed dialogue processes among a variety of stakeholders.

Protection of Civilians and Prevention of Mass Atrocities

Human rights violations, discrimination, and abuse are among the major warning signs of instability and conflict and monitoring and reporting of such abuses provide the evidence base from which to devise actions. Even when conflict prevention has failed or no means of stopping armed conflict are available, prevention of mass atrocities should remain a priority. Specific civilian population can become most vulnerable target of systematic attacks. This can increase the risk factors relevant specifically to the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation

Using confidence building and leverage, preventive diplomacy and mediation can play a role in altering the incentives of actors that propel societies toward violence. Diplomatic action is often a tool of first resort in response to high risks of conflict and sometimes the only approach, short of military intervention. To facilitate broader ownership of peace processes through broadening of the mediation environment in terms of both mediators and parties can improve the responsiveness and mobilization of international actors.

Preventing Violent Extremism

In the post 9/11 environment, violent extremism has reached a level of threat and sophistication that requires a comprehensive approach encompassing not only military or security measures but that directly address development, good governance, human rights, and humanitarian concerns. Since persistent, unresolved conflict can prove to be a major driver of violent extremism, where political violent conflict exists, efforts must be redoubled to promote and sustain dialogue between warring parties.

Peace Operations

Peace operations remains one of the most widely known international tools for prevention, although not explicitly envisioned in the UN Charter, and have evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War, from a narrow focus on monitoring cease-fires and peace agreements to complex multidimensional missions with mandates to consolidate peace, prevent relapse into conflict, and support the restoration of state authority. The preventive value of these operations lies precisely in the creation of disincentives for the use of violence. Peace operations with other mechanisms can provide comprehensive support across areas as diverse as human rights, the rule of law, sexual violence in conflict, violent extremism, organized crime and drug trafficking, security sector reforms, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

Findings

The Thematic Analysis of the data led to the emergence of a number of common themes that are central to this study. The Key Emerging Themes are presented as follows:

In all political discourses it is stated that the central actor in conflict is usually the ‘state.’ Security forces, which include official groups such as the regular military and the secret police as well as unofficial armed groups are the key instrument of a state’s power against its enemies. Another form of state power is judicial systems and prison systems, which punish those whose behaviors displease the state (see Danziger 2012: 328). In such a scenario, the second preventive tool consisting of ‘Protection of Civilians and Prevention of Mass Atrocities’ can be put in place especially in fragile and weak countries which have a history of violence against its own citizens.

Some of the prominent countries of the world have a long history of politically motivated assassinations that can encourages the state or the rogue citizens of such states to indulge in similar activities. I contend that the historical legacy can be used to predict future patterns of how the state and/or its fringe citizens will react to individuals who oppose their ideology or actions. In such countries, the EWSs can be put in place by the international community (UN) with the help of regional and sub-regional organizations (EU and/or African Union) as the case may be, to keep constant vigil and take preventive steps so as to defuse the situation before it turns violent.

In the contemporary world, some of the most serious concerns about political violence relate to attacks labeled “terrorism” because they often victimize people who some claim are “innocent” noncombatants. An act is usually called terrorism when there is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational or clandestine agents (NCTC 2011 cited in Danziger 2012). Unfortunately, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remained the world’s least peaceful area. It is home to four of the ten least peaceful countries in the world (see Institute for Economics & Peace 2018a). With the proliferation of groups employing terrorist tactics, the fourth tool ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ need to be extensively deployed especially in extremist prone countries. The states cannot do it alone, hence there is global consensus that states together with regional and sub-regional organizations develop plans of action to prevent violent extremism (see United Nations & World Bank 2018: 245). If the goal is to achieve social justice, warring parties can explore effective nonviolent alternatives to terrorism.

Since the end of the Cold War, separatist violence has spread throughout the world. At the core of the most nation-based violence is the nationality group’s struggle for autonomy – for the right to control its own political and cultural destiny. Some groups engage in separatist

violence to achieve substantial or total political autonomy from the existing political system. If the separatist group is small and lacks political resources, it usually turns to acts of terrorism or attacks against specific individuals within the political system (see Danziger 2012: 337). There are all possibilities of civil war that can engulf the entire state and sometimes the region. In such a scenario, 'Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation' can play a pivotal role in minimizing the risks of violent flare-up. In spite of facing inherent challenges, diplomacy and mediation has the potential to help generate settlement deals (see United Nations & World Bank 2018: 244) that can avert or end violence and establish sustainable peace.

When people find their political, social, or economic conditions intolerable, their frustration can escalate from demonstrations and civil disobedience to riots. Such political violence turns into rebellion when there is more frequent, premeditated, and widespread violence, involving more people (see Danziger 2012: 337). This usually happens when the state is in political decay. Peacekeeping operations (PKOs) are a key tool used by the international community to maintain security in countries plagued by violence (see Gordon & Young 2017: 64). International "Peace Operations" is an effective tool that can be deployed in pre-crisis situations to address latent sources of tension or longstanding "frozen conflicts" (United Nations & World Bank 2018: 248). It becomes amply clear, that peace operations are a key tool of the international community's preventive strategy to reduce political violent conflicts and usher peace.

The findings make it clear that the international community's preventive tools to combat political violent conflicts are quite appropriate. The first step toward the solution of any problem is to recognize its existence and nowhere is this truer than with political violent conflicts occurring at regular intervals throughout the countries of the world. They deeply affect the whole international community not only politically but also at socio-economic levels. As tools of prevention and a means to establish peace, these preventive mechanisms should never remain static. They must be dynamic, continually evolving their effectiveness to meet the challenges from the various facets of political violence that threaten global peace.

Conclusion

A central claim of this research is that the global community's quest for peace is directly threatened by all forms of organized political violence. The five types of political violence is at its source, more plausibly linked to state, and in extraordinary circumstances to non-state actors. This paper on political violent conflicts and their prevention extends existing works of other scholars by analyzing the implications for both state and non-state conflicts. The core argument was that the international architecture for prevention of political violent conflicts which is an inherently political process, must center on bolstering the structures, processes and capacities of states to eliminate political violent conflicts for building and sustaining peace.

The moderating influence of the international community's authorized organizations is important, as most countries in the world grapple with political violent conflicts. But influential scholars (Walter & Synder 1999; Prunier 2008; Gourevitch 1998 cited in Danziger 2012) opine that the global community has failed to thwart genocides, and has not been particularly effective in either preventing the outbreak of or resolving civil wars in the past in Bosnia, Cambodia, Somalia, and Rwanda and at present in Syria. A key implication of my findings is increasing the understanding of both the types of political violence and the preventive tools to combat them, is critical for internal state actors as well as external actors

and intergovernmental bodies, such as UN, EU and African Union, as they carry out initiatives to support nationally driven processes for peace.

The conclusion we draw is that inherently no state is able to manage alone the complexity of governance, and there is an automatic link between states and political violence. Thus, occasional outbreaks of political violent conflicts are inevitable. Our evidence helps to clarify the consequences that can be anticipated and what preventive tools could be deployed. In the techno-digital era, committing violence through deadly mechanisms are more well-organized, potent, and horrifying than at any time in human history (Danziger 2012: 352). Thus, in understanding the various forms of political violence, the appropriate use of international preventive tools to prevent or resolve such violent conflicts; and the balance between shunning violence and the quest for peace are more pressing now than at any time in recorded human history.

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