REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?

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The Impact of Identity Politics on the Monopoly on the Use of Force

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Identity politics has filled the vacuum created by the demise of ideological contenders for universal allegiance at the end of the twentieth century. It constitutes the driving force behind fragmentation—a major trend in the international arena and a counterpoint to growing interdependence. Although opposing trends, both identity politics and interdependence are enabled and magnified by technological advancement. And both challenge an international order based on viable states with the requisite monopoly on the use of force.

In order to examine the impact of identity politics on the monopoly on the use of force, this essay begins with a discussion of identity politics itself. What is it? What does it mean? Second, what are its implications for the nation-state? By extension, what impact does identity politics have on order and predictability in the political arena and the broader international environment? Finally, what policy recommendations emerge from consideration of these questions?

WHAT IS IDENTITY POLITICS?

Identities themselves are multi-layered and exist at all levels of society, ranging from the individual, through organizations, regions, and the state, to international formations. Multiple identities co-exist at each level and the salience of any particular identity ebbs and flows depending upon the circumstances.

Among the many identities present at each level, ethnic and/or religious identities have become more prominent in the wake of the Cold War. Always present, they were subordinated to varying degrees to the ideological competition between communism and capitalism for universal support during the Cold War.

Such ideologies are no longer important agents of political recruitment or mobilization in many parts of the world.[1] Disenchantment with both communism and capitalism toward the end of the 20th century created a political vacuum. The implosion of the Soviet Union and associated countries in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe,

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1 Parts of Latin America are an important exception.

SUMMARY

• Identity politics mobilized along ethnic and/or religious lines has filled the vacuum created by the demise of ideological contenders for universal allegiance at the end of the twentieth century. It constitutes the driving force behind fragmentation and undermines the nation-state as the organizing unit of international relations.

• The unraveling of the nation-state and its monopoly on the use of force has dire consequences for order and predictability upon which security, stability, development and prosperity have been based.

• A healthy response requires strengthening the capacity of governments and societies to negotiate effective and legitimate solutions to existing problems and disagreements among them.

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accompanied by the rapid demise of the global Cold War security architecture, gave way to enormous uncertainty and fluidity both within and between countries. Alliances, institutions, rules and predictability quickly disappeared well beyond the states directly affected and uncertainty concerning their continuing purpose confronted those that remained. In the sudden absence of established rules and norms, political entrepreneurs sought alternatives to the ideologies which had provided political, economic and social frameworks since the late 1940s. Some were operatives in former regimes who hastened to reinvent themselves. Others were new. In either case, they seized upon ethnic and/or religious identities to recruit supporters. Why? Those identities are easy to invoke in times of uncertainty. Belonging to one group or another is self-evident; no complicated analysis or appeals are necessary. Real or imagined grievances are readily available to reconfigure political alignments. And that is exactly what many politicians as well as insurgents have done.

THE FATE OF THE NATION-STATE

The concept of nationalism gained currency in the mid-nineteenth century in conjunction with the »spring time of nations.« The allegiance to »nation« was critical in the geo-strategic power struggles from the 1850s at least until the Cold War. The nation-state, a term first used in 1918 in conjunction with the break-up of European empires and the concept of self-determination, was a natural extension. It is defined as a form of political organization in which a relatively homogeneous people inhabit a sovereign state. Homogeneity is linked to a common history, traditions or language, not necessarily to ethnicity or religion. This provided the opportunity for a politically ascendant group to construct a shared history, traditions and language through the use of the printing press, education, and other socialization measures. Benedict Anderson explored these processes in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*.[2] Thus, the concept of the nation-state became a means to bring disparate peoples and regions together under one government. A new identity was born, often a potent one which was added to the multiple identities that citizens in a given territory already possessed.

The current trend toward fragmentation along ethnic and/or religious lines undermines the nation-state as the organizing unit of international relations. The dominance of ethnic and/or religious identities creates political communities around exclusionary principles that are not negotiable. As a result, an increasingly

2 Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

popular means for an aggrieved group to redress injustices is to establish and govern its own political space. The practical implications of this trend are evident in the break-up of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Sudan. Separatist movements in Spain, the Philippines, Yemen, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and Mali are emblematic of this appeal.

International actors often reinforce the trend. The Dayton Accords which structured the post-war settlement in Bosnia and the Ohrid Agreement designed to prevent major conflict in Macedonia are two examples. U.S.-led international interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq also exacerbated sectoral cleavages which may ultimately undermine those states.

Contemporary media are culpable as well. Many journalists lack more than superficial knowledge of the countries on which they report. Combined with the pressure to produce dramatic stories for the 24 hour news cycle, they seize on easy explanations that can be personalized through interviews with locals. Political and conflict entrepreneurs are only too happy to provide such explanations for journalists, which they, in turn, can cite to justify their own actions as noble efforts to redress long-standing grievances. Facile explanations of contemporary conflicts as the result of age-old ethnic and/or religious tensions have become the norm. The entire enterprise becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In the meantime, more nuanced analysis by experts which often points to cross-cutting interests and groupings that could negotiate acceptable solutions if given sufficient time and attention, gets lost in the pressure for ratings.

Unfiltered social media add additional fuel to the fire. Growing economic disparities, daily stories of violence, suffering and injustice provide fertile ground for despair. Urbanization, the break-down of social structures, and economic and social marginalization contribute to individual alienation and vulnerability. No unifying noble cause has emerged to counter these developments. Social media provide a ready medium for political and conflict entrepreneurs to spread lies or distort events—past and current—to recruit followers based on grievances and hatred. The current primacy of identity politics drives a dynamic of never-ending fragmentation.

IMPACT ON THE MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE

The monopoly on the use of force is unraveling in parallel with the nation-state. State security institutions are not trusted by aggrieved communities who create their own militias to provide protection and to combat state institutions. Security becomes privatized—aligned with a specific ethnic or religious community. The result is an increase in insecurity for all because no political entity is homogeneous. When security is linked to a specific ethnicity or religion, it becomes a zero-sum game. In a nation-state, security as a collective good is at least a possibility, however imperfectly practiced. The demise of nation-states has led to mass movements of populations: some aspire to form ethnically »pure« territories as we saw in the Balkans; others seek safety from ethnic or religiously mobilized conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. The attendant crumbling of the monopoly on the use of force in major parts of the globe reverberates far beyond specific countries or regions thanks to globalization. And there is no end to fragmentation in sight.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORDER AND PREDICTABILITY

The unraveling of the nation-state and its monopoly on the use of force has dire consequences for order and predictability upon which security, stability, development and prosperity have been based. A profusion of micro-states based on a specific ethnicity or religious sect is not a feasible alternative for a new international order. Therefore, political entities will never be »pure.« Given that reality, continued prominence of identity politics grounded in ethnicity and/or religion portends unending instability. Political Instability Task Force reports have examined all cases of instability since 1955 and controlled for every possible variable—from poverty, religious and or ethnic divisions, to class and geographic divisions. The findings of these exhaustive empirical studies identified fractionalized politics as one of three major factors producing instability. What is fractionalized politics? It is a system in which access to political power, wealth, education, government jobs, etc. is based on ethnicity, religion or region. The arrangements institutionalize the primacy of ethnic, religious or regional identities and reinforce political, economic and social cleavages. In sum, one's opportunities or limitations are pre-programmed based on where one is born and to whom. The Dayton Accords and the Ohrid Agreement institutionalized fractionalized politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia. Political parties in both countries are organized along ethnic/ religious lines; power sharing arrangements are based on the same. Government jobs are apportioned accordingly and institutions of higher education have been created for distinct ethnic/religious communities. Other professions have become linked to ethnicity and/or religion. Neighborhoods are no longer mixed; marriage outside one's faith or ethnicity has become rare because the pressures to conform are so great. The agreements did end or prevent conflict but the sustainability of these arrangements is doubtful. Dissatisfaction about special privileges for some and neglect of others has been bubbling among all groups in both states for several years.

A healthy polity that manages conflict and supports change rests on cross-cutting cleavages which bring people from many parts of society together at different times for different purposes. Education, work, sport and leisure, civic activities and the arts are venues in which people may engage based on interest or profession; not primarily ethnicity or religion. Upward mobility through education is open to all. In sharp contrast, fractionalized politics structure citizens' lives around immutable differences such as ethnicity and/ or religion. This produces a brittle polity, crippled by rigidities. If fractionalized politics become the new norm, instability and conflict will dominate for the foreseeable future.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGITIMATE AND EFFECTIVE STATE MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE

Identity politics is undercutting the legitimate and effective state monopoly on the use of force. In order to counter its dominance:

- Country and regional experts are sorely needed in the media to analyze and explain the sources of discontent and conflict accurately.
- More country and regional experts are required in the governments that aid fragile and conflict affected states to provide accurate and nuanced analysis upon which concrete assistance should be based. Donors should prioritize support to civic organizations and professions that cut across communities in such states. They provide sources of resilience to counter conflict entrepreneurs who exacerbate divisions.
- Government and academic experts should actively counter the popular narrative of age-old ethnic and religious conflict with solid research and empirical evidence.
- External interveners should not succumb to short-term solutions like the Dayton Accords or Ohrid

Agreement which entrench fractionalized politics and sow the seeds for future instability.

Identity politics in one form or another has always been with us. After all, politics is all about contesting priorities and allocations of resources among groups with competing interests. The chief concern is how ethnic and religious identities are being used today to foment conflict and fragmentation. The tendency is particularly pronounced and worrisome in fragile states; however, it is certainly not absent in developed and apparently stable states.

The antidote to the current trend is not to revive virulent nationalism or chauvinism which has been the source of unprecedented violence in the past. Rather, a healthy response would strengthen the capacity of governments to negotiate effective and legitimate solutions to existing problems and disagreements among citizens. Governments able to do this are not only in a position to establish or maintain a constructive and welcome monopoly on the use of force domestically, but also will be better placed to negotiate acceptable solutions to disagreements and conflicts with other states. In both domains, identity politics must be reconfigured to bolster cross-cutting identities that support social cohesion rather than reinforcing ethnic and/or religious cleavages whose exclusivity nourishes fragmentation and conflict.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ann L. Phillips is a Senior Advisor to the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peace-building at the US Institute of Peace. She has worked on security issues for more than 30 years as both an academic and practitioner. Fragile states and conflict management have been the focus of her work for the past decade.

REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE

The Reflection Group »Monopoly on the use of force 2.0?« is a global dialogue initiative to raise awareness and discuss policy options for the concept of the monopoly for the use of force. Far from being a merely academic concern, this concept, at least theoretically and legally remains at the heart of the current international security order. However it is faced with a variety of grave challenges and hardly seems to reflect realities on the ground in various regions around the globe anymore. For more information about the work of the reflection group and its members please visit: http://www.fes.de/GPol/en/security_policy.htm

THINK PIECES OF THE »REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?«

The Think Pieces serve a dual purpose: On the one hand they provide points of reference for the deliberations of the reflection group and feed into the final report of the group in 2016. On the other hand they are made available publicly to provide interested scholars, politicians and practitioners with an insight into the different positions and debates of the group and provide food for thought for related discussions and initiatives worldwide. In this sense, they reflect how the group and selected additional experts »think« about the topic and hopefully stimulate further engagement with it.

The Think Pieces are not required to fulfill strict academic requirements and are not thematically peer-reviewed by FES. To the contrary they shall provide an unfiltered insight into the respective author's arguments and thoughts. Accordingly, the authors are free to further develop their arguments and publish academic articles based on these arguments or containing elements of them in academic journals, edited volumes or other formats.

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