
Civil War

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What is Civil War?

James Fearon of Stanford University defines civil war as “a violent conflict within a country fought by organised groups that aim to take power at the centre or in a region or to change government policies”. Ann Hironaka further clarifies that “on one side of a civil war, is the state”. It could also be explained as a war between groups to take control of a nation or region or to even force the government to change its policies. Civil wars can have a high degree of two-sided violence between government forces and opposing groups. They normally result in heavy casualties and require a large amount of resources. Massacre of civilians by the state, or a riot, is not a civil war. Further, amplification of the definition is based on the number of war casualties occurring, which range from 100 to 1,000. As per the data given by the Correlates of War (which carries out an academic study of the history of warfare), civil wars are classified as having over 1,000 war-related casualties per year of conflict. However, these figures are not realistic considering the millions killed in the Cambodian and Sudanese civil wars. On the other hand, the casualty figures in Northern Ireland are much less. Since 1945, civil wars have resulted in the death of over 25 million people as well as the forced displacement of many more.

UN and the Civil War

Until 1949, the Geneva Conventions were designed to assist only the victims of wars between nations, thus, the principle of respect for a human being was applicable solely to military personnel. Subsequently, a definition emerged to describe the criteria for acts qualifying as “armed conflict not of an international character”, which included civil wars subject to the following conditions:

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- The party in revolt must be in possession of a part of the national territory.
- The insurgent civil authority must exercise de facto authority over the population within the determinate portion of the national territory.
- The insurgents must have some amount of recognition as belligerents.
- The legal government is “obliged to have recourse to the regular military forces against insurgents organised as military.”

The UN has, thus, a difficult task in classifying and intervening in a civil war, as seen from the examples of Sri Lanka and Sudan.

Historical Background

Civil wars through the 19th to the early 20th century were fought for the control of the state capital as it represented the seat of power. Thus, whoever had control over the state capital and the military could crush any revolt. If any rebellion failed to seize the state capital and the military, it was doomed to defeat. Civil wars during this era also tended to be short. For example, the fighting associated with the 1871 Paris Commune occurred almost entirely in Paris and ended quickly once the military sided with the government. The Commune was the result of an uprising after France was defeated in the Franco-Prussian War and the growing discontent among French workers. The Paris Commune was a government that briefly ruled Paris, from March 28 to May 28, 1871, but it came to a tortured end due to the way it was formed and its controversial decrees. The evolution of democracy also led to a clash with the established monarchies, resulting in civil war in many countries.

The Congress of Vienna (1815) defined the Great Powers to include the United Kingdom, Habsburg Austria, Prussia, France and Russia. These were powerful countries that would intervene in civil wars in other countries with force in support of existing governments. There were some exceptions to the short duration of civil wars like the American Civil War which lasted for four years (1861-65) and the Spanish Civil War which lasted for three years (1936-39).

The frequency of civil wars in the 1990s increased about ten times as compared to the 19th century and the duration also increased appreciably. The reasons for this could be attributed to the formation of an increased number of states, the weak profile of some of the newly formed states, reduction in wars among nations and the effect of the Cold War era. Post World War II, the number of ex-colonial states increased from about 30 to almost 120. The new states followed the format of governance of the country they were liberated

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from, with a centralised government, well defined borders and guarantee of fundamental rights of citizens, but the state was not strong enough to sustain such a form of governance, resulting in civil war. The development of strong administrative institutions was necessary to implement the dictum of the state's Constitution which was sadly missing in some of the new states. Charles Tilly's famous statement, "War made the state and the state made war" seemed to be coming true. Some European countries like the UK prepared India and Sri Lanka by giving them limited self-rule before granting them independence. But all decisions regarding the French colonies were taken in Paris, and Belgium

had forbidden any self-rule, but suddenly granted freedom to its colonies. Inefficient bureaucracies were also corrupt and full of nepotism. Some of these countries were also poor, lacked territorial integration and a sound economic base, leading to more poverty, factionalism and the sowing of the seeds of a civil war. Historically, the stronger nations have used force on weaker nations to expand their territory, but after World War II, the norms changed. Now the stronger nations, along with the United Nations, supported the weaker nations to maintain their sovereignty. This support was also formalised under the umbrella of international law. The protection given to the sovereignty of weaker nations, coupled with economic support, had the indirect effect of encouraging civil war in many cases.

International Intervention

Intervention in other countries' affairs, to promote self-interest, has been prevalent since nation-states came into being but its nature has changed manifold. Even after the establishment of the international system, intervention continues in some form or the other. It became common for one country to support the existing government, while another supported the opposition. This also resulted in the civil war being prolonged due to foreign aid. The strife in Sri Lanka is one recent example where it got prolonged due to foreign support. Powerful European nations had no qualms in intervening in civil wars to preserve self-interest or maintain hegemony.

Civil War and Monroe Doctrine

The US announced the Monroe Doctrine in 1821 to control Central America. The doctrine was named after US President James Monroe who enunciated two principles that by the 1850s formed the basis of the Monroe Doctrine. The first stipulated that the “American Continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonisation by any European Power.” The second embodied Monroe’s support for the newly independent Latin American republics by stating that the American and European political systems were “essentially different,” and that the US would consider efforts by European nations “to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.” For most of the 19th century, the Monroe Doctrine was ignored by the European nations but in the last quarter of the 19th century, the US began to invoke the Monroe Doctrine more strictly. Secretary of State Richard Olney formulated the first major corollary to the Monroe Doctrine by asserting that “the US is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.” The US took over the management of the finances of the Dominican Republic (in 1907), of Nicaragua (in 1911), and, in 1915, it actually occupied the republic of Haiti.

Civil War and Cold War

During the Cold War (1945-89), civil wars got added impetus due to the support provided for material and ideology on a global basis. They were mainly fought in ex-colonial weak states rather than the relatively stronger states that were aligned with the Warsaw Pact and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Some examples of prolonged Cold War-associated civil conflicts include the wars of Guatemala (1960-96), El Salvador (1979-91), Nicaragua (1970-90) and Peru (1980-2000).

High levels of population dispersion and, to a lesser extent, the presence of mountainous and jungle terrain increase the chance of conflict. Both these factors favour rebels, as population dispersed outward toward the borders is harder to control than one concentrated in a central region while mountains/jungles provide sanctuary, where smaller forces can resist larger forces. It also precludes sustained air effort by the government forces and harsh weather helps the rebel groups.

Examples of Civil Wars

The Servile Wars

The Servile Wars (also called the War of Spartacus), between 73 and 71 BC, comprise an early example of civil war. During the third Servile War, a band of escaped gladiator slaves who had grown in strength from 70 to over 120,000 men, women and children, rebelled. As it directly threatened the Roman heartland of Italia, the rebellion was finally crushed through the concentrated military effort of Marcus Licinius Crassus, although it continued to have indirect effects on Roman politics for years to come.

Wars of the Roses

The Wars of the Roses comprised a series of civil wars between supporters of the rival Houses of Lancaster and York, for the throne of England. They are generally accepted to have been fought intermittently between 1455 and 1487. The war ended with the victory of the Lancastrian Henry Tudor, who founded the House of Tudor which subsequently ruled England and Wales for 116 years. The name “Wars of the Roses” has its origins in the badges associated with the two royal Houses, the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster. The term came into common use in the 19th century, after the publication of *Anne of Geierstein* by Sir Walter Scott.

Chinese Civil War

The Chinese civil war was fought between the Kuomintang (KMT or Chinese Nationalist Party) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) from April 1927 to 1950 due to ideological differences between the Western-supported Nationalist KMT and the Soviet-supported Communist CPC. It was carried out spasmodically until the Second Sino-Japanese War when Japan, trying to exploit the internal turmoil, attacked and occupied eastern China. The CPC and KMT then stopped their conflict and formed a joint front to counter the Japanese. Japan was defeated in 1945 which also marked the end of World War II. The CPC and KMT then resumed their conflict in 1946 which ended in 1950 with the newly founded People's Republic of China controlling mainland China and the Republic of China's (RoC's) jurisdiction being extended to Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu and several outlying Fujianese islands. As no peace treaty was signed indicating the end of the civil war, there is still controversy as to its legal ending.

Spanish Civil War

The 19th century was turbulent for Spain and it experienced many civil wars and revolts carried out as a power struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. The Spanish Constitution of 1812 sought to abolish the absolutist monarchy of the old regime and to establish a liberal state. Such ideological struggles spilled over to the Spanish Civil War which was fought from July 17, 1936, to April 1, 1939. It began after an attempted coup against the government of the Second Spanish Republic by a group of Spanish Army generals, supported by the conservative Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas, Carlist groups and the fascistic Falange Española de las. The war ended with the overthrow of the Republican government and the founding of a dictatorship led by Gen. Francisco Franco.

Lebanese Civil War

There is no consensus on what triggered the Lebanese Civil War, however, it can be traced to the conflicts and political compromises reached after the end of Lebanon's administration by the Ottoman Empire. The establishment of the state of Israel and the relocation of a hundred thousand Palestinian refugees to Lebanon changed its demography, resulting in Lebanon's involvement in regional conflicts. The involvement of Syria, Israel, America and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) added fuel to the fire, erupting in the civil war starting in 1975 and ending in 1990. The 1980s were especially violent as the Lebanese Christian militia carried out massacres, the Syrian Army shelled Christian neighbourhoods in 1978 and 1981 and the Israeli invasion that evicted the PLO from the country, resulting in most of Beirut lying in ruins. It resulted in an estimated 130,000 to 250,000 civilian fatalities and about one million wounded.

American Civil War

In the presidential election of 1860, the Republican Party, led by Abraham Lincoln, had campaigned against the expansion of slavery beyond the states in which it already existed. The Republican victory in that election resulted in seven southern states declaring their secession from the Union even before Lincoln took office, which was rejected. Later on, four more southern states declared their secession. These eleven southern slave states then formed the Confederate States of America led by Jefferson Davis, fought against the US federal government which was supported by all the free states and the five border slave states in the north. The American Civil War which lasted from 1861-65, was the bloodiest war

in US history, resulting in the death of 620,000 soldiers and an undetermined number of civilian casualties. It resulted in the end of slavery, restoration of the Union and strengthening of the role of the federal government. The social, political, economic and racial issues of the war decisively shaped the destiny of the country and made it a superpower.

Sri Lankan Civil War

The origin of the Sri Lankan conflict can be traced back to the time of British rule when the Sinhalese started a political movement to gain independence which was eventually granted in 1948. However, soon after, differences between Sinhalese and Tamilians came up while drafting the first post independence Constitution. Way back in 1936, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party demanded the replacement of English as the official language by Sinhala and Tamil. However, in 1944, J R Jayawardene moved in the State Council that Sinhala should replace English as the official language. In 1956, Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike's passage of the "Sinhala Only Act" led to ethnic riots. The recent civil war is a direct result of this conflict. The idea of a separate Tamil state of 'Tamil Eelam' began to germinate in 1963. The Federal Party's offshoot, the Tamil United Front changed its name to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and adopted a demand for an independent state. During the late 1960s, several Tamil youth, among them Velupillai Prabhakaran, became involved in these activities and formed the Tamil New Tigers(TNT) in 1972 which adopted the emblem of the tiger from the Chola Empire. Meanwhile, the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students was formed in the UK, which became the backbone of the Eelamist movement in the Diaspora and later on, it was taken over by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The TULF supported the armed actions of the young militants of the TNT who were dubbed "our boys." Following the sweeping electoral victory of the United National Party in July 1977, the TULF became the leading opposition party with the manifesto of secession from Sri Lanka. In August 1977, J R Jayawardene's party followed its attack on the left with a well organised pogrom against the Tamils living in majority Sinhalese areas. Politicised Tamil youth in the north and the east started to form militant groups. The most prominent of these groups was the TNT, which changed its name to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or the LTTE in 1976. The LTTE initially carried out a campaign of violence against the state, particularly targeting policemen and also moderate Tamil politicians who attempted a dialogue with the government. Their first major operation was the

assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappah in 1975 by Prabhakaran. However, until the pogroms of 1977 gave it impetus, the LTTE was able to achieve little more. In July 1983, the LTTE launched a deadly attack on the military in the north, killing 13 soldiers. Jayawardene retaliated with well organized massacres and pogroms in Colombo and at other places, resulting in the killing of a large number of Tamils. This is usually considered the beginning of the civil war. For over 25 years, the insurgency caused significant hardships for the population, the environment and the economy of the country, with over 80,000 people officially listed as killed during its course. The tactics employed by the LTTE invited a ban from 32 countries, including the US, India, Australia, Canada and some nations of the European Union.

After two decades of fighting and three failed attempts at peace talks, including the unsuccessful deployment of the Indian Army as a peacekeeping force from 1987 to 1990, a lasting negotiated settlement to the conflict appeared possible when a ceasefire was declared in December 2001, and a ceasefire agreement was signed with international mediation in 2002. However, there was frequent breach of the ceasefire agreement by the LTTE. As a result, the government formally announced its withdrawal from the ceasefire agreement on January 2, 2008, alleging that the LTTE had violated the agreement over 10,000 times. Since then, the government squeezed the international funding and destroyed the vessels carrying arms to the LTTE. The LTTE finally surrendered on May 17, 2009, after a 30-month-long military campaign. Velupillai Prabhakaran was killed in the morning of May 18, 2009.

India got involved mainly due to having a large Tamil population and also the desire to project itself as a regional power. On June 5, 1987, the Indian Air Force dropped food parcels to Jaffna while it was under siege by the Sri Lankan forces. At a time when the Sri Lankan government stated they were close to defeating the LTTE, India dropped 25 tons of food and medicine by parachute into areas held by the LTTE in a direct move of support toward the rebels. Negotiations were held, and the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord was signed on July 29, 1987, by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Jayewardene. Under this accord, the Sri Lankan government made a number of concessions to the Tamilians, including devolution of power to the provinces, a merger—subject to a later referendum—of the Northern and the Eastern provinces into a single province, and official status for the Tamil language (this was enacted as the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka). India agreed to establish order in the north and east through a force called the Indian Peacekeeping Force

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(IPKF), and to cease assisting the Tamil insurgents. Militant groups, including the LTTE, although initially reluctant, agreed to surrender their arms to the IPKF, which initially oversaw a ceasefire and a modest disarmament of the militant groups.

The arrival of the IPKF to take over control of most areas in the north of the country enabled the Sri Lanka government to shift its forces to the south to quell the protests. This led to an uprising by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in the south, which was put down ruthlessly over the next two years. The IPKF was forced to withdraw from Sri Lanka due to opposition from both sides of the conflict. The 32-month presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka resulted in the death of 1,100 Indian soldiers and over 5,000 Sri Lankans.

Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination Support for the LTTE in India dropped considerably in 1991 after the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a suicide bomber, Thenmuli Rajaratnam. The Indian press subsequently reported that Prabhakaran decided to eliminate Gandhi as he considered Gandhi to be against the Tamil liberation struggle and feared that he might reinduct the IPKF, which Prabhakaran termed the "satanic force", if Rajiv won the 1991 Indian elections.

Conclusion

A review of the causes of civil war brings out the fact that it is an armed struggle between the 'haves and the have nots.' The principle involved in the struggle may be ideological, economic, ethnic, religion, etc. The definition of civil war is also difficult to formulate in precise terms which would convey the same meaning to all as it will always be a matter of perspective. That is why the UN has not been effectively interfering in Sri Lanka or Darfur but has highlighted the aspect of humanitarian suffering. Closer home, it would be difficult to define the military action of the Pakistan armed forces in Swat or that matter the police action against left wing extremism in Bengal.