

The "Third World" War

The Third World War has already begun." With that provocative statement, a geography professor recently offered a fresh and challenging analysis of what he believes is behind the approximately 120 "little" wars that are now being fought in the world. The author, Professor Bernard Nietschmann of the University of California at Berkeley, writing in the Fall 1987 *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, shows that the emergence of the Earth from intensive care for the immediate hazard of global nuclear war is no reason for complacency. We have a long way to go in learning the causes and cures of violence, and his analysis is a good start.

What Professor Nietschmann calls the Third World War is a combination of wars being fought between many of the 168 officially recognized countries he defines as "states" (centralized political systems) and the 3,000 to 5,000 communities of indigenous people within those states, which he defines as "nations." Most of the states involved are part of what is now recognized as the Third World (nonaligned, undeveloped). The nations under the official authority of those states are what the professor calls the "Fourth" World.

According to Nietschmann, a nation is a community which sees itself as one people on the basis of common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology, language, territory, and (often) religion. Some are small in population and area, but others are huge—such as the 5 million-strong Kawthooli (Karen)

One night one-third of the Miskito Indian nation went to bed "Nicaraguan" and woke up "Honduran."

nations within Burma, which is larger than 48 percent of the members of the U.N., and the even larger Oromo nation of 20 million in Ethiopia. Several large nations are artificially divided among a number of states. Kurds, for example live in Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the U.S.S.R. And the artificiality of the divisions is shown by a 1960

World Court decision that caused one-third of the Miskito Indian nation to go to bed Nicaraguan and wake up Honduran. Altogether, the Fourth World comprises about one-third of the world's population and occupies about half its land area.

Nietschmann's Glossary

In his article on the Third World War, Professor Bernard Nietschmann uses some terms in a manner different from common usage.

"State"	A centralized, officially recognized political system.
"Nation"	A community which sees itself as one people based on common ancestry, history, society, institutions, ideology, language, territory, and religion.
"Third World"	The largely undeveloped, non-aligned countries which do not belong to either the First (Western, democratic) or Second (communist) World.
"Fourth World"	The many hundreds of nations under the official authority of (mostly Third World) states.

Ninety-five percent of "states" are multinational (composed of more than one nation), one of the best examples being Indonesia, which includes 740,000 square miles, 13,700 islands and 300 nations. Many nations do not identify with the state within which they have been placed, and want to preserve at least a limited autonomy. But unfortunately many states, often former colonies which fought for their own right of self-determination, deny that same right to the nations they govern. They therefore invade and take over the nations' territories, while using such euphemisms as "nation building" or "economic development."

A good example is the development of the Amazon basin. Until recently, Brazil has considered this area undeveloped and has encouraged clear-cutting for large cattle ranches. As a result, rain-

forests are rapidly being destroyed and huge amounts of carbonic gases—500 million tons last year alone—are released into the atmosphere. Less noticed, however, is that, in addition to destroying the forest, the state is eliminating the culture of local "nations" of Indians who depend on the forest. Some of those nations had developed a thriving economy tapping and selling rubber in harmony with the rainforest. And while the destruction of their culture may not even be described as a war, the recent murder by the son of a cattle rancher of Francisco "Chico" Mendes, Jr., the internationally known Indian leader of the 30,000-strong rubber tappers union, highlights the violence that underlies the development program.

When nations oppose such invasions, the resulting conflict all too often leads to open war. Nietschmann estimates that 98 percent of the 120 current wars are in the Third World, and 75 percent are between Third World states and Fourth World nations. And at least until recently, the superpowers have taken and switched sides in these wars solely as tactics in the general East-West conflict, with little or no regard for the rights and aspirations of the peoples involved.

One of the states' most potent weapons against nations

has been to mislabel them in an effort to deny them identity and international support. Instead of referring to the nations by their true names, they call them "rebels," "separatists," "extremists," "dissidents," "insurgents," or even "terrorists." Because of general ignorance about nations, the tactic has been all too successful. How many of us, for example, know that the term "Ethiopian rebels" includes the Oromo nation? And while we are now generally aware that the Guatemalan government has killed many thousands in a successful "counterinsurgency" campaign, how many of us identify its victims as the Mayan nations?

Since nations are usually weaker than states militarily, the nations are limited to guerrilla-type resistance, and the tactics developed by the states to suppress that resistance are brutal and often deliberately directed at the civilian population. Given the deceptively benign title of counterinsurgency, these tactics include arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, and torture to intimidate opposition, control of subsistence and medicine to make the people dependent on the occupation regime, and destruction of villages and forced relocations to state camps to deprive guerrilla forces of information, shelter, recruits, and food—a process colorfully described as "draining the sea and stranding the fish." What the U.S. referred to in Vietnam as strategic hamlets, Guatemala calls model villages and Nicaragua calls resettlement camps. Whatever the name, the result is inhumane.

Professor Nietschmann calls this kind of activity genocide, and estimates that the Third World War has already produced 5 million casualties and as many as 25 million refugees, equal to the entire population of Canada. Many of the refugees do not receive international recognition and assistance for various reasons, among them that they have not in some cases crossed international boundaries, as is the case with 90 percent of the Guatemalan refugees.

So far, the Third World War has not been subject to clear international standards of warfare and treatment of

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prisoners and civilians. The massive killing in World War II led to the adoption in 1949 of the Geneva Conventions for the Protection of Victims of War in an effort to "civilize" the conduct of war between states. Until recently, however, armed conflict within a state has been treated as a domestic concern and therefore not subject to the Geneva Conventions. In 1977, international support for Palestinian and Namibian rebels led to the convening of a U.N. conference which adopted Protocols I and II to the Conventions, which attempt to deal with domestic conflicts.

Only 40 nations have adopted the protocols, and neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. has done so. The reason given by the U.S. is that the protocols would "give recognition and protection to terrorist groups." According to Professor Nietschmann, nonadoption means that, by state definition,



Preserving Culture?

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Artwork: National Art School, Papua, New Guinea

"state" combatants in the Third World War conduct such traditionally justified activities as counterinsurgency and are protected by the Geneva Conventions, but "nation" combatants conduct only terrorism and have no protection

The professor's recommended solution to the Third World War is the negotiation of reasonable autonomy for nations within states. He cites several successful examples, including the Catalan nation under Spain and Lalaallit Nunaat (Inuit-controlled Greenland) under Denmark, as well as a number of others under negotiation. While the negotiations for such autonomy will undoubtedly be difficult and complex, the alternative of continued violence is infinitely worse, as shown by the brutality of the suppression in places like Guatemala and the Israeli-occupied territories. Yet despite this harsh reality, the world will not choose the autonomy alternative until the people of the world acknowledge the Third World War and the existence and legitimacy of nations as well as states, and demand that their leaders do the same.

—Walt Hays

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