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Contesting Ideas on Peace (A Report & Some Reflections)

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Biswajit Roy

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Introduction

Conflict in the Contemporary World

Inter-state conflicts dominated the world for the better part of the twentieth century with the rivalry of two superpower blocs threatening nuclear doomsday in its second half. By contrast, the post-Cold War scenario has been witnessing a growing number of intra-state conflicts which has led to the crumbling of many nation-state and supra-national entities and continued bleeding of others till date. Since then, wars have been replaced by civil wars at varying levels in new theatres across the globe exposing the inability of the concerned nation-states to cope with new conflicts in conventional ways. The United States of America and Western Europe celebrated the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the German reunification and the Velvet Revolution in Prague as well as the not-so cushy revolutions in other former Warsaw Pact countries in Eastern Europe. But the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia ignited a cycle of civil wars in the Balkans, which forced Europeans to revisit the worst war crimes and crimes against humanity since the World War II. The flames of hatred that consumed millions of South Slavs and people of ancient Illyrian origins have been doused, hopefully for good. But the embers are still glowing. Will the latest cartographic jigsaw puzzle and pigeonholing of ethnic groups end war in the Balkans for good? Or, is this an endless journey from one dystopia to another, rather a daily dystopia?

Meanwhile, divided Cyprus continues to be a festering wound on the body politic of the European Union that had begun its journey with Jean Monet's post-war dream of war-free Europe. How to iron out this blot?

The ongoing Ukrainian conflict underscores the unfinished agenda of the Cold War. Many families of mixed origins in Ukraine, despite accumulated misgivings and mistrusts among communities, now find their lives shattered by ethno-religious bigots and standard-bearers of big power politics. Ukrainians have become useful for the US-EU axis. On the other hand, Russia's residual military-industrial power and its own energy resources, particularly natural gas that meets up a good part of Western demands have given it a strong economic leverage vis-à-vis the rival transatlantic axis. The clash of hegemonic ambitions between the two sides over the control of

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Ukraine's energy sector and the oil and gas reserve in the vast Eurasian zone between Caspian Sea and Black Sea is a key economic factor behind the current face-off. The US-EU instigations behind the ouster of pro-Moscow president from Kiev and Putin's retaliation to it by stage-managing Crimean referendum for inclusion in Russia only reveals the unfinished agenda of cold war. At the other end of the former Soviet sphere in Eurasia and Central Asia, some comrades-turned-enemies have engaged each other in competitive cross-border and internal wars. The demons of ethnocentrism, tribalism, xenophobia, jingoism, religious fanaticism and sectarianism have been unleashed in these conflict zones with far-reaching impact on other parts of the world.

With 9/11, we saw the rise of the Frankenstein's monster that was born out of Cold War exigencies and marriage of conveniences between the US-Saudi-Pakistani axis and fanatic Islamists. As Osama bin Laden and his comrades graduated from Afghan Mujahedeens to global Jihadis, the Al Qaeda network lashed out at its erstwhile mentors and benefactors. The retaliatory US 'War on Terror' has triggered a paradigm shift in conflicts around the globe. Jihadi Islam or Islamic fundamentalism has replaced communism as the number-one enemy of the 'free world'.

The Global South

South Asia

The post-colonial nation-states in global south like India had gone through less convulsive phases of nation-building, mostly under the guidance of Western-educated, cosmopolitan and liberal elites of the freedom-struggle generation or their inheritors. Now most of these states are rocked by tectonic shifts, with mutually hostile ethnic, religious and other identities erupting through the fault-lines of straitjacket nationalism. The corrupt, criminalized and sectarian political class and their subservient police and bureaucracy have only added to public alienation and demoralization. Things have started falling apart again.

New conflicts have been born or the old fissures have widened in South and Southeast Asia. Divided Kashmir continues to be the flashpoint between India and Pakistan even after four wars. Indian Kashmir is always in anti-India ferment. Full-scale civil war ended in army-led genocides of ethnic minority civilians in Sri Lanka. The bloody contest between the forces of secular and religious nationalisms, between collaborators of marauding Pakistani army and their victims during 1971 Liberation War is still raging in Bangladesh. Sectarian carnages are ripping apart Pakistan.

Tentative democracies in Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar and Maldives are suffering from grave tensions among major stakeholders including army, judiciary and mainstream political parties. Continued logjam over power-sharing can push back these polities into larger conflicts, given the strength gathered by centrifugal forces including the regionalist and ethnic movements seeking political freedom that ranges from internal autonomy to independence as well as armed insurgencies. How to get out of these messes?

West Asia

In West Asia, a queer mixture of Arab nationalism and modernism married to Soviet-style socialism on the one hand and Islamic traditionalism and anti-Zionism on the other, held sway for long in the form of Nasserite or Bathist parties against the extremist ends of all these trends. The perpetual

Palestinian wound continued to be the common denominator of all anger and angst on Arab streets and the cementing factor within the artificial borders carved out by colonial knives.

West-wary rulers, cosmopolitan but corrupt, authoritarian, and repressive, managed to gag all dissent in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. West-supported, archconservative and autocratic Saudi monarchy and Gulf Sheikdom kept the balance of social-political elite power. Islamic revolution in Shia Iran failed to catch much imagination in Sunni-dominated Muslim world and consequently did not pose a credible threat to the existing state structures. The Muslim Brotherhood, despite its widespread appeal and network particularly among the urban and semi-urban poor who lived in shantytowns around the islands of the rich, was still a largely underground force.

But the scenario changed with the US-led aggression in Iraq under the pretext of seizing Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saddam was caught and hanged in indecent haste but the non-existent WMD was never unearthed. Instead, the war tore apart the unstable social fabric, throwing up the renewed demons of Shia-Sunni rivalry beyond Tigris and Euphrates.

The sectarian conflict has now spread across the entire region—from the Mediterranean coast to the Persian Gulf, from Syria to Bahrain. The Lebanese cauldron is again on the boil. Iran's ambition to compete for leadership of the Muslim world has been doggedly challenged by Saudi Arabia, the hub of Sunni Wahabi orthodoxy, and its minions in the Qatar and Bahrain Sheikdoms. With Iran and its protégé Lebanese militia Hezbollah's support to the Syrian dictator Bashar Al Asad, now fighting West-supported rivals and Al Qaeda forces, the Shia triangle is complete and assertive.

The idea of Arab Spring caught the imagination of millions from Tunisia to Egypt and nurtured hopes for intra-state conflict resolution through the fusion of parliamentary democracy and non-sectarian, tolerant traditions. But the significance of the first 'Tahrir moment' was lost after the ouster of the democratically elected president Mohammed Morsi and the bloody suppression of his Brotherhood supporters by opposition-backed Egyptian army. Morsi's refusal to rollback his Islamist agenda and autocratic style was partially responsible for the showdown. No less are the US-Saudi supported generals and their friends among secular democrats who short-changed a historic possibility for a slice of power under the tutelage of army. This prompted post-Laden Al Qaeda's Egyptian chief Amman Zawahiri to call upon his compatriots to join Jihad saying that replay of Algeria in Egypt has proved once again that Islamists have no space in democracy. With general Fatah Al Sisi all set to repeat the fiat of Hosni Mubarak, the ban on Brotherhood and increasing death penalties against its supporters is bound to turn many Egyptians to Qaeda.

How to make sense of this madness? How to stop the battle cries of warring youths and wails of mothers and children at ruined homes across dividers— Shia vs. Sunni, Arab vs. Israeli government, believers vs. secularists and so on?

The New War for Global Resources

With globalization spreading its wings under Bretton-Woods Institutions and their progenies, another kind of war— the war over the control of global natural resources and markets in former colonies— have become intense. The great game over the control of old and new oil and natural gas reserves, particularly between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea has fuelled many intra-state as well as inter-state conflicts in Ukraine and Eurasia, particularly, south Caucasus. It is also a proxy war between the US-led West and post-Soviet Russia.

It is not only the hitherto known main energy resources, but also water, land (both mineral-rich and arable) and forests that have become the target of colossal grab by transnational and national corporate companies as well as wealthy individuals. Africa has emerged as the theatre of a new gold

rush with Asia and Latin America having their fair share of neo-colonial plunder and primitive accumulation. Apart from the old players, China has joined the great game with India Inc taking the cue. The ongoing frenzy for resource control by the few has led to the dispossession and dislocation of millions. This monstrous effort to create what could be dubbed 'the Lebensraum for global capital' has provoked new kinds of intra-state or local conflicts.

The old-style inter-state or inter-bloc geopolitics over resources is still in vogue; so is the practice of courting those considered 'terrorists' by one's neighbours/ competitors as one's 'freedom fighters'. But the new-age complicity between international cabals and national elite over unprecedented exploitation of nature and its children as well as their rapid commodification are more common.

This has created a vortex of intra-state violent conflicts along ethnic, regional, religious, tribal, linguistic as well as caste and class line threatening the territorial integrity and political equilibrium of the nation-states. India, Indonesia, Philippines in Asia, south Caucasian states in Eurasia and Ukraine, Columbia and Kenya and Nigeria in Africa are the examples of the last sort. Both right-wing and left-wing insurgencies are pervasive in most of these countries.

There are usually two patterns of the US-led Western interventions in the name of international community.

They bomb and kill or help to murder those leaders who play maverick (namely Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi) but want to keep oil-rich Iraq and Libya intact under friendly dispensations. They demonized Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, less for his autocratic rule but more for taking over excess land of descendants of colonial white settlers. Popularly elected Hugo Chavez-Rafael Correa-Evo Morales earned their ire less for their democratic credentials or the lack of it but more for their anti-monopoly, anti-US moves. Or, they dismember the nation-state playing up the intra-state conflicts. Sudan is the latest example. No doubt Muslim north and Christian south had a history of tension and distrust under the military dictators of Khartoum. However, it is not the faith of the people of South Sudan but its oilfields and unexplored land that had encouraged the successful Western intervention in favour the south's independence.

It is not a coincidence that this newly created country tops the list of land-grab by first-world big companies and individuals. It is another matter, of course, that the dismemberment of united Sudan along the religious and tribal lines could not stop the recent intra-tribal massacres in the new nation.

In post-colonial societies, as long as the ruling national elites were considered the inclusive and egalitarian nation-builders, custodians of minorities or honest brokers of peace and equilibrium among sectional interests, conflicts could largely be contained though conventional means of governance that included dialogue and cooption into political power-structures of key dissenters. Social capital of the democratic leadership that had accumulated since the days of the freedom struggle paid dividends in terms of moral authority to blunt the rough edges of conflicting identities and interests. But the scenario began to change as the gulf between the nationalist elites and the governed millions widened over the years. Now conflicts are being mitigated either through subversion of democratic processes or coercive homogenization projects. The undermining of the rule of law and the propensity of running roughshod over sensitivities of dissenting communities, have become common. Sometimes, the state has been seen to unleash bloody paramilitary and army repression that has triggered armed insurgencies.

New fronts of war have opened with the imposition of the reigning discourse on development and growth of national economy in the globalized world. There is hardly any effective, institutionalized public-government interface or informed policy debates in parliaments. Dissenters in

civil society are being branded as anti-nationals and extremists. The dispossessed and displaced millions who bore the brunt of the land-water-mineral grab are being taken for granted. Reduced to faceless statistics, their voices are being constantly gagged and manipulated through layers of representations in the larger 'public' and 'national interests'.

In the meantime, affirmative action for social justice and poor-poor projects, their dismal delivery notwithstanding, do not connect the indigent masses intimately to the nation-state and its guardians on whom their forefathers had reposed their faith at the dawn of independence. The current guardians, both the political class and bureaucracy, no more look upon the poor, the least advantaged and marginal as compatriots who need to be reached and included in an egalitarian nation-building project as it had been promised earlier.

They are now looked at through the neo-liberal prism of governmentality. In its crudest form, it can be described as the processes through which state creates citizens suitable to it rather than creating a state suitable to a society—a world apart from the innocence of social contract based on common good. In this complex power structure, governance can be decentralized, local and regional autonomy may be granted, provided the aspirant population groups internalize the state's mentality and governmental priorities.

The population groups targeted by various governmental tactics and calculations, however, have their own minds and priorities. So they engage with the state and its institutions and apparatus, sometimes feigning as docile clientele, sometimes playing spoilsport to bargain hard. Otherwise, they are mostly used to subverting governmentality in their own ways. Their irreverence and cynicism often exasperate the government planners and the political class who try, often unsuccessfully, to use the carrot-and-stick method.

The resultant mutual alienation of the government and the governed is making room for extremists at both ends. Paranoia over state security and militarization of governance by the hawks in ruling establishments are only complementing the insurgents of all hues at the ground level. The ensuing cycle of violence by both state and non-state actors gives an independent life to conflicts, the viciousness of which is sustained by those who have vested interests in continuing the clashes.

It appears that peace, however fluid and tentative, may be achieved in some cases of ethno-religious or regionalist conflicts if the nationalist elite accept the ground reality and concede various forms of autonomy and concessions within the parameters of the territorial integrity of the nation-state. But peace seems to be more elusive and highly problematic where conflicts have been raging over resources that profoundly affect lives and livelihood of millions.

The CORE project

Against this backdrop, many scholars and activists working in the field of conflict and peace studies or activities have been looking for ways of effective interventions. The European Union, which has received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, recently sponsored a three-year long international research project to study the 'Cultures of Governance and Conflict Resolution in Europe and India (CORE)', under the auspices of its executive arm, the European Commission.

Involving premier European and Indian universities and research groups, the CORE project studied conflicts in the Indian part of Kashmir, the Indian Northeast as well as the eastern states of Jharkhand and Bihar where ethno-religious separatists and Maoist insurgents are engaged in armed hostilities with the Indian state. In Europe, the case studies were focussed on Cyprus, post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as Georgia and its *de facto* independent region of Abkhazia in the South Caucasus.

The project's stated objectives were "to analyze how socio-economic and political intra-state conflicts are being perceived and dealt with through current governance initiatives in India and the EU. Through concrete case studies, it will assess the effect and impact of governance initiatives on conflicts where issues of identity mobilization and minority rights are prominent. The project will foster knowledge on the dynamics of conflict and peace in relation to changes in the political governance of states acting within an increasingly interdependent world." Also, "through a combination of fieldwork, statistical analysis and theory development," the project aimed at both "theoretical innovation and policy recommendations." An additional elaboration says that "the project particularly analyses the following areas of peace-building and governance: a) democratic institution building, b) development/ management of resources, c) human rights, d) rule of law, e) policing, and f) civil society."

In the context of the supposed universality of the EU peace-building framework, what strikes one most in the project is the willingness of the research institutions to interrogate the given idea of the universality of the EU-articulated Western peace-building framework given the fact that the section "description of work" of the project articulated the following objectives: "Analyse how increasingly globally articulated and networked norms, rules and policies governance are transforming and affecting conflicts locally; compare how the emerging EU peace-building framework with regional strategies aimed at dealing with conflict on and around the Indian subcontinent."

A series of international seminars on the result of the project culminated in Delhi (11-12 November 2013 organised by PRIA) where researchers presented their basic findings and exchanged views on various aspects of their studies. The present exercise is in part a partial report on some aspects of the discussions that took place in the Delhi seminar and in part the expression of the personal opinions of the author, who by profession is a journalist and has had the experience of covering different conflicts in India. It is necessary that the lector bears this caveat in mind while reading the article.

I am grateful that Ranabir Samaddar, Director, Calcutta Research Group (CRG, which was an important participant in the CORE project) invited me to join the Delhi deliberations and took interest in publishing my critical report and reflections on the conference. I also thank Dr Atig Ghosh, honorary Research Associate of CRG, who now teaches at Visva Bharati University and had participated in the Delhi deliberations, for taking great pains with editing my report.

However, CRG is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, the views expressed herein. The author also takes this opportunity to thank www.frontierweekly.com for carrying earlier versions of this piece.

Conflict Resolution-I: Is Peace in Kashmir and Northeast Possible without Breaking The Jinx of The Nation-State?

Violent separatist conflicts in Indian Kashmir and the Indian Northeast as well as the Maoist insurrection in the tribal heartland of the country have triggered academic interest, both locally as well as globally, over the years. The theme of the relation between governance and conflict was discussed at length at a CORE international seminar in Delhi held in the second week of November 2013. Indian academics from premier universities like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University (DU) and Benaras Hindu University (BHU) as well as reputed research organizations like the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) and Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) presented their case studies in Indian Kashmir, the India Northeast and the Maoist-influenced Jharkhand-Bihar. Their European counterparts from Manchester University, Central University of Europe (Budapest),

Peace Research Institute (Oslo), Berghof Institute (Berlin), and Institute for International Affairs (Rome) dealt on conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia and Cyprus.

The “concept note” of the project “understood governance as actors, institutions and processes that define contest and redefine what public good is.” Further it said: “Governance in conflict areas is always in a state of flux as the new rules of engagement emerge through the various combinations of private and public authority, the shifting interests of powerful actors in the supranational, central, state and local levels and the creative responses of social actors on the ground who can also recombine and reprocess institutional resources in response to new challenges.” This idea of governance promotes more than a survival method in the time of unending conflict and civil war. It wants to create an ambience of orderly daily lives amidst chaos and uncertainty, albeit with institutional support.

Fair enough. But one may ask if it presupposes disconnect between the warring sides and the collateral damages and whether it hopes to insulate the islands of local order from the cacophony of big politics. But can we expect to earn any durable peace dividend without addressing the bigger factors of conflicts simultaneously? This is not to dismiss any interim effort to give minimum relief and extend basic rights and amenities to the violence-hit population. Neither does it mean that resolution of larger issues would automatically resolve myriad problems of daily lives. It is the carefully-crafted, selective, insular framework that provokes question.

Kashmir

The collective concern for governance in conflict-hit Kashmir, particularly local self-governance through institutions like Panchayati Raj sounds pragmatic and well-intended. But questions still remain whether governance in conflict zones, especially in internally and externally disputed territories can be conflict-neutral or afford to avoid larger geo-political issues for long. The fact is that the success or failure of ground-level process aimed at “good governance” is bound to be a part of the contesting narratives of the state and non-state combatants.

Panchayat Polls in Kashmir: “A Lost Opportunity”

Notwithstanding the “multiple trajectories” of the Kashmir conflict, the deliberations at the seminar primarily focussed on the “lost opportunity for conflict-sensitive governance” after “different expectations of different players” wasted the momentum created by “free and fair” Panchayat polls in 2011 and left thousands of elected *Halqa panchayats* (village councils) in limbo.

The connects and disconnects between the governance and larger question of state and non-state violence, human-rights violations by both sides as well as political future of Kashmir came up in this background. The field studies pointed to the uncut umbilical cord that joins grassroots governance to bigger geo-politics. With Narendra Modi, the prime-ministerial candidate of the BJP, raking up Article 370 of the Indian Constitution (that guarantees special status of J&K) in the run-up for the general election this year, contesting discourses on the main reason of the conflict will be harped on again and again.

Navnita Chadha Behera of DU and Sumona Dasgupta of PRIA who had studied panchayat polls extensively blamed the callous and short-sighted approaches of the political class in New Delhi and Srinagar for “squandering the unique opportunity to bring some element of agency into the lives of an essentially non-combatant larger community” amid a “violent, militarized conflict ... with a legacy of broken trust and thwarted promises.”

The popular opinion had created the opportunity. “For Kashmiris, governance and conflicts are two different things. The problems of *bijli-paani-sadak* (electrification, drinking water, better roads) have nothing to do with the political future of the state,” Behera said. Since the Pakistan-backed separatist militants too had accepted the separation of management of civic affairs and political settlement of the insurgency, the researchers pointed out that the massive voter turnout in the panchayat polls and election of 33,000 panchayat members had presented an unprecedented prospect for popular local self-governance. The creation of the autonomous hill council in Ladakh, was another “positive instrument” to attain that goal, they said.

Salman Anees Soz, the son of former central minister from Kashmir, Saifuddin Soz, put the public mind in a pragmatic perspective. “No Azadi (independence) foreseeable, no inclusion in Pakistan possible ... governance has a big thing to do in Kashmir,” the president of People’s Empowerment Mission in Kashmir, who introduces himself as a “development practitioner”, said.

The Delhi-Srinagar squabbles on fund transfer process and “leveraging” it as well as politico-bureaucratic resistance to the devolution of administrative-financial power have stalled the impetus. The government’s inability to hold polls at block- and district-level Panchayat Raj institutions has crippled it further. But the decisive blow has come from New Delhi’s self-delusional ruling elite. They have described the massive turnout of voters in the valley as the “mandate against Pakistan and Terrorism”. True, voters had ignored the boycott calls by pro-Pakistan Hurriyat hardliners. Popular demands for *bijli-pani-sadak* had also pressured the pro-Azadi militants to allow mass participation in the polls. But, both the Azadi forces and common Kashmiris had made a distinction between civic management issues involved in village polls on the one hand and the political solution of the Kashmir dispute on the other. New Delhi’s hasty claims only invited a backlash from both pro-Pakistani and pro-independence militants; for them New Delhi’s rash conclusions were a godsend.

“This indicates that the ruling regime had no compunction about appropriating the people’s desire to participate in local affairs and development for grander purposes”, said Dasgupta and her fellow-researcher Priyanka Singh in their paper brief. “The failure of the experiment has led to the belief that it will bring back the guns,” Dasgupta added. She avoided linking the post-poll killing of some *sarpanches* (head of village council) to the militants “who got alarmed by New Delhi’s claims”.

But she mentioned the “atmosphere of fear and insecurity” though the slain persons’ families refused to blame the militants. The fact, however, remains that posters have been put up recently in Kashmir valley accusing elected panchayat members of being “government agents” and threatening them with “dire consequences”. “The opportunity for devolution of power has failed ... It has become part of another narrative [militancy]”, Dasgupta said.

The “external players” across the LOC always look for such spoilsports. But, the fact remains that they have gained ground. “Locals say, Delhi always insists that Kashmir is an internal issue. But at the same time, the Centre harps on the role of Pakistan in conflicts, both in its escalation and resolution,” Behera pointed out.

Multiple Miseries

Nevertheless, there is devolution of sources of miseries for common Kashmiris. Echoing the *Aam Admi* (commoners) experience in mainland India, they overwhelmingly shared the critique of corruption and the rejection of the political class. “Earlier Delhi was blamed for all wrong doings. Now people say that the Centre is sending money but state politicians are not performing,” Behera said.

According to her, “feel good factors” are there but also “apprehensions and predicaments” remain. For example, the *Shikara* (Houseboat) Owners’ Association wants normalcy to ensure tourist inflow but they dither to harp on it. “They need the support of politicians as well as militants. They are the persons who deal with the outsiders for livelihood, Indian and foreign tourists. That is why separatists/ co-patriots suspect them and call them betrayers,” she said.

Recalling the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) rule in J&K, she felt that the party, which is more sympathetic to the separatist cause, took a “policy of healing touch”: disbanded the special police force, froze the anti-terrorist act, reduced human rights violation and minimized ID checking by the security forces. These measures, perceived as pro-secessionists in mainland India, made the daily lives of the locals a little easy. “Violence petered out at that time ... But new situations emerged. The question remains ... what led to the army crackdown later?” she asked.

Referring to the “militarized conflict with different fault lines”, she said the policymakers in Delhi and Srinagar do not understand the political economy of conflict and which section of the populace have resorted to the violence. “Violence is a mechanism of opening the gates of power,” she said. Maintaining that the “source of the conflict and factors of sustaining the violence are different in Kashmir” she cited “increasing local issues, multiple identities, issues neither the policymakers nor the researchers are focussed on.”

Shades of Militancy

Dealing with militancy, Behera cautioned that its proponents and practitioners are not “homogeneous”. “They have many shades. The relation between the state and non-state actors kept changing ... enemies have become friends.” These include those who are fighting for Kashmir’s inclusion in Pakistan and independence as well as those who have surrendered to the Indian army and are siding with it.

According to her, separatist militancy’s popular appeal has suffered a downturn. “The societal attitude has changed. When militancy began, donations for Azadi came and militants earned huge prestige. Women put on *mehendi* when their sons or husbands crossed the LOC and held guns. “Now nobody is willing to give daughters to militants in marriage. Those who had crossed the border for arms training were held in awe earlier ... but today their families are almost outcasts,” she said.

Behera spoke of the “social media outreach” of the young street protesters, known as stone-pelters. Around 100 such youth were killed by Indian security forces on the streets of the valley in 2010. According to her, all “professional” stone-pelters networked intensively through mobile phones. They were organized and stockpiled their missiles before hitting the streets. The pattern of public protests have changed with them as macro-issues have taken backseat while local issues (such as, avenging the misbehaviour of a certain police inspector, etc.) trigger stone-pelting and other forms of violent protests. Alpana Kishore, a journalist-cum-researcher who had worked in Kashmir and who was present in the audience, concurred with this observation.

The People’s Mind

Opinions differed when Kishore and some others maintained that people of Kashmir “declined to take positions on political future”. “Separatists and Islamists do not care for peace-seeking dialogues and don’t want normalcy. On the other hand, the common people like to have negative peace ... an absence of extreme violence that hinders their daily lives,” Kishore said.

Soz felt otherwise. “Kashmiri people have made up their mind. But the history of 67 years of Indo-Pak relation is behind them. They know it is not going to be solved in near future. Pending the conflict resolution on the big issue, they are now bothered about the daily grind; how to manage daily lives. Idea of governance can help in this context,” he said.

Both Behera and Soz maintained that lots of people have vested interest in sustaining the conflict— politicians, paramilitary, army and non-state actors. “How do you deal with main actors and vested interests of all sides in this big dispute? It should be the new focus of research,” he said. Soz pointed to the great injustice committed by multiple players, both state and non-state. Not only physical violence, people have been denied rights and dignity in everyday normal life. People of Kashmir do not have the same rights as the rest of the country, he said.

Referring to the central election commission’s new guideline that allows a voter to register his refusal to vote if he finds a whole bunch of candidates unacceptable, he argued that in Kashmir such refusal would be construed differently. “Separatists are planning to use the new EC rule to send the message that election does not matter,” Soz said.

Role of The Indian Civil Society

Neera Chandhoke, Fellow of the Indian Council for Social Science Research, raised larger political questions. Calling the “peace-conflict binary” doubtful, she asked: “What is peace? Absence of army and stone pelting? Crucial is justice, not peace. Government is essentially entertaining conflicts.” She also pointed out that “governance is a World Bank buzzword while Foucault’s notion of governmentality is a completely different thing.”

Making distinctions between the different natures of political violence in India, she cited street violence on reservation issue as a “mode of politics to negotiate with the state which reaffirms the state’s legitimacy.” In contrast, pro-independence street violence and insurgency in Kashmir refused to honour “the political obligation to the [Indian] state as well as moral obligation to the rest of the country”. On the other hand, Maoists “refuse political obligation to the state but not to the rest of the country”. For her, violence may become necessary when people face multiple deprivations.

Putting the Kashmir conflict in post-colonial perspective, she said Kashmir suffered from historical injustice. “It is not the plebiscite [promised by the Nehru government] or the [Kashmir’s princely ruler’s] instrument [of accession to Indian union] but the breach of contract between India and Kashmiris. Indian civil society did not react to this breach. The [Indian] state posits Kashmir problem as an Indo-Pak conflict or issues related to Jihadi terror. Jihadis and the third party [Pakistan] are factors. But our job is to highlight the injustice [to the Kashmiris].”

Beyond Nation-State

It was left to her to raise the question about the political resolution of the Kashmir imbroglio, *sans* which any discussion on governance issues including an effective delivery mechanism and popular participation in planning and implementation at the grassroots are bound to be superficial. “There are many ways of solving it [the Kashmir conflict] except the nation-state, which is a historical mistake,” Chandhoke commented.

Indo-Pak confederation, joint facilitation of cross-LOC trade and free people-to-people contacts, mutually monitored demilitarization of the both sides of Kashmir and centrality of the Kashmiri people’s desire across the valley were among those non-nation-state ideas. Advocated half-

heartedly by some political and civil society “doves”, these ideas have been jettisoned by the “hawks” across the border. Similarly, calls for expulsion of foreign Jihadis from the valley and return of the Pundits and other evicted minorities to their homes, redemption of the tradition of pluralist *Kashmiriyat*, delinking of Kashmir’s right to self-determination from Jihadi bigotry, respect for rights of non-valley people, on the one hand, and the end of police state, civil society vigil on the state and non-state violations of human rights and pluralism, on the other, hardly find takers in the divided valley as well as in mainstream India and Pakistan.

Nevertheless, the faithful recording and critical analyses of the local voices across the Line of Control would throw up out-of-the-box ideas irrespective of the support they find either from the two nation-states or the self-proclaimed non-state spokesmen of the local communities. These ideas for the conflict resolution from below are likely to be anchored in history, geography and traditions. With institutional support, they can catch the popular imagination across South Asia offering respite after four Indo-Pak wars and the endless, futile talks on Kashmir amid increasingly militarized and sectarian conflict.

Social science researches often avoid walking through this political and diplomatic minefield. At times they choose to confine themselves within the safe zone of depoliticized governance, which essentially means harnessing administrative-political skills and processes to stabilize long-drawn conflicts and tune them at a low key.

Northeast

Northeast was the least discussed area of the conflict at the seminar. Nevertheless, Ranabir Samaddar of the CRG focussed on the basic continuity of the colonial state policies in postcolonial India. “Indian State’s policy is NE and Kashmir are not exceptions but the functional laboratories of how to rule. The colonial state first experimented in Ireland and then in Kenya,” he said. For Dipti Malhotra, journalist and biographer of Irom Sharmila Chanu, the 14 years of Sharmila’s hunger strike demanding withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act reveals the unjust nature of the Indian state. Maintaining that “trouble is coming from the State”, she referred to “unjust laws and 1,000-plus cases of fake encounters”. Asking the powers that be to change the “paradigms of security”, she exhorted: “Who are to be secured from whom? Threats are coming from inside, security has to be inclusive.”

As Samaddar spoke of forbidden forms of claims-making and increasing intolerance of the state even to prescribed norms of dissent, he wondered why Indian state still tolerated Sharmila. Mentioning that the colonial state did not allow hunger strike and freedom fighter Jatin Das was beaten up before his death, he said today’s Maoist prisoners and other hunger-strikers in jail often face the same. Malhotra, however, contested the notion that Indian government tolerated Sharmila because she was a “practitioner of philosophical non-violence”. “Sharmila is facing the tortures including solitary confinement and force-feeding”. Samaddar later clarified that he did not intend to demean Sharmila’s forms of protest. “There are no fixed boundaries between the prescribed and forbidden forms of protests. The contingency of the form is important,” he averred.

Not all conflicts are between the state and disgruntled tribes and communities in the Northeast. Unlike the old hot spots of independence-seeking insurgencies in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam, generally low-key but sustained inter-ethnic tensions in the region’s hills states have not received much attention from conflict and peace researchers. Trying a case study in Meghalaya, as Priyanka Upadhyaya of the BHU said of his research, his “dream of studying peace instead of a conflict was shattered.” Underlying the “myth of peace” in Meghalaya, there are manifold conflicts:

post-autonomy ethnic politics and violence between indigenous Khasis and Garos; clash of the indigenous with the outsiders—Bangladeshis, Bengalis, Nepalis, Marwaris and Biharis. Violence against “outsider” is not always overt but a fear psychosis pervades. The unemployed youth and student politicians are also divided along ethnic line. There is no neutral space. Then, the land question is also there. Community lands have been taken over. Widespread coal-mining in the Garo Hills fits in Samaddar’s theory of capital accumulation in India, Upadhaya said. To take the heat out of the ethnic cauldron, he stressed on the role of religious organizations. With 70 per cent of the population being Christian, role of the church is important. Others communities too would have to come forward for intercultural understanding. Also the issues related to the relation with the rest of India are to be addressed, he added.

But he did not mention the overarching issue of illegal immigrants, particularly from Bangladesh, that has been fuelling many Northeastern conflicts and insurgency time and again and has led to massive violence and killings. Dhaka is in a perpetual denial mode and New Delhi is divided between the Congress and the BJP in an unending blame game. Meanwhile, the political class and civil society in Guwahati, Shillong and Agartala often launch into shrill anti-infiltrator campaigns laced with demands for protectionist autonomy and electoral exigencies. But once again, the dogged refusal to learn the lessons of the Partition of India aggravates the poverty of political imagination of our policymakers as well as civil society.

This includes the academics too who cower to see beyond the nation-states and examine the idea of a confederation of South Asian nation-states or EU-like economic union of SAARC countries with regulated domicile rights for immigrants. Nonetheless, the idea deserves some informed discussion in view of the sub-continent’s history and geography as well as the logic of regional and global economy. Long-term resolution of ethno-religious conflicts does not lie in increasingly sectarian and closed-gate autonomy politics but in looking beyond the nation’s borders.

Conflict Resolution-II: State-Maoist Conflict in Jharkhand-Bihar: Is Peace Possible with Neo-Liberal Development?

Discussions also focussed on the Maoist insurgency and the Indian State’s military and non-military responses in the eastern states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Today the Central government describes Jharkhand and adjoining Chhattisgarh as the “epicentres of leftwing extremism”.

The State Strategies

According to Amit Prakash of JNU, who led the field study in Jharkhand and Bihar, the conflicts in Jharkhand and Bihar did not start at a certain point of time. There is a long history of several factors including deprivation, social injustice, caste wars and war over resources as well as political control over the state institutions. Also, there is no institutional method of listening to the locals by the state processes. However, the Indian state’s responses to the Naxalite violence have changed gradually. Earlier government tried to wipe out Naxalites militarily only. Now the ministry of home affairs admits development deficits, institutional gaps and problems of deliverance.

So, huge fund has been pumped into the Maoist-influenced zones for rural development and pro-poor welfare schemes through Panchayati Raj Institutions (three-tier rural self-governance system) and affirmative action have been attempted through progressive legislation. These moves have been done in sync with expansion of the military infrastructure and local support for the government and its security forces. Recruitment of youth from conflict zones in the police forces is

aimed at providing jobs to unemployed youth who are the potential recruits for the Naxalites and their main party, the CPI (Maoist).

Evaluating the state responses, Prakash said: “State is the vigorous and happy party to the conflict as it structures the conflict. Development has been undertaken to augment the security operation. The Tiritiya Prastuti Committee (TPC) and other Maoist splinter groups have been used by the security forces against [the main party of the] Maoists.” He, however, did not specifically discuss the cycle of competitive violence following the state patronage of the anti-Maoist vigilante groups in Jharkhand and Bihar and the mayhem created by the government-recruited tribal “special police officers” in the name of 'Salwa Judum' campaign (Peace or unity march in Gondi tribal dialect) in neighbouring Chhattisgarh; the militia has now been condemned and disbanded by the Supreme Court.

The Panchayats and Vested Interests in The Conflict

Explaining “the political economy of the conflict and the vested interests which want to sustain it” since “absence of conflict will diminish the flow of money”, it was observed: “Police and bureaucracy have vested interest in keeping Naxalism alive. Police and Maoist interests have converged in continuing the conflict ... both sides have kept the conflict at manageable equilibrium. Also, collaborative nexus among bureaucrats-local politicians and Naxalites is evident.”

Rooting for the conflict resolution through public participation in development planning and execution through elected panchayats, Prakash blamed “bureaucratic gate-keeping” and consequent state government apathy to transfer of funds to the Panchayat Raj institutions. He said that since there is a massive fund flow for development, Naxalites are also interested in joining and controlling panchayats, he said. While the basic character of Bihar and Jharkhand administration is the same, Prakash said neither the state apparatus nor the Naxalites had capacities or abilities to bring positive changes for people’s welfare.

“All sides are extracting [their pound of flesh] through the act of veto. Panchayat has become a mechanism of control in place of being one of participatory democracy. There is a huge amount of distrust among people regarding the PRIs,” he said. Even as he emphasized the importance of letting “the affected people have a right to the local governance”, a participant from Jharkhand pointed out that the “panchayats too are asking for levy nowadays.”

A Sceptical View of Stake-Holders

Tracing the historical trajectory of Naxalism in the two states, he opined that the contemporary Maoists were not a “continuity of the Naxalism of the 1960s.” He said, “Naxalism is a misnomer. The Maoists today have no normative objectives. The believers in Marxism and class struggle are divided now along caste lines and there are now armed gangs engaged in extortion.” He added, “They collect huge levy from all governmental development activities while controlling a mechanism of violence of demonstrable value.”

Roger MacGinty from Manchester University and Ranabir Samaddar from Calcutta Research Group contested him. “You said that the Naxalism of the 60s was different. Are you not romanticizing the past?” MacGinty asked. Prakash argued that Naxalites of the earlier era were embedded among people and could mobilize their supporters publicly despite police crackdown. He admitted that the Maoists had spread their wings over 16 provinces in central and eastern India including Bengal but did not explain what led to the widening of their support base despite the

unprecedented police-paramilitary crackdown. “Do you think that the issues of the 60s have been resolved so that a new set of issues have emerged and led to a new phase of insurgency? Earlier, Naxalites could mobilize people openly but now the space for that protest politics has shrunk,” Samaddar pointed out.

It is true that Naxalism in Bihar-Jharkhand has been heavily influenced by caste factors for long, more evidently since the advent of Mandal-Kamandal politics at the end of the decade. But this needs to be examined in the context of the class-caste conundrum; the complexities of the fusion and fission of the two identities in social-political as well as economic conflicts in India. Neither the guardians of Indian parliamentary democracy and its governance mechanism nor its critics and challengers have been able to wriggle out of this “mess” of Indian society and politics. An engaged study of the caste and tribal dynamics of Naxalism-Maoism in India would not only enrich the sociology and anthropology of contemporary rebellions but also would enhance the understanding of the mainstream politics of cooption, assimilation and exclusion in governance.

It is also true that today’s Maoists are engaged in levy war with other Naxalites and criminal gangs. The distinction between the two sides often gets blurred. I remember one squad leader of the MCC (one of the main constituents of CPI (Maoist) today) in Jharkhand arguing that “*Kranti ke liye paisa jaruri hai* (money is needed for making revolution).” He further justified the killing of members of another Naxalite faction on the ground that the latter “no more believes in armed revolution” and, hence, they are no longer entitled to collect levy in the name of people. Almost the same argument was put forward by a Maoist PLGA (People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army) leader recently who defended the “people’s tax” on contractors during an interaction.

While all this is true, we cannot be selective in our condemnation. Fleeting references to governmental patronage, and logistical and weaponry support to the anti-Maoist gangs who often work as the auxiliary force and death squads of the government’s security forces against the Maoists are not enough. The fact remains that the levy war among state and non-state actors is neither Maoist-specific nor unique in Indian subcontinent. Latin America and other theatres of left- and right-wing insurgencies offer plenty of such examples. Yet this does not presuppose the absence of “normative objectives” and practices by the rebel groups and parties.

For that matter, there is no dearth of normative literature and other forms of guidelines on dos and don’ts for Maoist rank and file. Indian Maoist leadership, like all communist party leaderships, explains the “deviations and shortcomings” either in terms of individuals becoming victims to petit-bourgeois or feudal vices, or inadequate ideological training, backward consciousness, and judgmental errors. They justify forcible levy collection as one of the ‘compulsions of an imposed war on people by the Indian government.’ They also claim that apart from spending on weaponry, food, medical and logistical expense as well as payment of “party wages” to cadres, a part of the levy or cuts from the contractors, etc. is also invested in “alternative development projects” in Maoist-influenced areas.

The increasing disjuncture between theory and practice, both of the Indian state and its internal armed challengers warrants a closer scrutiny of factors that have created the gulf. Such exercise is most expected from the social scientists, especially those who are studying the “stakeholders” in a conflict in order to make plausible policy recommendations for sustainable peace.

Rhetoric of Development Model and State Security

It is also important to flag the relation between the so-called development model that the Indian state is pursuing ruthlessly, particularly in the mineral-rich, tribal states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh,

and the ongoing violent conflicts there. This was not perhaps adequately discussed in the conference. The Supreme Court— and even some members of the ruling elite and policy mandarins in Delhi— have criticized time and again the “predatory form of capitalism” and the resultant state-corporate joint violence in the name of development. It is also necessary to mention the non-Maoist people’s movement activists and other critics of the state policies who have been facing the mockery of the rule of law and the violation of human rights and constitutional safeguards despite adhering to what Samaddar called the “prescribed forms of claims-making”. Many of them have even disapproved the “forbidden forms” like the Maoist armed struggle.

Samaddar highlighted the “spreading grid of capital accumulation,” particularly where “mining and other extractive economy is working” and the growing obsession with state security. “After 9/11, in the field of governance and conflict resolution, the theme of terror has become very crucial is statecraft and the task of governing. It has securitized the whole question of governance. Research should focus on it more. “If governance is not a military mode of governance but a civilian one, then we have to examine how this difference is achieved. Foucault had said once that the model of war had given to society the model of governance. Securitization uses war methods without declaring war. The link between the warlike mode and civilian mode of governance is important,” he said.

He also observed that the role of logistics is pertinent. The central ministry for the Northeast (Ministry for the Development of the North-East Region or DoNER) is the nodal ministry for development in the region. Enormous logistical planning is going on in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Road constructions are aimed at better troop movement in the areas known for gunrunning and border markets. All these processes are interlinked.

Roger MacGinty pointed out that “India has a history of mixing carrot and stick, welfare and security”. “Both EU and Indian experiences showed fetish-ization of economic growth which is creating new conflicts. In India, the sequence is, security first and welfare later. If peace-building is dependent on economic strategies then peace-making is going to suffer,” he cautioned.

Top-Down Development and The Panchayat Raj

Despite the stifling control by the *babus* and *netas*, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are important institutions to achieve rural self-governance. Some participants pointed out that laws like Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act and The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (FRA), popularly known as Forest Rights Act, focus on the *Gram Sabha/ Sansad* (village assembly/ parliament) promoting participatory democracy at the grassroots. The assembly, supposed to be the free forum for all villagers for collective village development planning and popular monitoring of elected panchayat members, can also play crucial role in conflict negotiation, as well as stabilization and transformation. However, they felt that the potential had been frustrated by the governments, which imposed their top-down developmental model with total disregard for the local specificities and interests of the affected communities.

Rajesh Tandon, the president of PRIA, said that though the Indian Constitution stressed on local self-governance, the panchayats/nagarpalikas have been bureaucratized to the hilt. “Constitution has no mention of planning commission, etc. but district planning boards which could have negotiated the multiple conflicts. But the centralization of planning decimated the constitutional spirit. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh did not even make the rules for the PESA. The concept of *Gramsabha* was made to ensure downward accountability. But it has not been implemented. The

Posco deal [the South Korean corporate giant's mammoth steel plant project in Odisha] was decided in Delhi and Bhubaneswar [Odisha's capital]. So conflict is natural at the ground level," he said.

Veteran journalist B.G. Verghese referred to the 5th and 6th Schedule of Indian Constitution, which made provisions for tribal autonomy. But he too lamented the straitjacketed approach of the country's policy mandarins. "What is good for Delhi is not good for Chhattisgarh, and that is the beginning of the problem. PRIs and PESA focus on the legitimacy of state institution through the participation of the people. But again, there is no proper delivery system," he observed. Commenting on the reluctance to transfer power and fund to PRIs in Kashmir and Jharkhand, he said MLAs are inimical to panchayats across the length and breadth of the country. Corruption is also a common thing. Both Tandon and Verghese spoke of a "social contract" between government and people of India, which had been broken systematically. MacGinty questioned, albeit figuratively: who were the signatories to that contract?

This makes a reality check pertinent in the context of the instrumentality of the PRIs as envisaged by the PESA, FRA *et al* in conflict resolution. While the Panchayat laws made room for participatory planning and popular monitoring in village development, the real power is in the hands of political parties and bureaucracy. The forcible land acquisition for government and private sector projects has been the key source of violent conflicts in rural India across the country, particularly in tribal areas. But Gram Sansads, and for that matter elected Gram Panchayats, do not have any say in the acquisition of rural land by state governments. The PESA and FRA, which deal with tribal and forest areas, have provisions for Gram Sabhas to be "consulted" for land takeover/ conversion. The environmental clearance for mega-projects needs on-spot public hearing on ecological and livelihood impact, etc. But none of these laws made Gram Sabha consent mandatory and inviolable or its veto decisive.

A 2010 report of the Council for Social Development (CSD) concludes: "All of the key features of this legislation have been undermined by a combination of apathy and sabotage during the process of implementation. In the current situation the rights of the majority of tribals and other traditional forest dwellers are being denied and the purpose of the legislation is being defeated. Unless immediate remedial measures are taken, instead of undoing the historical injustice to tribal and other traditional forest dwellers, the Act will have the opposite outcome of making them even more vulnerable to eviction and denial of their customary access to forests. The testimonies made it clear that this is not merely a result of bureaucratic failure; both the Central and the State governments have actively pursued policies that are in direct violation of the spirit and letter of the Act."

The recent stalling of the UK-based Vedanta Group's mining project in Niyamgiri hills following the opposition of all the Gram Sabhas in the affected areas and international public campaign against this violations of tribal rights, not to mention the Supreme Court intervention, is heartening. But the overall ground reality as described by the CSD has hardly changed. The Centre and major political parties did not bother to take initiative for making the Gram Sansad/Sabhas permission a must for all developmental and industrial projects both in forest and non-forest/tribal areas.

The parliamentary Left's position is no different from the Congress and the BJP. One remembers the reaction of the former Bengal Panchayat Minister Suryakanta Misra, who now wears the hat of a CPM politburo member and the Opposition Leader in the Bengal Assembly. "How can a village panchayat or Bloc panchayat samiti decide about a state or national project? For that matter, the Tata small-car project has a global importance," he said when the author asked him about the panchayat's approval in the land takeover for Tata Motors' Nano project in Singur. He ignored the

fact that the mega/macro projects, which mostly serve corporate interests and urban middle classes, came up on micro/ marginal community land or private farmland. Despite ruining millions of lives, there is little or no legal/ institutional mechanism to listen to the affected on the social costs and benefits of the projects or the larger developmental discourses and corresponding policies. The report of an expert group appointed by Indian Planning Commission on leftwing extremism-affected areas as well as Supreme Court orders and observations have already pointed to the institutionalised arrogance and apathy of national and regional power elites to the plight of communities affected by the land grab, mushrooming mining and plunder of other natural resources and mega-'development projects'.

The CORE project could perhaps focus more on the refusal of the rulers to listen to the affected millions and the denial of their role in decision-making for the projects of 'bigger import'. In this scenario, Tandon seemed to be candid enough when he spoke not only of the “disconnects in the hierarchy of governance institutions at the national-provincial-district and local levels”, but also “between the world of academia and practice and lack of public accountability of the knowledge production”.

Conflict Resolution-III: Conflict in Europe and EU Model for Peace: Unfinished Agenda of the Cold War

The peace efforts sponsored by the “international community” in the conflict zones of contemporary Europe and the rest of the world have often revealed post-Cold War, even post-9/11 US-Western, priorities and sensibilities. The global metropolitan presumptions about the conflicts afar and universal prescription for their resolution clearly favour a predetermined ideological and structural framework for conflict-reading and peacemaking. The latter often promotes restructuring of the troubled states, economies and identities, which are considered anachronistic to the victors of the Cold War and the Bretton Woods Institutions, which they control.

It is most precisely declared by the European Union in its 1993 “Copenhagen criteria” for the countries, which want to join the forum. According to it, an inclusion-aspirant state must meet three criteria. A. political: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. B. economic: existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. C. acceptance of the Community *acquis*: ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. No doubt, the EU's diagnosis and prognosis of conflicts and their trajectories across the world as well as its prescription for peace depend much on the abovementioned doctrine.

However, an EU-sponsored cross-continental research project on conflicts and peace in Europe, namely, in Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Georgia as well as in parts of India, once again expose the fault lines of the EU vision and model for peace.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The US-led West rejoiced and helped in the dissolution of former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia calling both prisons for nations and communities. True, the USSR and Yugoslavia were not the paradises of unity in diversity. Both suffered from big-nation domination and ethno-religious tensions. But the geo-political designs of the US-led West and the EU opened the Pandora's Box unleashing the monsters of ethno-centrism, jingoist zealots, religious bigots and bloodthirsty

warlords in the former Soviet sphere – Balkans, Central Asia and Caucasus— to finish the agenda of cold war.

The dance of death in the killing fields— competitive pogroms, massacres, rape camps and mass graves— continued for more than a decade in Yugoslavia in the nineties after US and its transatlantic allies scurried to recognize the secessions of pro-West Catholic dominated Croatia and Muslim-dominated Bosnia from the union dominated by Orthodox Serbia. The mutilation of the former union of South Slav nations that had risen from the debris of Austro-Hungarian Empire and survived the Fascist onslaught did not end with independence of its constituents alone. A cartographic jigsaw puzzle ensued that led to the creation of complex politico-administrative pigeonholes in mixed population areas within most of the newly drawn sovereign borders, essentially turning them into ethno-religious ghettos.

For example, Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Dayton agreement has been divided into two autonomous entities— a majority Bosnian (Muslim)-Croat (Catholic) federation and majority Serb (orthodox) republic of Srpska, along with a third region called Brcko district. Further, the federation itself is divided into ten cantons. Borders and boundaries of these units have been redrawn along the ethnic majoritarian lines.

What is the impact of this complex power-sharing on the everyday life in post conflict-societies? Judging from what Elena Stavrevska of Central European University (Budapest), who has studied the impact in the BiH, said, it is 'a nightmare, an absurd jugglery of identities over citizenship rights and benefits'. “As a result, several legal, social, educational systems now function in parallel, often to the detriment of its citizens. This has been particularly problematic for returnees, internally displaced persons and those living along the Inter-Entity Boundary Line in pre-war municipalities that were divided up under the Dayton Agreement,” she said.

According to Elena, this has compelled people to go for “fictitious registration”. “In order to receive an education in their mother tongue and instruction in the religion they practice, many citizens have opted to register themselves as residing in one entity while [actually] living in other. In so doing, they not only lose their eligibility to vote and to be represented politically whether they live, but also limit their interaction with people of other ethnicities— and accordingly, the possibility for reconciliation and genuine conflict resolution.” The complications also involve healthcare facilities, pension and other social security benefits, the study revealed.

Elena in her discussion however did not question the Dayton Agreement (a South-Asian parallel can be drawn remembering the consequences of the more simplistic Radcliff Award that had partitioned British India in 1947). The Western think tanks and their donor agencies considered Soviet-era multi-national, multi-ethnic state or union of nation-states as an untenable and superficial political construct. Their politically correct balancing acts between multiculturalism and European/US “way of life and shared values” notwithstanding, the state-corporate joint homogenization towards a Christian-White-Capitalist-Consumerist world order is virtually an extension of the colonial civilizing project. It is an irony that when the West facilitated assertion of ethnicity and other identities, celebration of all differences in former Warsaw Pact countries and undivided Yugoslavia, both remained political shibboleths and social-cultural inhibitions in the US and Western European “nations”.

Therefore there is a need to question the politics of autonomy that underpinned the Dayton agreement. Elena concluded that the “the [present] political system structures individual choices in a manner that undermines democracy and sustainable peace”. She confined her “policy recommendations” to the creation of “political, legal and institutional conditions that empower individuals to act on their interests and rights in a socially and politically responsible manner.” These

include inter-entity coordination and agreements to provide social security benefits to people of different ethnicities.

Yet she also mentioned “lots of nostalgia for Yugoslavia” among today’s citizens of the divided Balkans. “They say there was no political freedom but there were lots of multi-ethnic social and cultural spaces [in former Yugoslavia]. Today, even music and art have been divided along the ethnic line,” she rued. Perhaps reverting to old state and social structures is not an option in the current local, regional and global scenario. But should we consider this unending mitosis of identities and resultant amoebic autonomies inevitable? Is this the destiny of democracy-seekers? Is peace the other name of proliferation of hatred, constant cocooning of the self and “othering” of neighbours and friends?

These questions reverberated again in the discussion on Cyprus and Abkhazia. The first country, a Mediterranean Island, is divided between territories held by Greek and Turkish Cypriots, supported by their respective “motherlands”, Greece and Turkey. The second one is a de-facto independent territory of Georgia. The homeland of Joseph Stalin, Georgia itself seceded from the USSR along with Armenia and Azerbaijan, the other two south Caucasian constituents of the former Soviet Union. Focus of the studies in these two conflict areas was different. But the underlying issues brought out similar questions related to the EU model for conflict resolution in Europe.

Abkhazia

With 50 ethnic groups divided into sects and sub-sects of Christians and Muslims as well as speakers of three language groups in the land between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, the Caucasian cauldron always simmers at slightest provocation. Since the days of Tsarist and Ottoman empires, Russia and Turkey (also, to some extent, Iran) are the big players in this mountainous region between Europe and Asia. All the nation-states that were born out of the USSR have ethno-religious minorities who are asking for their cherished homelands. No doubt, the historic legitimacy of the small nations’ right to self-determination and their present dynamics cannot be ignored. But one may wonder if the US-Western support for such rights in the region does not stem from any altruistic mission.

The victors of the Cold War want Russian Federation (the core of the former USSR) to lose its Muslim-dominated areas in the north Caucasus including Chechnya and Dagestan as well as its traditional links with largely Christian Georgia, Armenia and Muslim-majority Azerbaijan in the south Caucasus. On the other hand, Russia is keen to retain its influence zones in the Caucasus as well as Ukraine, Belarus in the West on economic, demographic and political grounds. All these countries have varying numbers of Russian-speaking population with Soviet-era communication and other infrastructure that connected them to Russia. Further, both US-EU-Turkey alliance and Russia-Syria-Iran combine are eyeing the oil and gas reserve in the Caspian basin as well as other geo-political dividends. All the ethnic/ national freedom struggles in Russia’s neighbourhood are largely hostage to the big power game.

The conflict in Abkhazia is part of that context. The region was an autonomous republic within Georgia in Soviet era and non-Georgians here opposed Georgia’s secession from the USSR in 1991. The subsequent abolition of soviet-era constitution by the Georgian nationalist government led to cycle of civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia sided with the rebels and the West with Georgia. Protégés of both sides committed horrific crimes against ethnic minorities in their strongholds that triggered massive internal displacements and exodus of thousands from the region.

The proxy wars between Russia and Georgia in the 1990s led to full-scale war in 2008 that culminated in declaration of independence by Russian-backed separatists in these nominally Georgian enclaves and recognition by Moscow, Managua and Caracas *et al.* Invariably Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and Brussels did not accept it and lent their weight to Georgia. Though the war has ended, the political standoff still continues. The UN, itself hostage to big power game, did some tightrope walking but failed.

A silver lining seems to have appeared in the Caucasian horizon since the new Georgian government announced its willingness to reconstruct and reopen its railway communication to Russia, known as South Caucasus Railway, which was interrupted as a result of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in 1993. According to Nona Mikhelidze, a research fellow at Institute of International Affairs in Rome, this initiative is a part of a broader Georgian foreign policy strategy aimed at re-establishing political and economic relations with Russia. Also the new Tbilisi leadership has decided to engage their Abkhaz counterparts in peace talks while continuing its non-recognition of the latter's independence.

While both sides accept the rationale of economic cooperation through the reopened STR, Georgians are divided on the political significance of the move— whether it would upgrade the separatists' political status or renew the hope for reintegration. The other side welcomed it, but rejected any reunion. Russia has reasons to be elated as Mikhelidze pointed out that the STR would not only reconnect Tbilisi and Moscow but also the latter's rail link with Armenia and Iran as well as its coveted Western market.

But what is right for Russia and Armenia is wrong for Azerbaijan and Turkey. Yerevan and Baku have been fighting over the Nogorno-Karabakh region since the Soviet days. Also Baku and Ankara have fears that the reopening of the STR would undermine the import Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway (BTKR)— a project that links Georgia and Azerbaijan to Europe via Turkey. The BTKR project is intended to bring the region “more autonomy vis-à-vis both Iran and Russia”, another commentator has pointed out. Clearly, geo-political interests of the promoters of the STR and BTKR, for that matter, their big brothers are at cross-purposes.

But Mikhelidze said Armenian isolation did not help Azeris on the issue of disputed territory and the proposed reopening would help the latter to reach Ukraine. All these economic logic underline the continued import of Pan-USSR communication network in regional economy despite the latter's political dissolution and subsequent ethno-religious strife.

Though Mikhelidze's presentation did not shed much light on the question as to what can be the EU response to this move, particularly when Ankara and Baku are not happy with the development, her own recommendation gives the inkling. According to her, Tbilisi could encourage the EU to contribute to the implementation of the project in the framework of its “engagement without recognition”. Also, she argued that the EU involvement would “allay Western fears regarding the [Georgian] government's rapprochement with Russia”. Evidently, Western governments want to keep the Caucasian cauldron boiling.

Given this scenario, will the road to peace in south Caucasus go through the STR? Or, will the prospect be postponed with regional bickering over the STR vs. BTKR that is overshadowed by the rivalry of the global players, namely, the US-EU combine and Russia and its allies? The researcher did not address these larger questions.

Cyprus

A former Ottoman-turned British colony and claimed both by Greece and Turkey, the divided island represents a 53-year long “frozen conflict” as Roger MacGinty of Manchester University described it. Ethno-religious strife between the Greek and Turk settlers has led to the creation of *de facto* nation-states in the south and the north. The strategically located Cyprus has become a labyrinth of larger geo-political games of major European powers including Greece-Turkey rivalry. The West-recognized and ethnic Greek-dominated republic of Cyprus is an EU member along with Greece. Turkey failed to get its coveted berth so far despite its long efforts to be a part of the West since its Ataturk-led Europeanization and long membership of many western forums.

The Muslim-majority and now an Islamist party-ruled country which was once the hub of Ottoman Empire, failed to get a berth in the pre-dominantly Christian EU. It missed the bus due to the opposition from the Greek-dominated Nicosia regime, Athens as well as key EU powers, namely France and Germany. Turkish recognition and support to the parallel government of ethnic Turk settlers in the north is one of the key factors behind the Western opposition. With the former colonial master Britain continuing to enjoy its pound of flesh by holding two “sovereign base areas”, two UN-run buffer zones between the two contesting states is now dysfunctional.

“Despite years of unsuccessful peace talks, most state actors and international organizations continue to claim that a solution to the ‘Cyprus issue’ can only be found at the international level”, commented Birte Vogel and Oliver Richmond of Manchester University in their paper note titled “Enabling Civil Society in Conflict Resolution”. However, they observed that “elite and nationalist government and the UN-supported high-level peace processes become mutually self-sustaining: the peace process allows local elites to maintain their power ... sustains elite interest ... unlikely to promote change”.

Instead, the researchers focussed on the potentials of Cyprus’s inter-community movement, which has impact across the border. “The movement echoes a long-history of cooperation and hybridity in Cyprus— a trend that has been kept alive by its participants ... [it] offers an insight into how a lasting peace might be achieved ... they do not challenge the legitimate rights of long-held identities of any of the parties to the conflict ... [but] their initiatives are bottom-up, locally resonant, internationally legitimate ... such tradition offers a useful model for peace and governance, government ... in heavily politicalized post-conflict environments.”

But the “international community” and donor agencies have continued to support listed NGOs as they consider the latter as the “tools within liberal peace framework”. “Following a global trend, internationals prefer to engage with civil society in an institutionalized manner that seems easy to manage,” the researchers pointed out. In Cyprus too, the donors work with “selected partners”, who are governed by the “donor conditionality”. However, these funding criteria and the envisaged outcomes are not in line with local needs.

Consequently, the “peace-related civil society actors” have become “closely interlinked”, catering more to the “international audience” than bothering to “connect publicly to large parts of the population on either side of the Green line”. For example, these “civil society actors” do not bother to translate work of peaceniks among Greek Cypriots into Turkish but in English, which is the language of the donors and international audience. In this context, the role of civil society in other conflict areas and further examination of the EU model should be examined. This we do in the next section

Conflict Resolution-IV: Beyond Neo-Liberal 'Peace Industry'

As the gulf is widening between the liberal ideals of French and American revolutions and the neo-liberal market fundamentalists today, the concept of civil society with its Hegelian, Marxian, Gramscian and other variations is a world apart from the similar buzzword of Bretton Woods Institutions, particularly since the fag end of the Cold War. The coinage has been reduced to a World Bank euphemism primarily for the Western-US donor-driven and influenced NGOs.

The controversies over the role of these NGOs in conflict zones were revisited by the CORE project conference in New Delhi.

How Independent is the “Civil Society”?

Researchers on Cyprus found that the “elite and nationalist government and the UN-supported [also EU-sponsored] high-level peace processes become mutually self-sustaining: the peace process allows local elites to maintain their power”. Also, the funded NGOs who work within that very framework cater more to the “international audience” than bothering to “connect publicly to large parts of the population on either side” of the ethno-religious divide between Greek and Turkish settlers.

In contrast, there is an inter-community peace movement that stress on the shared traditions and hybridity. But the Western peacemakers and donors do not promote latter endeavours. Subsequent discussions in Delhi revealed that the pattern was not Cyprus-specific. In theory, the World Bank definition is more broad-based. According to it, “the term civil society is to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations”.

Further, the WB site says: “CSOs have also become important actors for delivery of social services and implementation of other development programmes, as a complement to government action, *especially in regions where government presence is weak such as in post-conflict situations* (emphasis added).”

However, the researchers on three European conflicts as well as other experts described the CSOs mostly as EU and other internationally funded NGOs. They drew parallels between the roles played by these NGOs critically. Referring to Cyprus, Roger MacGinty observed that the “large and well-established civil society” in the divided island is “orthodox, lazy and fat”. “It is not creative but tamed and co-opted by the establishment while being often donor-driven,” he said. In contrast, he mentioned the occupiers at the UN-controlled buffer zone in Cyprus, who were inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US. They urged for the “alternatives” to the donor-driven civil society. Speaking on BiH, Elena Stavrevska echoed MacGinty. “The NGOs are often alienated from the affected population and represent the international donors’ interests”, she said.

As women have suffered violence and post-violence trauma across the ethnic divide in the Balkans, international donors in the BiH specifically target them. “Lots of funds are coming for NGO projects for women empowerment,” she added. But does it promote dialogue among affected women across the communities and stress on rebuilding inter-ethnic/faith bridges, which we had found in Israel-occupied West Bank between Jew and Palestinian mothers? In Georgia too, Nona Mikhelidze found that the “EU funded moves for pro-European civil society initiatives”. According

to her, “civil society is divided between pro- and anti-government factions. Even those were in government earlier now joined civil society opposing the new regime.” The last observation resonates with our experiences in our parts of the world where a sustainable non-partisan but politically plural civil society, organically connected to grassroots is still a chimera.

Border Trade

In almost all divided lands, peoples across the ethno-religious divide as well as disputed territories go for clandestine border trades. “Illicit trade ... is the economic coping mechanism for the people in the conflict-ridden areas ... people-to-people communication, it helps to know the other side... they are the small avenues of conflict transformation,” MacGinty said citing experiences in divided Cyprus and Ireland. Elena Stavrevska too cited trade among communities in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina across the ethno-religious divides.

But many a time, big global/regional politics, local state and non-state actors obstruct border trades as experiences both in South Asia as well theatres of conflicts in Europe have shown. Janel B Galvanek of Berghof Foundation in Berlin pointed to the tensions over border business. “The unofficial trade has its role in conflict resolution. But there was tension when northern products [from Turkish side] were boycotted in Cyprus [in the Greek zone]”, she said. Navnita Behera further said that the cross-border trade is a “local initiative” across the Line of Control between Indian and Pakistani parts of Kashmir. “It came from peoples’ hearts.”

But some others felt that border economies are not always constructive for conflict resolution. Peter Burgess from the Peace Research Institute in Oslo said that the ghost economy outside the formalities of law was sometimes used by those interests who wanted to foster the conflicts in Cyprus. Rajesh Tandon of PRIA wanted more studies in the “unstructured economy or ghost economy” and its role “in stabilizing the ethnic relations” and in the overall “matrix of peace.”

Role of the EU and Its Liberal Model for Peacemaking

The sterility and un-sustainability of the EU interventions in conflict zones have triggered questions about the ideological and structural straitjacket that anchor its model of conflict resolution. The concept note of the international seminar reflected that critical approach. “It raises the key issues that researchers grappled with ... the impact of the EU model of conflict resolution and how this is understood and received by people in Cyprus, Georgia and Bosnia in a world where the EU is seen as the diplomatic exemplar”. In an oblique criticism of the EU model, it urged to “think beyond a liberal peace.” “The research project adopted a post-liberal peace-building approach in its analysis of conflict and governance and worked with the consensual understanding that free markets, procedural democracy and rule of law were not necessarily the magic bullets that could bring about an emancipatory and sustainable civic peace.”

MacGinty focused on the “EU economics of peace” and its dichotomies. “The EU firmly believes in market economy but is obsessed with regulation and bureaucracy”. Pointing out how political exigencies play a role in fund disbursement and EU interventions in conflict zones, he said: “Northern Ireland got two million Euros while the equally small Bosnia got six million Euro.” Generally, the EU gets involved when its member states are affected by the conflicts which sometimes spill into their territories. But EU’s self-image is important. This also explains its selective intervention in different conflict zones in Europe and rest of the world. Questioning the “EU

ambition in the Balkans”, he said: “Human rights violations still continue there ... [but] the EU is still there because its reputation is at stake. It is there because of selfish reasons.”

The researcher on Georgia felt that the “EU wants democracy.... It is a pragmatic actor.” But Peter Burgess pointed out that the “conflicting parties are themselves heterogeneous in Georgia, while the EU approaches focus on homogeneity”.

Ummu Salma Bava of JNU and a participant in the conference, was more scathing. According to her, “motivations behind EU engagements depend on EU’s vision of post-conflict scenarios and the locations of the conflicts.” She also spoke of the “identical construct of the EU moves despite the extreme heterogeneity [in the conflict zones]” across the globe. Asking “what democracy is and how the liberal order is constructed”, she commented: “EU is corrupting and undervaluing the local preferences while imposing its own values. It has co-opted new elites in the name of civil society.” She also questioned the universality of the Copenhagen Criteria for inclusion of new states in the EU that made a functioning market economy and ability to withstand competition from peer states mandatory along with other conditions.

Comparing European and Indian Conflicts

Comparing Indian and European experiences, Sumona Dasgupta said the EU liberal model focussed on stabilization/ resolution of conflict. But in India, it is the “daily management of conflict and here people feel no development is possible without conflicts”. MacGinty commented that “India is facing the problems of state-building while the EU is facing the problem of institution building”.

The concept note for the seminar observed: “We see emerging from it [the project] is the way in which critiques of neo-liberalism, of governance and its conceptual relationship with governmentality, a focus on decentralized institutions and local forms of peace agency, the escalatory tendencies of borders and the urgency of development and self-determination pressures across both case sets [Indian and European] are very similar.” It also examined the issues emanating from “the scale and responses of Indian state to a range of complex conflicts as it seeks to maintain its legitimacy as a democratic state with the capacity to develop.”

In this context the studies in conflicts in Kashmir and Jharkhand-Bihar under the project possibly could not go far beyond the EU peace and development model. In the first case, while researchers rightly criticized New Delhi’s ruling regime, which tried to appropriate the massive turnout for panchayat (village council) polls in J&K as an approval for India’s position on Kashmir despite voters made clear distinction between the issues involved in rural polls and political settlement over the disputed territory, they could not deeply investigate into the “lost opportunity for conflict-sensitive governance” in the context of stalemate over the larger issues. In Jharkhand-Bihar also, the researchers could not probe deeply into the relation between government’s developmental paradigms and escalating conflicts in large part of India including these two eastern states. Thus the subversion of the Forest Rights Act and PESA – the two instruments of grassroots autonomy through PRIs, public participation, accountability, decision making ability, and transparency - by the government was not thoroughly investigated.

Beyond Liberal Peace: Inter-Cultural Resources and Space for Dialogue

Some participants in the seminar wanted to draw attention to the peace processes and actors beyond EU and non-EU neo-liberal paradigms. The inter-community peace movement in Cyprus with its focus on shared tradition and hybridity was one of such examples.

Despite being neglected by state and secularist non-state peaceniks, syncretism in popular and subaltern cultural traditions in South Asia can be cited in a similar context, even though the research on Kashmir did not discuss the theme of *Kashmiriyat* for all Kashmiris irrespective of their religious faiths, which was vibrant before the Islamists communalized the Kashmir issue in the valley and the RSS-led Hindu revivalists in rest of India. The claim of *Kashmiriyat* as a subaltern cultural tradition has not been beyond challenge.

Nevertheless, Priyanka Upadhyaya emphasized the indigenous cultural resources for peace building. He criticized institutional undermining of such resources. Citing the intercultural, inter-faith traditions including that of the Bhakti and Sufi movements in undivided India, he mentioned how Gandhi and others banked on it.

He asked for more focus on the “ideational and cultural aspects” for meaningful moves towards conflict resolution in different societies. “The so-called rationalist scientific approach is not suitable to understand the complexities of peace-making,” he observed. He quoted Amartya Sen to point out that the “idea of democracy is in our traditions”. “Gandhi and other sources of non-violence and insistence on peaceful methods for conflict resolution should be promoted more,” he felt.

Questioning the liberal paradigm of peace, Ranabir Samaddar of Calcutta Research Group cited the increasingly shrinking space for dialogue during conflicts between the guardians of nation-states and their critics/challengers on the streets or those in jungles and hills. Referring to the first phase of anti-corruption movement by Anna Hazare in India, he said Indian President Pranab Mukherjee asked for dialogue inside the parliament but not on the roads. “So the government admits conflict, tolerates protests in prescribed forms of claim-making but do not allow forbidden forms. The good democrats are expected to follow the confines and the rules of institutionalized claim-making. But non-institutionalized sites are hardly tolerated. Even the communists and socialists want to regulate the frame of dialogue. But the law of society also triggers non-formal daily dialogues. The question is: How will be the conversations below accommodated in the framework of national and global governance?” Samaddar asked.

On development-induced conflicts, Samaddar pointed to the “challenges today, which emanated from the accumulation of capital and its impact on the peacemaking.”

Dealing with the new hierarchy of conflicts, Samaddar said in the imperial age rebels hailed the emperor as the great one while revolting against the local despots. “Now, it is the other way round. Local rulers say we don’t want to tax you but it is the Centre which goads us.”

With the empire of global capital looking for new pastures for primitive accumulation around the globe, the increasingly paranoid and security-obsessed control freaks of the neo-liberal regimes and their frontier-guards down the line constantly shift the centre-periphery, emperor-consul and global-local relationships. In this context, Neera Chandhoke was correct when she reminded the audience of Thomas Hobbes. “He [Hobbes] said scarce resource and lack of altruism were the conditions of modernity. Liberalism has new connotations now,” she pointed out.

Given the scenario, what should be the role of the peacemakers in different conflict situations? MacGinty felt that the “ongoing balancing act” would not suffice, even as “mutually hurting stalemate can push the conflict parties” towards short-term peace. He advocated “genuine power sharing and security for people”. Galvanek stressed on bridging the “disconnect between top-down and bottom-up initiatives”. Her colleague Hans Joachim Giesmann felt that the peacemakers’ job should be “transformation of the relations in a conflict into constructive relations, which would mean empathy for different perspectives in a violent situation ... rather than aiming at resolving the conflicts.”

Divergence of views was evident when MacGinty liked the messiness of socio-political life in India and criticized the conceit of western academia and the latter's disapproval of that messiness. "This messiness is incredibly valuable," he said. But Giesmann felt that "too much focus on local may create problem for the governance."

The "Industry of Peacemaking"

However, Giesmann apparently hit the bottom line when he observed: "The EU has lots of money. [European] Politicians want clear answer from researchers." Questions still remain: do the EU politicians want clear answer on the untenability of the universalistic claims of the EU model for peace and post-conflict state restructuring? Or, are they interested in finding innovative ways to make their framework workable in various situations? Finally, can an academic research project furnish clear answers?

Upadhyaya was candid when he pointed to the "emerging industry of peace or peacemaking." He was referring to the EU and other Western power-blocs as well as national governments, which network through global think tanks, national policy-makers, academia, and NGOs. Unlike the ghost economy of those who have vested interests in sustaining the conflicts and violence, this peace industry generates enormous paperwork and meticulous accounting. The professionals and pragmatics among researchers, like in all other professions, are expected to internalize the received wisdom.

Yet the Doubting Thomas will be still out there. They will keep on raising politically crucial questions and make incisive observations amidst safe wordplays, stereotypes and silences.

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