Not long ago it was fashionable to argue that modernization would reduce, if not eliminate, ethnic hatred. Instead, nationalism appears stronger than ever, and ethnic conflict remains a major global issue. The study of ethnic conflict as a distinct field from nationalism itself is only about twenty years old, gaining wide attention mainly in the last ten. It has grown up primarily in response to the decline over the last half century in the number of interstate wars and the simultaneous rise in the number of internal wars, especially ethnic and religious wars.

With the end of the cold war, there was a sudden, if short-lived, upsurge of optimism, especially among liberals, about the ability of the United States and other Western countries to resolve the problems of countries experiencing humanitarian disasters resulting from civil war and other forms of internal strife:

What is new is that since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. armed forces, and the Army specifically, routinely has been called upon to conduct peace and stability operations aimed at preventing, quelling, or dealing with the

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2. Although the technical meanings of the terms “ethnic,” “ethnoreligious,” “communal,” and “national” are not identical, it is becoming an increasingly standard shorthand to refer to the whole field as the study of “ethnic conflict.” See Donald Horowitz, Ethnic Groups In Conflict (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 41–54.

consequences of communitarian strife. Moreover, the post–Cold War peace operations are different from earlier peace operations in size, scope, and complexity. Rather than stemming from a purposive grand strategy, U.S. participation in such peace operations stems from its position of leadership in the world, humanitarian considerations, and a region-specific combination of U.S. incentives and constraints.4

This was true, despite a long-standing concern among realists that ending superpower dominance of volatile areas would produce dangerous instability.5

Before long many people in governments and NGOS began to argue that the appropriate response to countries with such deep internal divisions was to stop the killing as soon as possible and bring the participants together to negotiate a political settlement which would include power-sharing, democracy, and an economy open to international trade and investment. A representative example of this position came in the form of the 1997 Carnegie Commission Report on Preventing Deadly Conflict. The report assessed the strategies appropriate to respond to the increasing lethality of ethnic and civil wars. In it, the commission concluded that early action was the best way to prevent the growing number of noncombatants killed and that a combination of strategies should be pursued simultaneously and in concert—avoiding unilateral action by outside powers.

The Carnegie Commission identified the following key operational strategies as increasing the likelihood of ending violence and conflict: prevent the emergence of conflict, prevent conflict contagion, prevent conflict from resuming, approach conflict resolution in a comprehensive and consistent fashion (clear signals rather than mixed messages), couple political pressures with economic carrots and sticks, and act early and quickly.6

All of the Commission’s recommendations were excellent, in theory, but the report failed to recognize that there was not always a coalition of countries willing to intervene or act to defend human rights regimes. Also, although the report recognized that NGOS and international organizations may have their own vested interests, and may not be objective arbiters of conflict or provide reliable information about the imminence of violence, it could not offer an alternative measure that would prevent an impending human rights disaster.

Finally, and most significantly for this volume, the report recognized that on some occasions third parties might have to intervene coercively: “The question

arises as to when, where, and how individual nations, and global and regional organizations, should be willing to apply forceful measures to curb incipient violence and stop potentially greater destruction of life and property. The report, however, could not provide guidance or criteria indicating which forms of coercion might be effective, especially if these solutions were politically incorrect or ideologically unpopular.

Both the causes of ethnic conflict and appropriate international responses to it remain in dispute. Is it possible or feasible to anticipate specific conflicts, and if so, how can this be done? Under what conditions, if any, should outside powers intervene? How useful is power-sharing among groups within governments as a strategy to prevent ethnic violence? After large-scale ethnic violence, will a single government designed around power-sharing encourage cooperation, or does it make more sense to encourage or even require separation of the groups through partition, at least in some cases?

The experiences of Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, among others, quickly produced a second wave of analyses arguing that nation building based on power-sharing was either extremely difficult or practically impossible. Within this quite substantial literature, three articles by Chaim Kaufmann quickly

7. Preventing Deadly Conflict, xxv.
became the center of attention and controversy for several reasons. What made Kaufmann’s argument so provocative was that he suggested the alternative that dare not speak its name—controlled transfer of populations. His argument was straightforward: when ethnic violence involves large-scale killing of civilians, the resulting grievances make it impossible for the survivors to live together in any reasonably open political system. The key mechanism involved, taken from the study of international politics, was the security dilemma—given the high level of distrust and mutual vulnerability of intermingled civilian populations, any move by one side, even if defensive, would be interpreted as offensive and responded to accordingly. The only viable solution is thus separation and, in some cases, partition.

Kaufmann’s work raised many additional issues and several broad questions for further research:

1. How important is the security dilemma in causing ethnic violence?
2. Is renewed ethnic violence more likely when peoples are intermingled or separated?
3. If separation makes renewed ethnic violence less likely, would autonomy work as well as partition?
4. After large-scale civilian killing, can power sharing agreements between former adversaries result in stable government?
5. What useful role, if any, can third parties play in this process?
6. Are there unanticipated consequences of the separation prescription which make it too costly, compared to realistic alternatives?

All of these issues are discussed in the following papers.


Why were Kaufmann’s ideas so incendiary? They proved so provocative for several reasons.

(1) Kaufmann stated his argument clearly and framed it in very general terms; it presumably applied to all ethnic conflicts in which the civilian death toll is substantial (although Kaufmann did not stipulate a threshold for such toll). Thus the argument had implications for policy in all parts of the world.

(2) The policy prescriptions derived from Kaufmann’s argument directly contradicted the position noted above which advocated power sharing, democracy, and open economies as a solution to ethnic conflict; instead, Kaufmann argues for separation or partition. It is true that the prescription was not entirely general; it was supposed to apply only to cases in which substantial civilian killing had occurred, and, fortunately, the number of countries currently engaged in such activities is fairly small. These countries, however, are precisely the countries in which the international community is considering intervening, so that, in fact, Kaufmann was making an argument which called for a complete change in intervention policy.

(3) Population transfers, often involuntary, are hardly novel in conflict situations. Liberals have often approved of the outcome, while deploiring the means, as was the case in the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe after the Second World War, and even with regard to some of the shifts within the former Yugoslavia. Kaufmann, however, went much further, arguing that international organizations, in order to save lives, should be prepared to separate people, even if these people did not want to move. Many people interpreted Kaufmann’s recommendation as ethnic cleansing conducted by outsiders, albeit in order to reduce casualties. The articles appeared in the middle of a debate over intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethnic cleansing was being cited as a crime against humanity; no recommendation that outsiders should engage in policies which looked like ethnic cleansing, even if for ostensibly humanitarian purposes, was going to be readily accepted.

(4) At a broader level, Kaufmann’s argument undercut the rationale for all multiethnic states (which, of course, means that the argument applies practically to all states). It said that any state composed of people who have previously engaged in a conflict involving substantial civilian casualties is inherently unstable. Moreover, the argument implied that even those multiethnic states which have been involved in such conflicts in the past must live with the knowledge that, if such strife happens in the future, they, too, may be unable to put Humpty Dumpty back together.

(5) For these and other reasons, Kaufmann’s arguments were hard for most people involved in international affairs to accept. There did not, however, seem
an obvious case or set of cases which would allow us to reject Kaufmann’s ideas compellingly. It was true that partition had not always resolved disputes among the peoples involved, but this did not settle the issue since Kaufmann could argue that the level of violence was lowered as a result of partition, and that violence would have been more intense if the groups had been living together; indeed he is now working on a larger study bringing together such cases as India and Ireland. Some research showed that peoples living closely intermingled were actually less likely to resort to ethnic violence than people who lived in separated communities, presumably because closely intermingled people were more vulnerable to retaliation, but Kaufmann’s argument focused on a specific sub-set of cases—those in which there had already been substantial civilian killing, not the entire population of states. The lack of an obvious way to refute the argument seemed to add fuel to the emotional fires it triggered.

Other authors have been more restrained in their view of the rampant diffusion of ethnic conflict. Against the grim view that ethnic conflict is widespread, James Fearon, David Laitin, and Ted Gurr urged us not to exaggerate the occurrence of violence among ethnic groups. Russell Hardin seemed to predict that urbanization would reduce the potential for ethnic conflict since it reduced the ignorance that seemingly constituted a precondition for ethnic violence. Ashutosh Varshney found that ethnic violence in India varied from city to city in ways that suggested practical policy prescriptions to reduce or avoid it.

Kaufmann’s position has resonance in several other on-going debates. The common theme in all of them is an increasingly pointed criticism of the notion that outside powers could, rather cheaply, restore peace and create functioning, fairly democratic states in areas of ethnic conflict.

Traditional humanitarianism, for example, focused on giving aid to people in distress and carefully staying neutral on political questions in order to gain access to victims; the International Committee of the Red Cross has been the standard bearer for this approach. As the humanitarian disasters of the 1990s unfolded, however, participants increasingly became concerned that they were “putting band aids on cancer,” and that the rules of neutrality prevented them from contending with the causes of the problems, which were clearly political.

Indeed, in some situations, classical humanitarianism seemed to be making the situation worse:18 In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, aid workers helped hundreds of thousands of Hutus fleeing Rwanda into the DRC in the face of the advancing Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front. Intermingled with these fleeing Hutus, however, were thousands of *genocidaires*—the very people who had led the Hutu government-inspired genocide of the Tutsi. In the process of helping Hutu refugees, the UN was also empowering the Hutu paramilitaries to resume their guerilla war across the border with the new government.

Several influential critics, sometimes called the “new humanitarians,”19 argued that humanitarian groups had an obligation to enter the political process, either in the local communities or in the intervening countries, as advocates to help change the situations which produced the problems.20 These issues became more controversial when the United States, after 9/11, declared that humanitarian aid was a critical part of the American political project of regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, raising concerns that aid workers would now be viewed as parties to the conflict and legitimate targets for opponents.21

Kaufmann’s proposed policy of separation of peoples by outsiders, perhaps even forced separation, can be seen as the extreme case of such political humanitarianism. It highlights the ethical and normative issues involved in having outsiders not only intervene in internal political issues, but make major political decisions for those on the ground. Is this, as David Rieff says, “recolonization,”22 and, if so, is it justified by the intention of avoiding future casualties, given the limits of both government intelligence and social science to foretell the future?

21. See an excellent discussion of these issues in Afghanistan in Donini, Niland, and Wermester, *Nation-Building Unraveled?*
At another level, the issue also illuminates a separate discussion—the role of military force in humanitarian activities. Licklider recalls an epiphany in the 1980s when, at a conference of the United States Institute of Peace, humanitarians argued vociferously in favor of using force in Somalia, while military officers argued just as strongly that it was inappropriate. Indeed, Somalia was seen by many at the time as sort of a test case of whether, after the cold war, relatively small military forces could end civil wars and set the stage for peaceful development. The collapse of those hopes in Somalia, and subsequent experiences in the Balkans, led to a much more serious discussion of the numbers and types of military forces required for such expeditions, and whether outside powers really had the political will to pay the costs involved.23

The Kaufmann argument raises another question which much of this literature elides—what is it exactly that military forces should do in such situations? The initial assumption—that interposing forces between conflicting groups would suffice (a sort of heavy United Nations peacekeeping force, which worked in Bosnia)—has been supplanted by a willingness sometimes to fight groups which oppose the preferred settlement, as in Kosovo. (The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to bring about regime changes cannot properly be considered humanitarian missions.) Kaufmann, however, implies that there is yet another possible role for the military force outsiders send in to intervene in the conflict: encouraging, or possibly even forcing, civilians to leave their homes, presumably forever.

A major value of the Kaufmann argument is precisely that it forces advocates of particular positions within these different controversies to face an extreme case and explain how they would handle it, given their values and priorities. They must either say that this is indeed a possible, albeit perhaps unlikely, alternative which they would support, or they must explain why they would oppose it. In either case, the intellectual and moral bases of their arguments are likely to be clarified and strengthened.

Interestingly, Kaufmann’s argument has remained an isolate in the field: everyone knows about it and cites it, but there has been remarkably little serious

research on it. Although academic articles come and go, these issues roused deep emotions for people in the field. During a discussion at a conference a few years ago, Licklider saw a senior political scientist become so angry and agitated that he feared the person would have a heart attack. One of the most respected and temperate people in the field refused an invitation to the conference which produced some of the papers in this volume, saying that he did not want to dignify Kaufmann’s ideas by his participation. Thus, when Licklider was asked to suggest a topic for a small research conference at Rutgers in 2000, research related to Chaim Kaufmann’s controversial arguments was an obvious choice. The conference was sponsored by the Center for Global Security and Democracy at Rutgers. At the end of the conference it was decided to pursue the possibility of putting some of the papers into a special issue of a journal. Over time several of the papers were further developed into article form, and, at the suggestion of Benjamin Frankel of Security Studies, several more were solicited.

The papers vary widely both in methodology and conclusions. Alexander Downes notes that part of Kaufmann’s argument—that autonomy rather than separation may be the appropriate response to ethnic conflict—is in fact now part of the international consensus which calls for federal systems and power-sharing. He suggests, however, that the track record of this strategy is not impressive. He attributed the failures to the fear of each side of their former adversary and the consequent inability to cooperate in a single government, a somewhat different mechanism than Kaufmann’s security dilemma. Given this, the only logical conclusion is partition, the part of Kaufmann’s argument which most people find most difficult to accept. Downes supports his argument by intensive analyses of Bosnia and Kosovo.

Paul Roe suggests that the security dilemma mechanism is more complex and perhaps less common in intrastate conflict than is sometimes suggested. The standard notion is that both parties want security; the tragedy is that their goals are compatible, but they wind up in conflict nonetheless. Roe distinguishes between three different types of security dilemmas. In a “tight” security dilemma, each side can do what it feels is necessary to achieve security without undermining the perceived security of its opponent. There is no real dilemma, and a concerned outsider should try to eliminate the misperception. In a “regular” security dilemma, one or both sides believe they can have security

24. A growing number of young authors are beginning to test some of Kaufman’s hypotheses regarding separation against more traditional policy prescriptions of humanitarian action; see, for example, Daniel Byman’s Keeping the Peace: Lasting Solutions to Ethnic Conflict. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.)
only by doing things which will, in fact, threaten the perceived security of their opponent. The opponents correctly understand that they have incompatible goals, and it will be difficult to avoid war. The appropriate response is incentives to one side or the other to change its goals. In a “loose” security dilemma situation, one or both sides is not really interested in security at all; the problem is redefined as whether or not war is a rational strategy for one side, and this may depend largely on the particular situation. Under these circumstances, war is very likely, and the prescription would be some sort of military action such as the ones that Kaufmann prescribes. Roe illustrates his argument by looking at the Serb-Croatian conflict in Croatia; he sees it as a regular security dilemma, since, in order to feel secure, Croats needed a “Croatian” republic and Serbs needed a bi-national republic. Presumably the situation could have been resolved by a package of incentives from the outside which would have made both sides feel more secure with more limited goals.

Alan Kuperman notes that two quantitative studies of power-sharing agreements in ethnic conflicts (one of which is Kaufmann’s) reach diametrically opposed conclusions. He finds that this is due both to the fact that their cases are almost completely different (only 6 of the 27 and 28 cases in the two articles overlap) and to different definitions of negotiated settlement. He applies each article’s definitions to the other cases and suggests that the important difference may not be between ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts, but between ethnic conflicts involving groups which are concentrated and those which are intermingled. In particular, he suggests that groups which are regionally concentrated may find it easier to reach a negotiated settlement of their differences, a conclusion which seems to move in the same direction as Kaufmann’s argument, although it is substantially more qualified.

David Laitin uses data from the Minorities at Risk dataset to challenge Kaufmann’s argument that renewed civil war is more likely when populations are intermingled than when they are separated. He finds precisely the opposite, that rebellion against the state is much more likely to come when groups are separated, even when we control for other variables. Identifying eleven conflicts among groups which had been intermingled before civil war, he finds that none of these conflicts ended with population concentrations and autonomy or partition, that six conflicts seem to have ended peacefully, that three had another civil war which seems to have ended peacefully, and that only two of the eleven seem to have behaved in the way Kaufmann predicts. He also notes that in several of the cases Kaufmann cites, political autonomy seems to have helped produce peace without population transfers.

David Carment and Dane Rowlands focus on two central issues: can there be peace after civilian killing without partition, and what third party strategies
seem to work best in responding to such situations? Looking at wars linked to separatist issues, they find that wars with high number of casualties are less likely to be peacefully settled, and then go beyond the simple statistics briefly to discuss both the cases that seem to support and those which seem to disprove Kaufmann’s ideas. They then look at third party intervention in some of the cases. Noting that it is difficult to “code” many of the cases, they conclude that the evidence is inconclusive but that there are cases which seem to cast doubt on Kaufmann’s ideas.

James Fearon argues that partition may seem attractive in individual cases but that it would have major effects on other states as well. Granting a state to people who have used violence will encourage violent nationalism in other places. Moreover, since all states are possible targets for such action, the fact that governments are breaking up other states will poison interstate relations. Rather than supporting independence on the basis of violence, it should be based on the behavior of the state toward the minority group to give an incentive to states to treat their minorities well.

We do not claim that these papers identify all of the major questions raised by Chaim Kaufmann’s arguments, much less that they answer all these questions to the satisfaction of all concerned. Indeed, the authors do not agree among themselves. Research, however, is a social activity. We hope that the papers will encourage those who disagree to respond and move the argument from polemics toward the sort of research which, over time, can establish some common empirical ground from which we can move the discussion forward. The issue is too important to be left to emotional responses alone.