



Cost-Benefit Analysis in the South Sudan-Sudan Ethnic Conflict through a Rational Utilitarian Perspective

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Abstract

The protracted conflict between North and South Sudan has lasted for more than five decades. This conflict has had severe humanitarian impacts. With the magnitude of the resulting negative impacts, the two sides appear unable to reconcile. Various international mediation efforts have been made. However, failure to implement the peace agreement and non-compliance by the parties has always been the end result. The different ideas that exist between the two sides are the basis for the failure of existing agreements. These conditions have resulted in North and South Sudan never being satisfied with the contents of the agreement. The research attempts to analyze the North Sudan-South Sudan conflict through cost-benefit analysis in a rational utilitarianism approach. This approach reveals that each group acts to maximize their interests and often ignores the rights of minority groups and social justice. This research shows that both North Sudan and South Sudan have strong ambitions to achieve their interests. This research was analyzed using qualitative research methods based on library research.

Key Words: South Sudan; Sudan; ethnic conflict; cost-benefit analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The protracted conflict between Sudan and South Sudan has become one of the most complex security and humanitarian issues in the African region. The Sudan-South Sudan war has been going on since 1955. The conflict between Sudan and South Sudan is based on differences in ethnicity, religion, and economic interests that exist between the two (Johnson, 2020). In this case, the ethnic gap is the main factor in the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. The two largest ethnicities in Sudan are Arabs and Africans. As the majority ethnicity, the Arab ethnicity acts as the *main actor* in managing Sudan (Cahyanti, 2017). This is illustrated by the position of ethnic Arabs as the ruling seat of government in Sudan (Cahyanti, 2017). This condition causes Arab ethnicity to be able to easily do African ethnicity arbitrarily. One form of Arab ethnic domination is the prohibition of ethnic Africans to participate in elections and the politics of Islamization and Arabization enforced in Sudan (Cahyanti, 2017).

The struggle for oil resources is one of the crucial dimensions in the Sudan-South Sudan conflict that shows the complexity of calculating economic interests. South Sudan has significant strategic oil reserves, estimated at 3.5 billion barrels of crude oil (Patey, 2010). Control over these oil resources not only impacts economic power, but also becomes an instrument of political power. Each ethnic group seeks to maximize profits from these resources, using strategies of negotiation, confrontation, and violence to gain access and economic benefits from oil (Le Billon, 2012). The complexity of the struggle for oil reflects the rationality of the actors in calculating the gains and losses to be gained, where economic interests often dominate considerations of peace and regional stability.

The conflict between Sudan and South Sudan intensified when there was a political conflict between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon when Sudan and South Sudan were still one country (Putri, 2015). The conflict began when Salva Kiir made allegations against Riek Machar regarding Machar's attempt to stage a coup against Salva Kiir. The conflict caused a wave of violence and ethnic separation in Sudan. In the end, the conflict caused South Sudan to decide to secede from Sudan (Putri, 2015). The separation of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 did not necessarily resolve the existing conflict but rather created new dynamics in the relationship between the two countries. The intensity of the conflict is reflected in the death toll of more than 383,000 people since 2013, with 193,000 deaths recorded in the period 2017-2021 alone (International Crisis Group, 2023). Recent conflict events such as clashes in the Abyei region in October 2023 that left 54 civilians dead and forced displacement of more than 20,000 residents show that the security situation remains highly fragile (United Nations, 2023). The long history of ethnic tensions between Arab-Muslim groups in the

north and African-Christian/animist groups in the south has shaped complex patterns of conflict. According to Anderson (2019), these identity differences were further sharpened by British colonial policies that implemented a separate administrative system between the northern and southern regions, creating a significant development gap. Following Sudan's independence in 1956, political and economic domination by Arab-Muslim elites from the north further exacerbated relations with communities in the south.

The issue of natural resources, especially oil, is a crucial factor in the dynamics of this conflict. About 75% of the oil reserves are located in the territory of South Sudan, while export infrastructure and refineries are located in Sudan (Williams, 2021). The conflict has resulted in \$23 billion in economic losses in the oil sector over the period 2012-2022, with oil production falling to 40% of normal capacity. The situation is exacerbated by disputes over oil transit fees, with Sudan demanding \$24 per barrel while South Sudan is only willing to pay \$15 per barrel (World Bank, 2023). Border security issues are a challenge, with more than 2,000 violent incidents recorded along the border zone in the last five years (UNMISS, 2023). Territorial conflicts in five disputed areas - Abyei, Kafia Kingi, Hofrat al-Nahas, Kaka, and Jodha - have created permanent zones of tension that hinder the implementation of peace agreements (Davidson, 2022).

Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shows that more than 2.3 million people have been displaced by this conflict, with 1.7 million internally displaced and 600,000 cross-border refugees, while thousands more have lost their lives (UNHCR, 2023). This humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by limited access to aid, with 70% of the population facing acute food insecurity. Economic losses have also been significant, with estimated losses in the billions of US dollars due to disrupted oil production and cross-border trade barriers.

Since the outbreak of the first Sudan-South Sudan conflict, the international system has taken active steps to ease tensions between the two. In 1972, the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan was successfully stopped with the Addis Ababa Agreement. The agreement was the result of the demands of the Sudanese people who felt disappointed with the central government. During this period, the Sudanese people showed their disappointment through the formation of a sparist movement in the form of the *Equatoria Corps*. Basically, the *Equatoria Corps* was a small-scale sparist movement that only carried out rebellious actions in a matter of weeks. However, without realizing it, the impact was enormous. *Equatoria Corps* became the main inspiration for Southern Sudan to take part in rebellion. *Equatoria Corps* actually raised the awareness of Southern Sudan that they should rebel, because they were the most disadvantaged. With this basis, South Sudan

formed a guerrilla army in the form of *Anyar Nya*. Unexpectedly, the form of rebellion from *Anyar Nya* has a larger scale than the *Equatoria Corps*. The emergence of two rebel groups made the chaos between Sudan and South Sudan even more complex. The reason is, the emergence of the two groups gave birth to various other rebel groups. These conditions resulted in negotiation efforts always failing. This condition is the basis for the failure of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972.

Not stopping there, efforts to resolve the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan continued. One of the resolution efforts of this case was the establishment of the 2005 *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* (CPA) or known as the Naivasha Agreement. This agreement is an agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Government of Sudan. This agreement has several main points, such as: 1) a plan to end the conflict; 2) an independence referendum; 3) autonomy for the south; resource sharing; 4) security arrangements. (Martinez, 2023) However, these efforts did not produce positive results. Sudan tends to ignore the agreement. The failure to implement the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) shows the complexity of the problem. Martinez (2023) identified parties' non-compliance, weak verification mechanisms, and lack of effective sanctions as the main factors for the failure of peace agreements. Meanwhile, Brown (2021) highlights that traditional approaches to conflict resolution often fail because they do not consider the rationality and profit-loss calculations of stakeholders.

Various conflict resolution efforts that have been made have not shown significant results. This indicates the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and the factors that influence the decision-making of the actors involved. This understanding is crucial given the impact of the conflict that continues to spread to various aspects of people's lives in both countries, as well as the potential for destabilization that can affect the wider African region.

In the case of Sudan-South Sudan, ethnic conflict is the main issue underlying the prolonged conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. Sudan and South Sudan both have strong ambitions to fight for their ethnic interests. Both parties feel that the presence of the other party can threaten their position. On this basis, both Sudan and South Sudan are willing to take any action to fight for their interests. In fact, Sudan and South Sudan are willing to pour large funds into military conflicts. On this basis, the formulation of the problem in this study is what underlies Sudan and South Sudan to continue to conduct military conflicts if based on *cost and benefit analysis*?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rational Utilitarianism

The utilitarianism approach is a theory developed by British social philosopher Jeremy Bentham who emphasized that political decisions should be based on the principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" or the greatest happiness for as many people as possible (Pratiwi et al., 2022). This means that every government decision should be measured based on its impact on global welfare, as each individual is considered capable of determining their interests. According to Tieku (2013), governments are described as *homo economicus* actors, assuming that governments act rationally with *common* interest preferences, such as maintaining national sovereignty, security, military, and hegemony. In addition to decision-making based on *rational choice*, the government also considers aspects of *cost-benefit* analysis to maximize the interests of the country (Tieku, 2013). In the international context, the government not only focuses on domestic interests but also pays attention to external factors, including anarchy in the international system, competition in the global market, and economic processes across countries. Although similar to realism, rational utilitarianism focuses on *cost-benefit* factors and how states consider cooperation for collective benefit.

The theory of rational utilitarianism makes consequences the determinant of whether an action is right or wrong (Murithi, 2014). This theory defines right action as the action that produces the greatest happiness or utility. In this case, happiness and satisfaction are the main goals of every human action. Thus, each individual is required to act rationally by trying to provide the best results. One important aspect of rational utilitarianism theory is the measurement of consequences by involving the utility calculation process. The utility calculation process is a process of assessing the benefits and losses of each action. The process is aimed at determining the most favorable option. Creating a balance between benefits and losses is the key to decision-making.

The new view of utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill was introduced as an approach that emphasizes the "principle of beneficence", which judges an action as good and right if it aims to support justice, and bad if it supports evil. Mill's new principle reconstructed Bentham's view that only focused on materialistic aspects, and Bentham's utilitarianism focused more on measurable and practical results, which sometimes ignored more abstract values, such as emotional well-being, freedom, or human dignity (Muharir & Haryono, 2023). Because of this, many criticize utilitarianism for not paying enough attention to aspects of solidarity such as ideological similarities, historical relationships or other instruments of constructivism, even though in regional countries, solidarity plays an important role in a country's decision-making regarding cooperation.

Rational Utilitarianism according to John Stuart Mill is pragmatic where decisions are considered correct if the benefits obtained are greater than the losses incurred. In other words, this approach emphasizes *cost benefits* that seek to measure the benefits of a cost or loss that will be incurred. However, an emerging criticism of this view is how a country can ensure decisions favor collective benefits that can sometimes also harm small groups or individuals if the greatest benefits do not extend to them. This is a major concern in discussions on justice and human rights, where majority gains can overlook or disadvantage more vulnerable minority groups (Lewin, 1988).

Rational utilitarianism is one approach used in explaining international relations, including in Africa, with the assumption that governments tend to have similar priorities in material interests. These interests are considered relatively fixed, with the government's main goal being to ensure their country achieves the best outcome based on these interests. Governments, as rational actors, will conduct a *cost benefit* analysis to select the most effective and efficient strategies to achieve these interests. At its core, utilitarianism focuses on satisfying the majority, potentially overriding the interests of minority groups if they are perceived as a *cost* in order to achieve greater *benefits*. This approach measures benefits based on practical or material outcomes, such as control over natural resources or political stability, but it can overlook other important aspects such as human rights and social justice, which are particularly relevant in the context of ethnic conflict and power struggles.

On the other hand, rational utilitarianism is also inseparable from various criticisms. The most prominent criticism is that rational utilitarianism theory tends to ignore the rights and interests of individuals in order to achieve the interests of the majority (Murithi, 2014). Thus, individual interests are often neglected in this theory. In addition, measuring and comparing the utility of an action can be very complex due to subjectivity. This is based on the absence of standards that can measure the level of happiness and satisfaction. Thus, the sense of satisfaction and happiness varies.

Nevertheless, the use of this theory remains important and relevant in the study of International Relations, especially in analyzing a state policy. In this case, the standard of happiness and satisfaction from a policy can be based on the majority vote expressed by the public. Thus, this theory can also be used to evaluate the impact of government decisions on people's welfare. Overall, rational utilitarianism theory serves as a guide in making decisions based on *cost and benefit* analysis. This theory seeks to achieve the greatest welfare for society (Murithi, 2014).

METHOD

This study is a qualitative research that aims to explain the cost-benefit analysis of South Sudan and Sudan's actions in addressing the growing ethnic conflict. The qualitative research method was chosen because it is based on analyzing non-numerical data. Using the theory of rational utilitarianism, this research will analyze the reasons why the two countries maintain the conditions that are the basis for the continuation of the ethnic conflict between South Sudan and Sudan. This research uses data collection methods from primary data and secondary data. Primary data comes from reports, while secondary data is collected from journal articles, books, reports, newspapers, and websites.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Utility Principle

The Sudan-South Sudan conflict has been a protracted conflict. The conflict has incurred enormous economic and social costs, while the benefits have been almost non-existent (CECORE & CPDS, 2015). Even if there are benefits, only a handful of elites enjoy them. Under these conditions, Sudan-South Sudan seems reluctant to end the conflict (CECORE & CPDS, 2015). The failure of the peace agreement between the two countries further strengthened the unrest that occurred in South Sudan-Sudan (Martinez, 2023). Some of the agreements that failed to be implemented in South Sudan-Sudan are the Naivash Agreement and the Addis Ababa Agreement. The failure of the Naivash agreement is inseparable from the lack of satisfaction and happiness felt by ethnic groups regarding the agreement. This is because the approach taken in the agreement only involved the political elite without involving the wider community (Martinez, 2023). Thus, the community felt dissatisfaction and the conflict grew (Martinez, 2023). Meanwhile, the Addis Ababa Agreement failed to reconcile the two countries due to the attitude of North Sudan, which did not fulfill the obligations that had been agreed upon. In the Addis Ababa Agreement, North Sudan has the obligation to provide financial assistance to North Sudan to develop the newly granted regional autonomy rights. However, North Sudan never realized the clause.

The United Nations (UN) has made efforts to resolve the South Sudan-Sudan conflict. In this case, the UN has established three peace missions to ease the South Sudan-Sudan conflict. The first mission was to establish the United Nations Interim Security for Abyei (UNISFA) (Taskiyah et al., 2021). UNISFA was formed to secure the Abyei region and protect civilians from physical threats. UNISFA is equipped with humanitarian personnel tasked with maintaining security and providing assistance to communities affected by the conflict (Taskiyah et al., 2021). The

second mission established by the UN is the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). UNMIS was formed to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement and human rights in Sudan (Taskiyah et al., 2021). This mission involves military forces tasked with maintaining regional stability and preventing further violence.

The third mission established by the UN is the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). UNMISS is a mission formed by the UN after South Sudan broke away from Sudan. This mission was formed to assist the government of South Sudan, which is a new country, to prevent conflict, mitigate, and carry out conflict resolution (Taskiyah et al., 2021). The mission focuses on protecting civilians, monitoring the humanitarian situation, and supporting government capacity building in maintaining security and stability.

Basically, the three efforts were a series of missions made by the UN to resolve the Sudan-South Sudan conflict. However, these efforts were unable to achieve a permanent and effective resolution. This is based on the strong ambitions of the two countries to defend their interests and ambitions (Taskiyah et al., 2021).

The Impact of the Sudan-South Sudan Conflict

Health

Both North and South Sudan were already vulnerable health systems even before the conflict between the two (Mohamed & Prisno, 2023). The ongoing war has led to further deterioration in the Sudanese health sector. In times of war, the surge of patients continues to increase, but people's access to health facilities is increasingly restricted by the lack of fiscal power to access health facilities and the lack of medical labor. The escalating conflict between Sudan and South Sudan caused the government to divert health funds to military and health functions. Thus, community access to health facilities is increasingly closed (Mohamed & Prisno, 2023). The ongoing war between North and South Sudan has led to an almost 80% collapse in health conditions in Sudan (Mohamed & Prisno, 2023). The ongoing conflict has resulted in a low life expectancy for the people of Sudan. In the midst of the conflict, there are only 16% of health service centers that can be accessed by the community (Mohamed & Prisno, 2023). In fact, a UN spokesperson mentioned that across Sudan, women die from pregnancy and childbirth (Mohamed & Prisno, 2023).

Security Stability

The war between North and South Sudan has created a crisis that has brought Sudan to the brink of disintegration. The conflict has devastated tens of millions of Sudanese people and dragged Sudan into a more complex conflict. In this case, the security stability in Sudan is further disturbed by the recruitment of children as the White Army of North Sudan. In addition, the North Sudanese White Army has occupied barracks belonging to South Sudan (Pawesthri, 2019). These conditions make South Sudan's condition even more cornered. The head of the UN peacekeeping mission, Nicholas Haysom, said that South Sudan was on the verge of collapse (Pawesthri, 2019). The conflict between Sudan and South Sudan not only threatens Sudan's domestic security, but also threatens Africa's regional security. Sudan's position at the geostrategic crossroads of the Horn of Africa and the intersection with various countries such as Egypt, Libya, Central Africa and so on provide cross-border security threats (Pawesthri, 2019). In this regard, the U.S. Intelligence Community Threat Assessment states that the continuing conflict between Sudan and South Sudan is truly a threat to regional stability, especially when the conflict threatens other African regional countries that are experiencing conflict, such as Ethiopia (Pawesthri, 2019).

Cost Benefit Analysis of South Sudan

The *rational utilitarian* theory asserts that an individual or group acts to maximize their utility based on *cost-benefit* analysis. So, in the context of Sudan-South Sudan, it means that each group will choose the action that they believe will produce the greatest benefit for them. The difference in *treatment* of ethnic Arabs and ethnic Africans in Sudan became the basis for the beginning of the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan (Cahyanti, 2017). The difference in *treatment* is the basis for the magnitude of the losses felt by South Sudan while being part of Sudan. The gap between Sudan and South Sudan has been felt since 1965. At that time, the people of the Southern Sudan region were not allowed to participate in elections (Cahyanti, 2017). The perceived disadvantages can be shown in the division of ethnic Arab territories that get more fertile areas and the attitude of the government that utilizes South Sudan's crops to build North Sudan. In addition, the government's attitude towards ethnic Africans in Sudan has shown a bad attitude. Because, in 1983, President Ja'far Nimeiri imposed the politics of Arabization and Islamization in Southern Sudan (Cahyanti, 2017).

The stance taken by South Sudan provides a clear picture of the principle of utility in *rational utilitarian* theory. The principle of utility in the theory asserts that a country's decision should be based on the resulting consequences. This principle emphasizes that the right action is the one with the greater benefit (Murithi, 2014).

In the issue related to Sudan-South Sudan, South Sudan's actions can be interpreted as a form of application of the principle of utility. South Sudan's exit from Sudan is considered to be the most beneficial action for South Sudan. In addition to the freedom to manage the country, South Sudan also benefits from the oil resources in the region.

Since 1955, South Sudan has tended to maintain its position in relation to Sudan. In this case, South Sudan's attitude that tends to perpetuate armed conflict is based on the loss of trust in North Sudan, which often reneges on agreements. South Sudan feels that the agreement only benefits North Sudan and continues to harm South Sudan. In every agreement that has been made, South Sudan feels that the agreement is made so that South Sudan is silent but North Sudan continues to carry out its actions to develop the northern region by draining resources from the south.

On this basis, the abundance of oil resources in the Heglig region was one of the reasons that South Sudan took into account when it decided to secede from Sudan. The ongoing conflict in Heglig region during 2012 is a striking and illustrative manifestation of the practical application of this particular theoretical framework. The Heglig region, which has an abundance of oil resources, quickly turned into a symbol and meeting point for the two countries involved in this dispute. The aggressive efforts made by South Sudan to assert control over this strategically significant region clearly reflect their underlying aspirations to secure economic gains and to enhance their geopolitical position in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the mounting international pressure exerted on South Sudan eventually forced them to withdraw their troops, while simultaneously allowing Sudan to successfully maintain its hold over this region.

South Sudan's efforts to secure its oil rights did not stop there. The conflict that occurred again in 2023 showed a similar pattern. The conflict in Abyei initiated by South Sudan is a manifestation of South Sudan's rational attitude and utility. In this case, the conflict area is an area of cooperation between Sudan and South Sudan in oil management (Pawesthri, 2019). Through this case, South Sudan showed its attitude to obtain the principle of utility by fighting for the Abyei region as its territory. Moreover, South Sudan has lost in defending Heglig as its territory. Although South Sudan lost the battle for Heglig, it does not mean that the government of South Sudan did not apply the principle of utility. The application of the utility principle is shown by the existence of policies that are implemented based on majority satisfaction.

Cost Benefit Analysis of Sudan

In its war with South Sudan, Sudan was ready to reflect the *cost-benefit* principle described by rational utilitarian theory. After the referendum on the separation of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan lost $\frac{2}{3}$ of its oil fields, most of which were in South Sudanese territory (Cahyanti, 2017). However, Sudan retained control over critical infrastructure, namely the oil pipeline required by South Sudan for export through Port Sudan. This created an economic dependency, which Sudan utilized to demand a high transit fee of USD 32 per barrel, much higher than South Sudan's USD 1 per barrel (Cahyanti, 2017). Sudan's decision reflects utilitarian logic, where the country seeks to maximize revenue from its remaining resources to cover the losses due to South Sudan's independence.

The conflict in the Heglig region in 2012 was one of the peak applications of this theory. Heglig, known for its rich oil fields, is contested by both countries. South Sudan claims this area based on the 1956 historical boundary, while Sudan considers it part of its territory based on the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (Cahyanti, 2017). South Sudan's attempt to seize Heglig by sending troops reflected the country's efforts to gain economic benefits and strengthen its position. However, South Sudan backed down after international pressure, while Sudan retained control over the territory.

In addition, the conflict in Heglig also shows how cost-benefit analysis influences political decisions. Sudan allocates a large budget for defense (up to 25-70% of the total budget) to maintain its political and economic stability, especially in the midst of domestic discontent after losing oil revenues (Cahyanti, 2017). The large potential of resources in Heglig became the basis for Sudan's availability to spend 25%-70% of funds to conduct a military war with South Sudan. On the other hand, South Sudan, despite earning significant oil revenues, faces major challenges such as corruption and inefficient resource management, which hinder the maximum utility of its independence.

Sudan's intention to acquire the Heglig region is based on Heglig's position as the largest oil-producing region in East Africa (Gumilang, 2019). This condition underlies Sudan's willingness to wage war after feeling the decline in economic conditions due to the loss of Heglig within its reach. In this case, Sudan considered that the expenses incurred during the war would be comparable to the benefits obtained when Heglig became its territory. The availability of Sudan and South Sudan in conducting war is in line with Mearsheimer's view that the state as a rational actor will move to maintain life and maximize its strength to secure its position in the world (Gumilang, 2019). The magnitude of the potential resources

in the Heglig area, causing Sudan and South Sudan to be willing to wage a war that has a high risk in order to fight over the area.

Moreover, the principles of cost-benefit analysis can also be observed in the substantial financial resources allocated by Sudan to its defense sector, a strategic move aimed at maintaining its political and economic stability following the loss of critical oil revenue streams. On the other hand, while the government of South Sudan is indeed capable of generating revenue from its oil production, it has to face significant obstacles that include widespread corruption and inefficient management of its natural resources, both of which severely hamper the country's ability to fully realize the maximum potential benefits that may accrue from its newfound independence.

In sum, the deployment of the utility principle in the context of the ongoing conflict between Sudan and South Sudan demonstrates that political decisions are often influenced by considerations of tangible material gains and the corresponding effects of these decisions on the overall well-being of society as a whole. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that this particular approach carries significant risks for minority populations, who may unfortunately find themselves marginalized or ignored in broader decision-making processes that prioritize the pursuit of greater collective benefits over individual rights and needs.

CONCLUSION

The protracted conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, rooted in differences in ethnicity, religion, and economic interests, has lasted more than five decades and created severe humanitarian impacts, including more than 383,000 fatalities and millions of refugees due to continuing tensions following South Sudan's secession in 2011. Despite international mediation efforts, the failure to implement the peace agreement and the non-compliance of the parties demonstrate the complexity of the problem, where cost-benefit analysis in a rational utilitarianism approach reveals that each group acts to maximize their interests, often ignoring the rights of minority groups and social justice. The existing disparities between Arab and African ethnicities, as well as the exploitation of natural resources, further exacerbate tensions, creating a major challenge to regional stability and requiring a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics to achieve a sustainable resolution.

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