Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Thomas S. Szayna and Ashley J. Tellis

THE CONTEXT

Intrastate communitarian strife, often dubbed “ethnic conflict,” has gained much attention in the aftermath of the Cold War. Certainly, intrastate conflict has been by far the dominant form of strife in the world in the 1990s. Of the 108 armed conflicts that took place in the world in the period 1989–1998, only seven were interstate wars.1 Most of the intrastate conflicts have had a communitarian aspect. Several of the communitarian conflicts have led to tens and even hundreds of thousands of casualties. Despite its higher prominence, the phenomenon of communitarian conflict is not new. Occasionally, major world events, such as decolonization, the collapse of empires, and, more recently, the collapse of communism, have caused spikes in the incidence of communitarian conflict.2 But intrastate communitarian conflicts have been with us throughout the 20th century,3 and growing social pressures associated with moderniza-

1Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, “Armed Conflict, 1989–98,” Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 36, No. 5, 1999, pp. 593–606. Armed conflict is defined as “a contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths” (p. 605).

2After steadily rising from 47 armed conflicts in 1989 to 55 in 1992, the number and intensity of armed strife in the world declined steadily to 35 in 1995 and, since that time, has remained near that level (36 in 1998). Wallensteen and Sollenberg, p. 594.

tion suggest that such conflicts will remain with us for a long time. Such strife may even increase in the years ahead.

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

Facing the serious prospect of further involvement in peace operations in the years ahead, the Army has had to grapple with the problem of what that implies for its readiness, training, equipping, doctrine, and deployment.5 While the primary mission of the Army and the U.S. armed forces in general will remain the fighting of wars and protecting U.S. interests in the world, peace operations (spanning the spectrum from traditional peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention to postconflict stability and peace enforcement) will continue to place severe demands on the U.S. armed forces for the foreseeable future, with the Army (and the Marine Corps) most affected. To put it bluntly, there “will be more Somalias, Rwandas, Haitis and Burundis in the future,”6 and the Army will be called upon to deal


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with some of them. The frequent deployments of Army personnel in peace operations have led to a multitude of problems, such as higher-than-expected wear and tear on equipment, difficulties with retention of personnel in some units, and (probably the best known problem) the complications in the Army’s readiness for potential major theater war (MTW) contingencies as a result of the demands posed by numerous peace operations deployments.\(^7\) At the most fundamental level, it appears that many of the conflicts the Army will confront in the foreseeable future will be intrastate operations, with traditional MTWs becoming the exception rather than the rule. Such a prospect raises questions about the nature of the service and the acceptance of peace operations by Army personnel as a core mission for the Army.\(^8\)

Dealing with the consequences of communitarian conflicts is not an optimal way to address the problem of ethnic strife. A better understanding and anticipation of such conflicts, which consequently improves the prospects for preemptive remedial action short of using force, is a much better alternative. In short, preventing strife is almost always a more efficient strategy than dealing with the consequences of strife.

Unlike interstate wars, the majority of which end in a negotiated settlement, the majority of intrastate conflicts end with the extermination, expulsion, or complete surrender of one side.\(^9\) And civil wars

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\(^9\)In a survey of civil wars in the 20th century, I. William Zartman notes that less than a third have “found their way to negotiation, whereas more than half of modern inter-
with a communitarian or ethnic dimension are especially difficult to negotiate and the most likely to result in protracted strife, often going on for years and sometimes decades. The reason is straightforward: to end intrastate strife the warring sides must lay down arms and respect an agreement usually in the absence of a legitimate government and under conditions in which the agreement is generally unenforceable. In conditions of communitarian strife, where issues of identity are intertwined in the conflict (since ethnic bonds are psychologically similar to kinship bonds and involve perceptions of identity), it is especially difficult for the two sides to go on coexisting in the same state. Put differently, there are only two main pathways for the regulation of ethnic conflict: (1) eliminating the differences (there are four methods for accomplishing this: genocide, forced transfer of population, partition/secession, and integration/assimilation); (2) managing the differences (again, four main methods: hegemonic control, arbitration by third party, cantonization/federalization, and consociationalism/power-sharing). Because trust that would allow for the management of the differences is in short supply once conflict starts, it is no accident that elimination of the differences becomes the preference and that many ethnic and communitarian conflicts end up in prolonged and bloody strife, sometimes mixed in with attempts at genocide and complete elimination of the other side.

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13 As many scholars and analysts have noted, ethnic conflict is a type of social competition that “typically involve[s] large amounts of violence and often particularly vicious forms of violence.” Samuel Huntington, “Civil Violence and the Process of Development,” in Civil Violence and the International System, Adelphi Paper 83, London: IISS, 1971, p. 13. In other studies, civil war has been empirically linked to the
Because of the unenforceability of an internal agreement to end intrastate conflict, third-party intervention is usually required to guarantee the agreement\textsuperscript{14} and, even then, the intervening forces easily may become caught up in the continuing struggle between the belligerents.\textsuperscript{15} But without an intervention, the simmering intrastate strife may well spawn an international crisis, either in the form of a humanitarian disaster or because a neighboring state becomes drawn into the internal strife and, as a result, creates a regional conflict and the potential for an interstate war.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, for reasons of preventing long-term strife that may escalate to major regional problems, prevention is the preferred course of action. From an economic perspective, the costs of dealing with an ongoing conflict, as well as the opportunity costs and the costs of postconflict reconstruction, are uniformly far greater than the small costs entailed by prevention.\textsuperscript{17} And, in the sense of keeping clear of

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\textsuperscript{14}Statistical analysis of all negotiated settlements of intrastate wars in 1945–1997 shows that the most extensively institutionalized settlements (often requiring third-party intervention) are the most likely to prove enduring. Caroline A. Hartzell, “Explaining the Stability of Negotiated Settlements to Intrastate Wars,” \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution}, Vol. 43, No. 1, February 1999, pp. 3–22.


\textsuperscript{16}Especially in areas where an ethnic group inhabits both sides of the border, there are strong pressures for an intervention in support of the group, even if the gains are unlikely to be lasting. A. Bikash Roy, “Intervention Across Bisecting Borders,” \textit{Journal of Peace Research}, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1997, pp. 303–314. For a broader look at the international implications of communitarian strife, see Michael E. Brown (ed.), \textit{The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict}, Cambridge: Center for Science and International Affairs/MIT Press, 1996.

\textsuperscript{17}For an analysis of the costs incurred through lack of prevention and nonintervention, see Nick Killick, “The Cost of Conflict,” in Peter Cross (ed.), \textit{Contributing to Preventive Action}, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998, pp. 97–119; and
military involvement in communitarian conflicts, the United States has a vested interest (quite apart from any moral concern) in preventing the evolution of communitarian and ethnic tensions into outright strife.

However, prevention is easier said than done. Even in cases of a clear drift toward intrastate strife, it may not be possible to marshal the resources required to head off the conflict because, in the absence of a direct threat, it is difficult to expend substantial resources to thwart what some may see as a phantom threat. The general principle is that the earlier the warning, the fewer the resources required and the easier it is to prevent an escalation of tensions to open strife. For example, the prevention of an imminent eruption of violent strife may require the mobilization of substantial diplomatic, economic, and even military resources. But dealing with early signs of a drift toward violence may require only a fraction of what may be needed later. Thus, the role of accurate intelligence and early warning emerges as crucial in the prevention of communitarian and ethnic strife. Accurate early warning cannot take ambiguity and uncertainty out of the process of conflict prevention, and in and of itself it is not sufficient to prevent a conflict, but it is a necessary first step.

The U.S. intelligence community has a mixed record when it comes to anticipating the incidence of communitarian strife. According to some in the intelligence community, they generally “get it right” when it comes to imminent conflict. But the rate of success is not uniform. For example, few predicted the rapid disintegration of Rwanda into genocide. And even when accurate intelligence fore-


18There is a large literature and a variety of efforts (among governments, international organizations, and NGOs) to make prevention of conflict more effective. For some of the pitfalls to effective preventive action, see Michael S. Lund, “Preventing Violent Conflicts: Progress and Shortfall,” in Cross (ed.), Contributing to Preventive Action, pp. 21–63. Also see William J. Dixon, “Third-party Techniques for Preventing Conflict Escalation and Promoting Peaceful Settlement,” International Organization, Vol. 50, No. 4, Autumn 1996, pp. 653–681.

casts were available, such as regarding the former Yugoslavia, important elements of the driving forces of the conflict were unexpected. In both cases, Army units deployed as part of outside interventions designed to ameliorate some of the consequent suffering. When it comes to accurate strategic warning, that is, anticipating early the likelihood of communitarian strife, the record is also unimpressive. And yet, as mentioned above, for purposes of prevention, it is precisely the early identification of a drift toward violence that is most needed.

This report addresses the issue of early identification of the potential outbreak of communitarian strife. The report is the final product of a project that sought to help Army intelligence analysts and, more broadly, the U.S. intelligence community in monitoring and anticipating more accurately the worldwide potential for intrastate conflict. The research effort sought to improve the Army’s anticipatory skills by providing a theoretical model, grounded in the social sciences, of the social processes and dynamics that lead to ethnic and communitarian conflict and state breakdown. Under what conditions are ethnic groups likely to take up violence against the state in order to accomplish their goals? When are they more likely to favor the peaceful pursuit of group aims? Similarly, under what conditions are states likely to resort to violence and repression as opposed to negotiation with the aggrieved group? Put more simply, the project sought to pull together the existing scholarly knowledge about the evolution of communitarian and ethnic conflict into a practical tool for analysts and policymakers. The report is a contribution to the efforts of the intelligence community to come up with better tools to anticipate the incidence of ethnic conflict.20 In a larger sense, the project aimed to improve the Army’s ability to identify and plan for potential conflict contingencies around the world as well as to contribute to interagency planning for such contingencies.

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THE MODEL

The theoretical model proposed here differs from most of the intelligence community’s existing aids that the authors are aware of and fills what we see as a void. The aids most commonly used take the form of risk and vulnerability assessments. Generally, these are large-scale inductive models that statistically process enormous amounts of data—ranging from health and mortality statistics to the number of individuals under arms—in an effort to develop useful predictors of political violence. Such predictors, if at all available, merely describe correlations between some class of data and political violence. They do not establish a causal link between the variables included and the social outcome they seek to explain. Not surprisingly, such inductive models cannot ask questions that bear on the problem of how deprivation and discontent lead to strife. Thus they cannot generate a targeted set of information requirements that intelligence agencies can pursue to increase the understanding of causes and the ability to predict with respect to the problem of communitarian violence. Sequential models and especially conjunctural models link a series of events and are more sophisticated tools for early warning of conflict than the widely used correlational models described above. All of these models can play a useful—and increasingly accurate—role in identifying the countries “at risk.” But

21The term “model” is used throughout this report in the conventional sense familiar to the social sciences. It represents a closed system of causal statements providing a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon—communitarian and ethnic violence—under consideration. For an analysis of the concept of a theoretical model, see Max Black, Models and Metaphors, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962.


such models have shortcomings (often a high level of false positives), and they generally fall short when it comes to a detailed consideration of specific cases that might require a closer look at their potential for communitarian strife.

In contrast, the methodology in this report seeks to elucidate how ethnic attachments are channeled into political action that may result in strife. The model provides a conceptual overview of the processes triggering political mobilization along ethnic lines as well as a framework for understanding state responses, both of which interact to produce either political reconciliation leading to peace or political breakdown resulting in violence. The model draws on and incorporates insights from a variety of theories into a more comprehensive structure covering the entire process of ethnic mobilization and ethnic challenge to state power. The result is not a “model” in the standard (mechanistic) sense used by intelligence analysts, but rather a method in the tradition of scientific inquiry that aims to explore the basic structure and processes of a given phenomenon. It is, emphatically, not meant to be a mechanistic substitute for the knowledge, reasoning, and judgment of intelligence analysts, but rather a means for helping them order the information already at their command (and identify important information gaps) as they attempt to assess the prospects for communitarian strife.

There are several important considerations to be borne in mind when scrutinizing this model. First, the model is intended primarily to help the intelligence community order its thinking about the logic and dynamics of potential ethnic violence, and to systematically organize the information-collection requirements relating to the problem. Understanding this intention is critical to appraising the adequacy of the effort.

Second, this model is intended to provide a general conceptual framework which speaks to the issue of how ethnic mobilization occurs and how it could lead to violence under certain conditions. It incorporates the insights offered by various theories that focus on separate aspects of the problem (such as, for example, the relative deprivation of the populace or the extent of state capacity) into a more comprehensive structure that encompasses the entire process of ethnic mobilization from the roots of conflict all the way to social reconciliation or state breakdown. Having said this, however, it is
important to recognize that this framework does not proffer any specific “theory” of ethnic conflict, understood as explaining “why” ethnic conflicts occur in some “ultimate” sense. Rather, the framework offered here is fundamentally an “analog” model in the sense that it aims to identify what, if any, step-level disturbances must occur before the prevailing political system is transformed from one formal operating state into another.

This objective is particularly appropriate for purposes of “indication and warning,” where the focus is not so much to divine why ethnic conflicts arise in some “essentialist” way but rather to identify which critical variables are relevant for anticipating its outbreak and what might happen if some of these variables disturb some other variables in the explanatory system. While this task no doubt requires some implicit understanding of the causal drivers of conflict, the emphasis nonetheless is not on explicating the various causes and patterns of ethnic conflict per se but instead on developing a “model” that reproduces the structure and relationships within the process of ethnic mobilization in an eidetically adequate way.24

Third, this model is focused primarily on helping the intelligence community with the problem of long-range assessment of possible ethnic strife rather than with forecasting imminent ethnic violence and state breakdown. While the model speaks to some of these latter issues, it lacks the level of detail required to provide adequate predictions of such violence under a variety of conditions. Incorporating such detail would require more “intensive” sorts of explanations and would be very useful for intelligence analysts tasked with monitoring day-to-day flows of events. However, such models would by definition presume that ethnically driven competition is already under way and, hence, would be less useful from the perspective of trying to assess when and under what conditions ethnic mobilization may in fact come about (just the kind of work that forms the staple of analyses focusing on various long-range futures facing a given state or region). It is also important to recognize that for a variety of theoretical reasons it is probably impossible to develop any single model

24 This is precisely the meaning of an “analog” model as opposed to a “theoretical” model. For further detail about the differences between the two structures of scientific explanation, see Max Black, Models and Metaphors, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962, p. 223.
which can explain imminent ethnic breakdown. Instead, multiple models would probably be required, and these models would vary based on the outcomes sought to be explained (that is, mass refugee movements, ethnic violence, genocide, and state collapse, for example, would each require separate models) as well as on the relative weights assigned to various remote causes, proximate causes, and event sequences that combine to produce such outcomes. These issues are of lesser concern to an analyst focusing on long-range assessment, who is the primary consumer of this research.

It is also worth mentioning that while the model is intended to provide a general framework for understanding the key structural factors that could lead under certain conditions to ethnic strife, it is not designed as a computational device that “automatically” produces predictions of ethnic violence given suitable information. It is in fact—emphatically—not intended to be a mechanistic substitute for knowledge, reasoning, or judgment on the part of regional intelligence analysts but “merely” a means of helping them order the information already at their command (while identifying which information not yet available might be required) as they attempt to assess the prospects for ethnic breakdown in any given region or part of the world.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Readers should keep in mind several considerations and assumptions underlying the theoretical model. Perhaps most important is the whole notion of “ethnic” violence. The plea for disaggregation of the term made by two sociologists is worth stating here:

The temptation to adopt currently fashionable terms of practice as terms of analysis . . . ought to be resisted. The notion of “ethnic violence” is a case in point—a category of practice, produced and reproduced by social actors such as journalists, politicians, foundation officers, and NGO representatives, that should not be (but often is) taken over uncritically as a category of analysis by social scientists. Despite sage counsel urging disaggregation, . . . too much social scientific work in this domain . . . involves highly aggregated explananda, as if ethnic violence were a homogeneous substance varying only in magnitude. To build a research program around an aggregated notion of ethnic violence is to let public
coding—often highly questionable, as when the Somali and Tadjik-Istani civil wars are coded as ethnic—drive sociological analysis. We share the dissatisfaction with the general use of the term “ethnic conflict.” But rather than disaggregating, the approach adopted here is to subsume “ethnic conflict” into the overall process of sociopolitical competition. Thus, the terms communitarian conflict or even intrastate conflict are much preferable to the term “ethnic conflict.” Ethnicity and ethnic attachments play a role to some extent in most intrastate conflicts. But the tendency to identify ethnicity as the cause of the conflict is an unwarranted leap in logic that good analysis should avoid. Communal differences by themselves do not provoke conflict.

It is unfortunate that impressionistic and journalistic, rather than analytical, accounts of the Yugoslav breakup, with their imagery of brutality and “ancient hatreds” as driving forces, have had so much influence in public thinking about recent communitarian conflicts. Such unsophisticated explanations also have had a pernicious impact on the discourse within the U.S. policy community, with the “ancient hatreds” explanation even sneaking into President Clinton’s speeches on the topic. It is worthwhile to mention that virtually no scholar of nationalism and ethnicity accepts the “ancient hatreds” or the “uncorking of long-suppressed perceptions” explanation of the post–Cold War communitarian strife. As two prominent political scientists have noted:

> The most widely discussed explanations of ethnic conflict are, at best, incomplete and, at worst, simply wrong. Ethnic conflict is not caused directly by intergroup differences, “ancient hatreds” and centuries-old feuds, or the stresses of modern life within a global economy. Nor were ethnic passions, long bottled up by repressive communist regimes, simply uncorked by the end of the Cold War.

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Issues of identity have served on occasion as a marker to delineate the opposing sides of communitarian strife. Since some kind of marker is necessary for communitarian competition and strife, ethnicity and ethnic attachments thus have played the role of a necessary component in the strife. But necessary does not mean sufficient. As it is argued here, it takes substantial effort to transform issues of identity onto the platform of political competition. It is the drivers of such transformation that are the crucial factors in leading to communitarian strife, and this report looks at them in detail. Because of its wide usage, the term “ethnic conflict” is used throughout this report. But the reader should keep in mind that the term is used here as shorthand for communitarian intrastate conflict.

Closely connected to the above point, many popular accounts have stressed the eruption of ethnic conflict as primitive, atavistic, and “irrational.” But such beliefs are often less explanations than despairing reactions to a difficult phenomenon. If human behavior is irrational, of course it cannot be predicted or even anticipated. If, on the other hand, communitarian strife fits into the general category of social and political competition, its dynamics may indeed be understandable, and so more effective anticipation of ethnic conflict may be possible. In line with the fundamental assumptions of modern social science, the model presented here assumes that human behavior in collectivities is rational and can be understood. Rationality should not be understood as a universally agreed-upon mindset but a recognition that individuals are goal-oriented and adaptive, and that they will attempt to reach their goals by what they see as the easiest and least costly (or most efficient) means. The rationality assumption does not mean that all individuals have the same goals. However, if we understand the goal of an individual, then his actions should be predictable in principle.28

The term “ethnicity,” because of its fuzziness, is discussed at length at the beginning of Chapter Two. But because of its importance as a central concept in this report, it is worthwhile to summarize here the main idea of “ethnicity.” First, ethnicity is not some kind of a given but rather a constructed social phenomenon. As used here, ethnicity

refers to the idea of shared group affinity and a sense of belonging that is based on a myth of collective ancestry and a notion of distinctiveness. The group in question must be larger than a kinship group, but the myth-engendered sense of belonging to the group stems from constructed bonds that have similarities to kinship. Psychologically, for the individual, the ethnic group is the largest extension of the family. The constructed bonds of ethnicity may stem from any number of distinguishing cultural or physical characteristics, such as common language, religion, or regional differentiation. As a form of constructed identity, ethnicity is more malleable than is often assumed.  

29 It is also more ephemeral: it must be continually created and recreated through a multitude of socialization processes. Although ethnic activists often claim that ethnicity is somehow pre-determined, it is difficult to subscribe to this claim from a rationalist perspective. However, ethnic attachments are no less real for being socially constructed; indeed, when internalized deeply, ethnic attachments may elicit intense loyalty.

The construction of ethnicity is a by-product of politics, with politics understood as that activity relating to the production of order in social life. Politics forces individuals to discover common resources in their struggle for survival, and the construction of strong bonds based on perceived shared traits amounts to just such a resource, as the bonds then lead to the creation of an “in group” in the ongoing political struggle. Modernization acts as a catalyst for the process of constructing ethnicity, since it forces individuals to operate in a larger social environment than traditional society. In a traditional society, where an individual’s “world” is geographically and psychologically limited to a village and its surroundings, bonds based on kinship are sufficient. But when an individual has to deal with impersonal state and market structures and the larger “world” of the state or province, the old bonds no longer suffice. Then ethnicity becomes a useful resource for an individual in his attempt to survive and prosper in a larger social sphere. And in addition to promoting ethnicity, modernization acts as a catalyst to ethnic tensions through homogenization of values and expectations. As socialization pro-

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cesses become more uniform, all individuals begin to value the same things, such as wealth, political prominence, and social recognition. Thus, they are brought into conflict with other individuals and ethnic groups over the same bones of contention.

By the same token, ethnicity can be a useful tool for political mobilization. Indeed, the model assumes that ethnic action does not occur spontaneously but rather requires mobilization and direction. This assumption runs against the popular image of a disadvantaged group rebelling spontaneously against state tyranny—a romantic image not borne out in reality. There are many examples of severe group deprivation and repression that do not lead to rebellion, because the group is not mobilized for political action. Without mobilization, ethnically centered perceptions of injustice may exist but do not have larger political significance.

**ORGANIZATION**

Chapter Two develops the process model for anticipating ethnic and communitarian strife. First, the chapter elaborates the main approaches to ethnicity—the primordial, the epiphenomenal, and the ascriptive—pervading the literature. Much confusion has resulted from imprecise or different definitions of “ethnicity.” The authors make the assumptions explicit and present the framework on which the theoretical model builds. Developing out of the ascriptive tradition, the authors explicate the theoretical model designed to help the intelligence community anticipate the outbreak of ethnically based forms of strife. It explains how the potential for strife should be understood; how the potential for strife is transformed, through mobilization, into a likelihood of strife; and how extant state capacities interact through a process of strategic bargaining with mobilized groups to produce, under certain conditions, varying degrees of strife.

In subsequent chapters the model is applied to four cases. The first two cases are “retrospective.” In Chapters Three and Four, the model is applied from the perspective of what an intelligence analyst might have deduced had she used the model to structure analysis of Yugoslavia and South Africa in the late 1980s. Two applications of the model to “prospective” cases follow. Chapters Five and Six apply the model to contemporary Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia so as to ana-
lyze the propensity of these states toward major communitarian strife. Finally, Chapter Seven offers some observations on the use of the model, briefly identifies its limitations, and sketches out paths for its further development.

The appendix provides a specific tool for use by analysts to help them order and organize the information-collection requirements into a coherent whole on which to base an assessment. Drawing on the model, it identifies explicitly the questions and indicators that an analyst should consider with respect to the various developmental stages of ethnic tensions and strife.

The model and the questions for analysts (in the appendix to this report) were published originally in 1997. The many reviews of the model in the academic literature and the reactions within the intelligence community have been overwhelmingly positive. A common suggestion has been that the model should be tested. This report documents the results of those tests and provides examples for analysts on how to use the model. We remain convinced of the usefulness of the design and encourage its further development by others.

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