

Conflicts of Interest

Power lets states gain better outcomes in bargaining over particular issues that matter to their well-being. Most international conflicts—including the dozens of wars going on at present—are disputes about concrete grievances and demands—territorial borders, ethnic hatreds, revolutions, and so forth. The nature of international conflicts, including their potential for becoming violent, depends in part on the underlying interests and goals of the actors involved.

The following sections discuss six types of international conflict. Three are conflicts over tangible material interests:

1. Territorial border disputes, including secession attempts
2. Conflicts over who controls national governments
3. Economic conflicts over trade, money, natural resources, drug trafficking, and other economic transactions

The other three types of conflict concern less-tangible clashes of ideas:

1. Ethnic conflicts
2. Religious conflicts
3. Ideological conflicts

These six types of conflict are not mutually exclusive, and they overlap considerably in practice. For example, the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine after the 1991 Soviet breakup were complex. The two new states had a *territorial* dispute over the Crimean peninsula, which Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had transferred to Ukraine in the 1950s. In addition, *ethnic* Russians living in Ukraine, and ethnic Ukrainians in Russia, experienced ethnic conflict. There are *religious* differences between Ukrainian and Russian communities. The two states also had *economic* conflicts over trade and money after the Soviet breakup, which created new borders and currencies. These multiple conflicts did not lead to the use of military force, however. In 2005, the opposition took control of Ukraine's government (after a flawed election was rerun in response to weeks of mass street protests). Russian President Putin, who had campaigned for the incumbent party in Ukraine, protested vigorously but did not seriously consider military force. Thus, conflicts of interest lie at the heart of all international bargaining, from trade negotiations to arms control, but only sometimes do they turn violent.

Territorial Disputes

Among the international conflicts that concern tangible “goods,” those about territory have special importance because of the territorial nature of the state (see pp. 59–61). Conflicts over control of territory are really of two varieties: territorial disputes (about where borders are drawn) and conflicts over control of entire states within existing borders (discussed next under “Control of Governments”). Consider first differences over where borders between two states should be drawn—that is, who controls a disputed piece of land. Because states value home territory with an almost fanatical devotion, border disputes tend to be among the most intractable in IR. States will seldom yield territory in exchange for money or any other positive reward. Nor do states quickly forget territory that they lose involuntarily. For example, in 2002, Bolivian public opinion opposed a gas export pipeline through Chile to the sea because Chile had seized the coastline from Bolivia in 1879. The goal of regaining territory lost to another state is called **irredentism**. This form of nationalism often leads directly to serious interstate conflicts.

Because of their association with the integrity of states, territories are valued far beyond any inherent economic or strategic value they hold. For example, after Israel and Egypt made peace in 1978, it took them a decade to settle a border dispute at Taba, a tiny plot of beachfront on which Israeli developers had built a hotel just across the old border. The two states finally submitted the issue for binding arbitration, and Egypt ended up in possession. For Egypt, regaining every inch of territory was a matter of national honor and a symbol of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The value states place on home territory seems undiminished despite the apparent reduction in the inherent value of territory as technology has developed. Historically, territory was the basis of economic production—agriculture and the extraction of raw materials. Winning and losing wars meant gaining or losing territory, which meant increasing wealth and hence long-term power. Today, however, much more wealth derives from trade and technology than from agriculture. The costs of most territorial disputes

appear to outweigh any economic benefits that the territory in question could provide. There are exceptions, however, such as the capture of diamond-mining areas in several African countries by rebels who use the diamond revenues to finance war. (In 2002, 40 states created a program of UN certification for legitimate diamonds, trying to keep the “conflict diamonds” off the international market.)

Means of Controlling Territory Historically, military means have been the most effective leverage for controlling territory, and wars have often redrawn the borders of states. Military forces can seize control on the ground in a way that is hard to contest by any means except other military forces. When Saddam Hussein redrew the borders of Iraq to include Kuwait, his opponents found no better means to dislodge him (economic sanctions, negotiations, and so on) than to use military force themselves. Nor was his regime toppled except by military force in 2003.

Since World War II, however, there has been a strong norm in the international system *against* trying to alter borders by force. By contrast, it is considered a lesser offense for one state merely to topple another’s government and install a puppet regime, even if done violently. The principle is: Governments come and go; borders remain.

Secession Efforts by a province or region to secede from an existing state are a special type of conflict over borders—not the borders of two existing states but the efforts by a substate area to draw international borders around itself as a new state. Dozens of secession movements exist around the world, of varying sizes and political effectiveness, but they succeed in seceding only rarely. The existing state almost always tries to hold onto the area in question. For instance, the mainly Muslim republic of Chechnya, one of the republics of Russia (the Russian Federation), tried to split away from Russia in the early 1990s after the Soviet Union collapsed. In 1994–1995, Russia sent in a huge military force that destroyed the Chechen capital, but faced fierce resistance from Chechen nationalist guerrillas, and withdrew in defeat. In 1999–2000, another destructive Russian campaign won a tentative grip on power in the province. Today, Chechen guerrillas continue to fight Russian control and have taken their fight to Russian territory, including airline hijackings, hostage taking, and suicide bombings. In 2004, hundreds of children died after Chechen terrorists took over a school and held them hostage. In 2005, Russian forces killed the Chechen separatist leader they held responsible. Russian leaders portray the Chechen war as parallel to, and allied with, the U.S. war on terrorism.

As this example suggests, wars of secession can be large and deadly, and they can easily spill over international borders or draw in other countries. This spillover is particularly likely if members of an ethnic or a religious group span two sides of a border, constituting the majority group in one state and a majority in a nearby region of another state, but a minority in the other state as a whole. This pattern occurs in Bosnia-Serbia, Moldova-Russia, and India-Pakistan. In some cases, secessionists want to merge their territories with the neighboring state, which amounts to redrawing the international border. International norms frown on such an outcome.

The strong international norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity treat secession movements as domestic problems that are of little concern to other states. In the case of Chechnya, the Western governments objected not to Russia’s goal of maintaining control of the republic, but only to Russia’s methods of waging the war—which included indis-

criminate bombing and shelling of civilian areas. These actions violated standards of human rights, which are a weaker set of norms than those promoting state sovereignty. Ironically, as Chechen rebels have begun their own indiscriminate acts of violence against Russian civilians and in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Western objections have lessened. Even at their loudest, however, these objections did not disrupt political relations with Russia.

Even when secession conflicts spill over international borders, the international community tends to treat the matter lightly as long as the cross-border incursion is temporary. The general principle seems to be: “We existing states all have our own domestic problems and disaffected groups or regions, so we must stick together behind sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Messy border problems can be created when multinational states break up into pieces. In

such cases, borders that had been internal become international; since these borders are new they may be more vulnerable to challenge. This was the case in the former Yugoslavia, where ethnic groups had intermingled and intermarried, leaving mixed populations in most of the Yugoslav republics. When Yugoslavia broke up in 1991–1992, several republics declared their independence as separate states. Two of these, Croatia and Bosnia, contained minority populations of ethnic Serbs. Serbia seized effective control of significant areas of Croatia and Bosnia that contained Serbian communities or linked such populations geographically. Non-Serbian populations in these areas were driven out or massacred—**ethnic cleansing**. Then, when Croatia reconquered most of its territory in 1995, Serbian populations fled. Ethnic nationalism proved stronger than multiethnic tolerance in both Serbia and Croatia.

The breakup of a state need not lead to violence, however. Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in a cooperative manner. And the breakup of the Soviet Union mostly did not lead to violent territorial disputes between republics even where ethnic groups split across new international borders (such as Ukraine-Russia).

GOING SEPARATE WAYS



Efforts by a region to secede from a state are a frequent source of international conflict, but international norms generally treat such conflicts as internal matters unless they spill over borders. Increasingly, autonomy agreements are resolving secession conflicts. Here, Indonesian troops leave Aceh province in 2005 after separatists disarmed under a limited self-rule agreement.

The norm against forceful redrawing of borders does not apply to cases of decolonization. Only the territorial integrity of existing, recognized states is protected by international norms. Colonies and other territorial possessions historically were valued only as property to be won, lost, sold, or traded in political deals and wars. The transfer of Hong Kong from British to Chinese control in 1997 illustrates how colonial territory is dispensable (Britain's perspective) while home territory is nearly sacred (China's perspective). From neither perspective do the views of the inhabitants carry much weight.

Increasingly, autonomy for a region has become a realistic compromise between secession and full control by a central government. In 2005, spurred partly by the devastating tsunami a year earlier, separatists in Aceh province, Indonesia, disbanded, giving up on independence and instead participating in regional elections in 2006. The Indonesian government withdrew its 24,000 troops from Aceh and offered the province limited self-rule along with 70 percent of the oil, gas, and mineral wealth earned there.

Interstate Borders Border disputes between existing states are taken more seriously by the international community, but are less common than secessionist conflicts. Because of the norm of territorial integrity, few important border conflicts remain among long-established states. At one time, huge chunks of territory were passed between states at the stroke of a pen. Since the end of World War II, however, only a minuscule amount of territory has changed hands between established states through force (this does not apply to the formation of new states and the fragmenting of old ones).

Furthermore, when territorial disputes do occur between established states, they *can* sometimes be settled peacefully, especially when the involved territory is small compared with the states disputing it. The Soviet Union simply agreed to China's boundary preferences in 1986 after they had disputed ownership of minor river islands for years. And Nigeria and Cameroon got the World Court to adjudicate their border disputes in 2003, although the decision had not been implemented fully by early 2006.

Lingering Disputes Today, only a few of the world's interstate borders are disputed. Nonetheless, those that persist are important sources of international conflict. Among the most difficult are the borders of *Israel*, which have never been firmly defined and recognized by its neighbors. The 1948 cease-fire lines resulting from Israel's war of independence expanded in the 1967 war, then contracted again on the Egyptian border with the Camp David peace treaty of 1978. The remaining territories occupied in 1967—the *West Bank* near Jordan, the *Gaza Strip* near Egypt, and the *Golan Heights* of Syria—are central to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Another major border dispute is in the *Kashmir* area where India, Pakistan, and China intersect. The Indian-held part of Kashmir is predominantly inhabited by Muslims, a group that is the majority in Pakistan but a minority in India. A *Line of Control* divides the disputed province. Pakistan accuses India of oppressing Kashmiris and thwarting an international agreement to decide Kashmir's future by a popular referendum. India accuses Pakistan of aiding and infiltrating Islamic radicals who carry out attacks in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The two countries went to war twice before over

the issue, and nearly did so again in 2002—but this time with both sides holding dozens of nuclear-armed missiles that some experts estimated would kill more than 10 million people in an India-Pakistan war. Perhaps chastened by this experience, the two countries improved relations in 2003 and 2004, maintaining a cease-fire that stopped the incessant low-level fighting along the Line of Control, though not the fighting between Indian authorities and insurgents. In 2004, India agreed to begin a slow withdrawal of troops, and in 2005 a major earthquake helped relations as relief efforts need coordination.

Many of the world's other remaining interstate territorial disputes—and often the most serious ones—concern the control of small islands, which often provide strategic advantages, natural resources (such as offshore oil), or fishing rights. Six countries claim the tiny *Spratly Islands* in the South China Sea (see Figure 4.1). In 2002, they agreed to avoid confrontations over the islands, and they remain calm. Japan and China also dispute tiny islands, as do Japan and South Korea, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Spain and Morocco, Argentina and Britain, and Russia and Japan. In 2005, Japan and China argued over whether Okinotori—an uninhabited coral reef with two tiny protrusions smaller than a house—was an “island” (with economic rights) or just a “rock.”

Territorial Waters States treat **territorial waters** near their shores as part of their national territory. Definitions of such waters are not universally agreed upon, but norms have developed in recent years, especially after the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)* (see pp. 360–361). Waters within three miles of shore have traditionally been recognized as territorial, but there are disputes about how far out national sovereignty extends and for what purposes. UNCLOS generally allows a 12-mile limit for shipping and

FIGURE 4.1 ■ Disputed Islands

The Spratly Islands exemplify contemporary conflicts over territory and natural resources around islands. All or part of the Spratlys are claimed by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Taiwan.



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION



Control of islands, and of the large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that surrounds them under the law of the sea, has created a number of complicated interstate conflicts. Japan claims Okinotori, shown here in 2005, as an island with an EEZ, but China calls it merely a “rock” without surrounding economic rights.

a 200-mile *exclusive economic zone* (EEZ) covering fishing and mineral rights (but allowing for free navigation). The EEZs together cover a third of the world’s oceans.

It is because of the EEZs that sovereignty over a single tiny island can now bring with it rights to as much as 100,000 square miles of surrounding ocean. But these zones overlap greatly, and shorelines do not run in straight lines; numerous questions of interpretation arise about how to delineate territorial and economic waters. For example, Libya claims ownership of the entire Gulf of Sidra, treating it as a bay; the United States treats it as a curvature in the shoreline and insists that most of it is international waters. In 1986, the United States sent warships into the Gulf of Sidra to make its point. U.S. planes shot down two Libyan jets that challenged the U.S. maneuvers. In the Sea of Okhotsk, Russia’s EEZ includes all but a small “doughnut

hole” of international waters in the middle. Non-Russian boats have fished intensively in the “hole,” which depletes fish stocks in Russia’s EEZ.

Airspace The **airspace** above a state is considered the territory of the state. Any airplane that wants to fly over a state’s territory must have the state’s permission. For example, in a 1986 raid on Libya, U.S. bombers based in Britain had to fly a long detour over the Atlantic Ocean because France (between Britain and Libya) would not let U.S. planes use its airspace.

Outer space, by contrast, is considered international territory like the oceans. International law does not define exactly where airspace ends and outer space begins. However, orbiting satellites fly higher than airplanes, move very fast, and cannot easily change direction to avoid overflying a country. And very few states can shoot down satellites. Since satellites have become useful to all the great powers as intelligence-gathering tools, and since all satellites are extremely vulnerable to attack, a norm of demilitarization of outer space has developed. No state has ever attacked the satellite of another.

Control of Governments

Despite the many minor border disputes that continue to plague the world, most of the struggles to control territory do not involve changing borders or fighting over islands.

Rather, they are conflicts over which governments will control entire states within their existing borders.

In theory, states do not interfere in each other's governance, because of the norm of sovereignty. In practice, states often have strong interests in other states' governments, and try to influence who holds power in those states. Conflicts over governments take many forms, some mild and some severe, some deeply entwined with third parties and some more or less bilateral. Sometimes a state merely exerts subtle influences on another state's elections; at other times, a state supports rebel elements seeking to overthrow the second state's government.

During the Cold War, both superpowers actively promoted changes of government in third world countries through covert operations and support of rebel armies. The civil wars in Angola, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua are good examples. Both superpowers poured in weapons, money, military advisers, and so forth—all in hopes of influencing who controlled the country's government.

Occasionally, one state invades another in order to change its government. The Soviet Union did this in Czechoslovakia in 1968; the United States did not do so in Iraq in 1991 but did in 2003. The international community frowns on such overt violations of national sovereignty.

Economic Conflict

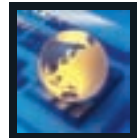
Economic competition is the most pervasive form of conflict in international relations because economic transactions are pervasive. Every sale made and every deal reached across international borders entails a resolution of conflicting interests. Costa Rica wants the price of coffee, which it exports, to go up; Canada, which imports coffee, wants it to go down. In a global capitalist market, all economic exchanges involve some conflict of interest.

However, such economic transactions also contain a strong element of mutual economic gain in addition to the element of conflicting interests (see Chapters 3 and 5). These mutual gains provide the most useful leverage in bargaining over economic exchanges: states and companies enter into economic transactions because they profit from doing so. The use of violence would usually diminish such profit by more than could be gained as a result of the use of violence. Thus, economic conflicts do not usually lead to military force and war.

Such restraint has not always been the case. In the sixteenth century, England's Sir Francis Drake intercepted Spanish ships bringing gold and silver from Central America and took the loot in the name of queen and country—a practice known as *privateering*. In 1861, France, Britain, and Spain invaded Mexico when it failed to pay its international debts.

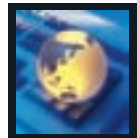
Today, military forms of leverage are not very effective in economic conflicts. With the tight integration of the world economy and the high cost of military actions, the use of force is seldom justified to solve an economic issue. Thus, most economic conflicts are not issues in international security; they are discussed in Chapters 5 through 8 (international political economy). But economic conflicts do still bear on international security in some ways.

First, many states' foreign policies are influenced by *mercantilism*—a practice of centuries past in which trade and foreign economic policies were manipulated to build



WEB LINK

Control of Governments



WEB LINK

Economic Conflict

up a monetary surplus that could be used to finance war (see pp. 175–176). Because a trade surplus confers an advantage in international security affairs over the long run, trade conflicts have implications for international security relations.

Second, the theory of **lateral pressure** also connects economic competition with security concerns. This theory holds that the economic growth of states leads to geographic expansion as they seek natural resources beyond their borders (by various means, peaceful and violent). As great powers expand their economic activities outward, their competition leads to conflicts and sometimes to war. The theory has been used to help explain both World War I and the expansion of Japan prior to World War II.

Another kind of economic conflict that affects international security concerns *military industry*—the capacity to produce military equipment, especially high-technology weapons such as fighter aircraft or missiles. There is a world trade in such items, but national governments try (not always successfully) to keep control of such production—to try to ensure that national interests take priority over those of manufacturers and that the state is militarily self-sufficient in case of war. Economic competition (over who profits from such sales) is interwoven with security concerns (over who gets access to the weapons). The transfer of knowledge about high-tech weaponry and military technologies to potentially hostile states is a related concern.

Economic competition also becomes a security issue when it concerns trade in *strategic materials* needed for military purposes, such as special minerals or alloys for aircraft production and uranium for atomic weapons. Few countries are self-sufficient in these materials; the United States imports about half the strategic materials it uses. Thus, international economic conflicts have important implications for international security.

A different kind of economic conflict revolves around the distribution of wealth within and among states. As discussed in Chapter 7, the tremendous disparities in wealth in our world create a variety of international security problems with the potential for violence—including terrorist attacks on rich countries by groups in poor countries.

Revolutions in poor countries are often fueled by disparities of wealth within the country as well as its poverty relative to other countries. These revolutions in turn frequently draw in other states as supporters of one side or the other in a civil war. If successful, revolutions can abruptly change a state's foreign policy, leading to new alliances and power alignments.

Marxist approaches to international relations (see Chapter 7) treat class struggle between the rich and poor as the basis of interstate relations. According to these approaches, capitalist states adopt foreign policies that serve the interests of the rich owners of companies. Conflicts and wars between the global North and South—rich states versus poor states—are seen as reflections of the domination and exploitation of the poor by the rich—imperialism in direct or indirect form. For example, most Marxists saw the Vietnam War as a U.S. effort to suppress revolution in order to secure continued U.S. access to cheap labor and raw materials in Southeast Asia.

Drug Trafficking As a form of illegal trade across international borders, drug trafficking is smuggling, which deprives states of revenue and violates states' legal control of their borders. But smuggling in general is an economic issue rather than a security one (see p. 192). Unlike other smuggled goods, however, drugs are treated as a security threat

because of their effect on national (and military) morale and efficiency. Drug trafficking also has become linked with security concerns because military forces participate regularly in operations against the heavily armed drug traffickers.

The U.S. government is trying to prevent *cocaine cartels* based in Colombia from supplying cocaine to U.S. cities. Such cocaine derives mostly from coca plants grown by peasants in mountainous areas of Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia itself. Processed in simple laboratories in the jungle, the cocaine moves from Colombia through other countries such as Panama before arriving in the United States. Populations in several of these countries, especially in cocaine-producing regions, benefit substantially from the drug trade. For poor peasants in Bolivia or for residents of the Colombian cocaine cartels' home provinces, the cocaine trade may be their only access to a decent income. This dilemma worsened in 2001–03 as coffee prices dropped to their lowest level in decades. (Similarly, in 2003 many Ethiopian coffee farmers switched to growing the drug khat for export when low coffee prices left them hungry.) Benefits to corrupt state officials or rebel armies are also substantial. In rural Peru and Colombia, leftist guerrillas have funded their operations by controlling peasants' production of coca. In southern Colombia, for example, the rebel movement maintained stronger control than military forces of the Colombian government.

Because of the long history of U.S. military intervention in Latin America, state cooperation with U.S. military forces is a sensitive political issue. In 1989, U.S. forces invaded Panama, arrested its leader, dictator Manuel Noriega, and convicted him in U.S. courts of complicity in drug trafficking through Panama.

The growing world trade in *heroin* created some similar conflicts in the late 1990s. Most of the raw material (opium poppies) came from two poor, conflict-ridden countries with authoritarian governments—Afghanistan and Burma—where Western governments had little leverage. Yet in 2006, even with a pro-Western government, Afghanistan was the world's main source of opium, enriching local farmers and officials.

Like the other sources of international conflict discussed so far, conflicts over drug trafficking arise from conflicting interests regarding tangible items such as money, territory, or control of governments. Harder to understand, in some ways, are international conflicts rooted in clashes of ideas.