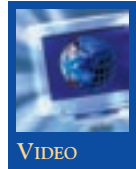


## Conflicts of Ideas

If all international conflicts were strictly material in nature, it might be easier to settle them. Given enough positive leverage, any state would agree to another state's terms on a disputed issue. More difficult are the types of conflict in which intangible elements such as ethnic hatred, religious fervor, or ideology come into play.

### Ethnic Conflict

**Ethnic groups** are large groups of people who share ancestral, language, cultural, or religious ties and a common *identity* (individuals identify with the group). Although conflicts between ethnic groups often have material aspects—notably over territory and



**Ethnic Conflict  
and  
Globalization**

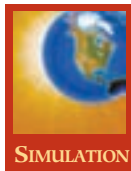
government control—ethnic conflict itself entails a dislike or hatred that members of one ethnic group systematically feel toward another ethnic group. In this regard, ethnic conflict is based not on tangible causes (what someone does) but on intangible ones (who someone is).

Ethnic groups often form the basis for *nationalist* sentiments. Not all ethnic groups identify as nations; for instance, within the United States various ethnic groups coexist (sometimes uneasily) with a common *national* identity as Americans. But in locations where millions of members of a single ethnic group live as the majority population in their ancestors' land, they usually think of themselves as a nation. In most such cases they aspire to have their own state with its formal international status and territorial boundaries.

*Territorial* control is closely tied to the aspirations of ethnic groups for statehood. Any state's borders will deviate to some extent (sometimes substantially) from the actual location of ethnic communities. Members of the ethnic group will be left outside its state's borders, and members of other ethnic groups will be located within the state's borders. The resulting situation can be dangerous, with part of an ethnic group controlling a state and another part living as a minority within another state controlled by a rival ethnic group.

Other ethnic groups lack any home state. Kurds share a culture, and many aspire to create a state of Kurdistan. But Kurds live in four states—Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—all of which strongly oppose giving up part of their own territory for a new Kurdish state (see Figure 4.2). In the 1990s, rival Kurdish guerrilla armies fought both Iraqi and Turkish military forces and each other. Kurds enjoyed autonomy in part of northern Iraq under U.S. protection in the 1990s, and quasi-autonomous status in a post-Saddam Iraq. The Kurds' success in the 2006 Iraqi elections gave them a strong position to retain this status.

In ethnic conflicts there are often pressures to redraw borders by force. When ethnic populations are minorities in territories controlled by rival ethnic groups, they may even be driven from their land or (in rare cases) systematically exterminated. By driving out the minority ethnic group, a majority group can assemble a more unified, more



**You Are a  
Prime Minister**



**FIGURE 4.2** ■ **Kurdish Area**

Ethnic populations often span international borders. Shaded region shows the approximate area of Kurdish settlements.



**Ethnocentrism**, or *in-group bias*, is the tendency to see one's own group in favorable terms and an *out-group* in unfavorable terms. No *minimum criterion* of similarity or kin relationship is needed to evoke the group identity process, including in-group bias. In psychological experiments, even trivial differentiations can evoke these processes. If people are assigned to groups based on a known but unimportant characteristic (such as preferring circles to triangles), before long the people in each group show in-group bias and begin to dislike the other group's members.

In-group biases are stronger when the other group looks different, speaks a different language, or worships in a different way (or all three). All too easily, an out-group can be **dehumanized** and stripped of all human rights. This dehumanization includes the common use of animal names—"pigs," "dogs," and so forth—for members of the out-group. U.S. propaganda in World War II depicted Japanese people as apes. Especially in wartime, when people see members of an out-group killing members of their in-group, dehumanization can be extreme. The restraints on war that have evolved in regular interstate warfare, such as not massacring civilians (see pp. 271–274), are easily discarded in interethnic warfare.

In several countries where long internal wars in the 1990s had led to dehumanization and atrocities—notably in South Africa—new governments have used *truth commissions* to help the society heal and move forward. The commission's role was to hear honest testimony from the period, to bring to light what really happened during these wars, and in exchange to offer most of the participants asylum from punishment. Sometimes international NGOs helped facilitate the process. However, human rights groups objected to a settlement in Sierra Leone in 1999 that brought into the government a faction that had routinely cut off civilians' fingers as a terror tactic. (Hostilities did end, however, in 2001.) Thus, after brutal ethnic conflicts give way to complex political settlements, most governments try to balance the need for justice and truth with the need to keep all groups on board.

Experience in Western Europe shows that education over time can overcome ethnic animosities between traditionally hostile nations, such as France and Germany. After World War II, governments rewrote the textbooks for a new generation. Previously, each state's textbooks had glorified its past deeds, played down its misdeeds, and portrayed its traditional enemies in unflattering terms. In a continentwide project, new textbooks that gave a more objective and fair rendition were created. This project helped pave the way for European integration in subsequent decades.

The existence of a threat from an out-group promotes the cohesion of an in-group, thereby creating a somewhat self-reinforcing process of ethnic division. Furthermore, overstating the threat posed by an enemy is a common way for political leaders to bolster their own position within an in-group.

Ethnic groups are only one point along a spectrum of kinship relations—from nuclear families through extended families, villages, provinces, and nations, up to the entire human race. Loyalties fall at different points along the spectrum. It is unclear why people identify most strongly at one level of group identity. In Somalia, loyalties are to clans; in Serbia, they are to the ethnic group; in the United States and elsewhere, multiethnic states command people's primary loyalty. States reinforce their citizens' identification with the state through flags, anthems, pledges of allegiance, and so forth. Perhaps someday people will shift loyalties further, developing a *global identity* as humans first and members of states and ethnic groups second.

## POLICY PERSPECTIVES

### President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

**PROBLEM** *How to prevent civil war while retaining control of your government.*

**BACKGROUND** Imagine you are the President of Liberia. Your election in the spring of 2006, as the first woman president in Africa, was hailed as a breakthrough for Liberia. The election ended decades of political violence that devastated your own country as well your neighbors of Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. Most recently, the violence ended when former Liberian President Charles Taylor went into exile in Nigeria. Tens of thousands of people lost their lives or were subject to human rights abuses, including torture and mutilation, in the wars begun under Taylor's rule.

Recently, however, there is optimism within your country and from the international community. Rebel groups have remained quiet, and Charles Taylor was arrested in 2006 and faces trial in a war crimes tribunal established by the UN for the brutal war in Sierra Leone. Economic aid has begun to stream into your country to assist in development. Your country is resource rich and has the potential to become a middle-income country owing to its vast natural agricultural and mineral resources.

Tremendous challenges, however, lie ahead. Economically, your country is underdeveloped with years of civil war leading to increases in corruption and economic stagnation. Many of the powerful economic actors in your country benefit from the corruption and graft, which you have pledged to end. Unemployment is very high with hundreds of thousands of young men unemployed. You still rely on the United Nations for security and many policing functions within your country. Although you have tried to rebuild an army, the process is slow and the training of the new troops weak.

**SCENARIO** Now imagine that a group that was involved in the civil war begins to re-open the war. The group had taken refuge in Sierra Leone and now begins to make cross-border raids against your country. You also suspect



they are sending weapons and funds to rebels within Liberia. While Sierra Leone does not support the group, its government is experiencing its own political instability and has limited resources to devote to the issue.

One option is to negotiate directly with the group. Negotiations could lead to peace, but might require power sharing in your government that could derail your attempts to lessen corruption.

Another option is to use military force against the rebels. But international donors would discourage you from endangering the fragile peace in Liberia, with the implicit threat of an aid cutoff if you are perceived to be too hard-line. Thus, a military offensive against the rebels would have financial risks. In addition, the re-emergence of a civil war would make your proposed democratic and economic reforms more difficult to implement. Your military is not well trained and you are very uncertain as to the possibility of success against the rebels. A strong military response to the rebels, however, could discourage future aggression and establish that you are a tough leader who is serious about enforcing the peace.

**CHOOSE YOUR POLICY** How do you handle this new threat from the rebels? Do you adopt a hard-line policy against them in hopes of defeating them? Or do you attempt reconciliation in hopes of minimizing the prospect of further bloodshed, but at the price of bringing your enemies into the government and thus undermining some of your goals?

## Religious Conflict

One reason ethnic conflicts often transcend material grievances is that they find expression as *religious* conflicts. Since religion is the core of a community's value system in much of the world, people whose religious practices differ are easily disdained and treated as unworthy or even inhuman. When overlaid on ethnic and territorial conflicts, religion often surfaces as the central and most visible division between groups. For instance, most people in Azerbaijan are Muslims; most Armenians are Christians. Most Croats are Roman Catholic Christians, whereas most Serbs are Orthodox Christians and most Bosnians and Albanians are Muslims.

Nothing inherent in religion mandates conflicts—in many places members of different religious groups coexist peacefully. But religious differences hold the potential for conflict, and for making existing conflicts more intractable, because religions involve core values, which are held as absolute truth. This is increasingly true as *fundamentalist* movements have gained strength in recent decades. (The reasons for fundamentalism are disputed, but it is clearly a global-level phenomenon.) Members of these movements organize their lives and communities around their religious beliefs; many are willing to sacrifice and even die for those beliefs. Fundamentalist movements have become larger and more powerful in recent decades in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and other religions. Such movements challenge the values and practices of **secular** political organizations—those created apart from religious establishments (the separation of religion and state).

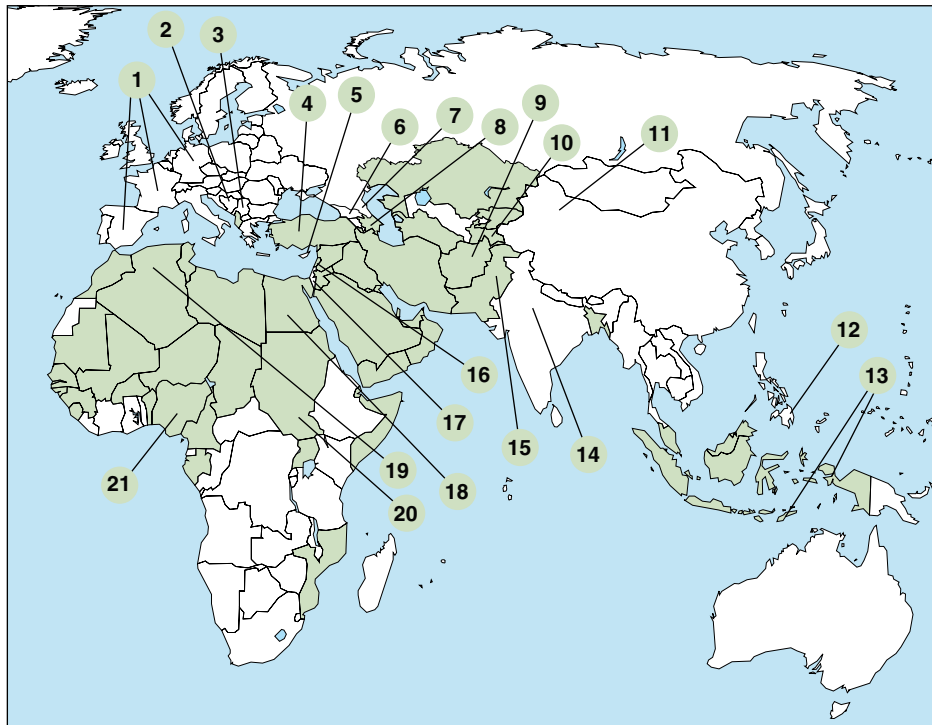
Among the secular practices threatened by fundamentalist movements are the rules of the international system, whereby states are treated as formally equal and sovereign whether they are “believers” or “infidels.” As transnational belief systems, religions often are taken as a higher law than state laws and international treaties. This runs counter to the norms of the international system, and to the assumptions of realism.

Currently, violent conflicts are being prosecuted in the name of all the world's major religions. **Islam**, the religion practiced by **Muslims** (or *Moslems*), has been frequently stereotyped in European and North American political discourse, especially at times of conflict such as the 1973 oil embargo, the 1979 Iranian revolution, the 1991 Gulf War, and the period since the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Islam is no more conflict-prone than other religions, but Christian-Muslim conflicts are taking place in a dozen locations. Islam is very broad and diverse. Its divergent populations include Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, and many smaller branches and sects. The areas of the world that are predominantly Islamic stretch from Nigeria to Indonesia, centered in the Middle East (see Figure 4.3). Most countries with mainly Muslim populations belong to the Islamic Conference, an IGO. Many international conflicts around this zone involve Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other, as a result of geographical and historical circumstances including colonialism and oil.

In several countries, Islamic fundamentalists reject Western-oriented secular states in favor of governments more explicitly oriented to Islamic values. These movements reflect long-standing *anti-Western* sentiment in these countries—against the old European colonizers who were Christian—and are in some ways *nationalist* movements expressed through religious channels. In some Middle Eastern countries with authoritarian governments, religious institutions (mosques) have been the only available avenue for political opposition. Religion has therefore become a means to express opposition to the status quo in politics and culture. (Political roles have also developed for other religions



Islam



- |                            |                         |                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Germany, France, Spain   | 8 Armenia/Azerbaijan    | 15 Pakistan         |
| 2 Bosnia-Herzegovina       | 9 Afghanistan           | 16 Lebanon          |
| 3 Serbia/Kosovo            | 10 Tajikistan           | 17 Israel/Palestine |
| 4 Turkey                   | 11 Western China        | 18 Egypt            |
| 5 Cyprus                   | 12 Philippines          | 19 Algeria          |
| 6 Georgia                  | 13 East Timor/Indonesia | 20 Sudan            |
| 7 Southern Russia/Chechnya | 14 India                | 21 Nigeria          |

**FIGURE 4.3** ■ Members of the Islamic Conference and Areas of Conflict

Shaded countries are members of the conference; numbered regions are areas of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims or secular authorities.

elsewhere, such as the Falun Gong movement in China in the late 1990s.) These anti-Western feelings in Islamic countries came to a boil in 2006 after a Danish newspaper published offensive cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed. Across the world, Muslims protested, rioted (with dozens of deaths resulting), and boycotted Danish goods.

In 1979, an Islamic republic was created in Iran. Pakistan and Sudan (as well as the north of Nigeria) adopted Islamic laws without a revolution. In Sudan and Nigeria, however, the adoption of Islamic law in one region heightened tensions with other regions that are not predominantly Muslim-populated. Sudan's civil war between the

mainly Muslim north (including the government) and the mainly Christian and animist south dragged on for two decades and killed millions. A 2005 peace agreement ended the war. The south will have autonomy for six years, followed by a referendum on the region's future, and meanwhile the rebel leaders joined the government. However, Sudan's government recently sponsored brutal attacks in the west of the country, by Arabs against fellow Muslims who are Black, demonstrating that religion and ethnicity are equally potent markers of communal identity in civil wars.

An Islamic government was established in Afghanistan in 1992 after a civil war (and following a decade of ill-fated Soviet occupation). Rival Islamic factions then continued the war with even greater intensity for several years. By 1997, a faction called Taliban had taken control of most of Afghanistan and imposed an extreme interpretation of Islamic law. The incendiary mixture in Afghanistan in the 1990s—unending war, grinding poverty, Islamic fundamentalism, and an ideologically driven repressive government—allowed Afghanistan to become a base for worldwide terrorist operations, culminating in the September 11, 2001, attacks. In response, the United States exerted its power to remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and disrupt the al Qaeda terrorist network headquartered there. Despite U.S. successes in the 2001 war, the Taliban still maintains adherents in Afghanistan, who are attempting to destabilize the country.

In Algeria, as many as 100,000 people died in an especially brutal war in the 1990s between the secular military government and an Islamic revolutionary movement. In Jordan, Islamic parties won the largest bloc of seats in Parliament without violence. Similarly, in Palestine the radical Islamist faction Hamas won free Parliamentary elections in 2006, because it was seen as less corrupt than the dominant secular Fatah party. Meanwhile, in the 1990s Islamic parties gained ground in Turkey—a fiercely secular state in which the military has intervened to prevent religious expression in politics—and a former Islamist leader became prime minister in 2003.

In addition to conflicts between religions and between Islamists and secular governments, divisions between the Sunni and Shi'ite wings of Islam have led to violence, especially in and around Iraq—a Shi'ite-majority country ruled by Sunnis under Saddam Hussein. Iraq's war against Shi'ite Iran killed a million people, and Saddam's repression of a Shi'ite uprising after the 1991 Gulf War killed tens of thousands. Under the U.S. occupation of Iraq since 2003, Shi'ite parties have taken power and Shi'ite militias have exacted revenge, while some Sunnis have waged a relentless and brutal insurgency. In 2006, after the bombing of a revered Shi'ite mosque in Iraq, a wave of sectarian violence killed thousands of Iraqis and pushed the country towards civil war.

The more radical Islamic movements not only threaten some existing governments—especially those tied to the West—they also often undermine norms of state sovereignty. They reject Western political conceptions of the state (based on individual autonomy) in favor of a more traditional Islamic orientation based on community. Some aspire to create a single political state encompassing most of the Middle East, as existed in A.D. 600–1200.

These developments pose a profound challenge to the present international system—particularly to its current status quo powers—and are therefore opposed by the world's most powerful states. From the perspective of some outsiders, the religious conflicts boiling and simmering at the edges of the Islamic world look like an expansionist threat to be contained. The view from within looks more like being surrounded and repressed from several



CHANGING  
WORLD  
ORDER

Religion and  
World Order

directions—a view reinforced by massacres of Muslims in Bosnia, Chechnya, and India in the 1990s and by the U. S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Overall, Islamic activism (and the opposition to it) is more complex than simply a religious conflict; it concerns power, economic relations, ethnic chauvinism, and historical empires as well.

Similar forces contribute to religious politics in non-Muslim countries. In India, Hindu fundamentalists have provoked violent clashes and massacres of Muslims that have reverberated internationally. In Israel, Jewish fundamentalists have used violence, including the 1995 assassination of Israel's own prime minister, to try to derail Arab-Jewish peace negotiations.

## Ideological Conflict

To a large extent, ideology is like religion: it symbolizes and intensifies conflicts between groups and states more than it causes them. Ideologies have a somewhat weaker hold on core values and absolute truth than religions do, so they pose fewer problems for the international system.

For realists, ideological differences among states do not matter much, because all members of the international system pursue their national interests in the context of relatively fluid alliances. Over the long run, even countries that experience revolutions based on strong ideologies tend to lose their ideological fervor—be it Iran's Islamic fundamentalism in 1979, China's Maoist communism in 1949, Russia's Leninist communism in 1917, or even U.S. democracy in 1776. In each case, the revolutionaries expected that their assumption of power would dramatically alter their state's foreign policy, because in each case their ideology had profound international implications. Yet, within a few decades, each of these revolutionary governments turned to the pursuit of national interests above ideological ones.

Sometimes even self-proclaimed ideological struggles are not really ideological. In Angola in the 1980s, the United States backed a rebel army called UNITA against a Soviet-aligned government—supposedly a struggle of democracy against Marxism. In truth, the ideological differences were quite arbitrary. The government mouthed Marxist rhetoric to get the Soviet Union to give it aid (a policy it reversed as soon as Soviet aid dried up).

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## IDEOLOGICAL SPLIT



Ideology plays only a limited role in most international conflicts. After revolutions, ideologies such as Marxism may affect foreign policy, but over the following decades countries such as China or the Soviet Union typically revert to a foreign policy based more on national interests than ideology. Nonetheless, ideological clashes still occur, as between the United States and Venezuela today, which have a strong trading relationship but suffer from antagonism between the Bush Administration and the leftist Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez (speaking here in 2006).

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The “democratic” rebels adopted democratic rhetoric to get U.S. support but practiced nothing of the sort. Earlier, they had received Chinese support and mouthed Maoist rhetoric. This conflict, which finally ended in 2002, really had nothing to do with ideology.

In the short term, revolutions *do* change international relations—they make wars more likely—but not because of ideology. Rather, the sudden change of governments can alter alliances and change the balance of power. With calculations of power being revised by all parties, it is easy to miscalculate or to exaggerate threats on both sides. Saddam Hussein, for example, miscalculated Iran’s power after its revolution (see pp. 48–49). But revolutions are seldom exported to other states.

We should not assume, however, that ideology and political philosophies play no role at all in international politics. Ideologies can help to *mobilize* national populations to support a state in its international dealings, such as war. And ideology can sharpen and intensify the conflict between two rivals, as happened to the superpowers during the Cold War. In some third world proxy wars of that era—for instance, Nicaragua in the 1980s—the rebels and governments had real ideological differences that resonated with the Cold War rivalry. And if we consider political democracy to be an ideology, it may be the exception to the rule that ideology does not affect IR much (see pp. 100–102).

All six types of conflict discussed in this and the previous section can be pursued through peaceful or violent means. We can better understand conflict by examining the types of leverage, violent and otherwise, that come into play in international conflicts.