



Introduction to International Relations

Chapter Notes: Chapter 13

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Chapter Thirteen:

Ethnic, Religious, and National Conflicts

Chapter Overview

Chapter 13 introduces students to ethnic and national conflicts by delineating the causes of and solutions for these conflicts, as perceived by the three perspectives. Realists, who argue that ethnic conflicts are hardwired into humanity's cognitive needs, advocate partition and separation as the most effective response. Liberal perspectives, emphasizing the role of elite manipulation in causing the conflicts, support federalism as a measured and effective solution. Identity perspectives see ethnic conflicts as socially created and so advocate tolerance and democratization as the most efficacious answers.

The perspectives' responses to nationalist conflicts are similar. Realists propose that a balance of power between opposing sides will bring stability, while liberals prefer negotiations and, if necessary, international intervention to end or prevent violence. Identity perspectives, finally, seek to transform the ideas and motivations that fuel nationalist conflicts by reforming domestic institutions.

Ethnic conflicts

- Realist: Sees ethnic conflicts as hardwired, the result of ancient hatreds. The best ways to deal with them, then, involve partitioning the conflicting parties.
- Liberal: Views ethnic conflicts as the result of elite manipulation; federalism is often the best solution.
- Identity: Views ethnic conflicts as ideationally constructed and thus seek to develop new, overarching ideas. These new ideas often involve tolerance or democracy and are implemented via constitutional solutions.

Ethnic conflict in Iraq

Iraq is comprised of three distinct ethnic groups.

- Sunnis: Dominate most Arab countries but are a minority in Iraq.
- Shiites: The majority in Iraq, Shiites' religious center is in the Persian country of Iran.
- Kurds: A mostly secular group with much in common with Turkish tribes.

What does the future hold for these ethnic groups in Iraq?

- Coalition forces are betting that they can create a new civic identity based on constitutional processes.
- Skeptics argue that the best that can be hoped for is a government of oligarchs.
- Some realists think that civil war is unavoidable, resulting in either a split Iraq or a situation in which one ethnic group is dominant over the others.

National and Territorial Conflicts

- Nationalism first arose during the French Revolution.
- The link between territory and government characterizes the modern nation.
- Nationalism was an important means of achieving and securing a national homeland.
- Realist: The best way of coping with nationalist conflicts is by balancing power.
- Liberal: Favors negotiations and, if necessary, international intervention to sanction aggressors and prevent the proliferation of arms.
- Identity: Seeks to change ideas that fuel nationalist conflicts by reforming domestic institutions.

China-Taiwan conflict

- After World War II, Taiwan was taken over by Chinese Nationalists fleeing the communist victory on the mainland.
- China seeks to reclaim Taiwan, which is now a democracy.
- Both continue to arm against one another, with the United States caught in the middle.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

- Both Israel and Palestine constitute ethno-national communities.
- Most prominent issue is territory— Palestinians demand a homeland, but some want to eliminate Israel as well.
- Problems include regional stability (realist), the efficacy of negotiations (liberal), and reforming oppressive political regimes (identity).

Thought Questions

1. Do you think that “ancient hatreds” are hardwired in humans? Are there dangers inherent in this line of thinking?

2. Is it possible to have overarching solutions to ethnic conflicts--e.g., always partition the warring groups or always pursue constitutional solutions? Or does this type of conflict necessitate individualistic responses?
3. What are positive and negative consequences of U.N. involvement in ethnic conflict? Give specific examples.
4. Which do you think is the greater threat in today's world, ethnic conflicts or nationalist conflicts? Why?
5. Which perspective offers the best solutions for the China-Taiwan conflict? Why?