Causes of Conflicts and Population Displacement

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## Origins of Refugees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Rwanda/Burundi</td>
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Past Causes of Displacement

- Principal reasons for people fleeing
  - Ideology
  - Individual acts of persecution
  - Proxy wars
Present and Future Causes of Displacement

- Most displacements follow wide-spread violence spiraling from the following:
  - Weak states with weak institutions
  - Poverty and economic collapse
  - Environmental disasters
  - Ethnic tensions exploited through political opportunism
  - Wide-scale human rights abuses
Current War Trends

- Previously saw wars between states
  - Now minor contributor to population displacement
- Most wars resulting from states targeting a single ethnic group
- War *within* states
  - Attempts to seize control of weakened or collapsed states
Who Is Displaced?

- Subsistence, peasant farmers
- Educated people
- Urban dwellers
- Certain social groups
- Religious groups
- Professionals
Political Roots

- Who is persecuted often depends on who controls the state
Political Roots

- Who has power, privilege, patronage, and perks?
- Which groups are stigmatized?
  - Education or status
  - Geographic location
  - Religion
  - Language, culture, social group
Circumstances that Create Conflict

- Weak states prone to internal violence
  - May lack historical identity and cohesiveness
  - Have poor resolution mechanisms
  - Political institutions not representative
  - Judiciary not independent
  - Lack of impartial law enforcement
Circumstances that Create Conflict

- Violence falls as per capita GDP rises
- Armed insurrection may be seen as the only way to change
  - Especially with ready access to cheap arms
- Opposition weak and often divided
- Political controversy disintegrates into anarchy
External Political Factors

- External forces may complicate unstable internal events as follows:
  - Raise the level of violence
External Political Factors

External forces may complicate unstable internal events as follows:

- Disrupt traditional mediation processes
- Prop leaders that lack legitimacy
- Military aid increases destructiveness of conflict
- Economic aid may raise the stakes
Economic Roots

- Economic tensions increase potential for population displacement
- Even though poverty alone may not cause displacement in static situations:
  - Extreme poverty breeds resignation
  - Poverty may increase ethnic and communal tensions
  - Poverty may interact with other factors to promote displacement
Economic Roots

- As economy declines . . .
  - Tensions may rise
  - Distribution of resources becomes politically explosive
- Search for scapegoats to blame
  - Often minority groups
Conflicts Accelerate Economic Decline

- Food production and distribution often early casualty
  - Precarious in subsistence economies
  - Resulting malnutrition accelerates disease and death
  - Salaried workers particularly at risk
- Rapid economic growth can also contribute to development of conflict
Environmental Roots

- Migration occurs as traditional lands become uninhabitable
  - Natural disasters
  - Man-made
  - “Eco-refugees” do not qualify for UNHCR protection
- Ecological factors may combine with other factors to promote displacement
Ecological Effects with Other Factors

- As population increases, competition over arable land increases
- Increasing land pressure leads to soil exhaustion/erosion, overgrazing
- Drought increases the impact of other factors
Ecological Effects with Other Factors

- Existing tensions may be turned into armed conflict
- Government or other forces may target environment of ethnic groups for development projects
Ethnic Tensions

- Some nations still cling to the idea of homogeneity of population
  - Race in Germany, Rwanda/Burundi, Yugoslavia, Somalia
  - Orthodox beliefs in Serbia
  - Sheriat law in Sudan
  - Language in Quebec

Continued
Ethnic Tensions

- Irredentism—Based on race, religion, culture
- The world’s 190 nations have 5,000 ethnic groups
- Continuing efforts to create/impose homogeneous states is a major source of conflict
Consequences of Ethnic Tensions

- Ethnicity highly susceptible to political exploitation
  - Groups seek community support by fanning ethnic antagonism, reactivating ancient hatreds
  - Political movements may use religion in same way
  - Ethnic conflict likely when one ethnic group takes control of state
Consequences of Ethnic Tensions

- Nationality defined by characteristics of one ethnic group
  - Even though nation may have multiple groups
  - Those not belonging may be seen as obstacles to nation-building
Conflict Resolution
Depends on Power

- Powers of central government are important in controlling group conflicts
  - Mediating capacity lost in single-group government
  - Cold war patronage often supported one client group
Mediation to Alleviate Ethnic Tensions

- Mediation to alleviate ethnic tensions is a challenge
  - Prevent them escalating into violent conflicts
  - Promote acceptance of ethnic diversity
  - Promote tolerance within and without national borders
Human Rights Abuses

- Forced departure violates the right to remain peaceably in one’s home
- Intentional targeting of civilians via military actions
  - Military sweeps thought to be sympathetic to the enemy
  - Use of land mines
Human Rights Abuses

- Human rights violations often at core of humanitarian emergencies
State’s Responsibility

- State’s responsibility encoded in the following:
  - The Universal Declaration on Human Rights
  - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Binding Form of the UDHR)
  - International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
Defenders of Human Rights

- Sovereign state primary defender of citizen’s rights as follows:
  - Freedom from torture and arbitrary detention
  - Freedom of expression, thought, or belief
- International community responsible once states fail in their duties
Human Rights Abuses Do Not Occur in a Vacuum

- Usually coexist with . . .
  - Economic strains
  - Disruption in food supplies
  - Political weakness and instability
  - Ethnic conflict
  - Tradition of violence
  - Ecologic deterioration
Resolving Conflict Situations

Process Involves Three Main Components

1. Immediate protection
   - Cease-fire agreements to stop human rights violations and persecution
   - Provision of humanitarian assistance
   - “Corridors of peace”
Resolving Conflict Situations

*Process Involves Three Main Components*

2. **Build structures**
   - For mediation
   - For resolution of conflict
   - For the return of refugees

3. **Develop an economic base**
   - To reduce resource inequality
Causes of Conflicts

An Alternate View

- Conflict is inevitable
- Violent conflict is often inevitable
  - In some conflicts, violence is appropriate
- Conflicts have two principal origins
  - Conflict over resources—the majority
  - Conflict over identity—the minority
Defining Conflict Resolution

- Mainly has to do with power and compromise
- Resolved when parties begin to realize pain and see that they may not win total control
  - Conflicts are then “ripe” for resolution
- The mediator’s role may be that of helping to ripen the perceptions of pain