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Causes of Conflicts and Population Displacement

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Origins of Refugees

1980s

- ◆ Vietnam
- ◆ Cambodia
- ◆ Afghanistan
- ◆ Mozambique
- ◆ Ethiopia
- ◆ Angola
- ◆ Sudan

1990s

- ◆ Iraq
- ◆ Yugoslavia
- ◆ Armenia
- ◆ Georgia
- ◆ Tajikistan
- ◆ Somalia
- ◆ Rwanda/Burundi

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

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