

# Contemporary Global Issues, 1989-Present

## THE STORY MATTERS...

The world faces a daunting array of challenges in the twenty-first century. Some of these, such as nuclear proliferation and cyberterrorism, are relatively new. Other problems, such as war, poverty, hunger, and disease, have a long history. Creative solutions are needed to address these problems. Microcredit loans are one example. Microcredit banks make small loans to individual entrepreneurs, the majority of them women, enabling them to start small businesses and to escape from poverty.

## Lesson 35-1

# Political Challenges in the Modern World

### READING HELPDISK

#### Academic Vocabulary

chemical                      drama                      arbitrarily

#### Content Vocabulary

peacekeeping forces              nuclear proliferation  
bioterrorism

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What influences global political and economic relationships?
- How do social and environmental issues affect countries differently?

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

In today's world, problems in one part of the world can affect people all over the globe. Terrorism, civil war, and ethnic conflict are some of the most difficult political challenges of the modern world.

## The United Nations

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What are the structure and goals of the United Nations?*

Today, the United Nations (UN) is one of the most visible symbols of globalism. The UN was founded in 1945 at the end of World War II. Two of the UN's goals are peace and human dignity. In the Preamble to the United Nations Charter of June 26, 1945 its members pledged "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights ... and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

The General Assembly of the United Nations is made of representatives from all member nations. It has the power to discuss any important question and to recommend action. The Security Council advises the General Assembly and passes resolutions that require the organization to act. Five nations have permanent seats on the Security Council: the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, and China. Ten other members are chosen by the General Assembly and serve for limited terms. Because each permanent member can veto a decision, deliberations can often end in stalemate. The UN Secretariat, an administrative body, is headed by the secretary-general. The International Court of Justice (or World Court) is the judicial body of the UN.

UN programs and specialized agencies work to address economic and social problems and to organize conferences on important issues such as women's rights and the environment. UN peacekeeping forces settle conflicts and supervise truces in "hot spots" around the globe.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Contrasting** How do the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council differ?

## International Security

**GUIDING QUESTION** *What international security issues confront the post-Cold War world?*

Despite the efforts of the United Nations, numerous challenges remain in the effort to provide security in today's world.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

Modern technology has led to frightening methods of mass destruction: nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. The end of the Cold War reduced the risk of nuclear conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, nuclear weapons still exist and nuclear conflicts remain possible.

The UN established the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1957. This agency is a safeguard system against nuclear proliferation, or the spread of nuclear weapons production technology and knowledge to nations without that capability. Most all countries are parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) which limits the development of nuclear weapons to the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China. The only countries that are not members of the NPT are India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea. India and Pakistan have exploded nuclear devices underground, and North Korea has performed nuclear tests. Israel has never publicly confirmed that it has developed nuclear weapons though it is widely believed to have done so.

Iran violated the NPT and was subject to international sanctions for years. In 2015 the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed limiting Iran's nuclear development in exchange for an easement of international sanctions.

Since the 1990s, there has also been an increased concern of the threat from biological and chemical weapons. Biowarfare, the use of disease and poison against civilians and soldiers in wartime, is not new. For example, chemical weapons were used extensively in World War I and during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Governments have agreed to limit the research, production, and use of weapons of mass destruction, but these agreements are difficult to enforce. Furthermore, these measures are unable to prevent terrorists from practicing bioterrorism, the use of biological and chemical weapons in terrorist attacks.

### The Challenge of Terrorism

Acts of terror have become a regular feature of modern society. Terrorists often kill civilians and take hostages to achieve their political goals. Beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s, many countries placed their concern about terrorism at the top of foreign policy agendas. Terrorist acts have received considerable media attention. When Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and killed 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, hundreds of millions of people watched the drama unfold on television.

Some terrorists are militant nationalists who want separatist states. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), for example, wants to unite Northern Ireland with the Irish Republic. IRA leaders now seem more willing to open normal relations with the police of Northern Ireland after decades of violence. The group Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) employs violence as a tool to free the Basque region in the western Pyrenees from Spanish control.

A radical Communist guerrilla group in Peru, known as Shining Path, also used terrorist violence. Aiming to create a classless society, Shining Path killed mayors, missionaries, priests, and peasants across Peru.

One of the most destructive acts of terrorism occurred on September 11, 2001. Al-Qaeda terrorists directed by Osama bin Laden hijacked four commercial jets in Boston, Newark, and Washington, D.C., flying two into the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. Almost 3,000 people were killed. President George W. Bush vowed to wage war on terrorism. This process began in Afghanistan in October 2001. President Barack Obama announced a major US. victory against al-Qaeda in 2011, when US. forces killed bin Laden at his hideout in Pakistan.

Worldwide, one of the most noticeable changes in public policies since September 11, 2001, has been increased security at airports. Many European and Asian governments have also begun working together more closely in their intelligence and police activities to track down terrorists.

Despite security upgrades and more international cooperation, terrorist incidents have continued worldwide since September 11, 2001. For example, in July 2005, during the London morning commute, four suicide bombers detonated bombs at three subway stations and on one bus. More than 700 people were injured and 56 people were killed.

## Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

### What Is Terrorism?

“Terrorism is ‘any action ... that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.’ “

– UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, December 2004

### SUMMARIZING

Explain the UN’s definition of terrorism in your own words.

In 2015 alone there have been more than 20 terrorist attacks in which 50 people or more have been killed. The deadliest occurred at the hands of Boko Haram militants in Nigeria in January 2015. More than 2000 civilians were killed in Baga, Nigeria. In November 2015, 130 people lost their lives from terrorist attacks in Paris at the hands of members the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State or ISIS.

### Fighting the Islamic State

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) began as a splinter group of al-Qaeda. It formed and gained strength after the withdrawal of US. troops from Iraq in 2011. More extreme than al-Qaeda, ISIL has ignored international borders and has rapidly seized control of large areas of northern Iraq and eastern Syria. ISIL has brutally targeted its religious enemies and engaged in public executions. Refugees have fled from ISIL-controlled areas in large numbers.

In June 2014, ISIL advanced further into Iraq, displacing over 1 million Iraqi citizens. The United States increased its advisory troops in Iraq to 800, and in August 2014, US. President Obama authorized targeted airstrikes within Iraq. Also in August and September, ISIL released public videos of the execution of captured American and British journalists. Obama pledged to increase the number of US. troops in Iraq to over 1,000 and to continue air and drone strikes against ISIL-controlled areas.

In 2015 ISIL stepped up its attacks outside Iraq and Syria. In November 2015, ISIL downed a Russian passenger jet, conducted deadly attacks in Beirut, Lebanon, and claimed responsibility for a deadly attack in Paris.

### Challenges in the Middle East

The war on terrorism spread to the Middle East when the United States attacked Iraq in March 2003. President Bush claimed that Iraq’s leader, Saddam Hussein, had chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam had close ties to al-Qaeda. Both claims turned out to be inaccurate and the United States soon became bogged down in a war in which Hussein’s supporters, foreign terrorists, and Islamic militants all battled the American-led forces.

By 2006, Iraq seemed to be descending into a widespread civil war, especially between the Shia, who controlled southern Iraq, and the Sunnis, who controlled central Iraq. An American troop surge in 2007 helped stabilize conditions within a year. The US and Iraqi governments then agreed to a complete withdrawal of American troops by 2011. The withdrawal of ground troops did occur in 2011, but in 2014 the United States returned with air support to Iraq, to combat ISIL.

Much of the terrorism in the Middle East is aimed against the West. One reason Middle Eastern terrorists have targeted Westerners can be traced to the beginning of the UN Mandate system which began after World War I. This led to western investment in the Middle East oil industry, which began in the 1920s.

This industry brought wealth to ruling families in some Middle Eastern kingdoms, but most citizens remained very poor. They often blamed the West, especially the United States, for supporting the ruling families.

The oil business increased Middle Eastern contact with the West. Some Muslims feared that this contact would weaken their religion and their way of life. Some Muslims began organizing to overthrow their pro-Western governments. Muslims who support these movements are called fundamentalist militants. They promote their own vision of what a pure Islamic society should be. While most Muslims do not share this vision and themselves are victims of terror, these ideas have brought great regional instability and violence worldwide.

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Determining Cause and Effect** How have governments responded to terrorism since September 11, 2001?

## Civil War and Ethnic Conflict

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How have civil war, ethnic conflict, and genocide affected some nations in the post-Cold War period, and how have governments and nongovernmental organizations responded to them?*

Ethnic and religious conflicts, which often lead to civil war, have plagued many developing nations and some developed nations in Europe.

### Europe

In Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics have frequently clashed. The Serbs used ethnic cleansing in the 1990s to kill Bosnian Muslims during the war in Bosnia. After Cyprus achieved independence, fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots led to a division of the island.

A crisis in Ukraine also led to conflict. In December 2013, many Ukrainians protested against Russia's role in Ukrainian affairs. Pro-Russian protestors began their own demonstrations in the southern Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, where 60 percent of the population is ethnically Russian. In late February 2014, the Russian military invaded Crimea amid international condemnation. Following the invasion, Crimea overwhelmingly voted to leave Ukraine and

to join Russia, but few countries have recognized the legitimacy of that election or Russia's claims.

### Africa

Within many African nations, warring ethnic groups undermined the concept of nationhood. This is not surprising because the colonial powers had arbitrarily drawn the boundaries of African nations. Virtually all of these states included widely different ethnic, linguistic, and territorial groups. In Central Africa, fighting between the Hutu and the Tutsi created unstable governments. In Rwanda, brutal civil war broke out in 1994 as Hutu militias began a campaign of genocide against Tutsis, killing at least 500,000. As thousands of Rwandan refugees died in camps, the United States began a relief operation in conjunction with the UN. In 1997 a UN-sponsored war crimes tribunal began in Tanzania. In 1998 the tribunal sentenced the former Rwandan prime minister to life imprisonment for genocide.

Ethnic violence also plagued Sudan, Africa's largest nation. In the western province of Darfur, Arab militias attacked African ethnic groups with the support of the Arab-led government. Entire villages were burned, more than 200,000 people died, and more than 2 million fled their homes. The UN took over a struggling peacekeeping operation from the African Union at the end of 2007. In 2008 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Sudanese president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In a 2011 referendum, southern Sudan voted to become independent from the north. The country of South Sudan was founded July 9, 2011.

### Asia

Several areas in Asia and Southeast Asia experienced ethnic and religious conflict, including Tibet, East Timor, and Sri Lanka. Tibet seeks independence from the Chinese government that has suppressed dissent among ethnic minorities. The Dalai Lama led the government of Tibet in exile from India since 1959 but stepped down in 2011.

In Sri Lanka, there has been tension and violence since 1983 between the majority Sinhalese (who are mostly Buddhist) who lead the government and the minority Tamils (who are mostly Hindu). The Tamil Tigers are a terrorist group that has committed violence in the country. A 2002 ceasefire halted the violence temporarily, but it ended with renewed violence in 2008. The military conflict ended in 2010.

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Explaining** How did governments and international organizations respond to the conflicts in Rwanda and Darfur?

## New Democracies

**GUIDING QUESTION** Where have new democracies emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries?

Some conflicts that stem from regional, ethnic, and religious differences in the 1990s and 2000s have led to the creation of new countries with fledgling democracies. Several states of the former Yugoslavia and East Timor became independent democratic states in recent years.

In 1999 the people of East Timor voted to become free of Indonesian rule, which was followed by violence between Christians and Muslims on the island. Nearly 10,000 died

from the conflict. In 2002 East Timor (Timor-Leste) was internationally recognized as an independent country. In 2007, with the help of the UN, East Timor held mostly peaceful democratic elections.

In recent years, democracy has also begun to flourish in Latin America. With the debt crisis in Latin America in the 1980s came a movement toward democracy as people realized that military power without popular consent could not maintain a strong state.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Describing** How did East Timor become an independent country?

## LESSON 35-1 VOCABULARY

**peacekeeping forces** military forces drawn from neutral members of the United Nations to settle conflicts and supervise truces

**nuclear proliferation** the spread of nuclear weapons production technology and knowledge to nations without that capability

**bioterrorism** the use of biological and chemical weapons in terrorist attacks