

# THEORIES ON CAUSES OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

## Psychology

These theories emphasize the role of **individuals** as leaders and participants:

1. **Freud** - believed aggression enables survival and therefore wards off death. When brute force used by a party frustrates someone or constrains someone, they will manifest an aggressive instinct to survive. We must inhibit our aggressions. Many species have inhibitors which inhibit them from killing fellow members of the species. Examples: wolves will go for the jugular vein but won't kill and ravens will pick out the eye of another raven but won't kill it.
2. **Carl Jung** - there exists a dark side of human nature projected onto an enemy who is imbued with hateful traits...traits which actually originate within one's self.
3. **Alfred Adler** - interpersonal struggles for social dominance and the "inferiority complex"
4. **Harry Stack Sullivan** - fears and anxieties derived from inhibited communication, which in turn give rise to terror-ridden distortions, which in turn produce a tendency to strike out at those who are different and those who we can't understand.
5. **Erik Erikson** - social ambiguity in society can produce confusion in the individual and the individual may seek refuge in "totalism" which leads to unquestioning identification with the state along with rejection of selfhood of others. Peoples' personal integrity, moral awareness, and wholeness becomes compromised by confusion and a tendency, then, to follow a misguided leader.

## Social Psychology

These theories emphasize the role of people in groups in society:

1. **Irving Janis** - Group think sets in during crisis, negative impressions of adversaries spin out of control, reduction of mental efficiency, shortcomings in information processing which block people from comprehending consequences, "motivated misperceptions" combined with a self-righteous "moral self-image". Groups can bring out the worst as well as the best in people. Group contagion can give rise to panic, scapegoating, mindless conformity, and collective misjudgment
2. **Stanley Milgram** - Violence is the product of particular social circumstances and willingness to obey authority

## Biological theories

These theories emphasize the role of genetics in humankind's biological heritage:

1. **Konrad Lorenz** and modern sociobiologists like **Edward O Wilson**- believe aggression is present in humans for survival, but with the advent of modern technology and modern weapons, the tendency for violence has become homo sapiens' greatest danger, especially along with "militant enthusiasm" which is a form of communal aggression with a lack of restraint on violence. In humans no built in inhibitors evolved. Pre-humans were prey to wild beasts for millions of years, but a potential victim had only submissive gestures to protect himself. When pre-humans and humans invented weapons things changed. Weapons, in addition to communal aggression (a militant enthusiasm and unthinking single-mindedness which gave a feeling of intense satisfaction and had a morale raising effect on the social structure) greatly escalated humans' ability to defend themselves, but also enhanced their ability to inflict violence on other groups.
2. **Barbara Ehrenreich**- believes anxieties and fears were hard-wired into pre-human species during a time when these species were prey to wild beasts and that homo sapiens sapiens inherited fears and anxieties of an "other" which had originally been wild beasts, but were later transferred to other humans.

## Anthropology

These theories emphasize the role of cultural conditioning in human societies:

1. **Margaret Mead** - Warfare is all learned behavior, it is not biologically innate. Mead cites many tribal groups which don't know war and don't have words and concepts for violence and aggression such as the Eskimos, the Lepchas of Sikkim (Himalaya Mountains), and the Pueblo's. She believed since warfare was learned, it could be un-learned. Trial by combat was abolished, replaced by trial by jury. Poor practices give way to better practices when people recognize the defects of old ways and invent new ways of relating to each other.

## Historians, Political Scientists, Economists

1. **Karl Marx** - The nation is a cause of war because nations compete for advantage and resources just as people do. This competition for advantage and resources is most evident in capitalist systems because capitalism does not recognize the limits of nature to continually provide resources to supply capitalists' machines.
2. **Barbara Tuchman** - Thinks crisis decision-making and deadlines for mobilization are a cause of war because peoples' full cognitive functions diminish in times of crisis, only a restricted range of options get considered, and there's a tendency to engage in grandiose thinking and exaggerate the opponent's malicious intentions. Inflexibility and weak leadership are also evident in these situations.
3. **Michael Howard** - war is caused by coolly reasoned actions and deliberations by leaders who engage in power politics or "realpolitik" to extend their power and control.
4. **Kenneth Boulding** - the force of nationalism and leaders, poets, musicians, writers and other artists who glamorize and legitimize acts of violence and heroism

- 5 **Emanuel Wallerstein**- theory of center and periphery - center cities or nations (G-7) are organized and prosperous and elites in the center tend to live off and exploit the labor and resources of the peripheral countries and peoples.
- 6 **Michael Klare** - interstate and interstate conflict caused by competition for wealth and security - when human communities come under stress (economic, social, environmental) or when communities engage in ethnic and religious competition, violence may break out

## **Peace Researchers**

1. **Johan Galtung** - Globalization (international capitalism) has led to division of labor which has led to global sweatshops which epitomize exploitation, inequality, and dependency. People in many occupations are part of this exploitative system. Groups oppressed by globalization seek to emancipate themselves and this could lead to violence and war.

2. **John Burton** - structural violence occurs when institutions and policies damage or destroy individual values and development. Structural violence is a major source of crime and aggression in society. In systems where structural violence is evident certain deep-rooted human needs such as the need for identity, security, control over one's life, fairness, recognition, and sense of belonging are not met. In many societies conditions of structural violence are accepted and problems are suppressed.

In a power-oriented and hierarchical framework, behavior that is rewarded would be behavior which coincides with the legal, social, and religious norms of a particular culture. For example, many observers feel aggression and acquisitiveness are rewarded in American society. From the perspective of the field of peace studies and conflict resolution, however, ideal behavior would be aimed at fulfilling human needs. Therefore, attention would be paid to feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and promoting the security, safety, well-being, identity, fairness, and sense of belonging of everyone.

New understandings bring shifts in thinking and these shifts require new vocabulary. For example, the term prevention has been introduced to replace

prevention. Provention means getting to the sources of conflict and taking strong initiatives to prevent it.

**Certain information for this worksheet was taken from the book Approaches to Peace by David Barash, Oxford University Press, 2000.**