9. **Competition, Expansion, and Reaction**

*The Foundations of Contemporary Conflict*

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**The Social Environment and Reactive Process**

We live, in some ways, in fortunate times. In a book that concerns present and future calamities, such a statement may seem incongruous. Yet amid all the present misfortunes we have the opportunity to learn, better than any previous people, the reasons for our problems. Any human event or process is a mere moment of reaction to previous events and processes. It is impossible to predict the future consequences of present events without understanding how the present itself has come to be. Historical knowledge is fundamental to designing a sustainable future. We are fortunate to have more such knowledge than any people who preceded us. We can become the first people to know where we are in history.

History is substantially a chronicle of reactive processes. For most societies and many people, the primary context to which they must adapt is not the natural environment, but other societies and other people. Responding to external pressures determines much of the political behavior of states and the cultural behavior of other types of institutions. The need to maintain a defensive posture, to protect citizens, to preserve territory, or merely to remain competitive drives much consumption of resources, regardless of cost. If the cost of pro-
tecting resources for the future is to lose autonomy, territory, or cultural identity today, resource conservation will always be foregone. This may be one of the most predictable regularities of political history. It represents an enduring conflict between surviving today at the expense of tomorrow and providing for tomorrow while accepting extinction today. Not surprisingly, history provides no example of a society that has chosen the latter.

One of history's clearest examples of reactive processes is the formation of what are called secondary states. Although states are costly organizations and require high levels of resources (Tainter 1988), they usually have a competitive advantage over less-complex systems. They also tend to be expansive, so that their less-complex neighbors are always in danger of being dominated or absorbed. Neighbors of states that wish to avoid this fate must develop organizational features that allow them to compete with states. This is secondary state formation. It is a major process by which the world has come to be filled with states. Archaeologists have been able to document only six cases of primary state formation in all of human history. Every other state has formed secondarily, many by reactive processes.

Reactive processes have been responsible both for the formation of much of today's world political system and for what may be its impending dissolution. The world system is showing clear signs of fragmenting, manifested in the intensification of cultural identity, the formation of new cultural groups, the equation of cultural distinctiveness with political autonomy, and the establishment of new, smaller nations. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the historical reasons behind today's culturally defined conflicts. Those conflicts can be understood in the historical context of competition among European nations, their global expansion and colonization, and the reaction of much of the world to Euramerican domination. Politicians, diplomats, and international workers who confront today's disintegration and violence are working with a great handicap if they do not understand the origins of these problems or their reactive nature. Historical processes

1. These are: Mesopotamia and Egypt, ca. 3500-3000 B.C.; China and the Indus River Valley, ca. 2500 B.C.; and Mexico and Peru in the last few centuries B.C. (Service 1975,5).

2. Because this chapter is primarily historical, I do not discuss the recent cold war, nor its influence on the Third World. That influence was substantial and exacerbated the reactive processes described here.
have shaped contemporary violence and must be understood to comprehend that violence.

Two types of reactive historical processes are pertinent to understanding the many problems that confront the world today and threaten to intensify in the future. The first is the pattern of competition that forms when polities with equivalent military abilities contend for dominance. Borrowing a term from archaeological literature, that process is called *peer polity competition* (Renfrew 1982, 1986; Tainter 1992; see also Price 1977). The second is the pattern by which much of the world has reacted to 500 years of European expansion and 150 years of Euramerican domination. These processes in combination have set the foundation for the disintegrative forces of contemporary world politics.3

**Peer Polity Competition in European History**

For at least the past four thousand years, one of the fundamental historical processes has been competition among societies organized at near-equivalent levels of population, territory, technology, organization, per capita product, and military capability (Tainter 1992, 104–5). Such societies are termed peer polities (Renfrew 1982, 1986). Some examples include the warring states of post-Chou China, the Mycenaean polities, the city-states of classical Greece, the Italian city-states of the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance periods, the southern lowland Maya, medieval and Renaissance Europe, and our current era. It is characteristic of peer polities that their evolution is stimulated, not by reaction to a dominant power, nor by relations between cores and peripheries, but by their interaction.

The relations among peer polities typically involve both trade and competition. Trade does not concern us here; competition is a powerful stimulator of sociocultural change (Tainter 1988, 1992). Where natural or

3. This chapter represents a convergence of two lines of research. The first, on peer polity competition, was developed for the conference “Effects of War on Society,” organized by Giorgio Ausenda. It was held May 26 to June 1, 1991, under the auspices of the Department of Public Education and Culture, Republic of San Marino (Ausenda 1992). The second, on contemporary culturally defined violence, was stimulated by the conference “The State under Siege: Political Disintegration in the Post-Cold War Era,” organized by R. Brian Ferguson. It was held at the New York Academy of Sciences, April 22–24, 1994. I am grateful to Professors Ausenda and Ferguson for the opportunities to participate in these conferences.
fiscal resources are sufficient, peer polities may engage in conflict that stretches over generations or even centuries. Such conflicts may involve endless maneuvering for advantage, forming and dissolving of alliances, and continual striving to expand territory or influence at a neighbor’s expense, or prevent the neighbor from doing the same. Peer polity competition selects for growth in the size and complexity of military systems; increases in the scale of warfare; innovations in technology, strategy, tactics, and logistics; and the reorganization of society to support competition (Tainter 1992).

In Europe of the past millennium, peer polity competition and warfare selected inexorably for larger states and greater capabilities for making war. This competition was fundamentally related to the technological innovation that allowed European nations to dominate the globe over the past half millennium (Kennedy 1987; Parker 1988). The challenge to each polity to finance such a system of escalating competition is the key to comprehending how European peer polity competition came to change the world.

Europe before 1815 was almost always at war somewhere; scarcely a decade went by without at least one battle. From the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries France was at war from 47 percent of all years in some centuries to 77 percent in others. For England the range was 48 to 82 percent; for Spain, 47 to 92 percent. Even in the most peaceful centuries these nations were involved in war, on average, nearly every other year. In the entire sixteenth century there was barely a decade when Europe was entirely at peace. The seventeenth century enjoyed only four years of total peace; the eighteenth century, sixteen years (Parker 1988, 1; Rasler and Thompson 1989, 40). History provides few comparable examples of such lengthy peer polity conflict, with so many innovations and such far-reaching consequences (Tainter 1992).

An account of the history of this competition could be initiated almost anywhere. Its foundation was established with the collapse of

4. To characterize European states of the past millennium as peer polities is not to downplay the very significant differences in the organization of those societies. In the nineteenth century, for example, European societies ranged from feudal to industrial. Two factors make the peer-polity concept useful for evaluating European history, particularly for western and central Europe. The first is that competition demonstrably spurred lockstep developments in technology, organization, and finance, so that competitive states always tended to have approximately equivalent capabilities. The second is that, although states varied widely in size, population, and natural resources, the formation of alliances has tended to even out these inequities (Tainter 1992, 104).
the western Roman Empire and the formation of smaller successor-states. A starting point closer to the present will suffice, however. The development of siege warfare in the middle centuries of the present millennium is a useful point of reference, for it is directly related to subsequent developments in technology, strategy, and logistics.

The development of siege guns in the fifteenth century ended the advantage of stone-built castles and required changes in the strategies and technology of defense. From the early fifteenth century, fortification builders designed walls that could support defensive cannon. A short time later walls were built that could also withstand bombardment. By 1560 all the elements of the trace italienne had been developed: a fortification system of low, thick walls with angled bastions and eventually extensive outworks. It was an effective but expensive method of fortification, requiring much labor to construct. The city of Siena in 1553, for example, found it so expensive to build fortifications in this manner that no money was left for its army or fleet. Siena was, ironically, annexed by Florence, against which its fortifications had been built (Creveld 1989, 101–3; Parker 1988, 7, 9, 12).

The trace italienne was effective. To capture a place fortified in this way could take months or years. Offensive tacticians responded with more complicated siege methods, and their costs rose as well. A besieging force of perhaps fifty thousand had to be kept in place for weeks or months. Such a force required 475 tons of food per day, to which must be added ammunition, powder, and building materials. From this time on, local lords could not afford to build and defend an effective fortress, nor to attack one. The resources for war were no longer found in the feudal countryside but in capitalist towns (Creveld 1989, 106–8; Parker 1988, 13).

There were parallel developments in open-field warfare. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries two developments made the armored, mounted knight obsolete: massed archers and the pike phalanx. These in turn were gradually superseded by firearms. To make the most effective use of firearms, infantry came to be drawn up in ranks, so that those in the rear could reload while the lead musketeers fired (Creveld 1989, 89–91; Kennedy 1987, 21; Parker 1988, 16–20).

As commanders maneuvered for battlefield advantages, tactics were developed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of firing. Training and battlefield coordination became more important. Uneducated soldiers had to be familiar with what were history's most advanced weapons. Ranks had to open and close on signal. Victory came
to depend on the right combination of infantry, cavalry, firearms, cannon, and reserves. Textbooks of drill sprouted across the continent and tactics became a gentleman’s topic of study (Creveld 1989, 92–94; Parker 1988, 18–23).

War came to involve ever-larger segments of society and became correspondingly more burdensome. Several European states saw the sizes of their armies increase tenfold between 1500 and 1700. Louis XIV’s army stood at 273,000 in 1691. Five years later it was at 395,000, and nearly one-fourth of all adult Frenchmen were in the military. Between 1560 and 1659 Castile lost about 11 percent of its adult male population in the constant wars (Sundberg et al. 1994, 13). Each day, a field army of 30,000 needed 100,000 pounds of flour, and 1500 sheep or 150 cattle. This was more than was required to feed all but the largest cities of Europe (Creveld 1989, 112–13; Parker 1988, 2, 45–46, 75).

Yet for all these developments, land warfare of the time was largely stalemated. There were few lasting breakthroughs. The new military technologies, and the mercenaries to put them to use, could be purchased by any power with enough money. No nation could gain a lasting technological advantage. Moreover, when a nation such as Spain or France threatened to become dominant, alliances would form to counter its power (Kennedy 1987, 21–22). Major wars of the time were therefore long, and tended to be decided by cumulative small victories and the slow erosion of the enemy’s economic base. Defeated nations quickly recovered and were soon ready to fight again. Land warfare had to be augmented by what amounted, in effect, to global flanking operations. European wars turned into contests for power and influence overseas (Parker 1988, 43, 80–82).

The great wealth from the New World was one of the factors that allowed Europeans to minimize the threat from their old enemy, the Ottoman Empire (Lewis 1958). They used this wealth also to sustain their ever-more costly competition among themselves (Kennedy 1987, 24, 27–28, 43, 46–47, 52; Tainter 1992, 110, 124). In 1760 the Duke of Choiseul noted that “in the present state of Europe, it is colonies, trade and in consequence, seapower which must determine the balance of power upon the continent” (Parker 1988, 82). The naval powers of the time were England, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark/Norway, France, and Spain. From 1650 to 1680 the five northern powers increased their navies from 140,000 to 400,000 tons. By this time England had to import critical supplies for its fleet, including masts, tar, and pitch from Sweden, and tried to develop a tar industry in its North
American colonies. In the 1630s the Dutch merchant fleet required the building of three hundred to four hundred new ships each year, about half of which were used in trade in the Baltic. Between the 1630s and 1650 the Dutch merchant fleet grew by 533 percent (Sundberg et al. 1994, 38, 42).

This naval strategy also led to problems of increasing complexity and cost. In 1511, for example, James IV of Scotland commissioned the building of the ship Great Michael. It took almost one-half of a year’s income to build, and 10 percent of his annual budget for seamen’s wages. It ended its days rotting in Brest harbor, having been sold to France in 1514 (Parker 1988, 90).

As the sizes of armies continued to grow through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new fields of specialization were needed. There was demand for skills such as surveying and cartography. It was necessary to have accurate clocks and statistical reporting. In the eighteenth century some armies carried their own printing presses. Organization became more complex. Staff and administration were separated. Armies no longer marched as a unit, but could be split into smaller elements that traveled, under instructions, on their own. Battles came to last up to several months. In France, the levée en masse (mass conscription) was begun in 1793. In 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia with an army of 600,000, including 1,146 field guns, on a 400-kilometer front (Creveld 1989, 114, 117–22; Parker 1988, 153).

In 1499, as he was embarking on a campaign in Italy, Louis XII asked what was needed to ensure success. He was told that three things alone were required: money, money, and still more money (Sundberg et al. 1994, 10). As all things military grew in size and complexity, the main constraint came to be finance. In the decades before 1630 the cost of putting a soldier in the field increased by 500 percent. The increasing expense of wars meant that nations spent more of their income on them. In 1513, for example, England obligated 90 percent of its budget to military efforts. In 1657 the figure was 92 percent. In 1643 expenditures of the French government, mainly on war, were twice the annual income (Kennedy 1987, 58, 60, 63). In the mid-eighteenth century Frederick the Great also spent 90 percent of his receipts on war. He found it necessary to debase his currency and to extract both contributions and plunder from civilians.

Sweden used its vast forest resources to pay for its wars. Copper, steel, and tar produced by the use of forest resources amounted to 90
percent of Sweden's exports. The money earned in this way was the major basis for Sweden's war efforts. In 1701, 86.5 percent of England's tar came from Sweden. Between 1658 and 1814 England sent twenty fleets to the Baltic to secure the trade in masts and timber (Sundberg et al. 1994, 28–29, 40, 42).

Sweden enjoyed a combination of low population, untapped forest reserves, and markets for its products among the combatants. The major states, lacking such circumstances, came to rely on credit to pay for their wars. Notwithstanding the flow of precious metals from her New World colonies, Spain's debts rose from 6 million ducats in 1556 to 180 million a century later, and bankruptcy often undermined Spanish military operations. The cost of war loans grew from about 18 percent interest in the 1520s to 49 percent in the 1550s. Both France and Spain often had to declare bankruptcy, or force a lowering of the rate of interest. Governments coerced bankers into extending new loans by refusing to make payments on existing debts. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries the Dutch, followed by the English, overcame fiscal constraints by gaining access to reliable short-term and long-term credit. They were careful to pay the interest on loans, and so were granted more favorable terms than other nations. They used this advantage to defeat opponents, France and Spain, that were wealthier but were poor credit risks (Parker 1988, 63–67; Rasler and Thompson 1989, 91, 94, 96, 103).

The wars did not directly augment net national wealth. Sweden's expenditures on wars, calculated as energy, exceeded the return by 240 percent (Sundberg et al. 1994, 25). The wars raised permanently the cost of being a competitive state, and war-induced debt levels persisted long after the fighting ceased. Power always shifts, and victorious nations could never dominate for very long (Kennedy 1987; Rasler and Thompson 1989, 106, 175–76). Many people of the time understood the futility of European wars. William Shakespeare created in _Hamlet_ the scene of Fortinbras and his army of twenty thousand who "fight for a plot, Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, Which is not tomb enough and continent To hide the slain." The image of Fortinbras fighting for a plot of land not large enough for the battle, nor to entomb those killed, was echoed explicitly and eloquently in 1775 by Frederick the Great.

5. _Hamlet_, act 5, sc. 4.
The ambitious should consider above all that armaments and military discipline being much the same throughout Europe, and alliances as a rule producing an equality of force between belligerent parties, all that princes can expect from the greatest advantages at present is to acquire, by accumulation of successes, either some small city on the frontier, or some territory which will not pay interest on the expenses of the war, and whose population does not even approach the number of citizens who perished in the campaigns. (quoted in Parker [1988, 149])

**Global Consequences of European Wars**

European peer polity competition stimulated technological innovation, development of science, political transformation, and global expansion. The development of sea power and acquisition of colonies became aspects of strategy in stalemated European warfare. European war thus ultimately affected and changed the entire world. By 1914 the nations of Europe, and their offshoots, controlled fully 84 percent of the earth’s surface (Parker 1988, 5).

For all the growth in size, complexity, and costliness, European wars of this period, as noted, rarely produced decisive results. States grew larger in territory and population, but whenever a power threatened to become dominant, its competitors formed alliances to counter it. A peer polity stalemate evolved over several centuries. At times, such as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this balance of power was even formalized through diplomatic arrangements.

As land warfare in Europe produced no lasting advantages, the expansion of competition to the global arena was a logical consequence. Competition expanded to include trade, the capture of overseas territories, the establishment of colonies, attacking adversaries’ colonies, and intercepting the wealth that flowed from them. The Thirty Years War (1618–48) is sometimes called the first global war for this reason. The balance of power in Europe came to rest in part on such matters; overseas resources were needed to sustain European competition. These were societies that, until the nineteenth century, were powered almost completely by solar energy. Sweden’s support base in the seventeenth century consisted nearly entirely (87 percent) of renewable resources. Lacking colonies outside its region, almost half of Sweden’s forest-based exports went to finance foreign wars (Sundberg et al. 1994, 18, 20). England’s wars in the 1540s cost about ten times the crown’s income
Competition, Expansion, Reaction

183

(Kennedy 1987, 60). For societies powered by solar energy, and using that energy so heavily within the limits of their technology, the main way to increase wealth was to control more of the earth’s surface where solar energy falls. It became necessary to secure the produce of foreign lands to subsidize European competition. New forms of energy, and nonlocal resources, were channeled into a very small part of the world. This concentration of global resources allowed European conflict to reach heights of complexity and costliness that could never have been sustained with only European resources (Tainter 1992, 123–25).

European rulers of the time faced unbearable pressure to extract wealth from their colonies. Yet even that wealth could not meet the cost of some campaigns. In 1552 the Hapsburg emperor Charles V spent 2.5 million ducats on a campaign at Metz, an amount equal to ten times his American income. By the 1580s Philip II was receiving 2 million ducats a year from American mines, but the ill-fated armada of 1588 cost 10 million ducats (Kennedy 1987, 46–47). Even with this massive transfer of bullion from the New World, Spain’s debt grew 3,000 percent in the century following 1556, and bankruptcy caused Spanish military operations to fail. Clearly, they would have failed much earlier (or not been undertaken) if Spain had not been able to draw upon New World wealth.

Peer polity competition not only forced Europeans to search for foreign lands and resources but it also virtually guaranteed them success in doing so. Such conflict, particularly when it is stalemated in balances of power, selects for continual innovation in technology, organization, strategy, tactics, and logistics. Any power that does not match its competitors in these areas risks defeat and domination. A nation that survives this process will be so proficient at making war that, outside of its group of peers, there may be no other military force that can withstand it. The inexorable pressure on European states to become ever better at making war meant that, when they ventured outside Europe, they often had a competitive advantage over other powers, whether organized as states or not (Kennedy 1987, 16–30). Time and again over the past five hundred years, comparatively tiny European forces have defeated much larger forces in the New World, Africa, and Asia. Nor was this unusual. Such abilities are a common consequence of peer polity competition. The global dominance of Europe in the past half millennium came from the same type of process that once allowed numerically inferior Greek and Macedonian armies to defeat much larger Persian forces, and
the Romans to conquer the Mediterranean. A state that survives peer polity competition may find the rest of the world at its command (Tainter 1992, 125).

European expansion as a competitive strategy set the stage for a continuing chain of reactive processes in the rest of the world. Understanding those reactive processes is the second historical ingredient to comprehending the ethnopolitical problems we now face.

Patterns of Reaction to Global European Expansion

An epoch of more than four hundred years of colonial expansion, followed by a century of Western economic and cultural penetration of all parts of the globe, has resulted in a world system in which most people must define themselves partly in reaction to Europe and North America (e.g., Marx 1993, 159; Friedman 1993, 229). It was inevitable that many such peoples would define themselves in opposition to Euramerican dominance. This has led to the development of such movements as Islamic fundamentalism, Sendero Luminoso (the Peruvian Shining Path Maoist group), and some cases of reactive ethnonationalism. What is not always so clear, and in consequence is typically misunderstood, is that European expansion has also caused violence among non-Western peoples themselves.

These processes began with the earliest phases of European expansion. Europeans in many areas commented upon the frequency with which indigenous peoples engaged in conflict (against Europeans or among themselves) and the ferocity with which they did so. Classic examples include the Yanomami of the Amazon Basin and the Iroquois of northeastern North America. War by such people led to much social speculation, from Hobbes to the present day, about the nature of war in nonstate societies, about the role of conflict in the development of state institutions, and even about the supposedly

6. I have not included in this analysis a discussion of Japan, whose economic development was itself a reaction to European expansion. Japan’s economic penetration of the world is comparatively recent, but reactions to it are already building. The development of a global reaction to Japanese commercial expansion will bear watching in coming decades.

7. A violent, rural, Marxist movement in Peru, originally proclaiming millenarian aspirations.
aggressive nature of our species. Contemporary research is showing
that this violence has been misunderstood from the beginning.

European expansion transformed indigenous societies from the
outset, and often before actual contacts had been made. The immedi­
ate consequences of expansion were disease, introduction of new plants
and animals, and technological change (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992,
8–11). Such effects often arrived before Europeans themselves, so that
even the very first descriptions of indigenous societies were sometimes
of people who had already been significantly changed. Among
these changes were the formation of pan-tribal confederations and
new ethnic groups, where previously these had not existed8 (Ferguson
groups appear to have formed in response to expanding states, and
may not have existed before the state.

It now appears that in the era of European expansion, many epi­
isodes of conflict among indigenous peoples, and between them and
Europeans, concerned access to European goods (e.g., Abler 1992;
has long been an element of state—nonstate relations. With its capac­
ity for mass production, European expansion magnified this factor.
European goods were valued by indigenous peoples not only for utili­
tarian reasons but also because they came to be embedded in social
relations. Manufactured goods were used to validate claims to status
and were intimately involved in wars and alliances. War among indig­
enous peoples, and between such peoples and Europeans, often had
much to do with access to European technology (Ferguson and White­
head 1992, 10–11). It was an early manifestation of the reactive process.

The Yanomami of the Amazon Basin illustrate these points. Long
noted in anthropology for the frequency and severity of their violent
behavior, they have been brought to public attention with labels such
as “the fierce people” (Chagnon 1968). The Yanomami are depicted as
representing the Hobbesian state of anarchic war in which all nonstate
peoples supposedly once lived (Chagnon 1968, 1974). Yet, contempo­
rary analysis of the Yanomami case by Brian Ferguson (1992, 1995a)

8. This too has been a recurrent reactive process. Along the fringes of the Roman
Empire, from the second through the fourth centuries A.D., tribal confederations emerged
among people who were often in conflict with Rome, and among themselves. These
transformations were a direct reaction to Roman expansion (Tainter 1994).
reveals that nothing is pristine or intrinsic about their violence. To the contrary, every reported incident of Yanomami conflict is, directly or indirectly, about access to or control of manufactured goods. Yanomami with direct access to Western goods try vigorously to monopolize them, which creates tension with outlying villages, and even within villages. The problem of access to goods manifests itself not only through violence but also through a set of conflict-related structural changes. These include changes in kin relations, relocation of villages, population aggregation, village alliances, feasting, economic specialization and exchange, the authority of headmen, and the treatment of the Yanomami as a cultural entity. Manufactured goods so significantly transformed Yanomami society that its recent configuration cannot be considered to represent accurately the precontact society. Ironically, some anthropologists who have taken manufactured goods on their visits to the Yanomami may have inadvertently stimulated episodes of the “pristine” violence that they subsequently described (Ferguson 1992, 1995a, and personal communication 1994).

The Iroquois in colonial North America were a group of independent “nations” often noted for their fierceness and territorial ambitions. Although Iroquois conflicts may have originated in the prehistoric period, in the historic era the Iroquois made war well out of proportion to their disease-reduced numbers. This practice was closely linked to their need for European goods. With the new importance of muskets in warfare, and a reduction in the local supply of beaver pelts, the Iroquois in the seventeenth century faced marginalization and ultimate obliteration. Pelts had to be obtained to trade for muskets. At the same time, losses to European diseases were so high that the Iroquois nations had constantly to replenish their populations with war captives and refugees. The Iroquois took to ambushing canoe fleets in Canada for pelts, and concluded that the solution to the shortage of beaver was to expand their hunting territory. Their wars were ultimately concerned with obtaining European goods (Abler 1992). Thus, the nature and intensity of Iroquoian conflict were transformed by European contact.

As frontier encounters were transformed into colonial administrations, and ultimately into independent states, political and economic processes in much of the world were transformed into the European model of the nation-state. Yet, the fundamental reactive nature of many processes did not change. Many of today’s conflicts can trace their
origins to the expansion, domination, and meddling of the great powers. Political and territorial arrangements in the areas of former colonies, and in what were the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Soviet empires, have caused cultural groups to stress their differences as they compete for control of state institutions (Ferguson 1995b). Peoples that have coexisted for centuries now stress the "traditional" nature of their conflicts. New cultural identities are emerging, as among the Maya of Guatemala (LeBaron 1993; Warren 1993) and in contemporary Tājikistān (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994). Ethnogenesis was apparently a policy of the former Soviet Union (Aklaev 1992; Rudensky 1992; Entessar 1993). On a smaller scale, the role of the state in ethnic formation can be seen in Bedouin resistance to Israeli attempts to assign them an ethnic classification. The principal of a Bedouin school once complained, "[I]f it was not enough what they [the Israeli administration] are doing to us, now they tell us we are an ethnic group" (Jakubowska 1992, 85).

Colonial policies have in many cases exacerbated cultural antagonisms, or even created them. When the British displaced the Moslems as rulers of India, for example, they used Hindus to run the colonial administration, and emphasized the differences between the religions. Hindus were sent to English schools and recruited as minor officials. Moslems largely attended Islamic schools, where the teachings concerned religious orthodoxy rather than secular advancement (Zeldin 1994, 266). In the postcolonial era continued poverty, lack of access to power, and disillusionment with Western-derived models of "modernity" have contributed to the rise of Hindu, Moslem, and Sikh nationalism (Spitz 1993). Throughout south Asia, politicians are exploiting these intensifying cultural differences for personal advancement, provoking recent violent events. In such a situation, an aura of antagonism can be rapidly created by unscrupulous leaders, and manipulated to further political ambitions.

One conflict that has deeply impressed itself on the world's consciousness is the tragedy in Rwanda. The true origins of this conflict are little known to the public. A century ago European colonists (first German, then Belgian) found in what is now Rwanda a centralized kingdom consisting of numerous clans, and three groups largely defined by occupational status. There were no distinct ethnic groups. The European administrators transformed the occupational hierarchy into an imaginary racial classification. The minority Tutsi rulers were
proclaimed by Belgian missionaries to have a cultural and racial heritage in Ethiopia—and thus nearer Europe. As the Tutsi converted to Catholicism they adopted this new “history” to legitimize their continued rule. Hutu cultivators were consigned to a life of toil. Such recruitment of the native hierarchy is a common ploy in colonial regimes.

In 1959, on the eve of independence, the Belgians reversed both their policy and the order of Rwandese society. They assisted in eliminating the Tutsi monarchy and in the installation of a Hutu republic. The Hutu have since seized upon the myth that the Tutsis originated elsewhere, condemning them now as foreigners. The fact that Tutsi and Hutu “ethnic” and “racial” identities were recently created by an outside power is now irrelevant. As they persecute each other and fight to control the Rwandan state, Tutsi and Hutu identities have emerged of a kind that never existed before. Survival now demands that they must be ethnic groups.

In the 1930s the Belgians issued identity cards, categorizing people as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa (low-caste hunter-gatherers who do not emerge in today’s journalism). Unable to implement their racial typology in practice, the Belgian administrators classified people by the ownership of cattle. Those with ten or more were Tutsi in perpetuity; those with fewer were Hutu. These identity cards still exist, and were used to categorize people in the recent massacres. Upon such a distinction 500,000 people were killed (Wall 1994).

**Summary**

There has been a persistent pattern of reaction to European expansion. That pattern consists of tribalization and ethnogenesis, intensification of cultural identity, and violence. The reasons for conflict range from control of Western-manufactured goods to control of Western-style governments. These patterns are seen historically among the Iroquois, in recent decades among the Yanomami, and today both in those conflicts that receive public attention and those that do not. In such places as the Balkans, Iran, central Asia, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, and Liberia, violence is shaped by cultural and political reactions to external forces. Though the forms of these conflicts differ, the factor that unifies them is that each is in part a response to former colonial, imperial, or other global powers.
Synthesis and Implications:  
The Historical Foundations of Contemporary Violence

There is a significant history behind the contemporary outbreak of violence. Its foundations can be traced to remote events that few people involved in today’s conflicts would anticipate. It is understandable primarily as an example of a common historic process—the development of reactive patterns. From secondary-state formation, to core-periphery relations, to peer polity interaction, reactive processes have been a dominant, driving force in history.

With the collapse of the western Roman Empire, Europe found itself with a host of small, successor states. As these increased in size and complexity, their conflicts formed into a peer polity pattern. Alliances were formed and broken, investments were made in more complex ways of making war, and rulers continually looked for more money. As continental warfare was stalemated, Europeans sought subsidies through global expansion—trade and colonization. These too became elements of the competitive spiral. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries European powers were acquiring colonies largely to prevent their competitors from doing so.

The expansion of Europe generated global changes that we are still experiencing. All societies that it touched were transformed, but none more so than indigenous, nonstate peoples. With disease, environmental change, and the availability of manufactured goods, such peoples were affected in ways that will never be fully calculated. Through phases of frontier contact, colonialism, and the formation of nation-states, the reactions to European expansion have included tribal formation, ethnogenesis, and violence. Where that violence focused on resisting European or American encroachment, the great powers have found it comprehensible if disagreeable. Yet, much of today’s violence has seemed so incomprehensible because it is directed internally. Europeans and Americans have not understood that their own expansion has stimulated much of today’s culturally defined conflict. There is a direct line of cause and effect from warfare in medieval and Renaissance Europe, to global expansion and colonialism, to today’s events in places like Rwanda, Somalia, and India.

A casual reading of this text might suggest two facile but erroneous inferences. It is worthwhile exposing these and dispensing with
them. The first is that European states, and other colonial, imperial, or capitalist powers, are morally responsible for the current state of the world. If today’s violence is even in part a reaction to European expansion, some will feel inclined to assign blame for this violence accordingly. Although this might give a measure of psychological satisfaction, it would be a short-sighted use of history. The identification of historical scapegoats too easily becomes an excuse for failures of contemporary action. Moreover, to the extent that European colonial expansion was made likely by previous events and processes, such as peer polity competition, the search for a scapegoat can always be shifted further back in time. A morally neutral approach to history must be adopted or else dialogue reduces to accusations and defensiveness.9 Historical events are neither good nor bad; they are simply a set of potential understandings. To blame any nation or part of the world for its history does little but guarantee further reactions.10

The other facile inference would be that this essay denies to today’s peoples and nations the ability to behave other than reactively. Clearly, no sensible historian or social scientist would suggest such a thing. One purpose of international policy making should be to encourage those who perpetrate today’s violence to use their faculties of choice, and act more responsibly. Yet, history is filled with examples of reactive processes, and an understanding of today’s troubles that ignores their origins is bound to be superficial. People always have the ability to choose, but choice requires information. The main purpose of this chapter is to generate an awareness of the origins of today’s behavior. Among the benefits of this awareness is that it allows the actors themselves to decide whether to modify their actions.

The discussion in this chapter suggests two implications that are essential to understanding today’s and tomorrow’s difficulties. The

9. This is written when the participants in World War II have just finished observing the fiftieth anniversary of the end of that conflict. It is a period filled with demands for apologies, acknowledgments of responsibility, and compensation of victims. With respect for the deep feelings of the participants in that struggle, I suggest that humiliation of any nation guarantees a future reaction, perhaps a violent one. Public demands for apologies are not wise, long-term policy. I do not condone any of the things done in that war, merely suggest that a mature understanding of it requires a dispassionate approach.

10. Consider also the contradiction of blaming Europeans for the consequences of their competitive spiral while admiring the consequences of peer-polity competition in ancient Greece—the defeat of the Persian invasions of 490 and 480 B.C.
first, raised at the very beginning, is the importance of knowing where we are in history (Tainter 1995). Historical patterns may develop over generations or even centuries. Rarely can an individual in a lifetime come to understand fully the origins of an event or a process. Yet, to remain ignorant of the origins of today’s problems is to condemn ourselves to manage them ineptly, and to condemn others to the consequences of that mismanagement. As for the future, it is folly to suppose that we can use present conditions to predict the twenty-first century if we do not understand how the present came to be. Managing political and cultural problems requires that we know where we are in history.

The culturally defined conflicts of today cannot be understood except in the context of global European expansion. Western nations that attempt to ameliorate or manage conflicts need to understand how their own histories have stimulated many of these problems. If today’s culturally defined conflicts are a response to European political and economic expansion, interference carries the risk of provoking further reactions. On one level this can be seen clearly. Video clips released, for example, by Moslem fundamentalists in Lebanon, by the government of Iraq, and by the Bosnian Serbs are clearly intended for Western news broadcasts. The Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front has legitimized its claim to rule Rwanda by asserting that its struggle is based on social transformation rather than ethnicity, that its troops are well disciplined, and that it has no wish for revenge against Hutus, only justice. These messages are meant for European and American ears (Wall 1994, 4). Beyond these obvious reactions to Western intervention, there is a likelihood of more subtle and far-reaching consequences. These include continuing ethnogenesis, further intensification of existing cultural identities, and the emergence of new culturally defined conflicts. In effect, historical processes will continue.

The point of this discussion is not to suggest that the West (or the United Nations) should abstain from involvement in the rest of the world, merely on the possibility of stimulating unforeseen reactions. In an era of global travel, communication, and economic linkages this is obviously impossible. The point is that those who design interventions in world conflicts must do so with the realization that involvement by dominant nations always stimulates unanticipated reactions.

A second implication concerns Western perceptions of cultural conflicts. Many in Western nations (including, unfortunately, journalists) assume that cultural differences are innate, immutable, and lead
automatically to violence (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992: 27–28, Ferguson 1995b). Both journalistic and some scholarly reporting tend to "explain" violence as the irrational but inevitable result of "ancient tribal feuds." It is assumed that contemporary expressions of cultural differentiation represent both actual history and the "natural" divisions of our species. Scarcity of land or other resources, in some arguments, interacts with these intrinsic divisions to generate violence (e.g., Homer-Dixon 1994).

Cultural differentiation in today's conflicts is, to the contrary, flexible and shifting, and responds to history, external stimuli, and deliberate manipulation. Current conflicts in central Asia are a clear example, where new cultural identities (such as Özbek) are emerging, stimulated substantially by the involvement of external powers (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994). In places such as the Balkans, "ethnic entrepreneurs" manipulate cultural identity for political mobilization. This manipulation masks the underlying issues, sometimes deliberately. To a casual observer it is easy to suppose that conflicts between cultural groups are conflicts about culture. Often the conflicts are about relations to the West, about the relations of local groups to Western-style central governments, or, as in Somalia and Liberia, are about the control of those governments (Ferguson 1995b). In such struggles, appeals to culture raise the moral authority of the political claim and tap profound emotions. This is an effective strategy of political assertion, but observers should understand that the label "cultural conflict" conceals more than it reveals.

If the arguments developed here have merit, the conflicts of today, and those of the twenty-first century, cannot be avoided or managed if we consider only conventional, short-term factors. The present analysis suggests a complex picture, in which reactive historical processes may combine with scarcity, power, politics, and culture to provoke violence, or may operate independently of them. The implications for preventing violence in the next century are complex as well: nothing can be more difficult in the management of conflict than to know that intervention itself may generate further violence. No doubt many who work in the crisis-laden world of international relations will be reluctant to accept the additional burden of gaining a historical perspective. Yet, if we accept the simple premise that problems can rarely be

11. A term suggested by Dr. Airat Aklæv of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.
solved if their causes are not understood, historical knowledge is essential. Diplomats, politicians, and other international workers cannot hope to achieve lasting resolutions to conflicts unless they first understand the importance of knowing where we are in history.12

12. I am pleased to express my appreciation to Drian Ferguson for stimulating my thinking about contemporary violence, and to Carol Raish for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.