16.4: Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism

Learning Objectives

1. Outline approaches that show promise for preventing war.
2. Understand the differences between the law enforcement and structural-reform approaches to preventing terrorism.

War has existed since prehistoric times, and terrorism goes back at least to the days of the Old Testament (e.g., when Samson brought down the temple of the Philistines in an act of suicide that also killed scores of Philistines). Given their long histories, war and terrorism are not easy to prevent. However, theory and research by sociologists and other social scientists point to several avenues that may ultimately help make the world more peaceful.

- Preventing War

The usual strategies suggested by political scientists and international relations experts to prevent war include arms control and diplomacy. Approaches to arms control and diplomacy vary in their actual and potential effectiveness. The historical and research literatures on these approaches are vast (Daase & Meier, 2012; Garcia, 2012) and beyond the scope of this chapter. Regardless of the specific approaches taken, suffice it here to say that arms control and diplomacy will always remain essential strategies to prevent war, especially in the nuclear age when humanity is only minutes away from possible destruction.

Beyond these two essential strategies, the roots of war must also be addressed. As discussed earlier, war is a social, not biological, phenomenon and arises from decisions by political and military leaders to go to war. There is ample evidence that deceit accompanies many of these decisions, as leaders go to many wars for less than noble purposes. To the extent this is true, citizens must always be ready to question any rationales given for war, and a free press in a
democracy must exercise eternal vigilance in reporting on these rationales. According to critics, the press and the public were far too acquiescent in the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003, just as they had been acquiescent a generation earlier when the Vietnam War began being waged (Solomon, 2006). To prevent war, then, the press and the public must always be ready to question assumptions about the necessity of war. The same readiness should occur in regard to militarism and the size of the military budget.

In this regard, history shows that social movements can help prevent or end armament and war and limit the unchecked use of military power once war has begun (Breyman, 2001; Staggenborg, 2010). While activism is no guarantee of success, responsible nonviolent protest against war and militarism provides an important vehicle for preventing war or for more quickly ending a war once it has begun.

**People Making a Difference**

**Speaking Truth to Power**

- The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that has long worked for peace and social justice. Its national office is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and it has local offices in more than thirty other US cities and also in more than a dozen other nations.

- AFSC was established in 1917 to help conscientious objectors serve their country in nonmilitary ways during World War I. After that war ended with the defeat of Germany and Austria, AFSC provided food to thousands of German and Austrian children. It helped Jewish refugees after Hitler came to power, and sent various forms of aid to Japan after World War II ended. During the 1960s, it provided nonviolence training for civil rights activists and took a leading role in the movement to end the Vietnam War. Since the 1960s, AFSC has provided various types of help to immigrants, migrant workers, prisoners, and other “have-not” groups in need of social justice. It also works to achieve nonviolent conflict resolution in urban communities and spoke out against plans to begin war in Iraq in 2003.

- In 1947, AFSC and its British counterpart won the Nobel Peace Prize for their aid to hungry children and other Europeans during and after World Wars I and II. The Nobel committee proclaimed in part, “The Quakers have shown us that it is possible to carry into action something which is deeply rooted in the minds of many: sympathy with others; the desire to help others…without regard to nationality or race; feelings which, when carried into deeds, must provide the foundations of a lasting peace.”

- For almost a century, the American Friends Service Committee has been active in many ways to achieve a more just, peaceable world. It deserves the world’s thanks for helping to make a difference. For further information, visit [http://www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org).

As we think about how to prevent war, we must not forget two important types of changes that create pressures for war: population change and environmental change. Effective efforts to reduce population growth in the areas of the world where it is far too rapid will yield many benefits, but one of these is a lower likelihood that certain societies will go to war. Effective efforts to address climate change will also yield many benefits, and one of these is also a lower likelihood of war and ethnic conflict in certain parts of the world.

Finally, efforts to prevent war must keep in mind the fact that ideological differences and prejudice sometimes motivate decisions to go to war. It might sound rather idealistic to say that governments and their citizenries should respect ideological differences and not be prejudiced toward people who hold different religious or other ideologies or have different ethnic backgrounds. However, any efforts by international bodies, such as the United Nations, to achieve greater understanding along these lines will limit the potential for war and other armed conflict. The same potential holds true for efforts to increase educational attainment within the United States and other industrial nations but especially
within poor nations. Because prejudice generally declines as education increases, measures that raise educational attainment promise to reduce the potential for armed conflict in addition to the other benefits of increased education.

In addition to these various strategies to prevent war, it is also vital to reduce the size of the US military budget. Defense analysts who think this budget is too high have proposed specific cuts in weapons systems that are not needed and in military personnel at home and abroad who are not needed (Arquilla & Fogelson-Lubliner, 2011; Knight, 2011; Sustainable Defense Task Force, 2010). Making these cuts would save the nation from $100 billion to $150 billion annually without at all endangering national security. This large sum could then be spent to help meet the nation’s many unmet domestic needs.

**Stopping Terrorism**

Because of 9/11 and other transnational terrorism, most analyses of “stopping terrorism” focus on this specific type. Traditional efforts to stop transnational terrorism take two forms (White, 2012). The first strategy involves attempts to capture known terrorists and to destroy their camps and facilities and is commonly called a *law enforcement or military* approach. The second strategy stems from the recognition of the structural roots of terrorism just described and is often called a *structural-reform* approach. Each approach has many advocates among terrorism experts, and each approach has many critics.

Law enforcement and military efforts have been known to weaken terrorist forces, but terrorist groups have persisted despite these measures. Worse yet, these measures may ironically inspire terrorists to commit further terrorism and increase public support for their cause. Critics also worry that the military approach endangers civil liberties, as the debate over the US response to terrorism since 9/11 so vividly illustrates (Cole & Lobel, 2007). This debate took an interesting turn in late 2010 amid the increasing use of airport scanners that generate body images. Many people criticized the scanning as an invasion of privacy, and they also criticized the invasiveness of the “pat-down” searches that were used for people who chose not to be scanned (Reinberg, 2010).

In view of all these problems, many terrorism experts instead favor the structural-reform approach, which they say can reduce terrorism by improving or eliminating the conditions that give rise to the discontent that leads individuals to commit terrorism. Here again the assessment of the heads of the 9/11 Commission illustrates this view: “We must use all the tools of U.S. power—including foreign aid, educational assistance and vigorous public diplomacy that emphasizes scholarship, libraries and exchange programs—to shape a Middle East and a Muslim world that are less hostile to our interests and values. America’s long-term security relies on being viewed not as a threat but as a source of opportunity and hope” (Kean & Hamilton, 2007, p. B1).

Although there are no easy solutions to transnational terrorism, then, efforts to stop this form of terrorism must not neglect its structural roots. As long as these roots persist, new terrorists will come along to replace any terrorists who are captured or killed. Such recognition of the ultimate causes of transnational terrorism is thus essential for the creation of a more peaceable world.

**Key Takeaways**

- Arms control and diplomacy remain essential strategies for stopping war, but the roots of war must also be addressed.
• The law enforcement/military approach to countering terrorism may weaken terrorist groups, but it also may increase their will to fight and popular support for their cause and endanger civil liberties.

For Your Review

1. Do you think deceit was involved in the decision of the United States to go to war against Iraq in 2003? Why or why not?

2. Which means of countering terrorism do you prefer more, the law enforcement/military approach or the structural-reform approach? Explain your answer.