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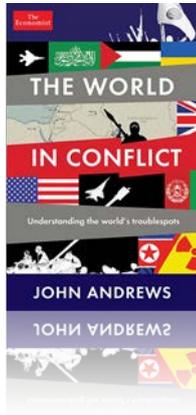


Obra Social "la Caixa"



**E**

# The World in Conflict: Understanding the World's Troublespots



Andrews, J. (2015), Profile Books Ltd., London.

*"If the present is a guide to the future, it will be one of frequent conflict – confirmation that violence is part of the human condition and that men and women will continue to take up arms in pursuit of their goals."*

## Summary

The word 'conflict' can be applied to almost anything: from a tiff on the football field to World War II. In *The World in Conflict*, John Andrews applies the term to those differences of opinion – between nations, individuals, or political movements – that trigger lethal violence. Up to now in the twenty-first century, the United States and her allies invaded Iraq and Afghanistan; Russia declared war on Georgia; France and Britain joined forces to overthrow the Libyan government, which subsequently collapsed into fratricidal anarchy; the brutal Islamic State emerged in the Middle East; and a constant competition for precious minerals has caused (and financed) wars and massacres in Asia. Other conflicts are less bloody, but remain dangerous, such as the standoff between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, or the stalemate between North and South Korea. In the Pacific, territorial and maritime disputes entangle China, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei, and no one is certain that current disputes will not lead to armed conflict. The number of simmering or violent conflicts in the world remains high. The author broadly examines the conflicts that are happening today, region by region. *The World in Conflict* will appeal readers who want an initial impression of the flashpoints that affect every region of the world.

## The author

**John Andrews** is an author and journalist specialising in international politics. He is a contributing editor at Project Syndicate and was a correspondent for The Economist for more than 24 years (reporting from Singapore, Hong Kong, Brussels, Washington DC, Paris, and Los Angeles). Andrews is also the annual conference interviewer at the

*World Policy Conference*, and is a frequent keynote speaker. He published *The Economist Book of Isms* in 2010. His most recent book is *The World in Conflict*.

## Key ideas and opinion

Conflicts can have many causes, often overlapping, such as religion, race, territory, resources, or ideology. The easiest option to categorise conflicts, in the author's opinion, is by geography and nation, even though many of these conflicts cross borders, especially in Africa and the Middle East (the best example being the rise of violent Islamism).

### *Middle East and North Africa: Connected by Islam*

The Arab world, which stretches from the Arabian Peninsula in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, with a population of over 400 million, is divided by its politicians and a legacy of colonialism into 22 countries (as recognised by the Arab League). Their governments range from autocratic monarchies, as in the Gulf countries, to supposedly socialist republics, as in Syria and Algeria. Economies vary from those based on petrodollars, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to those mired in a state of poverty that leads to conflict, such as Somalia. **Most of these countries are plagued by political and social tensions in which the role of Islam is a factor.**

In this region, Andrews pays special attention to the Arab Spring. One reason, according to the author, why so many Arab countries – from Yemen to Somalia, Iraq, and Libya – were plunged into chaos during this period is that the **social, economic, and political challenges are too great to be solved overnight, or even in a generation.** Another reason is that the wars that have taken place this century in Iraq and Afghanistan have spawned Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda. These groups are willing to use extreme violence to attack the allegedly anti-Muslim West and build a fundamentalist (or Salafist) Islamic society. The most notable feat of Al Qaeda was 9/11, but in recent years Al Qaeda has been overshadowed by an organisation known as Islamic State (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or IS. While Al Qaeda was using suicide attacks and bombings to generate terror, IS used these tactics to build what it calls the Islamic State, in which its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has been proclaimed as the caliph of the *ummah* (the Muslim community). If the Islamic State survives, it will erase the lines drawn on the map of the Middle East in 1916 by Britain's Sir Mark Sykes and France's François Georges Picot, when the European powers divided the lands of the defeated Ottoman Empire.

The continued existence of the Islamic State threatens Arab regimes around the world, including the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, whose efforts to spread an equally fundamentalist (but peaceful) interpretation of Islam have perversely helped to create Al Qaeda and IS. Some historians see similarities between IS and Kharijism, a fanatical

seventh-century sect that supported Ali Ibn Abi Talib and then fragmented before eventually disappearing two centuries later. **IS, according to Andrews, will eventually be defeated, perhaps more by social and economic pressure than military action.** However, as long as governance in the Middle East and North Africa remains corrupt and inept, Islamist fundamentalism is likely to remain powerful in the minds of the young and discontented in the Muslim world and beyond. In addition, Andrews notes, the geography of North Africa provides vast areas of sanctuary where extremists can hide and organise. The hope, according to John Andrews, is that the brutality of IS will cause it to lose popularity. **The most effective tool in the fight against the organisation may in fact be the same social networks that made it popular and inspired the young to join, since they can also be used to spread the cruelty of its actions.** Finally, Andrews adds, the IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is running a great risk of over-extending the organisation. While the Islamic State claims the allegiance of all Muslims, and several jihadist groups (such as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, and Boko Haram in Nigeria) support it, the major regional regimes (especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan) will inevitably coincide with the West in seeing IS as an organisation that must be destroyed.

### *Africa: Rich in resources but poor in governance*

With more than 50 countries, a population of over 800 million, and countless languages and tribes, **Africa will never be as homogeneous as Europe** – despite frequent attempts by outsiders to import the same model. There are few geographical similarities between, say, the vastness of Nigeria and mountainous Ethiopia, and from an ethnic point of view between, for example, the Ashanti of Ghana and Hutus of Rwanda. ‘Black Africa’ is a convenient shorthand used by non-Africans, but it means nothing beyond a description based on skin colour.

Nevertheless, says Andrews, there are some depressing features that are common to most African countries: enormous social inequalities; young populations (often with high levels of unemployment); and inefficient and corrupt governments. Bad governance and corruption are important factors in a continent where conflict scars many countries. However, other factors also come into play: conflict over natural resources, from oil (Nigeria) to diamonds (Congo); conflicts between tribes (as in Kenya or Rwanda); and conflicts between religions (as in Mali and Nigeria). Inevitably, these factors often overlap. The result has been wars within and across national borders.

Undoubtedly, the worst conflicts occurred in 1990 in **Rwanda**. In just 100 days, some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by the Rwandan army and Hutu Interahamwe militia, until the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) emerged victorious in July 1994 and established a government of national unity. Today, with 12 million people, Rwanda is often praised as an example of modernisation and stable and effective government, with convincing efforts made to reconcile Hutus and Tutsis. However,

says Andrews, critics point to the refusal of many Hutu refugees to return to their homes, and claims that the Rwandan regime is killing political opponents (mainly Hutu living abroad). The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (the main Hutu militia in exile) announced in 2005 that it had abandoned its armed struggle, but instead, it is accused of committing acts of terror and looting in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. This shows, says Andrews, that the **Rwandan genocide still has consequences for much of Central Africa.**

It is also surprising to see incursions by Islamist extremists, such as Boko Haram, in Nigeria. Efforts to stop the group have involved American surveillance and European and African troops fighting together in Mali. Even where Islamist extremists are not active, conflicts may still be influenced by religion, as in the Central African Republic. **But if a wrongly placed border helps provoke conflict, says Andrews, redrawing borders risks doing more harm than good.** For this reason, the African Union has always insisted on the inviolability of borders. Only Eritrea and South Sudan have been able to separate from a post-colonial African state. Despite this scenario, **there are optimists who, says Andrews, predict that Africa, with its young population and vast natural resources, will replace Asia as the continent of the twenty-first century.** The road to this scenario will be full of obstacles. However, it is important to note that African nations have already made progress: since 1991, more than 30 African leaders have been replaced peacefully at the ballot box, something that has not been often achieved in the Arab world.

### ***UK and Europe: A bloody past, a complacent present, and an uncertain future***

The European Union, with a population of over 500 million people, is the world's largest economic bloc. NATO, whose 28 members include 26 European states, is the largest and most successful military alliance in the world. So, at first glance, Europeans should feel secure; at least those within the European Union. **Indeed, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, for promoting peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights for more than six decades.** Nevertheless, this award should not encourage complacency by the EU.

European peace and security are not absolute. The first threat is from **secessionist movements** with proven propensities for violence (such as in Spain and Northern Ireland). A second threat comes from **extremist Islamism**: European jihadists, especially French and British Muslims returning from conflicts in the Middle East and willing to launch acts of terrorism in their countries of origin. A third threat is that **some European countries are drawn into wars beyond Europe**, as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, and the Central African Republic. Andrews argues that there is a fourth threat that until recently seemed unimaginable: **that the Cold War between the West and Russia rekindles with hot spots.** Evidence of this is the conflict that began in 2014 in

the **Ukraine**, and which resulted in the secession of Crimea and its annexation by Russia. Ukrainian soldiers were then challenged by Russian speakers in a horrible attempt to undermine the existence of the Ukraine and have it annexed by Russia. Given the support expressed by President Vladimir Putin for Russian speakers, **the former satellites of the USSR that are now inside the EU and NATO are increasingly nervous, and emphasise the importance of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty**: an attack on one member is an attack on all and will cause a collective response. So far, Article 5 has only been invoked once, in response to 9/11.

The author of *The World in Conflict* emphasises that Europe is not as dark as in the previous century (at least for the moment). However, storm clouds are on the horizon. Many of these clouds come from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The **Balkans** has yet to eliminate the shadows of its wars in the 90s, which killed more than 130,000 people and displaced more than two million. Although the nations that have emerged from the dismemberment of communist Yugoslavia seem peaceful, there are still considerable ethnic and religious tensions in Bosnia between Muslims, Croats, and Serbs; and in Serbia between Kosovan Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Only Montenegro has achieved independence peacefully from Serbia (following a referendum in 2006). Unfortunately, concludes Andrews, **despite the stability in Europe since the end of World War II, there are still conflicts in much of the continent, as well as the threat of many more.**

### *The Americas: Faith, drugs, and revolution*

**The influence of the United States** is very important in the Americas. During the Cold War, the US provoked conflict when it acted with determination in its opposition to communism and socialism. This was especially evident in 1973, when the CIA helped overthrow Salvador Allende, the socialist president of Chile. The most enduring conflict has been American opposition to the communist regime in Cuba, which included several attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. However, there are also tensions that have nothing to do with the United States, such as **border disputes in Central and South America**: Nicaragua has maritime or territorial claims that irritate Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, and Jamaica; Bolivia and Peru are immersed in dispute with Chile; and El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, and Guyana have all threatened their neighbours. However, outright wars have been rare.

Two other elements add to violence on the continent. One is the influence since the 1960s of **liberation theology**. This is a radical interpretation that reconciles Christianity with the regional realities of poverty and inequality. The implication of this belief for many, underlines Andrews, is that a modern-day Jesus would be a Marxist struggling to end the social inequalities that Latin American elites and the powerful Roman Catholic Church have ignored. This belief is supported by many priests, monks, and nuns who are ready to defy papal authority. Another threat to the region is the **manufacture and**

**importation of illegal drugs.** Estimates of the annual value of illegal drugs in the US market range from \$100 to \$750 billion. **The US has responded with a decades-long regional war on drugs.** Within the US, this has meant increased prison sentences for drug use. Outside the United States, it has involved strategies to eliminate crops, as well as financial and military assistance to Latin American governments for fighting guerrillas who support the drug trade. **The consequences are often unexpected:** poor farmers who are deprived of their cash crops join drug gangs; government soldiers abuse their power; crime and murder rates have become the highest in the world; and politicians and soldiers are often corruptly involved in a trade that, in theory, they should be fighting.

**Andrews concludes that the region will remain in conflict while drug trafficking, corruption, and gross social inequalities continue.** Social tensions and inequalities in the distribution of wealth led to Bolivarianism, a socialist and anti-American platform named after Simon Bolivar, the nineteenth-century independence leader. The most famous advocate of a Bolivarian revolution was Hugo Chavez, the former president of Venezuela, whose anti-imperialist tone resonated in neighbouring nations.

### *United States: Superpower and Goliath*

The US dominates the world. Its economic, technological, cultural, and especially military power is unrivalled. American special forces were deployed in 133 countries in 2014 – on missions ranging from night raids (such as the killing of Bin Laden) to training exercises. **Given the need to protect commercial interests, economic and military power in the United States has gone hand in hand,** and even more so in a world in which globalisation has made economies increasingly interdependent. In the nineteenth century, this meant, among many other conflicts, wars with Spain and China, and the occupation of the Philippines. In the twentieth century, the United States participated in World Wars I and II and fought against China and the Soviet Union in the Korean Peninsula. The Vietnam War remains engraved in the national memory. These major wars were accompanied by smaller conflicts, from interventions in Lebanon and the invasion of Panama, to the first Gulf War in 1990-91, and the bombing of Serbian positions in 1993-95. **A significant feature throughout the century was American superiority in conventional warfare.**

**This reality, however, is different this century, in which it is not inevitable that America will emerge victorious from the battlefield.** As Colin Powell warned when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under George W. Bush: ‘if you break it, you pay for it’. What had been a conventional war against the forces of a state, in this case Iraq, has become an endless war against an army of stubborn insurgents. This led, especially **during the Obama presidency, to a change in tactics, with unmanned aerial drones attacking targets in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia.** Such tactics had consequences, including the death of innocent civilians, which increased

resentment toward the United States and encouraged local people to join the same organisations that America was trying to destroy, such as Al Qaeda in Yemen, Al-Shabab in Somalia, or the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**The question that now faces every American president is how to confront the challenge of extremist Islamism.** Despite the alarm in the West over Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russian support for secessionists in eastern Ukraine, the conflicts in which America is involved are against non-state actors, particularly Al Qaeda and other Islamist extremists. Moreover, combating extremist Islam abroad, stresses Andrews, creates risks in America's homeland. **A nation that jealously protects freedom of expression, and whose citizens have the constitutional right to bear arms, is also a fertile ground for violent conflict between the people and their government, says Andrews.**

### *Asia: People and potential power – both for peace and for war*

The area between the Ural Mountains and the Pacific Ocean is so vast that finding an adjective to adequately describe its size is impossible. However, says Andrews, some generalisations are hard to ignore: **Northeast Asia**, in which Russia (an Asian and European power), China, and North Korea have nuclear weapons, represents a flashpoint with global implications; **South Asia** is a permanent source of conflict, especially in the confrontation between India (a nuclear power that is now almost as populous as China), and Pakistan (also a nuclear power); **Afghanistan and Pakistan** are nearly failed states, and can export Islamic terrorism to the rest of the world; and **Southeast Asian** states are in a situation in which China is increasingly showing its teeth in disputes over maritime borders. **One consolation is that the situation is less violent than in the past.** Japan's invasion of China in the 1930s resulted in the death of some 10-20 million Chinese and the rape of 80,000 women. The Korean War 1950-53 (technically still unfinished) killed 1.6 million civilians. The number of victims of the Vietnam War is estimated at about 3.5 million between 1969 and 1975. However, the conflict in Afghanistan has been far less bloody: it is estimated that from the American invasion in 2001 until the departure of its combat troops in 2014, some 20,000 civilians were killed, as well as 3,500 American and allied troops.

According to Andrews, an explanation for this reduction in numbers is that **wars between states have more or less disappeared.** Another explanation, related to the previous one, is the **end of the Cold War**, in which the United States, China, and the Soviet Union were committed to supporting their respective 'client states'. Ironically, the Cold War helped foster the **Islamist violence** that has become a feature of Asia this century. The Mujahedeen – a religiously inspired group that was supported by the US and fought in the 1980s to expel Soviet troops from Afghanistan – has evolved into a variety of jihadist groups in Central Asia. Andrews highlights two factors: firstly, that



given the lasting influence of Al Qaeda in the region, and the ability of the Islamic State to attract young people in Iraq and Syria, violent jihadism will remain a major source of conflict across Asia – from Kabul to Beijing. And secondly, it is naive to think that wars *between* Asian states will remain the most important topic in the history books in the future. **Economic power is often accompanied by military power and the will to use it.** **China** has already overtaken the United States as the world’s largest economy in terms of purchasing power, and within a couple of decades, it will overtake America in military might. Meanwhile, the Pacific states fear an aggressive China, and see their alliances with the United States as a guarantee of security. But for the moment, concludes Andrews, the conflicts of greatest concern to Asian governments are those arising within national borders, whether of because of ideology, race, religion, or a combination of all three.