

Global Issues

Reader's Guide

Key Terms

terrorism, state-sponsored terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human rights

Find Out

- What is state-sponsored terrorism?
- Why has the United States been reluctant to sign the treaty creating the International Criminal Court?

Understanding Concepts

Global Perspectives What steps have been taken to halt the global threat of nuclear proliferation?

COVER STORY

Day of Terror

NEW YORK CITY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Terrorists today crashed two commercial airliners into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. A third plane hit the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and a fourth went down outside Pittsburgh. All 266 people in the four jetliners were killed.

Within an hour of the first attack, Americans watched in horror on television as the south tower of the World Trade Center collapsed due to the heat of the explosion. Shortly after that the north tower fell. Many office workers in the twin towers jumped out of windows to their deaths to escape the flames. Hundreds of firefighters and rescue workers searched the debris but found few survivors. The U.S. military was put on the highest state of alert, and the nation's borders were immediately closed.



Smoke billows where twin towers stood

In today's interdependent world, citizens, national leaders, and officials in international organizations must increasingly deal with global issues that affect a large part of the world's population and cannot be solved by the actions of any single nation. Important global issues today include defeating terrorism, limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting human rights, and protecting the environment.

As the world becomes more and more interconnected, even the most powerful nations, including the United States, cannot escape the impact of global issues. As one leading American political scientist explains, "U.S. security and economic interests are inevitably tied to what happens in the rest of the world. Whether we like it or not."

Global issues pose a challenge to a nation's ability to claim authority within its own borders and to act independently of other nations. This is because responding effectively to issues of a global scale sometimes requires a country to accept the decisions or rules of an international body such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization, even if such decisions or rules differ from that country's own.

Some global issues are so large in scope that a group of nations must cooperate to solve the problems. This often means that individual nations must give up some measure of national authority. For example, to combat worldwide pollution, nations may agree to participate in a treaty that limits a nation's economic and industrial choices for the good of all treaty members. In other words, solving global issues may require cooperation among nations. A prime example of such cooperation came after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, when President George W. Bush met with nearly 80 foreign leaders to ask for their cooperation in fighting terrorism.

Terrorist Attack

Attack on the World Trade Center

Rescue workers and firefighters desperately search for survivors in the rubble of the 110-story towers. Hijackers took over passenger jets and flew them into the twin towers in a planned and coordinated act of destruction.

Do you think such incidents help terrorists achieve their objectives? Why or why not?



International Terrorism



The U.S. State Department reports that recent years have seen more than 300 attacks of terrorism per year across all regions of the world. **Terrorism** is the use of violence by non-governmental groups against civilians to achieve a political goal.

International terrorism has become one of the greatest dangers of the new global era. This truth became very clear to Americans on September 11, 2001. Terrorists launched their most devastating attack ever on the United States, hijacking commercial airliners and crashing them into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Another plane intended for a similar attack crashed in Pennsylvania.

Since World War II, most terrorist attacks on Americans have been carried out by Middle Eastern groups. One reason for such attacks stems from the history of American investment in the oil industry. Such investment enriched the ruling families of some Middle Eastern kingdoms but left most of the people poor. Some of these people became angry at the United States for supporting the wealthy ruling families. American support of Israel also angered many in the Middle East.

The global importance of the oil industry also increased cultural exchanges between Middle Eastern countries and the West. Many Muslim

fundamentalists resented this contact, fearing that it weakened traditional Islamic values and beliefs. New movements arose calling for a strict interpretation of the Quran—the Muslim holy book—and a return to traditional Muslim religious laws. Eventually, some of the more militant fundamentalists began using terrorism to achieve their goals.

In the 1970s, several Middle Eastern nations realized they could fight the United States by providing terrorist groups with money, weapons, and training. When a government secretly supports terrorism, this is called **state-sponsored terrorism**. The governments of Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Iran have all sponsored terrorism.

A New Terrorist Threat In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In response, Muslims from across the Middle East headed to Afghanistan to join the struggle against the Soviets. Among them was a 22-year-old Muslim named **Osama bin Laden**. Bin Laden came from one of Saudi Arabia's wealthiest families. He used his wealth to support the Afghan resistance. In 1988 he founded an organization called **al-Qaeda**, or "the Base." Al-Qaeda recruited Muslims and channeled money and arms to the Afghan resistance.

Bin Laden's experience in Afghanistan convinced him that superpowers could be beaten. He also believed that Western ideas had contaminated Muslim society. He was outraged when Saudi

Arabia allowed American troops on Saudi soil after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Operating first from Sudan and then from Afghanistan—then under the control of Muslim fundamentalists known as the Taliban—bin Laden dedicated himself and al-Qaeda to driving Westerners, and especially Americans, out of the Middle East. In 1998 he called on Muslims to kill Americans. Soon afterward, truck bombs exploded at the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In 1999 members of al-Qaeda were arrested while trying to smuggle explosives into the United States in an attempt to bomb Seattle, Washington. Then, in October 2000, al-Qaeda terrorists crashed a boat loaded with explosives into the USS *Cole*, an American warship docked in Yemen. Finally in 2001 came the devastating attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., and the United States responded by going to war.

War on Terrorism Begins Experts on Islam point out that Islamic terrorists misrepresent the teachings of the Quran and that many of their statements actually contradict core Islamic principles. According to Bernard Lewis, an internationally recognized authority on Islam, “The callous destruction of thousands in the World Trade Center . . . has no justification in Islamic doctrine or law and no precedent in Islamic history.” When the United States began bombing targets in Afghanistan in October 2001, Bush emphasized that he had ordered the military to attack al-Qaeda’s camps and the Taliban’s military forces, and he reiterated that Islam and the Afghan people were not the enemy.

President Bush also vowed that while the war on terrorism began by targeting al-Qaeda, it would not end “until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.” In order for terrorism to be defeated on a global scale, however, many nations will have to work together towards that common goal.

Nuclear Weapons Threat



Another problem that the world faces is **nuclear proliferation**, or the spread of nuclear weapons. Five nations—the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, and China—have had nuclear weapons for many years. Israel, South Africa, Argentina, and Taiwan are also believed to

possess nuclear weapons. More recently, India and Pakistan have acquired the capability to produce nuclear weapons.

The United States, in cooperation with many other developed nations, has taken several steps to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. In late 1956, a joint agreement of 81 nations created the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This organization oversees the safe operation of nuclear power plants and limits the export of plutonium processing technologies needed to build nuclear weapons.

In 1968 the major nuclear powers created the nuclear **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, in which they promised not to provide nuclear weapons technology to other nations. They also vowed to ensure the safe use of nuclear power and to encourage general disarmament and destruction of existing nuclear weapons. Since the NPT’s creation, over 180 parties have joined this treaty. On occasion the United Nations has also imposed sanctions on nations seeking to build nuclear weapons.

A new challenge to limiting the spread of nuclear weapons has arisen, making the success of these international agreements more difficult. Scientists have revealed that it is possible to build small nuclear weapons using readily available low-enriched uranium or spent nuclear fuel, the waste left over by reactors used to generate electric power. Previously it was thought that only plutonium or highly enriched uranium could be used. As a result, the treaties and monitoring programs put into place so far have focused only on those two substances. The fact that these cheaper, more readily-obtainable substances can be used to make weapons of mass destruction means that a wider range of nations may have access to the materials needed to build nuclear weapons. This means that the chance of terrorists obtaining weapons of mass destruction has increased.

North Korea signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985 as a non-nuclear weapons state. In 1992 both North and South Korea agreed to sign a Denuclearization Statement which stated that neither country was allowed to test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons and forbade the possession of nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities. Also, plans were discussed for nuclear weapons inspections in both countries. After these promising beginnings, however, North Korea showed little