A Comparative Analysis of the Intractability of the Basque Conflict

Abstract:
Since the regime of dictator General Franco (1939-1975), the Spanish government has repressed or banned virtually all expressions of the Basque national identity and political expression. This failure to recognize the Basque culture within Spanish society has created a void in which the Basques have felt self-confined for generations. The conflict between the Basques and Spain has never found clear resolution, has often been punctuated by armed resistance, and has become virtually intractable. Spanish nationalism has prevailed over the indigenous group in the region, leaving resentment and frustration for those seeking to practice their traditions and cultural distinctions. The Spanish blend of fascist, traditionalist, and militarist responses has reinforced the deep-felt resentment of the Basque people in their pursuit of the civil liberties granted to all other citizens of the Spanish state.

The existence of the Basques has been problematic to the Spanish because cultural differences challenged Franco's ideal of a unified Catholic state. Catholicism was the essence of the `nation' and Castile was its `ethnic core,' thus leaving little room for any opposing ideology and principles. Political, religious, and cultural autonomy for the Basques was regarded as a path to secession rather than a positive accommodation strategy. Since the end of the Second World War, the Basques have been fighting to regain their homeland as well with a sense of self-character. The role of identity has played a significant part in the conflict, as the intensity of the antagonists' hatred for each other lacks understanding and compassion.

This thesis will examine the Basque conflict as a particularly nettlesome example of a subset of internal conflicts that have been deemed intractable. Intractable conflicts have peculiar characteristics and can only be resolved under certain limited conditions. I will review the multidimensional history of this conflict to determine why it has been so entrenched, and why past efforts to resolve it have foundered. I will then undertake a comparative analysis of other intractable conflicts and their resolution status in order to discern what factors account for the success or failure of peacemaking efforts, and whether the Basque case can benefit from the lessons learned. In the end, I hope to offer a framework for bringing peace to this troubled region.

This thesis will be an interdisciplinary project that employs historical interpretation, comparative history, political science, and peace and conflict studies to analyze the Basque conflict and to propose promising ways to resolve it. This study identifies and analyses violent and nonviolent behaviors of the Basque and Spanish antagonists as well as the structural mechanisms attending to the social violence. Value issues will be evident throughout. In pursuit of my degree in International Affairs, I am interested in gaining a critical awareness of the historical and ethical issues that manifest in the Basque conflict, identifying the factors crucial to the successful resolution of other intractable conflicts, to then applying these lessons to this case and future endeavors.
of terrorist and political conflict, the Basque Country had dropped to the sixth position in per capita GDP. During that period, terrorist activity by the Basque terrorist organization ETA resulted in almost 800 deaths. Basque entrepreneurs and corporations had been specific targets of violence and extortion (including assassinations, robberies, and kidnappings-for-ransom). This type of study is difficult. On the one hand, a pure time-series analysis of the severity of terrorism and the evolution of the Basque economy will be contaminated by the economic downturn which Spain suffered during the second half of the 1970's and the first half of the 1980's, at the peak of terrorist activity.