

## ENEMY IMAGES AND CONFLICT

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### Abstract

This work provides an analytical discussion for commonly-held negative stereotypes in conflict situations, known as enemy images. It emphasizes that enemy images create serious obstacles to conflict resolution by creating psychological barriers between the parties and making them cognitively antagonistic to each other. Therefore, removing hostile images must be a first priority on the way to resolving a conflict. The underlying causes of enemy images, their impact on the behaviors of conflicting parties and strategies utilized to remove such images are discussed, in that order. Special attention is given to the need for a comprehensive effort to cope with enemy images.

Keywords: Conflict, Stereotype, Image, Resolution

### Hasmane Önyargılar Ve Uyumsuzluk

#### Özet

Bu çalışma sosyal ve uluslararası uyumsuzluklarda çok sık gözlenen hasmane önyargılara ilişkin analitik bir tartışma sunmaktadır. Çalışmada vurgulanan ana tema hasmane önyargıların uyumsuzluğa taraf partiler arasında psikolojik bariyerler yaratarak çözümü zora soktuğu, bu sebeple ortadan kaldırımlarının öncelikli bir zorunluluk olduğudur. Sırasıyla hasmane önyargıların nedenleri, uyumsuzluğa taraf partiler üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri ve bunlarla mücadele yolları ele alınmaktadır. Ayrıca negatif önyargıların çok boyutlu bir sorun olduğu, bu yüzden de çok yönlü bir mücadele ortaya konması gerektiğinin altı çizilmektedir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler : Uyusmazlik, Önyargi, Imaj, Çözüm

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## Introduction

Embedded enemy images have been argued to be a serious obstacle to conflict management, reduction, or resolution (Stein, 1996: 93). It is believed that once formed, such images tend to become deeply rooted and resistant to change, even when one adversary attempts to signal a change in intent to another. The images themselves then perpetuate and intensify the conflict. Hence, there is little chance of resolving a conflict unless the hostile imagery is changed.

In this regard, this study inquires the impact of enemy images on the antagonistic behaviors of conflicting parties and its implications to conflict resolution. The study consists of three parts. The first part defines the concept of enemy images and briefly discusses their underlying dynamics. The second part attempts to identify various negative roles of enemy images in the attitudes of conflicting parties. The final part comes up with several strategies, by utilizing an inter-disciplinary approach, that might be helpful to remove or reduce negative images.

## I. ENEMY IMAGES: DEFINATION AND UNDERLYING CAUSES

The enemy image, in its generic sense, corresponds to the commonly-held, stereotyped and dehumanized image of the out-group (Wahlstrom, 1992: 175). It is a set of negative beliefs or hypotheses regarding the other side that an individual or group is convinced are valid. Conflicting nations, groups, or individuals usually develop fixed, distorted images that are in fact quite similar. Each party claims righteousness and purity for itself and attributes hostility and evil to the other side. Each sees itself as virtuous, restrained and peace-loving, while viewing the opponent party as deceptive, bellicose, and warlike.

In contemporary studies of enemy images, one can identify a wide spectrum of different approaches in which the emphasis may be on the biological, the psychological or the political factors leading to the formation of the enemy image. Very often the choice of approach reflects the writer's own scientific background. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarize different approaches under the following three categories.

### 1. Biological Determinism

The simplest explanation believes in the existence of some sort of universal human need for aggression which creates enemies even if there is no clearly-defined enemy. In his book, *On Aggression*, Konrad Z. Lorenz speculates that human beings, like other animals, contain a store of aggressive energy that seeks to release and can be easily triggered in cases of real or perceived threat (Lorenz, 1966). Sigmund Freud similarly postulates the existence in the human being of a fundamental eros, or life instinct, and a

fundamental thanatos, or death instinct. He argues that all instincts are directed toward the reduction or elimination of tension, stimulation and excitation. Death involves the removal of all excitation, yet people go on living despite the death instinct, since the life instinct channels the annihilative drive away from the self toward others (Daugherty and Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 276-277)

From these perspectives, then, the creation of enemy is a necessary psychological release by which individuals or groups preserve themselves through diverting their aggressive and self-destructive tendencies to outsiders.

## 2. Psychological Explanations

More elaborate explanations are offered by psychologists and psychiatrists who describe the psychological processes underlying the emergence of the enemy image. In his study, *The Need to Have Enemies and Allies*, Vamik Volkan argues that having enemies, as well as allies, although it may be pathological in some forms, is inherent to the development of the human mind; specifically, to the development of a cohesive identity. To Volkan, individuals are not born with an integrated identity, but slowly develop a sense of self by going through certain development phases during childhood period. One's cohesive and genuine sense of "I" (self) evolves normally within the first three years. The basic way the child prepares itself for this process is by learning to attribute to other individuals or things certain parts which originally belong to it. This phenomenon is called "projection". Two types of projection are utilized:

a-) Negative Projection: The child projects its unwanted, unpleasant, "bad" aspects onto others in order to maintain the cohesiveness of parts that it keeps inside itself. This way, the child aims to preserve self-purity, as well as self-harmony.

b-) Positive Projection: Interestingly enough, the child also projects pleasurable, "good" aspects of itself onto others, as if to keep them safe for use on a "rainy day". If the child becomes anxious about losing these good aspects, it projects them onto idealized objects at the time of integration to ensure their preservation.

In light of these, Volkan theorizes that negative projections create enemies and positive projections allies. Of course, while such projections occur, what is good and what is bad are learned from the society. By belonging to a large group, the child begins to accumulate what is known as group reservoirs, supported and sponsored by the adults in the group. The function of these reservoirs is to serve as a receptacle for the projections ("good" and "bad") of all the children in the group (Volkan, 1988).

This hypothesis of the psychological need for enemies, as well as friends, is echoed in David Finlay's contention that our brains appear to be programmed to partition people into friends and enemies. In describing the need for enemies, Finlay wrote, in *Enemies in Politics*, that:

The enemy symbolizes the antithesis of core values and beliefs regarding human needs, such as belongingness and security, as well as attitudes toward authority. He is a part of the polarized world which all men create, and reflects man's two-sided prism of beliefs and disbeliefs- that which is accepted as true and good and which is rejected as false and evil. There are, in other words, cognitive processes of adjustment, balance and strain for congruence which tend to cause and sustain ideas of enemies...(Finlay, 1967: 7)

Many other psychoanalysts, too, support or express much the same idea. Freud, for instance, talks about the psychological principle of "narcissism of minor differences" in reference to humans' tendency to exaggerate small differences and project their unwanted aspects onto others who are even slightly different from themselves (Freud, 1961: 140). Erik H. Erikson, in the same way, coined the term "pseudospecies" to refer to people's tendency of portraying themselves as "the humans" and others as "less humans" (Erikson, 1966: 601-621). A similar idea also appears in Erich Fromm's argument that the existence of an enemy gives a meaning to the individual who, in his view, has lost the meaning of life in the face of advanced capitalism and who is desperately searching for a meaning (Fromm, 1955).

### 3. Strategical Factors

Aside from biological and psychological explanations, some recent studies on enemy images have focused on strategical factors behind the creation of enemies. The argument made at this level is that the idea of enemy does not "just appear" but is cultivated carefully by politicians and by those who are in power for interest-based reasons.

In this respect, H. Luostrainen argues that enemy images are functional for the purpose of justifying domestic political choices (i.e., guns, instead of butter), diverting people's attention from domestic problems to abroad, explaining aggression at home and abroad and strengthening the national identity, particularly in young nations (Luostrainen, 1989: 127). W. Eckhardt expresses much the same idea in his study on enemy images:

A war economy needs enemies in order to justify its military expenditures. Costa Rica, which has had no army for some forty years, presumably has had no need of an enemy. A survey of Costa Rican attitudes and beliefs provides some confirmation of this hypothesis. In general, the more you spend on military expenditures the more you need an enemy in order to justify these expenditures; the less you spend the less you need an enemy, for the same reason (Eckhardt, 1991: 87).

Emphasizing the unifying function of enemies, James A. Aho similarly argues that national leaders tend to create enemies, since this way, they keep harmony within the society. American leaders, for instance, needed Saddam Hussein, for with the collapse of communism, they have been deprived of an enemy from whom they protect “liberty” and “civilized values.” Indeed, “there could be no heroic community without an enemy” (Aho, 1994: 15).

## Evaluation

To sum up, these three-category explanations appear to cover some of the most significant factors behind the formation of enemy images but perhaps none of them offer the “necessary and sufficient” condition. Meanwhile, it is important to note that the acts and characteristics of the enemy are also very important. Sometimes enemy images include experience-based knowledge. That is, as popular wisdom tells us, “paranoids” may have real enemies. Some empirical evidence, for instance in the case of Nazi Germany, clearly showed that the enemy could be really aggressive and quite indifferent to the rights of others. But nonetheless, it is extremely difficult to separate “real” causes from the biological, psychological and strategical dynamics. In most cases, enemy images are constructed as a result of a complex interplay between the two.

## II. THE IMPACT OF ENEMY IMAGES ON THE BEHAVIOR OF CONFLICTING PARTIES

Whatever the causes, enemy images, once formed, harm inter-group relationships and breed escalatory spirals in conflict situations for a number of different reasons. These can be summarized as follows:

### 1. Selective Perception

Due to enemy images, the parties in conflict see and acknowledge negative aspects of each other that fit or support the stereotype and ignore other aspects that do not fit. In other words, the parties see what they want to see and overlook what they wish to ignore. As a result of this black and white thinking, “de-individualization” takes place, a collectivist ethic emerges, and polarization becomes easier.

### 2. Self-fulfilling Prophecy

According to most social psychologists, the perception of the enemy, even though it may be erroneous, helps to shape reality and brings on the self-fulfilling prophecy. In conflict situations, especially when suspicions run high, a “defensive” move by one side may look “provocative” to the other, evoking from the latter a further “defensive” reaction that serves only to confirm the suspicions of the former. Similarly,

people tend to be aggressive towards others they view as hostile, which, in turn, encourages the others to retaliate, hence confirming the view of them as hostile.

### 3. Biased Attribution

When one party behaves the way that the other party expects, the other party attributes that behavior to the opponent party's inner dispositions, reinforcing its view of what the opponent party is really like. When the opponent party behaves differently from the expectation of the other party, the other party, in that case, attributes that behavior to environmental pressures or the opponent party's weaknesses.

This was particularly the case in American-Soviet relations during the Cold War era. When the Russians behaved contentiously, the American government announced that this confirmed the Russians' aggressive nature. When the Russians behaved in a conciliatory fashion, on the other hand, the American government explained that behavior as due to circumstances, such as military weakness. This way, the Americans maintained a stable view of the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War.

### 4. Mirroring

Enemy images are also mirrored; that is, so long as one side possesses certain negative images regarding the other side, the other side retaliates in the same way and develops similar images, even if it does not have any in the beginning. Over time, both sides become equal in terms of having polarized images which are quite analogous.

Many leading empirical studies on enemy images reveal that especially the US-Soviet relations during the Cold War era were characterized by mutual negative stereotypes, whereby both sides similarly viewed each other as aggressive, expansionist, imperialistic, untrustworthy, immoral, materialistic, and even evil (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; Stagner, 1967). By the same token, in a cultural study of Jewish-Arab attitudes, Raymond Cohen found that two-thirds of the Jews thought that they could not trust the Arabs, and correspondingly, two-thirds of the Arabs thought that they could not trust the Jews (Quoted in Ryan, 1995: 87-88). Likewise, in November 1989, ICAP and PIAR, two major public relations firms from Greece and Turkey, which carried out a joint poll in order to measure the public views found that the Greeks and Turks almost equally mistrust each other, with 81 percent of the Greeks and 80 percent of the Turks suspicious of the other (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1994: 167).

### 5. Dehumanization

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of enemy images is the cognitive process of dehumanization. Dehumanization can be characterized by a decline in empathy for the other side and involves the removal of human facets (Wahlstrom, 1992: 177). Savage murders, torturing and killing are directly related to seeing victims as dehumanized enemies.

Under normal circumstances, it is not easy for human beings to engage in violent acts and to kill other human beings. Before man enters into violence and killing, he must first dehumanize those who means to “eliminate” so that he can feel that he is doing the right thing, that he will be loved for doing it. He must portray the enemy as crude, uncivilized, barbarian, greedy, criminal, terrorist, and even non-human, like beast, reptile, or insect in order to release himself from the burden of guilt feelings.

Empirical evidence shows that especially during wartime, a psychological need for dehumanization arises, since killing or brutal tactics cannot be easily justified otherwise. For instance, before the Japanese performed medical experiments on some Chinese in World War II, they named them *maruta*- logs of wood (Keen, 1986: 25). Likewise, when Western countries went to war against the Asians, they often portrayed the Asians as “faceless hordes, as alike as photo-prints from the same negative” (Keen, 1986: 26). More recently, we have all witnessed, thanks to global communication, how the Iraqi prisoners were dehumanized and tortured by many American and British soldiers.

Dehumanization, as a result, systematically destroys man’s tendency to identify himself with other human beings, and gives him a “reason,” as well as an emotional ground, for brutal tactics and killing. Therefore, the image of *homo hostilis* does not only consist of feelings of strong dislike but also involves the possibility of violence, killing and destruction under war or war-like circumstances.

### III. CONSEQUENCES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION: REDUCING OR REMOVING ENEMY IMAGES

Conflict perhaps will not disappear just by changing hostile imagery, but even it will not lessen without a psychological transformation of large number of individuals. At best, enemy images make agreements hard to reach, creating a climate of distrust, which, in turn, prevents the parties from focusing on the real problem(s) and from engaging in collaborative acts. So long as each side stereotypes the other in a less humanized way, it is not difficult to imagine what the outcome would be in, for example, a political negotiation.

At worst, such images may trigger an existing tension, leading to irrational violence and destruction. In some cases, enemy images may also lead to what Lewis Coser called “irrational conflict”; that is, the parties act as if they were in dispute even though no objective conditions for conflict exist (Coser, 1956). Consequently, breaking, or at least reducing, enemy images appears to be an essential component of conflict resolution.

It should be noted that enemy images are deeply embedded in group identities, hence they cannot be easily removed. Nevertheless, such images are not given; there are many ways to cope with them. In his excellent study, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon W. Allport sets out several ways that mutual negative images could be reduced. The main strategies include acquaintance programs (i.e., neighborhood festivals, community conferences, etc.); group retraining methods; positive action by the mass media;

exhortation by community leaders such as churchmen, politicians, etc.; and individual therapy (Allport, 1954: Ch. 30).

C. E. Osgood has also developed a strategy called “gradual reduction in tension” (GRIT) to reduce hostile images between adversaries. The key features of GRIT are as follows: One side unilaterally makes an unambiguous concession to the other side, which is, ideally, open to full verification. This action is accompanied by a clear signal that a reciprocal action is expected. If the other side responds positively and also makes a concession, the process is continued through a series of bilateral efforts. If no reciprocal action is forthcoming, no one really loses anything because the initial concession is chosen; that is, it does not affect the security of the side making it. Osgood suggests that unilateral initiatives by one side be continued over a period regardless of the unresponsiveness of the other in an effort to change aggressive interpretations into conciliatory responses (Osgood, 1985). Dean G. Pruitt and Jeffery Z. Rubin agree that such action can reduce stereotypes and build confidence between the parties in conflict, especially when the behavior is seen voluntary and involves some costs (material, psychological) for the gesturing side (Pruitt and Rubin, 1994: 39).

Another idea, in this respect, would be the so-called track-two diplomacy, based on the assumption that interactions among individuals belonging to conflicting groups reduce prejudices and inter-group tension. Joseph V. Montville defines track-two diplomacy as “an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict” (Montville, 1990: 162).

As far as enemy images are concerned, the track-two diplomacy, by allowing face-to-face communication, may help antagonists arrest the dehumanization process, overcome psychological barriers and focus on relation building. Direct personal interactions oftentimes allow hostile parties to realize positive aspects, and more importantly, “human face” of each other. As interactions go on, reason, rather than emotion, would become the dynamic factor of the relationship.

Indeed, Herbert Kelman, who conducted many problem-solving workshops between the Jews and Palestinians, and Edward E. Azar, who also organized several workshop exercises around the Lebanese and Sri Lankan conflicts, observed that the workshops greatly helped the parties reduce their prejudices to one another, discover personal points in common, and ultimately create a new climate of trust (Kelman, 1990: 152; Azar, 1990).

Creating “superordinate goals,” the goals that can only be achieved by cooperation between conflicting parties, offers another way of dissolving enemy images. This idea was invented by Muzafer Sherif in the course of a series of experiments conducted in the 1950s on children who were attending summer schools in the US. In their experiments, Sherif and his colleagues divided a group of boys into two groups, and conflicts between them were then encouraged. As inter-group hostility increased so did intra-group solidarity. The mutual hostility was only overcome when the two groups were brought together to engage in cooperative acts for common ends that they could not



obtain on their own. This led Sherif to conclude that only the pursuit superordinate goals can overcome stereotyping and reduce hostility (Sherif, 1967, 1969).

Obviously, in most conflict situations, the differences separating the parties are far deeper than the differences created by artificially dividing up school kids in an American summer camp. But nonetheless, having and working on common goals would enhance bonds between the parties in a number of ways. One would be reducing the salience of group boundaries. That is, people working towards common goals are in some sense members of the same group, and thus are not so likely to be antagonistic towards one another. Another would be by a reinforcement mechanism. As the two parties work together, each of them rewards the other and produces a sense of gratitude and warmth in the other. Pursuing superordinate goals also means that each party sees itself as working on behalf of the other, a view which is likely to foster positive attitudes (Pruitt and Rubin, 1994: 136-137).

Finally, if enemy images are to be overcome, the role of education in this process should not be forgotten, for the whole process of child raising may have a critical impact on attitudes and beliefs in later life. If the hostile attitudes and perceptions of one generation are not passed on to the next, the younger generation might be able to deal with inter-group problems in a more constructive atmosphere. Hence, education ought to be designed to foster intellectual and moral qualities, such as critical thinking, openness, scepticism, objectivity, and respect for differences, not as a vehicle to transmit historical enmities from generation to generation.

At the more informal level, on the other hand, public intellectuals can play a significant role in shaping the thinking of the ordinary in a positive way. Such intellectuals are not just people who are knowledgeable but people who shape the thoughts of their generations. Studies on the so-called "third culture" reveal that especially in industrial societies in which there exists unrestricted information flow, public intellectuals can increasingly contribute to the spread of mental tolerance through promoting inquiry and discussion of intellectual, artistic, and literacy issues (Brockman, 1996). Ultimately, this impact would be utilized to reduce stereotypes and foster positive attitudes.

#### Conclusion: The Need For A Comprehensive Strategy

All of the ideas to reduce or overcome enemy images discussed above are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it has been already hinted that they can be mutually supporting. Perhaps the best result can be obtained if the various strategies can be combined. The problem (of enemy images) is many sided, and obviously there is no single formula. Therefore, the wisest thing to do is to attack on all fronts simultaneously. If no one single attack has large effect, yet many small attacks from many directions can have large cumulative results over time.

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