The Conceptual Definitions of Peace and Conflict

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Introduction

Peace and conflict are concerns that continue to occupy the minds and actions of state and non-state actors in the international system. International Relations itself, is primarily the study that attempts a conceptual analysis of the two items. This chapter deliberates on how peace can be promoted and how conflict can be prevented or reduced. But what are peace and conflict?

The Concept of Peace

As simple as the word "peace" may seem, providing a clear-cut definition of it in the study of International Relations seems more demanding as historic events, ideologies and peculiar regional circumstances have shaped the meaning of peace (Richmond, 2008). But at a first glance, Galtung (1967: 12) describes it as an "umbrella concept". To him, it is a state of mind felt as a consequence of the actualization of certain stated human desires. That is, it is a feeling of internal serenity as a result of external stability.

Galtung (1967) also describes peace as touching the concept of law and order. That is, an anticipated social order achievable through the instrumentality of force and the threat of it. This concept, however, does not ignore violence; rather it erects regulations and outlines punishments to produce and maintain a state of tranquillity. Also there is the idea of peace as absence of any mutually agreed hostility, otherwise known as "negative peace". It is important to note that this only rule out the existence of deliberate violence between groups or states, but considers the need for occasional revolts, protests, demonstrations, et cetera. On the other hand, a condition of order conjured by respect for human socio-cultural diversity is called "positive peace". It is a social condition where multi-culture is respected; multi-ethnic is loved; multi-idea is welcomed; multi-religion in embraced; minorities are protected; equality of rights, equity, justice, guided liberty and freedom are guaranteed. Therefore, the characteristics of peace in International Relations could be cooperation and integration (Galtung, 1967; Scherrer, 2007). However, in the study of International Relations, there have been divergent views and debates on the right theory and practice to attain

peace; especially in a world characterized by selfishness, greed, inequality, conflict, violence, war, power, exploitation, oppression, bluff, etc.

Perspectives on Peace as a Concept

Idealists are the most ambitious group in seeking international peace. Plato (1941) argued that the utopian peace is only found in an 'ideal form' just as Socrates' truth and goodness are found in an ideal form, which cannot be fully attainable. The idealists argued that man, by nature, is not violent; man is a peace lover, he will always want to keep peace with his neighbour, but in case of probable violence, social and political norms, regimes and organization could inhibit such (Richmond, 2008). In ancient political thoughts, Heraclitus, the Pythagorean philosophers, and the Greek ideal saw harmony – peace in this context – as an ultimate principle of state existence. They saw it as physical and ethical principle; a property on human nature (Sabine, 1973). That is, peace is inherent feature of human being.

Put differently, Bansikiza (2004) submits that peace is both a gift by God and an effort by the people to achieve it, individually and socially. Due to the fact that peace is not reached once and for all, it demands continuous attempt in connecting divided people, reconciling differences and removing bitterness harboured. However, the idealists' notion of a world void of war, promoting disarmament, the right of self-determination for all men, and the presence of a world government to ensure order and proper distribution of scarce resources brought about the establishment of the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization after the World War I and World War II respectively (Angell, 1916; cited in Richmond, 2008).

Contrary to the above argument, the *Realists* describe international relations as a Hobbesian "state of nature"; i.e. a "state of war" (Mapel, 1996: 55), characterized by selfishness, misdirected aggressive impulses, and stupidity (Waltz, 1993: 124). The realists argued that life is solitary, brutish, nasty and short, and life is the survival of the fittest. They asserted that since resources are scarce and unevenly distributed, man must struggle for survival. Therefore, peace, as put forward by

the idealists is unattainable; chaos and man are inseparable (Morgenthau, 1949).

Since the realists see the state as the central unit of international system which structure is anarchical, it is therefore impossible to achieve fundamental quality progress (Soendergaard, 2008: 1). This chaotic nature of the international system made Morgenthau (1949) describes peace as power balance and stability; and he argued that permanent peace cannot be achieved. As a result of absence of a legitimate government authority to regulate and enforce agreements between states and other actors (Carlsnaes, Risse, and Simmons, 2002: 352b), and the prevalence of the determination of state units to protect their identities and achieve their outlined national interests by all possible means, peace is unobtainable (Richmond, 2008). Hartmann (1973) posits peace and war as 'by-products' of the interplay of the national interests of states. "How is state to preserve and/or achieve its vital interests and make itself secure in a world where peace hangs upon the slender thread of sovereign states refraining from taking decisions to go to war?" (Hartmann, 1973: 15). Therefore he argues that peace – like security – is a relative condition in international relations. States will rather seek the attainment of their national interest and self-preservation (security) instead of peace. Though states are secured in the conditions of peace, the necessity to actualize stated interests makes them prefer uncertainties over peace.

The *Liberalists* are a more optimistic set who beliefs that peace in international relations is attainable in situations of cooperation and shared norms rather than the quest for power and security. They are concerned with the creation of harmonious domestic political structures with the introduction of acceptable international regimes, laws, and norms that will limit the excesses of states and multilateral organisations in their polity. Even though they share in the belief that peace is not achievable, they see peace as something to be aspired for. The international system could at best experience positive peace when certain domestic and international practices are embraced by all, which will ensure socioeconomic justice and respect for the rights of the individuals (Richmond, 2008). The liberalists belief that interdependence will engender peaceful co-existence. They see international trade as necessary instrument in promoting such interdependence. To them, state will

not necessarily go to war against another state it has trade relations with. That is, mutual benefits derived from trade relations will most often discourage an interruption of war, thus promoting peaceful condition.

The *Marxists* thigh the condition of peace in the international system to the realities of the global political economy. The idea that the global economic system is divided into a class structure (the developed and the developing countries, the haves and the have-nots, the bourgeois and the proletariats, the owners of factors of production and the owners of labour) manipulating the forces of exploitation and revolution for each other's specific interest. The Marxists contend that peace is not feasible in this arrangement unless there is justice and equality in the distribution of resources (Richmond, 2008).

Conceptualizing Conflict

Conflict itself is not evil; often times it arises from the process of seeking sustainable progress and satisfaction. We quickly forget our similar positive intentions, dissipating energies on the contradictory ideas of the path to the common end. Among other things, conflict emanates as a result of misunderstanding, man's superiority complex, failure to compromise and reconcile ideas, beliefs, cultures and interests. If harnessed, it could serve as a powerful tool for progress. Meanwhile, for the purpose of this paper, we shall be conceptualizing conflict as it relates to the field of Politics.

In a general context, conflict, unlike peace, is a state of inward (intra-personal) or outward (inter-personal) disorder and strife. It is an inevitable feature of nature. However, conflict could be conceptualized from two approaches, namely: the objectivist approach, which suggests that conflict emanates from the social and political structure of the society; and the subjectivist approach, advancing that apparent differences and incompatibility of goals cause conflict. The definitions of conflict will be therefore categorized under these two approaches.

Objectivist Approach

To Stedman (1991: 269), conflict 'emanates from the tugs and pulls of different identities, definitions of what is right, fair, and just'. March and Simon (1958; cited in Oyeshola, 2005: 105) view conflict as a 'break-down in standard mechanism of decision making'. While Forsyth (1990) posits that conflict transpires when 'the actions of beliefs of one or more member of a group are unacceptable to and, hence are resisted by one or more groups or members'. Mitchell, (1981: 18) sees it as a result of 'mis-match between social values and social structure'. But Nwolise (2003) summarizes it as a 'clash, confrontation, battle or struggle'.

Subjectivist Approach

Stagner (1967: 16) defines conflict as a 'situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal; and each party perceive the other as a barrier or threat to that goal'. Likewise, to Wallensteen (2002: 16), 'conflict is a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strike to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources'. Chaplin (1979: 109) describes it as 'the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives'. Putting it differently, Wilson and Hanna (1990: 255) refer it as the 'struggle involving ideas, values and /or limited resources'.

However, from the above definitions, it is obvious that conflict emanates from contradictions that occur in social interactions. They strengthen the arguments of the Realists that man by nature is chaotic. Innate in man is conflict (Morgenthau, 1949). The realists went on to argue that because the state is as rational as man, therefore, like man, the state will seek ways of survival and satisfaction by all means. The international system is, moreover, characterized by varieties of state interests which are either contradictory or competitive, and the absence of a world governing body will definitely engender conflict. Also, the definitions support the view by the Marxists insofar that conflict within the international system is primarily conflict between the global north and the global south.

Conclusion

The multidisciplinary nature of International Relations makes it difficult to hinge both concepts of peace and conflict on certain universally accepted definitions. History, politics, sociology, economics, science and technology have affected the meaning, nature and study of peace and conflict; and in more contemporary realities, environmental issues are becoming determinant factor for peace or/and conflict situations.

However, realities in the international system have constantly exhibited a confluence of peace and conflict. It is important to note that the study of International Relations is principally the study of states' and non-states' interests, which are the determinant of actions. Peace and conflict are at the mercy of these actions; the decision to cooperate, trade, aid, bluff, war, estrange, sanction, et cetera are determined by the outlined interest.

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