THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL VIEWS OF DEFINITION OF CONFLICTS

Radoslav IVANČÍK
General Staff of the Slovak Armed Forces, Bratislava, Slovakia
Pavel NEČAS
Armed Forces Academy of Gen. M. R. Štefánik, Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia

Abstract

Of all the other terms, conflict is a basic concept that appears most frequently in this article. The term has a Latin origin and is derived from the word of conflictus. It covers a range of meanings, including a fight, collision, clash, dispute, rift, misunderstanding, contradiction, or a tendency to run into each other or collide with each other. In essence, it is an activity, undertaken by individuals or groups, aimed or directed against another individual or group owing to inconsistencies in their needs, differences in their interests, and tendencies of discord in their relationships, whether for political, religious, ethnic, racial or any other reasons. The concept of conflict has accompanied the existence of mankind and society from its inception and has been observable in the entire course of human history.

Key words*: Conflict, security, research, definition, classification.*

Introduction

The profound changes unfolding in the world after the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s have since then been accompanied, mainly under the influence of globalization in the early 21st century, by an unprecedented acceleration in the development of human society. Unlike in the past, today's profound qualitative changes in all walks of life manifest themselves already over the lifetime of a single

generation. With the increasing dynamics of the economic, social, scientific, technical and technological development, the potential for changes is so great that not only every nation state but also the entire international community must now pay continuous attention to analysing such developmental tendencies, and this is particularly true in the sphere of national and international security.

Unfortunately, the fundamental changes in the global security environment, emerging after the fall of bipolarity, have brought, besides their uncontested positives, also numerous negatives. While the positive side of this process has become manifested mainly in and through the removal of the threat of war between two antagonistic military-political groupings – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact, as well as the threat of a possible nuclear missile apocalypse, the negative side has increasingly manifested itself through diverse forms of terrorism, asymmetric security threats and an increased prevalence of crises and conflicts throughout the world. The tremendous changes in the global security environment, combined with massive transformations in the political, economic, social, environmental and technological fields, have provoked in the world not only integrating but also disintegrating tendencies and efforts, spearheaded by a number of countries and groups.

Despite this, a classic conventional conflict between two states has become extremely rare in recent years. After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, war has turned out to be an outdated phenomenon especially in the Euro-Atlantic region. Besides political, economic, social and other factors, one of the main drivers behind this is the fact that the new line-up of sophisticated weapons, weapon systems and military technologies is so overwhelmingly powerful and destructive that the weapons are rendered almost impossible to use in warfare. This mostly relates to weapons of mass destruction and conventional high precision weapons of enormous destructive power, the use of which by the belligerent parties would result in far-reaching consequences. Indeed, this is one reason why such military tools are no longer exploited in pursuit of national interests and as solutions to potential conflicts.

Nevertheless, conflicts continue to be waged outside the Euro-Atlantic area, whereas most of them have taken place or are still taking place in a region referred to by Francis Fukuyama as "historical." This is a region where the fundamental questions pertaining to the existence and functioning of individual countries have

not been resolved yet, and where the willingness to "wield swords" and to sacrifice human lives in pursuit of one's goals still prevails. Therefore, the primary goal of the authors of the article, grounded on publicly accessible information, data and facts whilst using standard methods of scientific research, is to provide readers with a view of the definition of conflicts.

Research on Conflicts

The initial research in the field of conflicts was mainly geared towards the inter-relations between peace and war and the rifts and contradictions of class struggle, etc. Today research done on conflicts combines the research results of peace and war studies with international relations, political science, sociology, economics, defence and security, and international law. Each of these disciplines approaches the field of conflicts from its specific theoretical insight and, therefore, there exist numerous different definitions of conflict as well as methods of analysis. While some analyses deal more with the military aspects of conflict, and some with political and economic ones, others are more concerned with the sociological and geographical aspects.

In their research studies and publications, individual researchers and authors also deal with different facets of conflicts and treat them from different angles, placing emphasis on a variety of conflict-related factors and elements. Despite this, it may be generally stated that conflict is conceived as a phenomenon composed of mutually interconnected elements – actors, issues, dynamics and contexts. It follows from the above that the definition and categorization of conflict is a very demanding and complex process. To delineate the empirical field of research, it is necessary to establish criteria for defining conflict, so that we can distinguish which phenomenon should be included or excluded. This must also be done to ensure consistency in the use of terms.

The definition of conflict should be wide enough to not only apply to a particular historical period or type of conflict but also to include all conflicts. At the same time, it should be accurate for the purpose of data collection and the possibility of delineating a specific conflict in time and space by different researchers. In examining conflicts, it is imperative to adopt an impartial approach towards

the actual definition of conflict. Wasmuth summarizes four conditions for an impartial investigation of conflicts, as follows:

a) conflict should be viewed as a social fact and should not be confused with its form,
b) the definition of conflict should not contain any limiting assessment so as not to pre-determine the conflict's analysis,
c) in defining conflict, it is essential to avoid unnecessarily narrowing down the definition by contextual characteristics, so as not to reduce the complexity of the entire concept,
d) the definition of conflict should not confuse cause with effect.

Definitions of Conflicts

According to Wallensteen, conflict is more than a particular conduct or action and, therefore, must contain a certain element of incompatibility, i.e. serious disagreement between a minimum of two parties whose needs cannot be met at the same time. The incompatibility of their positions lies in the lack of limited resources. Hence, it is a condition in which adversaries perceive conflict as a zero-sum game. The basic elements of conflict entail actors, activity, and incompatibility of interests. These determine Wallensteen's definition of conflict as being a "social situation in which a minimum of two parties strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources", whereby the parties' efforts encompass a wide range of actions from making threats to waging war. Resources are not conceived as mere economic wealth but rather all that which an actor is interested in, for instance, justice, observance of moral principles, wielding of political power, territorial control, etc.

A similar definition was formulated by Bartos and Wehr, who define conflict as a situation in which "actors use conflict behaviour against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility". Their military analysis is more concentrated on analysing the incompatibility of objectives, development of conflict behaviour and hostility as the underlying causes of conflict. The supplied definitions of conflict are seen from different perspectives and emphasise different elements. Nevertheless, each of them is based on the existence of at least two

actors, among whom there is a certain incompatibility of interests and who are actively committed to actions furthering their goals.

According to Weber, society is made up of groups that differentiate themselves from others in their status. Given the different status, they also have different interests that cause conflicts. Consequently, any hope of eliminating conflicts from human society with regard to the existence of different status groups is illusionary and, therefore, we need to become reconciled with the eternal struggle of one group fighting against another. In this context, however, it should be noted that the interests of groups and individuals are not only contradictory but also identical, insofar as they serve as a basis for attainment of balance and consensus.

Simmel bases his examination of conflicts on the postulate that egoistic groups that exist in society are not isolated from each other; on the contrary, they are interwoven by a myriad of invisible threads. In his opinion, it is the pursuance of group interests that mitigates conflicts and fosters the common grounds that can ensure societal stability. Despite this, conflicts are inseparably interwoven into the fabric of everyday life of society.

The ideas of Simmel were further developed by Coser, who, in his work, focused on the analysis of the conflict's positive functions. According to him, conflict may contribute to either sustainability or adaptation of existing social relations or structures. It is right in Coser's work that we observe one of the central themes of conflict theory, whereby socially dangerous are not the conflicts themselves but rather the absence of rules to contain them. The presence of conflicts is a natural state of society. Not the presence but the absence of conflicts in society was, in his opinion, an abnormal phenomenon. Coser asserts that conflict is a struggle over values or claims to specific status, or struggle over power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate one's rivals. He maintains that the essence of conflict consists in the clash of values and interests of different social groups.

Waissová defines conflict as a social reality, where two parties stand against each other (individuals, groups or states) with a different view of a particular fact or with divergent (opposing) interests. According to Krejčí, conflict represents a situation, whereby a specific group (tribe, ethnicity, political party, a coalition of parties, an alliance of states) or an individual is in deliberate conflict with one

or more groups or individuals. According to him, conflict is a struggle over values pertaining to status or an attempt to preserve or enhance one's power, in which the aims of the parties to the conflict are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their opponents.

The theory of conflict is also elaborated on by Dahrendorf, who focuses on clarifying the sources of conflict. He claims that the principal source of conflict is not a clash of economic nature but rather the political rivalry among social groups in an attempt to gain a share of power and the chance to make decisions about those who have been excluded from sharing power.

For international relations, a conflict that enfolds in the sphere of politics becomes the centre of attention – a political conflict, which is, according to Pfetsch and Rohloff, conceived as a clash of overlapping interests, built around national values and themes (such as independence, right to self-determination, border and territory, distribution of domestic and international power, access to power, etc.). It must last for a certain period of time, have a specific extent, and involve at least two parties (states, groups of states, organized groups or organizations) determined to further their own interests and achieve victory, whereas one of the parties must be an organized state. Tools possibly employed in the course of conflict resolution entail negotiation, threat, pressure, passive and active termination of conflict, use of physical force and war. In spite of the fact that it is a relatively complex definition of conflict, it fails to include conflicts enfolding in the political sphere, for example, conflicts between two non-state actors, nor does it take account of economic interests such as motivation for instigating a conflict.

A broader definition of conflict is offered by the Heidelberger Institut für Internationale Konfliktforschung. It views political conflict as a clash of interests (different positions) in relation to national values. Such conflict has a particular time interval and seriousness (extent), and involves at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) determined to pursue their intentions and achieve their goals. Political conflicts may assume violent or non-violent forms. According to the Peace Research Institute Oslo, the criterion being applied in this case presupposes the use of armed violence, aimed at furthering the actor's position in the conflict, with an inevitable consequence of the emergence of victims. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program views an armed conflict as an

incompatibility related to a government/territory, while the use of armed force between two actors, of which at least one is a government actor, results in a 25 battle-related death threshold.

The most extreme form of armed conflict is war. To avoid any confusion between these concepts, it is necessary to determine the difference between "armed conflict" and "war", because every war is an armed conflict but not every conflict will result in war. In this case, Vasquez adopts Bull's definition. Accordingly, "war represents organized violence carried out by political units against each other" just because it may be simple yet broad enough to encompass different types of actors and the subject of the conflict, whilst at the same time including an element of organized violence, not a random activity, but rather a premeditated and collective action.

Conclusions

For the purpose of accomplishing the objectives of this article, conflict is conceived as a situation in which at least one party systematically uses armed violence, with the aim of furthering its political and/or other interests. This definition incorporates the aspect of systematicity, i.e. organized, purposeful and continuous use of armed force, which distinguishes armed conflict from organized crime, or coincidental pathological phenomena. At the same time, it includes an element of violence in achieving one's goals.

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