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Theories on the role of international organizations in maintaining peace and security

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Abstract

There are different theories as to the role of international organizations in maintaining peace and security. Accordingly, constructivists argue that international organizations induce states to cooperate internationally even though their power and utility-maximizing interest is not achieved. Neo-Liberals also believe that international organizations are vital to make the world peaceful and cooperative. Neo-realists, on the other hand, argue that international organizations are the means by which states achieve their self-interest, thus, contribute nothing for peace and security. UN, as a testing ground, has contributed a lot in the maintenance of peace and security by deploying peace-keeping forces in the conflict areas though still lack of member states' commitment to provide necessary supports, the level of their interest at stake and the interest of veto powers put challenges on the effective operation of the organization.

Keywords: Constructivism, Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Realism, Peace, Security, United Nations.

1. Introduction

As regards the role of international organizations in maintaining peace and security, there have been divergent views. Some argue that international organizations are the representation of state self-interests and cannot satisfy what is expected from them. Others argue in favor of positive role of international organizations in promoting cooperation as well as peace and security. There are contending theories in this regard. For the purpose of this study, however, constructivism, neo-realism/structural realism and neo-liberalism/neo-liberal institutionalism have been discussed pertaining to the role of organizations in maintaining peace and security.

2. Constructivism

Constructivists argue in favour of international organizations. They argue that international organizations have the role of not only regulating state behaviour but also modifying the identity and interest of states, which, in turn, directs states action (Mitchell, 2006). Finnemore (in Hobson, 2003:154) believes that states are "normative-adaptive entities". This means that, through international organizations, states adapt international norms of appropriate state behaviour to inform their policies and domestic structures (*ibid*). Thus, international norms push states to cooperate internationally even though states' power as well as utility-maximizing interests is not achieved (*ibid*). Constructivists underestimate the relevance of relative gain, unlike the neo-realists, and propagate the more likelihood of cooperation among states (Nugroho, 2008).

Moreover, international organizations, by constraining self-interest of states and infusing new appropriate norm to states, control states not to deviate from international cooperation (*ibid*). This optimistic view on the role of international organizations makes constructivists to embrace neo-liberals. Above all, international organizations have the role of, *inter alia*, promoting democratization of member states and encouraging member states to pursue peaceful conflict management strategies (Mitchell, 2006).

3. Neo-Liberalism

Neo-liberals or liberal institutionalists argue in favour of the significance of international organizations in promoting cooperation and stability. Unlike the neo-realists, neo-liberals assert that "states are concerned with maximizing their 'absolute gains' – an assessment of their own welfare independent of their rivals (what will gain me the most?)" (Burchill, 2005: 65). This is vital for promoting cooperation among states and maintaining mutual benefit. In this connection, Boehmer, *et al.*, (2004) argue that in a condition where states focus more on obtaining absolute gain, cooperation and collective security are more feasible.

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In other words, neo-liberals believe in collective security and argue that states can devote themselves to the preservation of joint interests through international organizations (Niou and Ordeshook, 1991).

Keohane, being optimistic about the relevance of those organizations, states that international organizations are capable of facilitating cooperation, and without them “the prospects for our species will be very poor indeed” (in Sinclair and Byers, 2006). Hence, he values organizations’ role in promoting cooperation. Besides, neo-liberals affirm that organizations “assume the role of encouraging cooperative habits, monitoring compliance and sanctioning defectors” (Burchill, 2005: 65). Hence, one can infer from this that, organizations have a pivotal role in facilitating cooperation between states.

Liberal institutionalists, though recognize the systemic anarchy, the importance of military power and the pre-eminence of states’ interests, argue that organizations are a framework for cooperation, which can help to address the risk of security competition between states and promote peace and stability (Sinclair and Byers, 2006; Boehmer, *et al.*, 2004; Baylis, 2001; Burchill, 2005). Besides, they claim that since organizations feed states with information in the areas of security, they can lessen uncertainty and other risks that could emerge out of anarchy (Meierhenrich, 2012; Nathan, 2012). Generally, as Hobson (2003) notes international organizations are vital to make the world peaceful and cooperative. Thus, their argument is that international organizations do play significant role in maintaining peace and stability. To substantiate this argument, they present the role of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in maintaining stability in South-East Asia, the role of OAU in contributing its part to address interstate differences, the role of European organizations in enhancing security in Europe as a witness for positive role of organizations in maintaining peace and security (Baylis, 2001).

In supporting the neoliberals’ assumption of the positive role of international organizations, Nathan (2012) came up with concrete evidence. Taking into account the progress of regional organizations in the peace and security area, most importantly, through preventive diplomacy, mediation, post-war peace-building, arms control, and disarmament, Nathan argues that it will be irrational to argue that international organizations cannot bring peace. He substantiates his argument by explaining, *inter alia*, the role of AU in Kenyan civil violence and the mediation effort of IGAD in Sudan.

In a nutshell, as can be understood from the above discussion, neo-liberals believe that international organizations are very important in facilitating interstate cooperation and maintaining peace and security.

4. Neo-Realism

As neo-realists or structural realists argue, organizations are the product of state interests, thus, they cannot independently function, rather, it is state interests, which determine the decision whether states cooperate or compete (Baylis, 2001; Meierhenrich, 2012; Sinclair and Byers, 2006). UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU) are international organizations through which states safeguard their interests. Arguing that they are formed on the basis of self-interest calculation, neo-realists reject the importance of international organizations in serving to achieve peace and security (Baylis, 2001; Meierhenrich, 2012; Nathan, 2012). International organizations could not have the

role to prevent war (Nugroho, 2008). For neo-realists, organizations are reflections of the interests of states and states are unwilling to surrender their power. Thus, the cumulative effect of these constrained the independent role of international organizations.

Neo-realists are pessimistic about the possibility of international cooperation as they believe that states highly care for their relative position. An important point, which characterizes neo-realists’ assumption, is their focus on relative gains (Burchill, 2005; Brown and Ainley, 2005; Baldwin, 1993; Lamy, 2001). In this regard, Burchill (2005: 65) notes as follows: “Neo-realists, such as Waltz, argue that states are concerned with ‘relative gains’ – meaning gains assessed in comparative terms (who will gain more?)”. It is possible to deduce from this that, states care for their relative position (for their better position compared to others) in cooperating with others and if cooperation does not serve this ultimate interest, cooperation will be fragile. Neo-realists further assume that states cooperate and join international organizations when it is suitable to them (Sinclair and Byers, 2006). As a result, international organizations survive so long as they allow states to follow their own interests and assist states to achieve relative gain.

To sum up, as can be inferred from the above discussion, neo-realists underestimate the importance of international organizations. Rather, they believe that, international organizations are the means by which states achieve their self-interest. Thus, they are pessimistic about the role of international organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

In the following sections, the study examines the role of UN in the peace and security areas briefly, especially, the UN Security Council’s rapid deployment in crisis areas. In this connection, the concept of UN Standby force will be highlighted.

5. United Nations: As a Testing Ground

United Nations was founded in 1945 with the primary purpose of maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council, the primary responsible body, is mandated to “pacific settlement of disputes” under Chapter VI of UN Charter. The Security Council suggests the appropriate means to be used by concerned parties when it believes that the issue would threaten international peace and security. However, it has no binding effect on member states (UN, 2007). More importantly, the Security Council is also mandated under Chapter VII of the Charter to decide on appropriate actions to be taken when there exists “any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression”. Such power of the Security Council involves the use of force “to maintain or restore international peace and security”. The collective security role of the UN is, thus, stipulated on the Charter providing power to the Security Council ranging from peaceful resolution of disputes to the use of armed force depending on the situations. Accordingly, Matheson (2001) presents that since the end of the Cold War in 1991, UN has played significant role in resolving intrastate and interstate violence as well as boundary conflicts either with the permission of the states or based on the power of the Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Since the maintenance of international peace and security is the primary responsibility of the Security Council, from its very establishment the Security Council has needed rapidly deployable force to respond to threats to international peace

and security (Koops and Warwick, 2008; UN, 2003a). This means that there has been a great need for improvement of UN peace-keeping operations to effectively and promptly respond to numerous crisis situations. This was evident from the UN Secretary General's (Boutros Boutros-Ghali) recommendation, in his "Agenda for Peace" and the "Supplement" to member states to cooperate with UN in peacekeeping operations through preparing their troops for rapid deployment with the same training standards and procedures (Koops and Warwick, 2008). Consequently, member states, refusing the earliest proposal of having a standing army (a permanent army similar to the army of a certain state) on the ground that will endanger their sovereignty, favoured this proposal of a standby arrangement (where forces situated in the country of their origin and deployable through notice) as a sensible choice (*ibid*).

Accordingly, Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO) has organized the United Nations Stand-by Arrangement System (UNSAS) since 1994 to strengthen the supports of states in the peacekeeping operations of UN (Mazzei, 2009). The UNSAS does not have its own military force; rather it depends on contributions from member states of military units, equipments and personnel (UN, 2003b; Mazzei, 2009). Hence, the ultimate power whether to deploy resources or not is under member states' will (UN, 2003a). States who pledge to contribute forces are required to provide their troops with training as per the UN standards and procedures (UN, 2003b; Koops and Warwick, 2008).

As discussed above, UNSAS is constituted by pledges of member states; hence, to support it, a group of like-minded states discussed to create rapidly deployable force within the framework of UNSAS. On December 1996, Austria, Canada, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden signed a letter of intent and forged the Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG), at Hovelte Barracks in Denmark, with the intent of improving the rapid deployment of UN peacekeeping force (Koops and Warwick, 2008). Eventually, in supporting the UN, the SHIRBRIG deployed first in 2000 for United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) (UN, 2003a; Koops and Warwick, 2008). SHIRBRIG also assisted in planning activities for United Nations Mission in Cote d' Ivoire (UNOCI) of the 2003 (Koops and Warwick, 2008). Moreover, on the request of DPKO for assistance, SHIRBRIG deployed in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) in 2003 and 2004, respectively (UN, 2003b; Koops and Warwick, 2008).

The UN Security Council, though not in all case, has been able to minimize or prevent conflict across different corners through its peacekeeping operations (UN, 2007). Therefore, UN as an international organization has played a paramount role in the maintenance of international peace and security, though not without challenges. Putting it differently, UN has played a great role in the overall peace and security of the world even though it fails to address all issues adequately. Hence, the importance of international organizations (in this case, UN) is obvious though still lack of member states' commitment to provide necessary support, the level of their interest at stake and the interest of veto powers put challenges on the effective operation of the organization.

6. Conclusion

As regards the role of international organizations in maintaining peace and security, there have been divergent theories. Constructivists argue that through international organizations states adapt international norms of appropriate state behavior to inform their policies and domestic structures. International norms push states to cooperate internationally even though states' power as well as utility-maximizing interest is not achieved. Neo-liberals also believe in collective security and argue that states can devote themselves to the preservation of joint interests through international organizations. International organizations are vital to make the world peaceful and cooperative. Neo-realists, on the other hand, argue that international organizations cannot independently function, rather, it is state interests, which determine the decision whether states to cooperate or compete. Organizations are reflections of the interests of states and states are unwilling to surrender their power. They believe that international organizations are the means by which states achieve their self-interest.

The reality in the UN shows that since the end of the Cold War in 1991 UN has played significant role in resolving intrastate and interstate violence as well as boundary conflicts either with the permission of the states or based on the power of the Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In this regard the deployment of UN peace-keeping force in Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, Liberia and Sudan can be mentioned as simple instances. However, it does not mean that UN has addressed all issues completely. Lack of member states' commitment to provide necessary supports, the level of their interest at stake and the interest of veto powers put challenges on the effective operation of the organization.

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