Peace and Conflict studies

A brief overview of our field of work

University for Peace

UPEACE Centre The Hague

Introduction

The history of man is a history of conflict. All around the world and in all times, conflict is present. Violent conflict threatens peace and causes major harm. People get hurt, loose their lives, or have to flee, at times with millions of people at the same time. Buildings and other infrastructure are severely damaged. Churchill once said: "The story of the human race is war." It is therefore evident that conflict is also an important subject for scientific research. However, surprisingly, this interest from the academic world for conflict arose only relatively recent. It was not until after the Second World War, that peace and conflict became a common field of study at universities. Nowadays, many disciplines at various universities contribute to the subject area of conflict. To name but a few: political science, psychology, evolution biology, international relations, anthropology, sociology, ethics, and law. If we better understand how conflict emerges, there is a higher chance we are able to peacefully resolve conflict. Every conflict is unique and complex. Yet there are recurring patterns. An important characteristic for peace and conflict studies is the strong orientation on practice. Insight into problems in former Yugoslavia, Sudan, the Middle East and Rwanda, contributes to a better understanding of the development of conflict.

Violence in the world

Since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, the type of conflicts in the world has changed. Until then, there was a certain power balance in the world whereby the two great world powers gave support to warring parties in regional conflicts. But after that moment, the world changed from bipolar to multipolar. One speaks of old and new wars. **Old wars** are fought between states, have a clear start, a declaration of war, and a distinct ending with for instance a peace agreement. Warring parties are militaries, and civilians remain unaffected. **New wars** are played out within states with multiple warring parties. Civilians are more involved in the conflict. Start and end are often diffuse. This type of conflict has one or several peaks of severe violence which can flare up at any time. Besides, in the so-called old wars, political **ideologies** play an important role in mobilising groups of people into conflict while in the new wars it is **identity** which plays this role. This involves the question who am I and where do I want to belong to? It concerns rivalry between parties with different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, religion, history or language. Underneath conflicts of ideology or identity are mostly issues around territory or natural resources such as gas, diamonds, water or oil. In short, wars have transformed from **interstate** conflict to **intrastate** conflict. Moreover, modern conflicts are often not purely intrastate conflicts. Typical is the multitude of international relations in civil wars, for instance through trade, diaspora, political support or pressure from the international community.

The definition of peace and conflict

Peace is worthwhile and conflict is threatening because of the probability of eruption of violence. Conflicts are many and diverse. A person can be in conflict with him or herself, for example with his or her conscience. Alternatively, a person can be in conflict with his or her neighbours as a result of nuisance. Peace and conflict studies concern the study of conflicts at a large scale, between states or between groups of people, or it concerns tensions at local level. For the latter, one could think of tensions between groups with different backgrounds or of violent gangs that rule in certain neighbourhoods in big cities and where police is absent.

Scientists have the tendency to define their subject area. To define conflict, they use criteria such as the number of deadly victims on a yearly basis. For instance, a minimum of 25 deadly victims defines violent conflict and a minimum of 1,000 deadly victims defines war. All numerical criteria are somewhat arbitrary. The **Global Peace Index** **(GPI)** uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators to define the level of peace and 162 countries are rated in this index. In 2015, Iceland, Denmark and Austria are ranked highest and Syria and Iraq are lowest. A much used description of conflict is a situation whereby two or more groups have conflicting objectives. There seems to be a correlation between the **Gross National Product** (GNP) and the scoring on the GPI. Prosperous countries score higher on the GPI ranking. When defining peace it is important to differentiate between negative and positive peace. **Negative peace** means the absence of armed conflict. The description indicates what is not present.

Figure 1.   *Positive Peace Index,* Institute for Economics & Peace

One talks of **positive peace** when there is a general wellbeing and people live in harmony with each other and with the planet in general. The latter definition is very broad, thereby placing many facets in the perspective of promoting peace. One could think of issues around sustainability, governance, gender, human rights and the role of the private sector.

The emergence of conflict

Above, the motives for old and new wars are explained. Conflicts are defined as ideological or territorial. Sometimes **terrorism** is defined as a separate type of conflict although with terrorism it is often also the case that there is a different view on territory or ideology.

Looking at the relationship between prosperity and avoidance of conflict, it is explainable that many conflicts exist in developing countries. There is a debate among theorists whether greed or grievance is an important motive for the emergence of conflict. With **greed** one assumes that greed of individuals is the greatest motive for conflict. With **grievance** one assumes that discontent about inequality and injustice is the most important motive for conflict. In reality, greed and grievance are often intertwined.

A mix of certain factors leads to a greater risk for conflict. For instance, there is a higher likelihood of conflict if the economy of a particular country is dependent on export of natural resources. And there is also a greater likelihood if a relatively large part of the population consists of young men with little or no perspective to earn a decent living.

There is also more chance of conflict in countries with limited economic growth, with high inequality and with subordination of a certain disadvantaged group. Inequality is defined by the **Gini-coefficient** whereby the richest 1% or 10% of the population in terms of income or capital is compared with the rest of the population. The Gini-coefficient varies between 0, maximum equality, and 1, maximum inequality. Not all inequalities matter in the same way. Inequality at national level is often a less determining factor than inequality between regions or groups of people. Depending on the point of reference, inequality will increase the probability of conflict.

A view of conflict as a process

Physical violence draws attention and is highly visible. To understand conflict, it is important to create understanding of what lies behind the outbreak of violence. Conflicts emerge when there is a breeding ground. Conflicts have a history and later on, a settlement. A well-known model is the model of escalation and de-escalation by **Johan Galtung**, the Norwegian founder of the subject area of Peace and Conflict Studies.
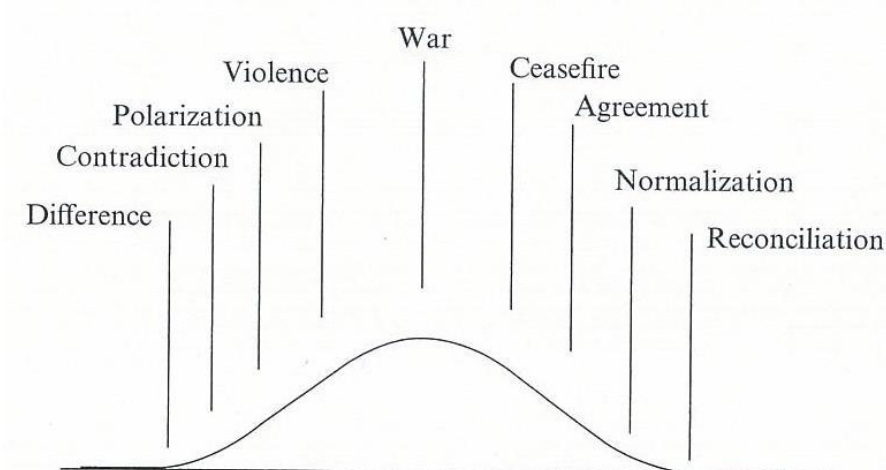

Figure 2.   *Conflict escalation and de-escalation*

The foundation of the model is a difference in beliefs between different groups of people. This can grow into a contradiction in beliefs and eventually, after constriction, to polarisation. Through incidental violence, a war can emerge. The end of a war can be announced by a cease fire whereby gunfire fades and, with any luck, results in a peace agreement. Gradually normalisation of relations occurs and this possibly leads to reconciliation between the different parties in the conflict. Although the signing of a peace agreement is an important milestone, it is not a guarantee for lasting peace. For lasting peace, more is required. A tested aspect is **DDR: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration**. This concerns the disarmament of warring parties, and giving the former combats an alternative to participate in the post-conflict society, for instance through employment projects. Reconciliation between parties that used to oppose each other is an important element to reach lasting peace. A remarkable example of reconciliation is South Africa where a **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** has been instigated. By admitting crimes in public it was possible to escape ramification. In the words of Bishop Tutu: "Without truth no healing, without forgiveness no future." On the left side of war in Galtung's model of escalation and de-escalation, there are opportunities to prevent the transition into the next phase. And on the right side, efforts are required to ensure that transition into the next phase happens.

Management of conflicts

Conflicts can end when warring parties are willing to enter into dialogue with each other. This often happens at the moment when a stalemate is reached and it becomes detrimental for both parties to continue the conflict. Then the time has come for negotiations. Whether negotiations are successful depends on many factors. A lot needs to be determined before the negotiations start. Who are the participants, who defines the agenda, where do the meetings take place, how to organise the room where the negotiations take place, et cetera. How can an atmosphere which is supportive for reaching an agreement be created? The warring parties can themselves take the initiative to negotiate but more often a third party is involved in the negotiations. Parties can opt for **mediation** whereby they themselves remain owners of the conflict and can determine which concessions they are prepared to make. Or they can opt for **arbitration** whereby the warring parties put their faith in the hands of an independent intermediary and pledge beforehand that they will accept the outcomes of the negotiations.

An important actor in managing conflicts is the **United Nations** (UN). The UN was created after the Second World War as a continuation of the League of Nations which was created after the First World War. The main task is promoting peace, as has been recorded in the **Charter of the United Nations**. The Headquarters of the UN is in New York and it is comprised of different organs. It has a Secretary-General, currently the South Korean Ban Ki-moon, the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the **International Court of Justice** based in the **Peace Palace** in The Hague. The Security Council meets whenever there is a crisis situation in the world. The composition of members changes but consists of **five permanent members** who have **veto rights**. These are China, France, Great Britain, Russia and the United States. This choice of
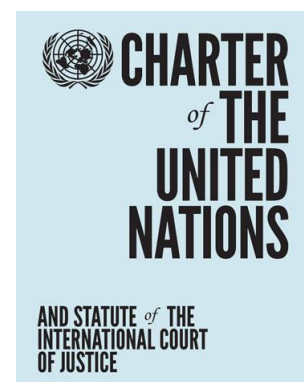
permanent members reflects the balance of power in the world right after the Second World War. The UN does not have its own army but can call upon the member states to make a contribution. Because there is a veto right and because the five permanent members have very different points of view and interests, decision making is difficult. Yet, the number of times that the UN has intervened in violent conflict has increased in the last couple of years. At the time the UN was created in 1946, the number of member states was 55. This number has now increased to more than 200 with the Occupied Palestinian Territory having observer status. Hammarskjöld, one of the first Secretary-Generals of the UN summarised its meaning as follows: "The job of the UN is not to bring mankind to heaven but to save it from hell."

The instruments of the United Nations

The recipe for the solution of conflict varies, depending on the nature of the conflict. The UN can decide to proceed to **peacekeeping**. The first generation of peacekeeping missions was marked by consent of the warring parties and was a form of monitoring of the compliance with the cease fire. In practice, this means using lightly armed military as a symbolic buffer, 'the thin blue line', between the warring parties. The impartiality of the stationed troops is essential. Normally, troops from countries which are allies to one or more of the conflicting parties are not involved in the peacekeeping mission. This includes world powers and former colonizers. In the course of time, troops were mostly provided by India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The world keeps an eye on things. This type of intervention was common during the Cold War era.

After the Cold War, the number of peacekeeping missions increased: 12 UN missions took place before 1990 and 57 took place after 1990. Also the role of the missions expanded. The UN troops were no longer merely an impartial observer, but began to play an active role in establishing peace, **peacemaking**, and also had a role in the reconstruction after the conflict, the so-called **peacebuilding**.
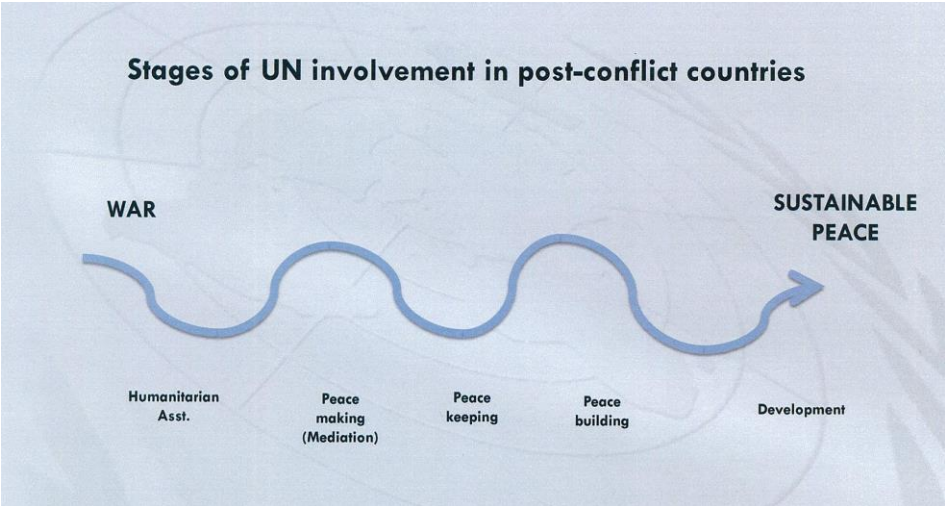

Figure 3.   *Peacebuilding: to prevent relapse and failed states,* UN Peace Building Support Office (PBSO)

Peacemaking takes place via diplomacy, negotiation, mediation or military intervention. The goal of peacebuilding is to take away the causes of conflict and to realise lasting peace respecting the habits and customs that are common in the conflict area. Peacebuilding often also has an element of **statebuilding**. Many conflicts can sustain because of the inability of the state to create order and stability within its borders.

An even more recent phenomenon is **peace enforcement**. Military intervention is used to enforce a peace agreement or to neutralise the violation of a peace agreement. In the case of peace enforcement, it is possible that not all parties that are involved in the conflict agree with the intervention by the UN. The task description or **mandate** of the UN is wider in the case of peace enforcement than with other types of interventions because the spectrum of violence that can be used by peacekeepers is wider. Up to now, only three peace enforcement missions took place: one in the Democratic Republic of Congo, one in the Central African Republic, and one in Mali.

The role of states

The members of the UN are states. States are the bearers of rights and obligations when it comes to international law. In regular civil law, the bearers of rights and obligations are people, companies and other organisations. In legal terms this is expressed as natural and legal persons. Linked to the concept of state is the concept of nation. A **state** is a political entity that exercises power in a certain territory. The state has the monopoly over violence. The concept of **nation** refers to a more or less homogenous population with a similar culture, language, religion, or descent. State is linked to a certain territory, while nation is linked to a population. In case a political governance unity overlaps with a mostly homogenous population, one refers to a **nation-state**. At the moment, the world has about 200 states and approximately 800 ethnic groups. Many developing countries are not a nation-state. The first colonists have randomly created territorial borders irrespective of the population which led to many different populations being part of the same state.

There are also populations without a state, such as the Kurds. This situation can be a source of conflict. The state should protect and ensure safety for its civilians. To offer this protection, the state needs a system and this system needs means which can come from collecting taxes. This implies a professional governance structure as well as willingness by the population to pay taxes.

Fukuyama emphasises that this is only possible provided that there is strong political order in the country. This requires a strong state but also one that is kept in balance by strong counterforces. The most important counterforces are the principles of the rule of law and democratic legitimacy. The **rule of law** means that state leaders are not above the law but need to abide by the law like any other civilian. **Democratic legitimacy** is, amongst others, characterised by free and fair elections and the presence of a parliament or permanent representation with substantial power. The state is controlled by law and by civilians. In case the state has only limited counterforces, dictatorship can be formed. In case a state is not able to protect its civilians, this can be a breeding ground for conflict. In these cases, one speaks of a **fragile or failed state** depending on whether the capacity of the state is partly present or not present at all.

As a result of the failing of states, for instance after the genocide in Rwanda, and because of the inability of the international community to successfully intervene, a new philosophy emerged called

Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The point of departure of international law is the **sovereignty** of states. States are autonomous on their own territory. Weak states generate problems such as poverty, drugs, refugees, terrorism, and large-scale human rights violations such as murder, mutilation, and rape. In these cases, the international community should be able to intervene. A fragile state can in this case not call upon its sovereignty. However, this conviction is controversial.

International law and international justice

Human rights are a relatively new phenomenon. An important document is the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** of 1948. Human rights can be categorised by classic fundamental rights and social fundamental rights. **Classic fundamental rights** concern freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and association. These rights protect people against the interference of the state in the lives of civilians. **Social fundamental rights** require active involvement of the state to provide civilians with education and livelihood. Even though human rights are universal, critics say that Western values are prevailing, especially when it comes to the classic fundamental rights, such as the emphasis on freedom and on the individual.

While the enforceability of international law is futile compared to national law, perpetrators of international law can be prosecuted. In practice, experience has been built with ad hoc facilities as well as a permanent form of jurisdiction. As a result of the experiences in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, prosecution has taken place via a **tribunal** in The Hague and in Arusha, Tanzania respectively, especially for this purpose.

The **International Criminal Court** (ICC) is a permanent facility, based in The Hague. The ICC only acts complementarily and merely intervenes when states do not. Natural persons can be prosecuted by the ICC, but collective entities such as a Government or a company cannot. The maximum sentence is 30 years imprisonment and, in exceptional cases, life imprisonment. The ICC strives to reach a good balance between **justice** and **peace**. Sometimes these two concepts can be contradictory. This is for instance the case when participants in peace talks claim amnesty for themselves for acts they contemplated or committed during the conflict.

Other important juridical institutes and courts are the **International Court of Justice** (ICJ) and the **Permanent Court of Arbitration** (PCA), both based in the **Peace Palace** in The Hague. The ICJ treats cases of disputes between states and the PCA is qualified for arbitration between states, intergovernmental organisations, and private parties.

Peace and the University for Peace

This brief overview shows that, although peace is worth pursuing, it is by no means obvious. In this context, the United Nations created the **University for Peace** (UPEACE) in 1980. UPEACE is based in Costa Rica, a country that took a remarkable decision in 1948 by dissolving its own army and a country that took the initiative in 1979 for a worldwide university for peace issues. UPEACE has three departments: 'Peace and Conflict Studies', 'International Law and Human Rights', and 'Environment and Development', and offers several 1 year MA programmes and a Doctoral programme (see www.upeace.org/calendar).

In 2012, **The Hague**, a city which identifies itself with the concepts of peace and justice, received a branch of UPEACE: UPEACE Centre The Hague. The office is housed at the Academy Building of the Peace Palace; education, research and lectures form the core activities.

Apart from Peace and Conflict Studies in a broader sense, UPEACE the Hague also has two specific areas of interest. This concerns 'Business and Peace' and 'Water and Peace'. The motivation to put the focus on business is that business is the motor for prosperity and can therefore create a prerequisite for peace. Also the manner in which this happens is of importance. Instead of using child labour and giving bribes, treating the environment and labour rights with respect should be the norm.
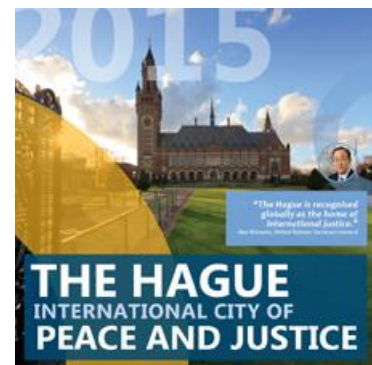
The attention for water has to do with the fact that water often is a source of conflict. This does not only concern availability of water. Drinking water and irrigation are a primary condition for life. Also the quality of and governance over water can be an issue. Who can do fishery where? Polluting a river upstream, can lead to problems downstream. And upstream and downstream could very well be divided by a state border. Who is entitled to navigate which water routes? With or without the risk of running into pirates? It should be noted that in case of conflicts concerning water, research conducted by the Oregon State University shows that these normally lead to cooperation between involved parties instead of an outburst of violence.

The educational activities of UPEACE The Hague are aligned with developments in universities where **peace education** sometimes form a separate subject. Besides, there are institutes of higher education such as **The Hague University of Applied Sciences** that considers **world citizenship** as a benchmark for all its efforts. World citizenship is a prominent aspect of positive and sustainable peace. Moreover, the **Sustainable Development Goals** of the UN, adopted in the General Assembly in 2015, form an important document. This concerns 17 different goals in the field of, amongst others, poverty reduction, food, health, education, gender, and climate change which are expected to be reached by 2030. These ambitions form a starting point for UPEACE The Hague.

Roelf Middel, *Board Member UPEACE The Hague*

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