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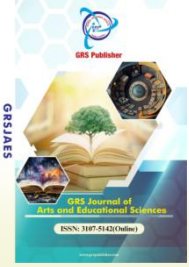

In the Theories of International Relations and Geopolitics: The Study of Location (The Concept of Conflict)

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Abstract: One of the key debates within the theories and schools of international relations and geopolitics is the discussion surrounding the sources of conflict and disputes between states. Since tensions and conflicts between states and governments have always occurred at various levels and dimensions—and will likely continue in the future—scholars and theorists from different schools of international relations and geopolitics have sought to identify and explain the roots and factors contributing to international conflicts in various ways. The schools of thought and philosophy in international relations, based on their approaches to analyzing global issues, have presented their perspectives on the emergence of differences and conflicts between political units across local, national, regional, and global dimensions. Given the importance of identifying the factors that create tension and conflict in inter-state relations, a wide range of perspectives has been proposed by thinkers from different academic disciplines as well as diverse intellectual and philosophical schools. It appears that each theory in international relations, depending on the philosophical foundations and scientific approaches of its proponents, identifies different—and at times contradictory—factors as the causes of conflict between states. Geopolitical thinkers have also analyzed various aspects of geopolitical factors contributing to inter-state conflict but have not offered a comprehensive or unified view of this phenomenon. In this article, using a descriptive-analytical approach in an applied study, the emerging sources of conflict between states will be examined within the framework of theories in international relations and geopolitics.

Keywords: *conflict, debate, nation-state, international relations, geopolitics.*

Cite this Article

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Introduction

The terms and concepts of tension, challenge, debate, conflict, and crisis are widely used in the literature on geopolitics and international relations, often to describe hostile or adversarial relationships between two countries or rival powers. Tension and conflict between political units—at domestic, national, regional, and global levels—have existed throughout human history and remain a persistent feature of political and social interactions.

Governments, as the most prominent political units possessing sovereignty and power within their territorial boundaries, have historically experienced relations characterized by tension and conflict with neighboring states and other countries. These tensions often arise from efforts to ensure national survival, expand spheres of influence, or secure national interests. In many instances, governments hold perspectives that conflict with those of neighboring, regional, or global powers regarding certain geographical, cultural, or geopolitical factors and values, whether located inside or beyond their borders. In such cases, disputes and confrontations inevitably emerge.

The roots of conflict in regional and global relations have been analyzed from various viewpoints, framed within schools of thought and philosophical traditions by scholars in international relations, political science, and political geography. Numerous theoretical efforts have been made to systematically explain conflict and war in international relations, resulting in a wide range of—sometimes contradictory—theories. Each theory presents a distinctive view of conflict, grounded in its own assumptions and principles, which are themselves shaped by different ontological, epistemological, and philosophical foundations.

The prevalence of certain theories over others has often corresponded with the dominance of specific discourses and knowledge systems in particular historical periods and social contexts. Thus, with paradigmatic and discursive shifts, as well as real-world changes, the theoretical landscape has also evolved.

Broadly speaking, there are two general approaches to studying the roots of tension and conflict. On one hand, psychologists, biologists, game theorists, and decision theorists study human behavior and trace the origins of tension and conflict to human nature.

On the other hand, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, organization and communication theorists, political scientists, international relations scholars, and systems theorists examine conflict at the level of groups, societies, institutions, social classes, large political movements, ethnic or religious communities, nation-states, coalitions, and cultural systems.

Moreover, there are diverse theoretical perspectives on the roots, causes, and nature of conflict, violent confrontation, and war. Each approach focuses on different variables and factors depending on its chosen unit and level of analysis.

According to David Singer's three levels of analysis and Kenneth Waltz's "three images," theories of tension and conflict in international relations can be grouped into three analytical levels, each offering a framework for understanding the roots of conflict and war:

1. At the individual (micro-systemic) level—or the *first image*—violence, conflict, and war are attributed to the flawed nature of humans.
2. At the national (micro-systemic) level—or the *second image*—the causes of conflict are analyzed based on the internal characteristics and structures of states.
3. At the international (systemic) level—or the *third image*—conflict and war are examined in relation to the anarchic and decentralized nature of the international system, which fosters conditions conducive to violence and war (Singer, 1990; Waltz, 2001).

Among geopolitical theorists, there is similarly no unified theory regarding the causes of conflict between states. Each geopolitician emphasizes certain geopolitical factors believed to play a major role in triggering international conflict, while often downplaying or neglecting others.

In this article, geopolitical theories will be analyzed across several dimensions, including territorial (terrestrial), hydro political, Geo-cultural, environmental, and geoeconomics factors.

The Essence of the Concept of Conflict

Conflict refers to a situation or condition in which a particular human group—whether religious, cultural, linguistic, political, social, economic, tribal, or ethnic—is in conscious opposition to another specific group or groups due to real or perceived incompatibilities in goals and values.In essence, conflict is a type of interaction between individuals or states, which does **not** include their struggles with nature or the environment. It is a form of competition in which the parties strive to obtain scarce resources. In doing so, they attempt to strengthen their own position and status, while preventing, exploiting, or excluding the other party from attaining their desired objectives.

In other words, conflict arises when the parties perceive a difference or incompatibility between themselves and attempt to resolve or manage that difference in a way that favors their own interests. As Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1981, p. 297) note, conflict occurs when parties perceive and understand their differences and seek to resolve them in their own favor.

From a sociological perspective, Lewis Coser defines conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Coser, 1956, p. 3).

Depending on the causes, context, and conditions, conflicts may be either violent or non-violent, overt or covert, controllable or uncontrollable, and resolvable or irresolvable. Thus, conflict does not necessarily manifest through violence—it can also take the form of less visible or indirect actions and behaviors.

Today, many define politics as the art of managing conflicting interests—a process aimed at the peaceful resolution of various disputes. A large number of social scientists agree that the complete elimination of conflict from human society is not only impossible but also undesirable, as some forms of conflict are essential for social change and progress.

Seymour Martin Lipset notes that both Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx emphasized the necessity of conflict between socio-political units (Lipset, 1991, p. 71).

According to Nyberg, conflict is a fundamental aspect of development—one that cannot be fully controlled, nor entirely prevented, and should not necessarily be avoided. From Robert Gurr's perspective, conflict is characterized by the open and hostile interactions of rival groups.

These interactions exhibit **four** key characteristics:

1. Two or more parties are engaged in antagonism.
2. They mutually take actions against one another.
3. They display hostile behavior with the aim of destroying, harming, neutralizing, or otherwise taking advantage of the opposing party or parties.
4. These interactions are confrontational, open, and public. (Gurr, 2009, p. 47).

According to Behrman's definition, **conflict** is the existence of disagreement and incompatibility between multiple groups, which results in a perceived threat to each group's needs, interests, or benefits. (Behrman, 1998, p. 77)

This relatively simple definition encompasses four core concepts, explained as follows:

1. Disagreement and Incompatibility: Conflicts typically involve several levels of disagreement between the positions or perspectives of the parties involved. However, the actual disagreement may differ significantly from what appears on the surface.

In fact, conflicts are often accompanied by considerable misunderstanding, which may obscure the true nature of the disagreement. Thus, conflict is not merely a difference of opinion—it arises when individuals or groups perceive a threat to their well-being or security.

2. Conflicting Groups: People generally associate conflict with clear incompatibility or disagreement between identifiable groups. However, it is not uncommon for individuals to realize—sometimes with surprise—that they are part of a conflict they had not consciously acknowledged.

In many cases, individuals who are embedded in a broader social system are drawn into a conflict even if they personally interpret the situation differently.

The parties involved typically react based on their own **perceptions** of the situation rather than on objective analysis. These perceptions are shaped by various factors, including

personal values, culture, belief systems, awareness, experience, and other socio-psychological variables.

3. Perceived Threat: People are generally more responsive to perceived threats than to actual ones. Although perceptions may not always align with reality, they nonetheless influence people's behavior, emotions, and decisions.

Thus, the **perception** of threat—whether real or imagined—has a powerful effect. If the actual sources of threat can be accurately identified, conflict can be approached and managed in a structured and strategic manner.

4. Needs, Interests, and Concerns: The issues that arise in a conflict are usually enduring and deeply rooted. These issues are not merely situational but often involve **complex and multifaceted needs**.

In addition to tangible, material needs, conflicts often involve **psychological and emotional needs** that are intertwined with identity, recognition, or security. These needs contribute to the persistence and intensity of the conflict. (Behrman, 1998, pp. 78–81).

Research Method

This article is based on a **descriptive-analytical** research method. The data and information have been primarily collected using the **library research** technique.

In this method, greater emphasis is placed on the examination of documents and records, including references to both domestic and international books, publications, newspapers, academic articles, journals, and relevant websites.

After the collection and classification of information, the analysis was conducted mainly through **descriptive interpretation**, relying on **logical reasoning and critical thinking.**

Research Findings

In this section, an attempt is made to explain the concept of conflict within the framework of international relations theories and geopolitical perspectives. Among the theories of international relations, the schools of **realism**, **neorealism**, and **neoliberalism** have been selected. In terms of geopolitical theories, the views of **Peter Haggett** (territorial and hydro political perspectives), **Samuel Huntington** (Geo-cultural perspective), **Edward Luttwak** (Geo-economic perspective), and **Thomas Homer-Dixon** (environmental perspective) have been studied to examine the phenomenon of conflict between states.

Theories of International Relations

- **Realism Theory**

Realism, as a dominant theory in international relations, seeks to provide a general and comprehensive explanation of international politics and related phenomena. Realists locate the roots and causes of conflict in **human nature and behavior**. States, like individuals, are inherently selfish and power-seeking in their pursuit of national interest. This innate selfishness and ambition lead inevitably to **conflict and war**.

This theory has philosophical roots in the ideas of **Thucydides**, **Niccolò Machiavelli**, and **Thomas Hobbes**, and was systematized in international relations theory by **Hans J. Morgenthau** after World War II. The pessimistic worldview of Machiavelli and Hobbes, combined with the theological perspectives of thinkers like **Reinhold Niebuhr**, presents humans as selfish, aggressive, egotistical, and naturally violent. Realists, much like some biologists and psychologists, view humans as inherently savage—suggesting that **violence and conflict are instinctual** (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 2004, pp. 143–145).

According to Machiavelli, the instinct for power leads first to **natural war**, then to **political war**, in pursuit of political satisfaction. Once one will dominates others in domestic society, it seeks to dominate at the international level, producing **civil and international wars**.

Thus, for realists, the desire for power is natural. In a state of nature, "**man is a wolf to man**," and survival becomes the primary motivation. Fear of being killed and the desire to remain alive push individuals and states to accumulate power for self-protection.

This bleak view of humanity forms the foundation of **classical realism**. According to this perspective, the central concern of states, like individuals, is **survival**. Unlike individuals who may seek protection from a legitimate authority, states exist in an anarchic international system without a central government to prevent violence or enforce rules.

As a result, security and power become states' highest priorities. The **pursuit of power is natural and even necessary** in this environment, and may be achieved—even through force and war. Therefore, **conflict and war are considered dominant aspects of international relations**, while peace is seen as an exception.

Morgenthau argues that politics is a **struggle for power**, inherently conflictual and violent. Moral and legal norms, according to realists, are **ineffective** in the political realm. Since the desire for power is a fundamental part of human nature, only **counterbalancing power** can restrain it. Hence, the most effective way to achieve peace and stability (defined as the absence of war) is through a **balance of power**.

Realists reject the idealists' concept of **collective security**, arguing that moral appeals and cooperation cannot deter states from aggression. Instead, international stability can only be preserved when **rival powers counterbalance and neutralize each other**. In this view, **war is not only legal but sometimes necessary**—a legitimate tool for maintaining equilibrium.

Thus, from the **realist perspective**, war has a **positive function** in international politics: maintaining the balance of power. Though it may seem paradoxical, both **realists** and **just war theorists** conclude that war can be **legitimate** under certain conditions—ultimately determined by the **dominant powers** themselves (Morgenthau, 1934, pp. 120–125).

- **Neorealism Theory**

Neorealism, also known as **structural realism**, builds upon the foundational assumptions of classical realism—such as state-centrism, power politics, and state rationality—but shifts the explanation of conflict **from human nature to the structure of the international system**.

The central question for neorealists is: **Why do states with vastly different domestic systems and ideologies often behave similarly in foreign policy?** The answer, they argue, lies in the **anarchic structure** of the international system, which imposes the **same constraints** on all states regardless of their internal differences.

Unlike Morgenthau, who attributes the pursuit of power to innate human tendencies, **Kenneth Waltz** and other neorealists claim that the **lack of a central authority** in the international system compels states to seek power as a means of ensuring survival.

This **anarchy** does not imply chaos or perpetual conflict but denotes the **absence of a global government**. In such a system, **sovereign states are the highest authority**, and no external power exists to regulate their behavior (Baldwin, 1993, pp. 29–32).

The anarchic structure leads to three general patterns of behavior among states:

1. **Distrust and Suspicion**: States are constantly wary of each other because they have the capacity to use force. With no legal authority to appeal to in case of aggression, states tend to **distrust others to ensure their own security**.
2. **Survival as the Primary Goal**: In an anarchic system, states must rely on **self-help**. Alliances may be useful, but they are temporary and conditional. Each state is responsible for its own survival and cannot rely on external guarantees.
3. **Pursuit of Relative Power**: States strive to **maximize their relative power** because the stronger a state is in comparison to others, the more secure it becomes. This logic incentivizes states to exploit or undermine others to secure their own position (Mearsheimer, 1994, pp. 10–12).

Neorealists argue that **peace and stability** can be achieved through **a balance of power among great powers**. Even in the absence of moral consensus, this balance ensures order. When a **hegemon** emerges, it can also impose a form of stability—known as **hegemonic stability**—by acting as a quasi-government in the international system (Keohane, 1989, pp. 112–113).

- **Neoliberalism Theory**

Neoliberalism, or **neoliberal institutionalism**, represents a theoretical synthesis of **liberal** and **realist** thought, but it is more closely aligned with **neorealism** in its assumptions about the international system.

Like neorealists, neoliberals view states as **rational, unitary actors** operating in an **anarchic** international system. However, unlike neorealists, they argue that **international institutions** can play a **constructive and independent role** in mitigating conflict and facilitating cooperation (Baldwin, 2008, pp. 289–290).

Neoliberals acknowledge that **anarchy** creates an environment of **distrust**, which can hinder cooperation and encourage **cheating and defection**. However, they argue that **anarchy does not eliminate the possibility of cooperation**.

Through specific mechanisms and strategies—such as **repeated interactions**, the creation of a **"shadow of the future"**, **issue-linkage**, and **analogical reciprocity**—states can overcome trust deficits. When supported by **international institutions and regimes**, these strategies can encourage long-term cooperation even among self-interested states (Keohane, 1989, pp. 105–106).

For instance, **issue-linkage** enables retaliation across different domains, increasing the **cost of defection** and discouraging opportunistic behavior (Milner, 1992, p. 177; Stein, 1993, p. 88).

In this context, international institutions provide a platform for:

- **Transparency**
- **Monitoring and verification**
- **Enforcement of agreements**
- **Coordination of expectations**

According to **Dehghani-Firoozabadi (1998, p. 57)**, international institutions can be defined as recognized patterns of behavior around which the expectations of actors converge.

Thus, neoliberals believe that while conflict may arise due to the anarchic structure of the system, **cooperation is not only possible but can be sustained** with the help of well-designed institutions that align long-term interests and reduce uncertainty.

Geopolitical Theories

- **Peter Haggett: A Territorial and Hydropolitical Perspective on the Phenomenon of Conflict between States**

Peter Haggett's Hypothetical Model is a conceptual framework designed to examine the geographical factors contributing to tensions and conflicts in the relationships between states. The model introduces a **hypothetical landlocked country**—referred to as the "Hypothetical"—that faces a range of geographically based challenges and sources of tension with its neighboring states (Haggett, 1983, p. 477; Haggett, 2001, p. 521).

Haggett first presented this model in the **1972 edition of *Geography: A Synthesis***, where he identified **twelve geographical factors** that could lead to interstate tension:

1. **Corridor rights** for a landlocked country to access the sea through a neighboring state's territory.
2. **Disputes over watershed interpretation**, particularly where mountainous borders complicate the delineation of boundaries.
3. **Variable riverine boundaries**, where shifting river courses lead to changes in national borders.
4. **Disagreements over border demarcation** in shared lakes and disputes over the use of their resources.
5. **Upstream water diversion**, where a tributary country controls or reduces water flow to downstream nations.
6. **Territorial expansion** of ethno-linguistic groups into neighboring countries, potentially fueling irredentism.
7. **Cross-border ethnic minorities**, where the same racial or ethnic group resides on both sides of a national boundary.
8. **Seasonal migration of nomads**, which may violate international borders and spark disputes.
9. **Internal separatist movements**, especially when they receive cross-border support or attention.
10. **Strategic or symbolic resources near borders**, such as uranium deposits or culturally significant sites, which are contested by neighboring states.
11. **Territorial claims for strategic depth**, where a country asserts control over adjacent areas to secure vital positions and resources.
12. **Legal disputes over artificial weather modification**, such as cloud seeding, which may unintentionally affect precipitation patterns in neighboring states.

Through this model, Haggett underscores the **importance of spatial and locational variables** in the genesis of interstate tensions. His emphasis lies on **tangible and geographical factors**—such as access to water, resource distribution, and border demarcation—as primary drivers of conflict.

However, a notable limitation of Haggett's model is its **omission of non-material factors**. The model does not account for **geo-economic** or **environmental** causes of conflict, nor does it engage with **intangible or psychological dimensions**—such as national identity, historical grievances, or ideological perceptions—that often fuel crises in international relations.

Despite this, Haggett's territorial and hydro political approach remains a valuable contribution to understanding how **geographic configurations and spatial dynamics** can structurally predispose states to conflict.

- **Thomas Homer-Dixon (1994): An Environmental Perspective on the Phenomenon of Interstate Conflict**

According to **Thomas Homer-Dixon**, environmental factors affect national security and the emergence of conflict between states in **two primary ways**: **direct** and **indirect**.

In the **direct** pathway, environmental changes lead states to compete with one another for control over **natural resources**, resulting in geopolitical rivalry and confrontation. In contrast, the **indirect** pathway involves environmental degradation triggering **socio-political consequences** that, in turn, foster the conditions for conflict.

Based on this framework, Homer-Dixon proposes **three types of conflict scenarios** related to environmental change (Homer-Dixon, 1994):

1. **Conflicts over non-renewable natural resources**, such as fossil fuels and minerals, which have historical precedents.
2. **Conflicts over renewable natural resources**, particularly in relation to shared or contested access to freshwater and fisheries. Disputes over water rights in river basins and fishing zones are key examples.
3. **Indirect environmental conflicts**, which Homer-Dixon considers more dangerous than the first two categories. These occur via two mechanisms:
    - **a) Identity-based conflicts**: Environmental stress leads to large-scale population displacement, which can give rise to new or intensified **ethnic and identity-based tensions**. Migratory pressures often cause instability, especially when displaced populations settle in regions where cultural, ethnic, or religious differences become flashpoints. This is visible in ethnic clashes that emerge globally as a result of environmental degradation and migration (Suhrke, 1993, pp. 14–15).
    - **b) Economic deprivation**: Environmental problems may result in **economic decline and inequality**, contributing to a sense of deprivation among citizens. Disparities in access to natural resources and development attention from the state create regional imbalances, weaken the legitimacy of political institutions, and lead to internal unrest. Ongoing conflicts in parts of the Philippines and Chinese provinces are cited as evidence (Homer-Dixon, 1993, pp. 65–67).

However, this perspective is not without criticism. Several scholars question the **strength of the causal link** between environmental degradation and national security. Critics argue that the **theoretical and empirical basis** for connecting environmental issues to conflict is weak, especially in the case of indirect effects. The multitude of **intervening variables** in socio-political processes makes it difficult to isolate environmental change as a primary cause of conflict (Levy, 1995, p. 56).

Moreover, Homer-Dixon's model focuses **exclusively on environmental factors**, omitting other critical geopolitical drivers of interstate conflict such as ideology, economic competition, and strategic interests. While his **evolutionary approach** to conflict offers valuable insights into the intersection of ecology and security, the **assumed strength of the link between environmental degradation and armed conflict** remains a topic of scholarly debate.

- **Samuel Huntington (1993): A Geo-cultural Perspective on the Phenomenon of Conflict Between States**

In his widely cited essay, **"The Clash of Civilizations?"**, **Samuel Huntington** argues that in the post-Cold War world, the **primary sources of conflict** will no longer be ideological or economic. Instead, **cultural and civilizational differences** will become the main drivers of global tensions and conflict (Huntington, 1993, p. 22).

According to Huntington, although the **nation-state** will remain the most powerful actor in global politics, the most significant conflicts will occur **between nations and groups belonging to different civilizations**. Civilization, in his definition, represents the **broadest cultural identity**—encompassing shared elements such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and values—that distinguishes human societies from one another.

Huntington identifies the following criteria as key indicators that distinguish civilizations:

- **History**
- **Language**
- **Culture and traditions**
- **Religion (the most important factor)**

He predicts the emergence of **seven or eight major civilizations** that will shape the future of global politics: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Orthodox-Slavic, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations (Huntington, 1993, pp. 24–25). In Huntington's view, **religious identity** and **civilizational consciousness** will surpass ideological or national identity as the primary organizing principles of global politics.

He emphasizes that **geo-cultural blocs**, rather than **geo-economic alliances**, will dominate the future global order (Huntington & Ó Tuathail, 1998, p. 7). The **fault lines** between civilizations—especially between the West and Islamic or Confucian cultures—will be the most **volatile and dangerous zones** of conflict. He asserts that:

- Differences between civilizations are **real and significant**.
- **Civilizational awareness** is increasing.
- Conflicts between civilizations will **supersede ideological and economic conflicts**.
- Political, economic, and security institutions are **more successful within civilizations** than across them.
- Conflicts between different civilizations will be **more intense and protracted** than those within the same civilization.
- **Violent inter-civilizational conflicts** will be the most likely cause of global wars.
- The **primary axis of global politics** will be the relationship between the **West and the rest**, especially with **Islamic and Confucian** countries (Huntington, 1993, pp. 47–48).

Despite the wide influence of Huntington's thesis, his work has been subject to **extensive criticism** from scholars of international relations. Critics argue that Huntington **overemphasizes the role of civilizational identity**, particularly religion, while ignoring the multifaceted nature of conflict. His assumption of a **strong and direct causal relationship** between civilizational differences and conflict is seen as **overly deterministic** and **reductionist**.

Furthermore, his model does not account for **economic, political, and strategic interests**, which often play equal or greater roles in shaping interstate tensions. While Huntington's geo-cultural perspective highlights an important dimension of contemporary global conflict, it **fails to address the full complexity** of the international system.

- **Edward Luttwak (1990): A Geo-economic Perspective on the Phenomenon of Conflict Between States**

In his influential article, *"From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce,"* **Edward N. Luttwak** argues that the **post-Cold War era** marked a fundamental shift in the nature of international relations. According to Luttwak, traditional **military power** was losing its central role in global affairs, increasingly being replaced by **economic tools and strategies** (Luttwak, 1990, pp. 17–18).

He contends that in the emerging **geo-economic age**, **capital** has supplanted **military might**, **non-military innovation** has replaced **military technological advances**, and **markets** have become more significant than **military bases or garrisons**. However, he emphasizes that these economic instruments are merely **means**, not **ends** in themselves.

Luttwak further notes that although **economic strategies** may still be influenced or constrained by military realities, in this new era of **geo-economics**, both the **causes** of conflict and the **means** of engagement must be predominantly **economic**. He suggests that trade-related disputes, when they escalate into political conflicts, should be addressed through **economic warfare** rather than traditional military engagement.

Among the **geo-economic tools of competition and conflict**, Luttwak identifies:

- **Import restrictions**
- **Export subsidies**
- **Regulatory control over competitive technical standards**
- **State support for selected industries or educational systems**
- **Structural manipulation of competitive markets**(Tuathail et al., 1998, p. 128)

Luttwak's theory presents **geoeconomics** as both a **driver of conflict** and a **strategic toolkit** for states navigating international rivalry. In his view, the battle for influence and power is increasingly fought in **global markets**, through **economic coercion**, **policy competition**, and **trade-based strategies** rather than through military confrontation.

However, the developments in **international relations over the past two decades** have challenged the comprehensiveness of Luttwak's theory. While **geo-economic factors**—such as trade disputes, sanctions, energy politics, and technological competition—remain significant sources of tension, they do not operate in isolation.

The re-emergence of **traditional geopolitical rivalries**, military buildups, and territorial disputes underscore the **continued relevance of geopolitical and strategic variables**. Thus, while Luttwak's theory provides a **valuable lens** for understanding the **economic dimensions of conflict**, it **fails to account for the broader and more complex geopolitical dynamics** that drive international tensions and crises.

In sum, **geoeconomics** is a critical but **incomplete framework** for explaining the phenomenon of conflict between states. It highlights important trends in the **globalization era**, particularly in relation to **economic power projection**, but it does not fully capture the **multi-dimensional causes** of modern interstate conflict.

Analysis and Discussion

One of the central debates in theories of international relations and geopolitics revolves around the concept of **conflict** and tensions between political units at various levels. Among these, **interstate conflicts**—those occurring between sovereign states and nations across different regions of the world—have garnered particular attention and significance.

Each theoretical school within international relations and geopolitics analyzes the concept of conflict between states and the underlying causes from its own distinct foundation and perspective. This article has explored the concept of conflict through the lenses of **classical realism, neorealism,** and **neoliberalism**, which represent some of the most influential theoretical approaches in the field.

From the **realist** perspective, the roots of conflict are traced back to **human nature and behavior**. Realism views both individuals and states as inherently **greedy and ambitious**, driven by self-interest and the pursuit of power, which inevitably leads to conflict and war.

The **neorealist** school accepts many of realism's assumptions, including the centrality of the state, the importance of power, and the unitary rational actor model. However, it departs from classical realism by locating the causes of conflict not in human nature or state psychology, but in the **structure of the international system**—specifically, its anarchic nature and the absence of a central authority.

Meanwhile, **neoliberal theorists** share the neorealist view of states as rational actors operating in an anarchic international system, but they place greater emphasis on the **constructive role of**

international institutions. Unlike neorealists, neoliberals argue that these institutions can mitigate conflict and facilitate cooperation independent of the distribution of power among states.

Beyond these traditional IR theories, this study examined several geopolitical perspectives that address the causes of interstate conflict. These include.

- **Peter Haggett's** territorial and hydro-political approach, which emphasizes **territorial disputes and water resource conflicts** as key sources of tension between neighboring states;
- **Thomas Homer-Dixon's** environmental perspective, which highlights the role of **ecological factors and resource scarcity** in fostering conflict;
- **Samuel Huntington's** geo-cultural theory, which posits that **civilizational and cultural identities** are primary drivers of post-Cold War conflicts; and
- **Edward Luttwak's** geo-economic theory, which views **economic competition and strategies** as the main axes of conflict in the contemporary international system.

A critical assessment of these geopolitical theories reveals a common limitation: each tends to adopt a **one-dimensional and evolutionary perspective** in explaining the sources of interstate conflict. This narrow focus results in an **incomplete understanding** of the complex and multifaceted nature of international tensions.

In reality, a comprehensive model explaining geopolitical conflicts must integrate a diverse set of variables, including **geographical, hydro-political, geo-cultural, geo-economic, environmental, geostrategic, and political factors**. Only through such a multi-dimensional and holistic framework can we fully capture the intricate dynamics that generate and sustain conflicts between states.

Conclusion

An examination of the theories proposed by scholars in geography, geopolitics, political science, and international relations regarding the causes of tension and conflict between states reveals that **no single theory fully accounts for all the multifaceted dimensions** of interstate conflict. Each theory tends to focus on a subset of factors, offering a **partial and sometimes contested explanation** rather than a comprehensive framework.

Some international relations theories emphasize **human nature and individual characteristics** as the root causes of conflict, while others highlight the influence of the **state and its political system**. Still, others point to the **structural and functional features of the international system** itself as the primary source of conflict. Similarly, geopolitical theorists diverge in their emphasis—some underscore **cultural and civilizational factors**, others prioritize **geo-economic and economic interests**, and still others identify **environmental or territorial and border disputes** as central to tensions between countries.

Notably, scholars such as **Peter Haggett (1972)** and **John Collins (1998)** have endeavored to adopt a more **comprehensive and multidimensional approach**, incorporating a variety of variables—including strategic, cultural, economic, environmental, and hydro-political dimensions—into their analyses. Yet, even these attempts fall short of providing a fully integrative model capable of explaining the complex geopolitical sources of tension in international relations.

Therefore, from the perspective advanced in this article, an effective and robust model to explain the geopolitical factors driving tension and conflict between states must simultaneously incorporate **cultural and geo-cultural variables, geostrategic factors, territorial and border issues, geo-economic considerations, hydro-political dynamics, environmental concerns, and the emerging realm of cyberspace**. Only through such a multidimensional and holistic framework can the intricate and interconnected causes of interstate conflict be adequately understood and addressed.

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