CONFLICTS AND WARS: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Plan:

1. Concepts, types and functions of conflicts
2. International conflict research
4. Peculiarities of the "new generation conflicts"

Concepts, types and functions of conflicts

There are many approaches to the study of conflicts in IR, which is explained by differences in interpreting the concept of "conflict." The following are basic interpretations of this concept.

L. Cozier	Conflict is a clash between collective actors over the *values, power and rare resources*. The aim of each side here is to neutralize, weaken or remove its rival.
K. Bowlding	Conflict has objective content. This is a situation of rivalry, where the sides recognize incompatibility of their possible stands and each side aspires to occupy a position, not correspondent to the position which the other side wants to occupy.
J. Berton	In most cases, the conflict bears subjective character. A conflict that seems to affect "objective" differences of interest can be transformed into a conflict with a positive result for both parties, provided that they reconsider mutual perceptions that would allow them to cooperate on a functional basis to share the disputed resource.
Derrienic J.	A representative of the activist branch in sociology who seeks to combine the advantages of both above-mentioned approaches. Requires "an analysis of the practical conditions necessary for their implementation."

The methodological basis of Russian studies of international conflict is the position of the dialectical philosophy that *conflict is an extreme form of the aggravated contradiction*. In the conflict study it is important to have "researcher's angle of view," which helps to form conflict content interpretations and recommendations on behavior in the conflict and its resolution.

Conflict is an integral part of social interactions, it has many positive and creative functions. It does not allow stagnation, stimulates interest and curiosity, acts as a mediator, which helps to

articulate problems. Conflict is the basis of social and personal changes, plays a stabilizing and integrating role.

The typology of conflicts is diverse and also depends on the "angle of view," goals of the analysis, etc.

Conflicts can be

- Interpersonal, intergroup and international (interstate);

- Intra-group, intra-State.

Most common among external conflicts are

- territorial claims;

- diplomatic disputes;

- economic contradictions.

They can take the *form* of armed clashes, wars or peaceful diplomatic demarches, economic sanctions, etc.

From a functional point of view, conflicts can be *constructive* and *destructive.*

In the IR science the following conflicts are of particular importance:

- political;

- intra-political;

- international political;

- armed;

- unarmed;

- conflicts - "fights";

- conflicts - "games";

- zero sum conflicts;

- nonzero sum clashes.

Conflict Functions:

- act as a mechanism for setting standards that meet the new conditions;

- helps to assess the relative strength of each opposite interest groups;

- promotes the abandonment of the existing system relationships;

- promotes a new balance of power and relationships on a new basis.

Highlighting constructive and destructive conflicts, Yale University professor Morton Deutsch states that rivalry is not identical to conflict. Conflict can develop both in an environment characterized by rivalry and in a competing environment. The process of conflict resolution depends largely on the nature of the environment, psychological factors of the parties to the conflict, their perception of each other and of the conflict itself.

International conflict research

There are many classifications on the causes of conflict. Part of them concentrates on the peculiarities of the international relations structure. The larger part focuses on conflicts between states.

For example, J.Galtung, who proposed a "structural theory of aggression," considers the *imbalance of criteria,* owing to which we know about the state position in the international system, to be the main reason for international conflicts. According to some criteria, a state may have a high position in the system, while according to another criteria a state may occupy an insufficient or disproportionately low position.

"The emergence of aggression," says Galtung, "is most likely in a situation of structural imbalance." However, the existence of structural imbalances does not in itself mean that the conflicts resulting from it will necessarily reach their highest degree - military confrontation. The latter becomes most likely under two conditions: firstly, when violence turns into an integral and familiar feature of society; secondly, when all other means of rebalancing have been exhausted.

Thus, F.Brayar and M.R. Jalili distinguish three groups of international conflicts, which differ in nature, motivations of their participants and scale. They include classical inter-state conflicts in the first group; inter-state conflicts with a tendency towards integration; national wars of liberation, etc. The second group includes territorial and non-territorial conflicts; the latter, in turn, may have socio-economic, ideological motives and or simply to proceed from the will to power. Finally, depending on the scale of conflicts, they are divided into generalized ones, which include a large number of states, and which are able to develop into world conflicts, as well as regional, subregional and limited (in terms of the number of participating states) conflicts.

Peculiarities of the "new generation conflicts"

An armed conflict, according to experts at Uppsala University (Sweden), is "a contradiction over power or territory, which is disputed with an armed force by military formations of at least two warring parties, and results in death of at least 25 people." If at least one side uses government armed forces in confrontation, it is considered a "state participated conflict." If a state is not one of the warring parties, a conflict is considered to be "non-state." At the same time, only a relatively large-scale and intense conflict can be considered a "war" - an armed confrontation that directly led to death of at least 1,000 people during a year (direct participants in hostilities - combatants - and civilians who died, for instance, as a result of crossfire, that is, as a result of hostilities between combatants).

But over the past two decades, the meaning of an "armed conflict" concept has been changed, which is associated with a change in the concept of "security" as such. We are talking about its gradual evolution - from more traditional and militarized concept of "national security" (with a state security at its center) to the concept of "humanitarian security," or "human security."

Firstly, there was a further departure from major wars in the nature of conflicts – for example, in 2006 only 3 "wars" were recorded - in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka. Most of the conflicts since the end of World War II have been intra-state rather than inter-state. Over the past decades, more than 95% of all conflicts involving the state have been intra-state (which, however, does not mean that these conflicts cannot be internationalized).

Secondly, attention to participants in armed conflicts is increasingly shifting from state to non-state actors. Counting the number of non-state conflicts since the early 2000s - armed confrontation between non-state players without direct participation of a state - shows that it exceeds almost twice the number of conflicts involving a state.

Thirdly, two types of modern conflicts come to the forefront. First of all, these are intra-state conflicts: protracted "civil wars" of relatively low intensity, in which the warring parties seek to avoid frontal clashes and battles. They attack mainly the civilian population, considered as the support base for the enemy. Another type of conflict that is less common, but much more intense and fleeting, is the so-called asymmetric wars. They are conducted between the armed forces of the leading, most developed countries of the world and an incomparably weaker state or non-state enemy. Such type of conflicts included the NATO military operation against Yugoslavia (1999), the intervention of the US led coalition in Afghanistan (2001) and the US and its allies' invasion in Iraq (2003).

Fourthly, changes in the nature of armed confrontation (the departure from major conventional inter-state wars and predominance of intra-state and asymmetric conflicts) could not but affect the structure of human losses during hostilities. Up to 90% (!) of the dead and wounded in modern conflicts are civilians, not armed combatants.

Fifthly, significant part of the armed violence in contemporary conflicts is less intense and more localized than the main confrontation. This violence may not even fall within the definition of conflict as such (confrontation between at least two parties).

Sixth, new types and forms of armed conflict continue to emerge. For example, the confrontation between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement in 2006 does not fall under any of the main types of conflicts in terms of composition and level of participants, since it is neither an intra-state nor an inter-state confrontation in its pure form.

In recent years, new challenges and threats have replaced traditional types of conflict. Players such as criminal (including cross-border) groups, religious and quasi-religious movements, transnational networks are increasingly coming to the forefront. Among modern participants of armed conflicts, more non-state players than states come to the center stage. They oppose a state or other groups, or participate in an armed confrontation on the side of a state, but not necessarily controlled by this state. The number of casualties in non-state conflicts is usually 2 to 5 times lower than in conflicts involving a state. However, it should not be forgotten that non-state violence is directed mainly against the civilian population.

From other trends related to forms of armed struggle used by non-state players, we can pay attention at the sharp increase in terrorist activity. The latter is used as a tactic of asymmetric confrontation both in local-regional armed conflicts and at the transnational level.

Questions:
1. Give definition of the term "conflict".
2. List main types of modern conflicts.
3. What kind of groups of international conflicts to do you know?
4. What is the main reason for international conflicts according to J.Galtung?
5. List main features of the "new generation conflicts".

Notes:
1. Stepanova Ekaterina. "State and Person in Contemporary Armed Conflicts". *International processes.* - January-April 2008. V.6. № 1(16).