



THEORETICAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE CRISES AND CONFLICTS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE XXI CENTURY

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Abstract: *The approached issue regarding the crisis and conflicts in contemporary international relationships at the beginning of the 21st century is very vast and complex both from the political, social, economic, and military point of view. This requires a profound and systematic analysis to define the main concepts of decision makers who need to generate conservation or transformation strategies of the geopolitical system in order to bring it back to the state of functional balance and crisis exacerbation in a state of conflict.*

Keywords: *crisis; conflicts; globalization; international relations; risks; peace theory.*

Globalization and the theory of the democratic peace have transformed the international relations, removing the traditional policies of asserting power in the national agenda of most actors.

Lately, the emergence of new risks, crises and conflicts has caused instability at the regional / global level to gain ground and to resort more often to the use of military means.

Today, the world faces many increasingly complex problems whose solution requires the involvement of states and organizations with tasks in the security field.

The intensification of the crisis between states has inevitably led to increasing the international disputes. This phenomenon appeared particularly often, with almost regular frequencies and it has its origins mostly in history, but it can also occur as a result of the evolution of society and international life at a time.

The *crisis* is a multidimensional phenomenon, but in most cases it is analyzed by the interdependencies between violent effects it produces and its other dimensions. These connections are defining in the crisis management strategy modeling and are expressed by concrete policy developments which aim at imposing a certain conduct.

Globally, the political analysis reveals the fact that the world of this beginning of century and millennium, is subject to a complex process of

redefining the international relations.

The results of these analyzes reduce the danger of triggering a major military confrontation and the development of a climate of cooperation and partnership, with the objective of shaping a new security architecture that respects the values of democracy, freedom, human rights, rule of law and economy market.

In the context of contemporary international relations, crisis is a phenomenon that can occur in a dispute and /or conflict of interest between two or more parties that will most often be states, but can obviously be nations, groups or even international bodies.

The crisis, although it is a complex phenomenon, in most of the cases is analyzed by the interdependencies between the violent effects it produces and its other dimensions. Currently, these connections are defining in modeling the analysis mechanism and crisis management and are expressed by developing concrete strategies that aim to impose a certain behavior.

Before defining crisis, it is very important to know the origin of the word and where it comes from.

Studies show that the origin of the word *crisis* comes from the Ancient Greek. The verb *krinein* verb has the meaning: *to separate, to judge, to decide*. Over time the Greek word, *krisis* suffered successive changes, but the etymology is linked to the notion of judgment or decision¹. Consequently,

¹Vasile Simileanu, *Crizele și conflictele spațiului islamic*, Editura Top Form, București, 2009, p. 77.

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there is no crisis without the need for decision and without a prior judgement.

In the dictionary of the Romanian language, the crisis is defined as a "*manifestation of some difficulties of economic, political, social type etc.; disorder and testing period that manifests itself in society.*"²

Political theory interprets the crisis as an immediate change, due to strong disorders in social life, characterized by special sharpening of the existing contradictions and antagonistic forces clash.

Charles Herman, an expert in international political studies, defines crisis as "*a situation that threatens the high priority targets for the decision-making unit, restricts the time available for a response before the situation is changed and, when it occurs, it surprises the decision unit members*"³.

Michael Brecher, a professor of political sciences (McGill University, Montreal, Canada), defined the crisis as "*a situation characterized by four necessary and sufficient conditions, as they are perceived by the decision makers from the highest level of the implied actors: a mutation in external or internal environment; a threat to core values; a high probability of involvement in hostilities mainly with the military character.*"⁴

According to Barry Mc. Longlin crisis is "*an event, disclosure, charge or a set of internal and external problems that threaten the integrity, reputation or the existence of an individual or organization*"⁵

From the sociological point of view, the concept of crisis is "*a time in the dynamics of a system characterized by a sharp accumulation of difficul-*

ties, tensions outbreak of the conflict, making it difficult for normal operation, triggering strong pressures for change"⁶.

Referring to the international situation, General Beaufre defines crisis as "*a state of tension in which there is a maximum risk of an escalation into an armed conflict, in which the opponent will be prevented from acquiring a certain political or military advantage; so this advantage is the stake of the crisis for the defender, minimum risk*"⁷.

Alastair Buchan, former director of the British Institute of Strategic Studies, referring to the geopolitical crises has made the following statement: "*the conflict period between two or more states which occurs when one party attacks the other on a precise point or as it can be defined as when they have to take a decision on the reply that must be given to this defiance*"⁸.

Jean-Christophe Romer considers the crisis as "*a moment of rupture within a well-organized system. It involves the obligation of the decision makers to define a position either for conservation or for transforming a given system, in anticipation of its return to equilibrium*"⁹

In the security field there are a variety of definitions of crisis, from those developed by specialists in security studies to those from the official documents of security institutions. An example of this is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, defining the crisis as "*a situation manifested at national or international level, which is characterized by the existence of a threat to values, interests or main goals of the implied parties*"¹⁰.

In the NATO Crisis Management Handbook, crisis is seen as a "*national or international situation, where there is a danger of giving priority to values, interests or purposes of an implied party*"¹¹.

² *** DEX - Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, Ediția a III-a, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2009, p. 241.

³ Herman F., *Crisis în Foreign Policy. A Simulation Analysis*, Indianapolis; 1969, p. 201, *apud*, Marinică Cazacu, *Criza. Aspecte teoretice și influența acesteia asupra stării de securitate*, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I", București, Nr. 2/2009, p. 321.

⁴ Brecher I., *Studies in crisis behavior Special Issue The Jerusalem of International Relations*; 1978, p. 38, *apud*, Marinică Cazacu, *Criza. Aspecte teoretice și influența acesteia asupra stării de securitate*, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare "Carol I", București, Nr. 2/2009, p. 321.

⁵ Longlin, B., *Risk and Crisis Communication*, Ed Longlin Multimedia Publishing Ltd, Ottawa, 1996, p. 10, *apud*, Marinică Cazacu, *Criza. Aspecte teoretice și influența acesteia asupra stării de securitate*, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, Nr. 2/2009, p. 321.

⁶ Cătălin Zamfir, Vlăsceanu Lazăr, *Dicționar de sociologie*, Editura Babel, 1998, p. 144.

⁷ Beaufre-*Deterrence and Strategy*, Centre for Defence & International Security Studies, Lancaster, 2001, p. 54.

⁸ Buchan, Alastair, *The End of the Postwar Era: A New Balance of World Power*, Editura Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974, p.87, *apud*, Marinică Cazacu, *Criza. Aspecte teoretice și influența acesteia asupra stării de securitate*, Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, Nr.2/2009, pp. 321-322.

⁹ *Apud*, Vasile Simileanu, *Conflictetele asimetrice*, Editura Top Form, București, 2011, p. 197.

¹⁰ George C. Marshall European Center for Security, *Conflict Prevention and Management of Crisis and Conflict*.

¹¹ *** *Generic Crisis Handbook*, NATO, Bruxelles, august 1999, p. II-2.



Crisis, of whatever nature it may be, represents a moment of failure, the split within an organized system, being the bearer of risks for both national and international security.

Analyzing these definitions we can see that they have common general features, as follows: during the crisis, the evolution speed of the events is higher than the speed of reaction of the bodies involved in its management; crisis may surprise one or more parties implied in the conflict; each crisis has its own evolutionary scale; it is manifested by increasing the dissensions between the parties; any crisis requires external monitoring; institutions involved in crisis management need to plan short-term actions.

At the time of emergence and manifestation of the crisis phenomenon, the policy makers need to define a position either in favor of maintaining the system or of transforming it in order to resettle the balance and return to normality.

In most of the cases, the crisis gives some risks for the national or international security and requires immediate taking of appropriate decisions to resolve it. The crisis event is determined by the situation it generates and the area in which it occurs. For example, the economic crisis is different from the military one, although there are connections, states and moments of symmetry between the two types of crises.

The crisis analysis requires the consideration of all implied actors, included in the collaboration, work or antagonistic relations which are a challenge for the entities involved in the crisis management.

The decision process involves defining a position either in favor of transformation, or of sustaining a given system, in anticipation of a return to steady and normal. The decision must be taken by the actor who presents legitimacy, knows the people's attitude and is credible. The decision maker must eliminate the uncertainty, provide motivation, and maintain the spirit of mobilization and organization to the public, thus preparing it for reactions to formulate an adequate response to the crisis.

The emergency in deciding depends on the time available in evaluation and response. Although sometimes the crisis is predictable, it appears by surprise being caused by reasons that can hardly justify the violence in other conditions.¹²

If the crises and especially the international

¹² Cf. Petrișor Mandu „Managementul crizelor”, Editura Lux Libris, Brașov, 2005, p. 43.

ones are not resolved in time, they can turn into armed conflicts that may affect national, regional or global security, so that their managing becomes a matter of interest not only for the countries directly involved, but also for the international community, which can involve by organizing political and diplomatic mediation missions, and when necessary by conducting crisis response operations under the aegis of the oriented security international organizations (UN, OSCE).

Conflicts can be found at all levels of human coexistence. In fact, not their presence would constitute a threat to peace, but the violences that propagate unjust systems and which, by taking over, push their interests and think that only they have „absolute truth.” These systems can create patterns of thought and behaviour targeted for total conquest (one party's losses represent gains for the other one). In this respect, the strongest, sees the justice sitting only by his side.

In most studies, the conflicts are associated with fights, conflicts of interest, the use of violence or power.

An emotional attitude towards the object of the conflict is reflected in the domestic policy. In international politics it is different. The conflicts and their deepening change the attitudes and behavior of the implied parties, and in case of conflicts with a violent course, the opponent is seen as non-human, even as sub-human, his works are considered barbaric, even if they may not be different from their own.

Currently, conflicts have become one of the most important problems of the world politics, affecting both developed and underdeveloped countries. Starting with the Central America and ending with Southern Asia and Africa, conflicts between states are no longer sovereign crisis; they have become intrinsic lately, between population groups that are defined and distinguished by their ethnic, linguistic or religious identity.

According to Edward Azar, conflicts are defined as the consequences of incompatible goals of one or more parties, for which there is no effective mechanism of coordination, mediation and conciliation¹³. The parties which are usually referred to be states, but also communities within the states, as is the case of more and more conflicts

¹³ Edward Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*, Dartmouth Publishing Company, Hampshire, England, 1990.



in the contemporary world.

Specialists in the field who have dealt with studying the conflicts arising after the Cold War came to the conclusion that *most of them are no longer waged between classical actors of international relations, but have a character of internal conflict. It is estimated that for the first time in the history of the world it is impossible to see a major conflict between the world powers*¹⁴.

Accordingly, the current conflicts do not carry between national armies any longer, but most often between government entities (ethnic, political, religious), which seek different interests within the same state¹⁵.

At the same time it is also one of the reasons why victims of military-civilian balance has changed in recent years, the number of losses among the civilian population representing 90% of the total.

To eliminate conflicts of international life, the in-depth understanding of their causes is required. Like war, conflict has developed an approached from various perspectives and thus ended up having an equally diversified definition.

Some theorists assume that in modern society the conflict can be viewed as constructive and even beneficial to social self-regulation, and others regard it as something negative and with negative consequences for the evolution of modern society.¹⁶

In the theory of international relations, the conflict is perceived and analyzed according to the School of thought with which it is associated the one who investigates this social phenomenon.

For example, *supporters of the behaviour current* say that the nature and role of conflicts can be understood only if human behavior is studied when it acts to procure the necessary means to ensure survival and prestige in the community.¹⁷

According to the *supporters of the psychologist current*, they consider that the human being is embedded in the matrix instinct of aggression. To find an answer to the aggressive behaviour of the human being, they seek to combine the

¹⁴Taylor B. Seybolt, *Major armed conflicts*, in <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb00/ch1.html>, consultat la data de 5 noiembrie 2014.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ James E. Dougherty, Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1981, p. 187.

¹⁷ Robert L. O'Connell, *Of Arms and Men, A History of War, Weapons, and Aggression*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, p. 30.

psychoanalysis research results with those of sociology.

At the middle of the ninth decade of the last century, a group of psychologists and sociologists in Spain tried to explain the aggressive behaviour by interdisciplinary research in urban areas with a case study conducted in the city of Seville.¹⁸

The research result shows that the appearance of conflict in human communities is determined by the type of relations between individuals on the one hand and between human groups on the other hand.¹⁹ Hence the conflict is also defined in different ways.

R. J. Rummel, the renowned specialist in the theory of peace and war, says that *in philosophical sense, the conflict can be defined as a confrontation between a power with other power in trying to destroy everything that appears to manifest against it*.²⁰

According to analysts Kenneth D. Bush and Robert J. Opp, they consider that modern society is by nature confrontational and that violent conflicts are actually those affecting both the structure and the way it functions.²¹

Also, the analysts at Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, define conflicts as interest collisions or different positions in relation to national values (territory, secession, decolonization, autonomy, system of thinking / ideology, national power, the regional prevailing, international power, resources etc).²²

Diminishing the role of principal actor on the international stage of the national state and the emergence of new non-classic players, intensification of process of reducing the territory of communities and political fragmentation after the collapse of multiethnic states, the emergence of new threats to human and collective security

¹⁸ John E. Mack, *The Enemy System*, in Vamik Volkan, et al eds., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships: Volume I: Concepts and Theories*. Lexington, MA, Lexington Books, 1990, p. 58.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

²⁰ R. J. Rummel, *Understanding Conflict and War: Vol. 2: The Conflict Helix*, Chapter 26, in <http://www.mega.nu:8080/ampp/rummel/tch.chap26.htm>, consultat la 5 noiembrie 2014.

²¹ Kenneth D. Bush și Robert J. Opp, *Peace and conflict impact assessment*, in http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9398-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html, consultat la 6 noiembrie 2014.

²² The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) at the Department of Political Science at the University of Heidelberg, consultat la data 6 noiembrie 2014.



(transnational terrorism), led to the emergence of new types of conflicts.²³

Jack's Levy noted that "*the interest for the conventional problems, as the balance of powers, international alliances, arms race, prevent attacks and confrontations between superpowers passed in the second plan, giving way to new problems related to ethno-nationalism, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, resources limiting, preventive diplomacy, humanitarian interventions and conflicts of small states*".²⁴

According to the author, these new concerns of the contemporary world reflect an approach to a much smaller conflict, determined by a more complicated international system, rather than a radical change of the wars causes.

Conclusions

The intensification of globalization in recent decades seemed to bring hope of peace, prosperity, security also at a decent standard of living not only in the Western world.

Globalization and theory of democratic peace, transformed the international relations, removing the traditional policies of asserting power in the national agenda of most actors. The current security is the result of behaviour of state actors, non-state actors or even individuals that seem to cause the traditional theories of security.

The emergence of new crises and conflicts caused the instability to gain ground and to use of the military means more often. Today, the world offers a contradictory picture alongside prosperous areas from the economic point of view, characterized by stability and integration trends in international bodies.

The disappearance of some power centers controlling certain areas (see USSR), created a sense of freedom for the states freed from their influence, a situation that contributed to changes within its borders.

The period after the Cold War made that most

of the conflicts to be deployed within its borders. This type of conflicts, called internal conflicts led to the change in approach to security by international actors who turned their attention to those states within which outbreaks of violence would generate harmful consequences for the countries concerned or for a region.

The experience of international organizations (UN, OSCE, NATO, EU) in crisis management, an important component of conflict prevention dimension, and the development of mechanisms of action, determined their selection as reference points to support the efforts of the international community in order to create a more peaceful world in which crises and conflicts should no longer find their place.

Starting from the globalization phenomenon, which causes expansion of the negative consequences of crises and conflicts, canceling thus the advantages of geographical distance that put the state actors safe from these, the international organizations will need to establish new formulas of cooperation in this field, ensuring effective crisis management activities and conflict prevention.

Comparing with the multitude of approaches in the field of concepts of crisis and conflict, now their analyses and studies do not include those proposed mechanisms to analyze such situations. The fact that crises situations are often triggered by factors that are based on the interests of the involved parties and that can hardly be deciphered make the work of specialists who are directly concerned with analyzing them while putting a great pressure on decision makers who are in the position to take decisions in extreme situations. For these, several hypotheses will be taken into account, because the accurate anticipation of how these actors can act during a crisis is very difficult.

Therefore, a few possible scenarios should be developed in order to reduce the risk of removal from that situation so that the anticipation of the intentions of the international involved actors can be diluted, making it difficult to identify the best solution for the crisis in question.

Finding the most effective way to resolve the situation becomes a problem for those who have a contribution to starting, dealing with and resolving the crisis while a difficult analysis mechanism may cancel this handicap, providing a more realistic picture of the crisis and position of the parties.

²³ Didier Bigo, *L'international sans territoire. Guerre, conflits, transnational et territoire*, (partie 1), in <http://www.conflits.org/document.php?id=234>, consultat la data de 5 noiembrie 2014.

²⁴ Jack's. Levy, *Contending Theories of International Conflict*, in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, with Pamela Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), p. 3.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was made possible through financial support provided through the Sectorial Operational Human Resources Development Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, within the project **POSDRU/159/1.5/S/138822**, entitled „*Transnational Network of Integrated Management of Doctoral and Postdoctoral Smart Research in "Military Science", "Security and Information" and "Public Order and National Security" – Continuous Training Program of Elite Researchers - "SmartSPODAS"*”.

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