



“EXAMINING EUROPEAN UNION (EU) IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION- A REFLECTION”

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Abstract

This paper examines the European Union (EU) in the role of regional organisation against the conflicts that take place around the world. In this context, the paper explores whether it is one among the victims or a contributor to the global disorder. So this paper explored the internal factors that promoted fragmented voices and contributed to complicating the regional security within the EU, and also how the EU's external role turned out to be a challenge for its security.

Index Terms- Conflict, Conflict Resolution, European Union, United Nations, Political Actor

Introduction

Conflict in the present day has crossed the entire traditional political framework and stretched even to non-political and non-state actors, resulting in the form of hybrid conflict. Hybrid conflicts have pushed the actors involved (state and non-state) to delegitimise the international legal framework and traditional conflict resolution strategies. Counter to it all acts of retaliation are strengthened and legitimised, this has destabilised the conventional security order. It also throws a challenge to the stability of the global political order.

Conflicts happening at local, regional or international levels have the potential to influence globally. It is not rational and profound to expect the United Nations (UN) alone to shoulder the responsibility for the conflicts. Circumstances facilitated the regional organisations to step into the shoes of the UN. Among such regional organisations, the European Union (EU) began to resume the role of an actor in addressing conflicts. Although the EU, along with NATO, has succeeded in intervening in the conflicts in the name of peace-building under the shadow of UN Charter Chapter VIII, it has promoted military intervention (*Panhuys, Brinkhorst and Maas, 1968; Rodrigo, 2010*). This has resulted in the EU turning out to be at the threshold of hybrid conflicts at the international level. Even though the SIPRI (2016) documents the recent success of military interventions in conflict zones in establishing peace since 2009, all the conflicts remained unresolved and they are mounting in another form. This is because the actors involved in resolving conflicts have approached the conflict from a traditional conflict cycle model which takes the form of escalation to

de-escalation. The EU has failed to analyse the possibility of a violent conflict turning into a fresh conflict (*Oliver, 2011*). The spill-over effect of such conflict is in the form of the refugee crisis, extremism, and fragmented ethnic conflicts that began to prop up.

To address this situation, this paper strongly argues for the EU's vital role as against the other global actors. EU needs to have a long-term strategy to address conflict. Therefore, this paper strongly emphasises 'conflict resolution' as the main principle and goal to address the root causes of conflict and promote peace at the grassroots level by finding a permanent solution to the conflicts (*Rami, Karim and Martin, 2016*). This paper argues that the EU should be a 'facilitator' in resolving conflict and act from a 'bottom-up' approach rather than a 'state-centric'- 'top-down' approach.

Persistent failure by the states in recent days has brought international relations to panic, as a consequence of loss of authority, disintegration of institutions and some territories turned out of administrative ambit. The argument of the ex-Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros Ghali on the collapse of the state institutions creating more damage to the overall system resulting in a series of chain reactions sounds more apt in the current conflicting scenario. This is been reflected in the current conflicts carried away in some of the Arabian countries as well as in some of its neighbouring states, resulting from the collapse of the political system, which in turn leads to spillover effects which take the form of new and different conflicting scenario in other parts of the region and even beyond the region. This has paved the way for the non-state actors to take dominance over the State, trying to find its inclination towards non-political factors against the credibility of the state. The downward mobility in the political condition across the region made the international community take the role and responsibility of state-building (reconstructing political institutions) and peacebuilding but at some point, this has also added some confusion in the process of establishing global civil society and also in the process of retaining order in the state. This is because at some point external powers hesitate to bear the burden of other countries' internal security as well and they will be unclear about what should be the appropriate intervention to address the issue.

This paper before developing an analytical understanding of the EU as a political actor and its role in conflict resolution tries to develop a conceptual framework of the major terminologies such as conflict and conflict resolution, on which further study is formulated.

Understanding the term 'Conflict':

It is very difficult to formulate a mind in the human community without conflict. Science cannot wipe out the human struggle for power, as conflict is inherent in human society. Epistemologically, the core and significant aspect of the emergence of conflict is the knowledge of a group in a situation, this situation is considered as a conflict. The knowledge developed over a conflict later leads to the incompatibility of goals between groups. In such a conflict scenario if at least two or more goals prevail which are incompatible between them, then such a condition is called conflictual. The goal of a group reflects the desire and the members of the group respond to reach the goal. So for the creation of conflict, goals are required. Incompatibility reflects the differences between the goals of different groups. Incompatibility is subjective because the incompatibility of one party differs from the other and even the incompatibility may change within a group from situation to situation and from one time to another. Conflict reflects values, beliefs, rights or principles, but among all these conflict of interest plays a significant role in forming the other

forms of conflicts. Considering conflict of interest as the factor for conflict, dependency theory to some extent supports the liberal view, that is, trade between developed countries only can bring down conflicts interstate. It is on this model the deepened conflicting scenario in Europe which was prevalent for centuries between the states was taken care of to see that no more Europe should turn into a battleground, so after II World War, the six states of Europe came together under the economic ground, which at present turned out to be as European Union. So the European Union is a success resulting out of the conflict prevention process which was carried out on economic terms.

The need to reflect and analyse the term 'conflict resolution' becomes so relevant in the present day, because what was considered as success in countering conflict in Europe is at the very risk of its existence. Fragmented voices and differences among the member states are popping up in Europe these days, and showing all signs of turning back to conflict. So this paper tries to point out the failure of member states in resolving the conflicts which were prevalent even after the II World War, and emphasises only preventing the conflicts and thereby building supra-structure keeping the conflicting factors unresolved, as the reason for the present outbreak of differences within European Union. So there is a need to acknowledge the difference between dispute and conflict. The dispute is the difference or claims over the resources, which can be settled when a conflict of interest is solved between the parties, whereas, conflict is deep-rooted in values, emotions, culture and ethnicity so the resolution is a bit difficult as compared to a dispute.

What is Conflict Resolution?

Conflict resolution is a political process, where the incompatibility which is apprehended between the goals and interests of parties involved in conflict will be removed and in its place, a new environment is formed which is agreeable to the parties. Here the negotiators of conflict resolution negotiate and finally draw an understanding from mutual consensus without distributing the interest of the opponent and by avoiding contradictions.

Conflict resolution is also a psychological process, as it needs to create an impact on the situation and goals of both groups and take away the opposing factors between the groups and the prevailing political circumstances by the negotiator. When conflict resolution is approached through a social-psychological perspective it considers conflicting aspects and issues which can be settled only when these parties themselves combined arrive at reciprocally agreeable solutions which last longer.

Conflict resolution believes in long-lasting results and not in temporary solutions. So this paper tries to reflect and analyse the European Union as a political actor and its role in resolving conflicts within this conceptual framework.

European Union (EU) as a Political Actor:

By the end of the Cold War, many former Soviet states began to turn democratic and expressed their desire to join the European Union, but as those states were not able to fulfil the criteria to join the Union, they had to wait. From the other end, the European Union which was engaged only on economic terms had to look for political affairs thereafter. The circumstance was very much inevitable that the European Union had to look for eastern enlargement and this made the European Union enter into political activities. The conflict which was deeply rooted in Eastern Europe began to open up in the post-Cold War period and this

had a larger impact on the Western European country's stability, To stop the spill-over effect European Union came out with the Neighbourhood policy. European Union gradually began to consolidate its capacity to address political issues and this was supported by consecutive treaties starting from the Maastricht Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty. Institutions promoting political role was established under the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

European Union as a Conflict Resolution Actor:

Yugoslavia dragged the European Union to the challenging days, which opened up many challenges and loopholes for the European Union. It entered the Yugoslavian conflict to avoid a spill-over effect, but as the European Union lacked its defence unit and was not prepared and experienced enough to address such conflicting situations it found it difficult to resolve the conflict. So the last resort it had to invite NATO and only after NATO's intervention conflict was resolved. Later European Union realised its defect and gradually under the CFSP it established its defence system and began to engage in conflict regions in resolving it. So European Union gradually began to involved in Palestine under (EUPOL COPPS), DR Congo (Operation ARTEMIS), Sudan and Somalia (AMIS and AMISOM), Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM), Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia- (Operation CONCORDIA-FYROM), Georgia- (The rule-of-law mission – EUJUST Themis), Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), Iraq (EUJUST LEX), and so on.

European Union's role in conflict resolution was sharply affected by the economic crisis in Europe since 2008 and this made the European Union withdraw its defence units from the conflict zones and it was not able to promote defence under such circumstances. The overall impact of these operations was much lower, as the European Union focussed and prioritised its approach to small training and capacity-building missions. It was also criticised that the European Union engaged only where there was a high political profile involved and it engaged in most of the African conflicts to experiment with its conflict resolution techniques and not to resolve conflict.

European Union's passive role in political issues has raised many questions. Does the European Union have an understanding of conflict resolution? Does it involve in a conflict resolution process to resolve conflict or for the sake of protecting its interest or with no clear-cut objective?

Considering the recent developments in Europe, especially the security challenges it faced Ukraine in 2014 and after within the region and between several states of Europe, a question is getting reflected and strengthened often and on though it is considered to be too early to answer it, that is, given the prevailing condition it is stated that is Europe slipping back to its old way of power politics as the core of relation between the nations? If this question turns into reality then this opens up several other fundamental questions such as, what would be the credibility of the European Union? Does the European Union turn out to be a failure as a political actor? If it fails to address the conflict effectively within its region, then its role as a global political actor especially in terms of its capacity in resolving the conflicts in other parts of the world would be a major challenging question.

Conclusion

This paper strongly argues that the European Union can only be a credible conflict resolution actor in resolving the conflict in real terms than any actor. Given its active role as a normative actor, the European Union has every potential to emerge as an effective conflict resolution actor but provided it needs to change its approach by engaging as a peace facilitator and engage in negotiation and emphasis on resolution, it needs to adopt bottom-up approach to remain relevant in the present hybrid-conflict stage. The paper argues that the more the European Union emphasises armed retaliation as an approach to conflict resolution like other actors, the more the chance of just the prevention of conflict and not resolution so such conflicts will re-emerge in another form, as it is taking place in recent years in the former Yugoslavian region, Iraq and many more conflicting zones.

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