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Original Research Paper

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFLICTS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT The article highlights the evidence on the root causes of conflicts by focusing on the relationship between conflicts and international trade, the economic causes, as well as on the long-term impact of conflicts on development. It employs a descriptive analysis of the fundamental concepts followed by a literature review on each section. The assessment that trade reduces the possibility of conflicts while contributing to economic growth is highly supported in the broad literature, yet in some cases, the reverse holds true. This research highlights evidence on both situations and suggests various implications.

KEYWORDS : international trade, internal conflicts, economic conflicts, war, development

INTRODUCTION

Attempts to define conflicts face many difficulties, a deficiency that stems from the diversity of situations that lead to conflicts but also from the very nature of the concept and the labels it has received over the time. In a general sense, a conflict can be seen as an open opposition, a struggle between individuals, groups, social classes, parties, communities, states with economic, political, religious, ethnic, racial, divergent or incompatible interests, with disruptive effects on social interaction. Thus, there is a conflict when two or more people or groups express the perception that they have incompatible goals.

The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century were characterized by conflicts within states leading to an emphasis on the role of economic factors in understanding civil conflicts. It is clear, moreover, that many of the international conflicts find their explanation in domestic conflicts - a suitable example can be the current situation in Ukraine.

To understand current events - religious conflicts, wars, political instability - it is enough to take a look at the map, says Robert Kaplan (2012). The author brings to the attention of the general public the theories of well-known geopoliticians, claiming that "the map is the first clue to discern a historical logic about what is to come", just looking at the crises in Europe, Russia, China, the Indian subcontinent, Turkey, Iran and the Middle East.

The literature on the relationship between international trade and conflicts follows three main arguments: that free trade promotes cooperative relations, that trade can reduce tensions between partners and trading blocs and that trade has no significant impact on conflicts. Similarly, the analysis of the economic factors is based on a wide range of arguments. This article is structured on the following main objectives: the analysis of conflicts and its impact on international trade, identifying the economic causes of international conflicts, and the analysis of the relationship between conflicts and development/underdevelopment.

The Relationship Between Conflicts And International Trade

When we think of the relationship between international trade and conflicts, three main arguments tend to stand out: free trade promotes good cooperative relations; trade can reduce tensions between partners and trading blocs; and that trade has no impact on conflicts being considered that these can be explained by much more diverse and complex variables.

The theories of classical economics are notorious and have a multitude of empirical and anecdotal evidence in support of them. Many consider the argument that trade reduces the possibility of conflicts by explaining the comparative advantages that are formed between two countries participating in trade. Moreover, the traded goods do not matter whether they are strategic or not. An example is the India-Pakistan relationship, in which an intensification of trade, especially India's exports to Pakistan, would significantly reduce conflict relations. It is considered that a regional pact on trade liberalization would have a much higher potential in the process of improving long-term cooperation relations between these two countries.

The formation of trading blocs and free trade areas does not seem to impact conflicts. It is considered that while trade intensifies within the formed trading blocks, which can become annoying for formal partners, all goods traded through non-trading block members can increase due to the overall volume of trade. Other research highlights the negative effect of military spending on economic growth (Long and Leeds, 2006; Jackson and Nei, 2015). Interestingly, this negative effect diminishes significantly when a country chooses to export some of its military production.

On the other hand, there are researchers such as Keshk, Reuveny and Pollins (2010) who find these statements to be false. They consider that, in fact, trade is the cause of the conflicts. In support of this claim, it is argued that while trade between two countries could lead them to develop good relations of cooperation, a third actor intervenes, dissatisfied with the small amount of resources available to it.

Another series of researchers consider both positions presented above to be incorrect. There are arguments, at least with regard to American trade, that this factor is in fact a tactic used to influence developing countries, thus providing them with the security they long for (Dieter and Higgott, 2007). It is stated that the United States seeks to conclude trade treaties with Asian states with the ultimate goal of national security, not trade. Therefore, this concern for increasing trade between these states is seen as an instrument of peace, but in fact it would be used to gain influence in this region (Cha, 2009). It is largely admitted that economic geography would have a much greater influence on military spending and subsequently on trade, and that it is this factor that drives nations to engage in conflicts, thus affecting the amount of goods traded. It was also found that military treaties had positive effects on trade (Long and Leeds, 2006; Jackson and Nei, 2015).

Researchers such as McDonald's (2004) go further to demonstrate that freedom of trade is not a guarantee of peace. He indicates how the process of globalization failed to prevent the First World War. There are many different discussions and opinions in academia about the positive, negative or neutral effect of international trade on conflicts. It could be said that rich nations are more prone to conflict than poor ones because they have more reasons to defend their wealth (Jakobsen et al., 2013).

Studies in political science explore the relationship between trade and conflicts mainly by insisting on the consequences resulting from the exercise of trade: conflict or peace, from a liberal and realistic perspective. The liberal perspective argues that the economic benefits generated by trade for both parties involved would reduce the possibility of a conflict due to losses that could result from trade activity. Realists believe that this factor would have a less significant, even insignificant effect on conflicts as long as increased competition and trade asymmetries could trigger conflicts between partners. Ultimately, there is an agreement on the negative impact of conflicts on trade, with liberals arguing that trade conditions will be affected, and realists supporting the argument that states are interested in trade gains that raise the possibility of the opponent to increase its military capacity (Barbieri and Levy, 1999).

In economic studies, the causal relationship between trade and conflicts, using econometric models has been little explored so far. The only economic model for the correlation between trade and conflicts was developed by Polachek in the 1980s. According to this model, conflicts result in the loss of wealth while trade - seen as a source of wealth resulting from comparative advantage - is more difficult to be achieved in situations that involve conflicts, thus preventing partners from engaging in conflicts. Numerous studies have empirically tested Polachek's model and confirmed these results (Polachek and Seiglie, 2007). Martin et al., (2008) assessed the impact of trade on war, the latter being seen as the result of disastrous negotiations between participants in trade. They found that while trade reduces the possibility of conflicts, lower dependence due to openness to multilateral trade relations increases the possibility of conflicts. These results confirm the assumptions made by Gowa and Mansfield (1993) that trade is more likely between bipolar systems characterized by political alliances than in multipolar systems. However, there are studies that do not find a pure positive link between the degree of openness of an economy and conflicts (Bussmann, 2010; Kine, 2012).

All of these studies discussed the issue of how trade influences the relationship between countries participating in this activity, helping to identify the likelihood of a conflict between different countries participating in trade. There are only a few empirical economic studies that analyze the opposite of the situation presented above, how trade influences existing trade relations. The first to study this inverse relationship is Pollins (1989). Morrow et al., (1998) concentrate on the determinants of international trade policies by including variables on internal conflicts, as well as a variable on democracy and political alliances. Due to the problem of collinearity of conflicts and the variable of political alliances, the coefficient proved to be insignificant. Martin et al., (2008) use a gravitational equation to illustrate the negative impact of conflicts on trade. Moreover, they conclude that the negative effects are persistent, in some cases for more than a decade after a conflict ended. Using a gravitational equation, Hegre et al.,(2010) confirm the same results for both world wars and identify a trade reduction of more than 80%, which is much higher than what Martin et al., (2008) discovered.

Blomberg and Hess (2006) are among the first to expand the concept of conflict: the researchers assessed the impact of violence on trade, using a synthetic measure for violence that includes terrorism, internal and external conflicts, interethnic fights and riots. They concluded that violence translates into a 30% increase in trade tariffs. Lamotte (2012) illustrates the impact of economic sanctions and trade conflicts using a case study on Yugoslavia. Through a gravitational equation, the researcher finds a persistent negative effect of sanctions and conflicts on trade, with a much more pronounced impact of sanctions than in other countries that have experienced the game of conflict.

As can be seen, economic studies mainly use gravitational equations to assess the impact of conflicts on trade. Regarding the analysis of the impact, we cannot clearly identify a unit of measure that sums up the consequences of conflicts on trade, especially the most recent ones, one of the difficulties arising from the impossibility of knowing the real status of the relationship between the partners engaged in trade activities. There is significant evidence that there is a weak link between the possibility of a conflict between countries whose trade interests are mutual. However, it remains to be studied how it influences the occurrence of civil conflicts, trade between members of a country, and even more, between regions or even minorities.

The Economic Causes Of Conflicts

Economic analysis of conflicts has its origins in identifying the economic variables that predispose certain societies to conflicts. One of the main variables is poverty, which is the cause of conflicts more in civil conflicts than in international ones (Stewart, 2002). Economic growth is often associated with low levels of conflicts. This is because policies to promote economic growth in developing countries are designed in such a way as to prevent potential conflicts. However, even if a high level of economic growth reduces the possibility of conflicts, it can be seen that globally, the economic growth recorded throughout the twentieth century corresponded rather to an intensification of the number of civil conflicts. Another aspect taken into account is the inequalities found between different groups/regions or even members of a society. However, this argument is not supported by statistical research because it is difficult to quantify and requires a distinction between what constitutes inequality between groups, regions and individuals.

A significant number of papers, both theoretical and empirical, identify many motives why a high level of economic growth pushes people to defend their wealth even through violent acts, leading to large-scale conflicts. Some question the high level of economic growth resulting from an increase in the value of available goods in an economy and the existence of tendencies to defend these goods, most often using violence. A consequence of this is that in some cases prosperity and violence go hand in hand. Evidence to support these claims has its origin in the literature on the history of European development (Bates et al., 2002) as well as in the anthropological literature suggesting that in certain societies, the accumulation of wealth is hampered precisely to avoid conflicts (Colson, 1974). An increase in the amount of goods available in a country can lead to an increase in the motivation to control that state (Keen, 2000). Another approach identifies a positive link between wealth and conflicts and focuses on the process of development. Economic development can produce a radical change in the political structures that can further generate opportunities for conflicts. In this context, Bates (1973) states that policies resulting from ethnic conflicts would in fact lead to a form of modernization.

Other researchers also found a significant negative correlation between conflicts and wealth. This relationship has been studied among others by Collier and Hoffler (2002), Fearon and Laitin (2003), but there are concerns about the use and interpretation of the statistical results obtained by them. One of the reasons is that econometric results usually use aggregate measures such as the total wealth of the population, and not depending on the concentration of the poor in the territory of that country. Another reason is that countries experiencing conflicts do not provide enough data. In this case, the effects of wealth on conflicts tend to be underestimated.

The structure of economic activities within a country is also important. For example, countries whose main economic activity is the sale of raw materials are more prone to conflicts (Collier and Hoffler, 1998; Collier, 2000). Recent research has sought to highlight the link between certain natural resources, such as oil or diamonds, in the dynamics of domestic and international conflicts, but without much success. Different researchers at the World Bank have suggested that natural resources is a driver of internal conflicts because there are certain citizens willing to arm themselves to obtain them, but we believe there are more plausible explanations for this, such as the failure of government institutions to implement responsible policies on the control of raw materials, but also on the control of weapons. Through various case studies, many researchers have focused on differentiating natural resources, in order to make sense of the means that create the link between natural resources and conflicts (Fearon and Laitin, 2002; Humphreys, 2005; Lujala et al., 2005; Ross, 2006; Le Billon, 2008). This research distinguishes between natural resources according to the extent to which production tends to be centralized, the geographical distance between the areas where production is located and the central government, and most importantly, the extent to which trade in certain natural resources is legal or not. In this context, the institutional capacity of the government, which seems to alter this link between resources and conflicts, has been questioned.

Economic policies promoted by a country's leadership can play a key role in assessing the probability of a conflict. State policies that lead to divergences, which later turn into large-scale conflicts, can result in deliberate decisions aimed at weakening state institutions so that members of the leadership get richer easily. There are also cases when well-intentioned economic policies, designed to contribute more effectively to economic growth, can result in conflicts. One argument for the latter is the structural adjustment programs initiated by the IMF and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted in an explosion of global civil conflicts.

Closely related to the subject of this study is a need to look, at least as a whole, at how economies work after conflicts end. In this direction, research has focused on quantifying the economic costs of various conflicts. It was found that some areas where the conflicts took place faced a significant reduction in investment (Besley and Persson, 2011), while in other areas there was an explosive growth being stimulated, especially technological innovations. Various studies have attempted to identify the overall costs and benefits of conflicts employing an economic production model based on information on changes in population, human capital and total productivity. However, there are no studies that have measured the aggregate costs resulting from all these factors combined, just as very little importance has been given to the costs and economic effects registered by local producers. Perhaps the most relevant analysis is that of estimating costs prior to a major conflict, the cost of preparations, to which should be added the current costs of the conflict period and the subsequent costs.

Many researchers focused on economic behavior, analysing various groups involved in violent conflicts, especially rebel groups (Wennmann, 2007; Hegre et al., 2010; Naylor, 2002). Therefore, it has been found that some of the rebels are self-financing by taking control over natural resources, while others are financially supported on the one hand by the migrant population, and on the other hand by foreign governments. Agricultural production is also an important source of funding for rebel groups (Jaafar and Woertz, 2016), perhaps even more important than control over natural resources, which is often overlooked. The financing conditions, but especially the form of financing the rebel groups, depend fundamentally on the relationship between them and the civilian population. When rebels enjoy popularity among civilians, they can often benefit from cash or other donations, otherwise they can resort to blackmail at any time. It is not clear from the current research to what extent the civilian population contributes to the financing of rebel groups and whether or not this relationship prolongs the duration of the conflict. However, it could be implied that this relationship could also be exploited in order to determine the conditions of peace, and implicitly, to stop a conflict.

Mercantilism, imperialism and capitalism have outlined the lines of research on the problems facing economists today. The main economic explanations for international conflicts followed three directions: the failure of the state to promote functional policies, the struggle for power, and the nature of capitalism. Closely related to the economic theories outlined on conflicts, whether inter-state or international, are the efforts of many researchers in fields such as philosophy, psychology, politics and international relations, geopolitics, etc. It could be concluded that these areas have addressed the issue of conflicts to a greater extent than the economy has.

Whether we are talking about militarism, strategic studies or defense, an essential factor seems to have left its mark on the way we relate to the international environment. It is international trade seen either as a tool for mitigating or escalating conflicts. The study of the causes of conflicts often addresses the idea of how governments self-finance themselves, how a country's income is spent and what are the economic policies that are promoted during conflicts. Unsurprisingly, much of government spending goes to defense and related economic activities. These instruments have a much more serious impact on the poor and have been found to persist long after the end of the conflicts (Call and Cousens, 2008). Although there are countless examples in history of how conflicts help governments by facilitating the coagulation of tax institutions, there is no evidence that will justify to apply this hypothesis in societies that currently experience conflicts, most likely, this being due to a relatively weak administrative organization capacity.

No less important is the role of international actors represented by large corporations, NGOs and other international aid institutions and agencies. The presence of international corporations and the role they play on the global conflict scene is becoming more and more noticeable (Bennett, 2002), especially through NGOs. There is evidence, for example, that many conflicts have been extended by oil corporations that have supported governments (Patey, 2007). Measures to induce transparency of international corporations resulted in a number of policies, a formal export ban for certain sectors, diamond certification and the publication of corporate social responsibility reports. Most of these policies are based on the voluntary cooperation of corporations, but so far no organism has been designated to analyse the activities of large international corporations in countries experiencing conflicts.

Similar to large corporations, aid agencies are accused of sometimes making things worse (Lischer, 2003). In an attempt to help people in need, they rather fueled conflicts by supplying goods and materials that eventually fell into the hands of the enemies. Evidence of these effects remains anecdotal as there is no attempt to quantify them.

The economic, military or other capabilities of nations cannot be divided and quantified separately. States are not placed on the top, because they stand out in one chapter, and not in another. Their position depends on how they present themselves in relation to all of the following criteria: population and territory size, endowment with resources, economic capacity, military strength, political stability and political competence, to which we could add human capital and labor productivity.

External governments use economic instruments to produce effects in conflict-affected zones, such as sanctions, trade or military aid. It is considered that sanctions are the main economic weapon although their impact is proving to be rather poor as they often hurt citizens more than political decision-makers. Military aid is considered a rather primitive tool in situations of civil conflict but is more effective in influencing foreign policy. However, there is little evidence to suggest a link between the provision of military aid and the conclusion of a conflict by peace (Bapat, 2011). The arms trade is often the decisive factor in a conflict, which is the reason for the repeated attempts, failing otherwise, to regulate the arms market. Illegality in this sector reaches its peak, requiring a more active involvement of internal and international control bodies in order to combat this phenomenon.

The Relationship Between Conflicts And Development/ Underdevelopment

The question that arises when discussing this topic is whether the level of economic development of a country is the cause or the effect of a conflict. Research on underdeveloped economies has come to different conclusions. Research on some countries in South Asia, the second largest region in the world in terms of the number of conflicts, would conclude that in this region, conflicts are both the cause and the effect of the underdevelopment situation (Ghani and Lakshmi, 2010). Thus, in order to get out of this vicious circle, it would be necessary to redistribute efforts to reduce poverty while reducing the number of conflicts that would allow the much-needed economic growth.

Conflicts can be triggered by low levels of economic growth leading to lower levels of rebellion against the state in countries located in poor regions. Poor economic growth in some regions may be the result of unequal distribution of development gains, or even political marginalization. Another factor triggering conflicts can be natural disasters (Ferris, 2010). Regions in South Asia lagging behind in terms of economic development face both low growth rates and high vulnerability to natural disasters. The consequences of conflicts on the development of this region are all the more serious due to the inability of institutions to cope with these situations, geographical conditions but also poor integration in global markets.

Research over the last twenty years has also focused on analyzing the degree of instability manifested on the African continent. From Somalia in the east to Sudan, Congo, Angola and Sierra Leone in the west, a fairly high number of incidents have occurred, falling into a wide range of categories (Kaplan, 2012). In these countries, conflicts have been perpetuated, on the one hand by political interests and, on the other, by economic interests manifested by various actors. The perpetuation of conflicts was driven by the export of diamonds, oil and other natural resources that this part of Africa has in abundance (Basedau and Wegenast, 2009). However, in the absence of political stability and a favorable regulatory environment, these resources have hampered the region's development process, giving rise to numerous conflicts.

Another series of research focuses on the Middle East region. Using case studies based mainly on narratives, the conflicts in this region were analyzed in order to identify the economic impact on neighboring countries (Sab, 2014; Rother et al., 2016). Research has identified a contraction in economic growth, an explosion in inflation, rising budget deficits, the loss of budget reserves and the weakening of the entire financial system. Unlike other regions of the world, there has been some economic recovery in the Middle East, even though many countries are still crushed by internal conflicts. In this area, things are no longer so simple to understand and an analysis of history can be a starting point for highlighting the many factors involved in the emergence of various conflicts.

In a broad sense, development refers to the social, economic and political processes that seek to improve people's life. The main measures are to to make sure that opportunities for survival and coexistence, basic needs, basic infrastructure and social cohesion are provided. Even though there are often contradictions, most studies see the low level of development and extreme poverty as risk factors for conflicts (Stewart, 2002; Humphreys and Varshney, 2004; Raleigh, 2011). At the same time, the conflict itself can wreak havoc on levels of development. The 2005 UNDP Human Development Report suggested that "violent conflict is one of the safest and fastest routes to the bottom of the Human Development Index table - and one of the strongest indicators for an extended stay there" (UNDP, 2005). As is suggested, low level of development and conflicts are in most cases connected. Political conflicts and wars can hamper development; on the other hand, development could reduce conflicts, although we can only refer to key factors in development outcomes, such as inequalities or social exclusion (Woodrow and Chigas, 2004).

Because development processes produce change within a society, it can be said that they intrinsically retain the potential for conflict. This is why development initiatives in regions affected by conflicts should take into consideration the conflict dynamics. Because of their interconnected nature, often development and peacebuilding activities use similar strategies. Best practices emphasize the importance of working at different levels and the use of participatory and consultative methods.

Education activities promote knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help people either to prevent conflicts, to resolve conflicts peacefully, or to create social conditions conducive to peace (Harber and Sakade, 2009). The values of social justice are essential for education. Social justice is achieved through solidarity and responsibility, through the principles of equality. These ideals can be achieved through peace education programs and peacebuilding initiatives that can translate into long-term behavioral change around the world.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the literature concluded that there are various causes for conflicts of which we have focused on the international trade dynamic, economic factors and the level of development of various countries and regions around the world. Conflicts have long-term consequences which is why specific policy measures need to be adopted in order to diminish the probability of conflicts. Wars have by far the most devastating consequences rooted in different types of inequalities that often result in extreme poverty and economic stagnation. On an international level, trade reduces tensions between partners and promotes cooperation even in areas that do not involve trade. Most causes of conflicts are linked to economic motives, either of groups or individuals. Resource scarcity and the overall control of different natural resources are counted as legitime motives too.

The research summarised above implies some relevant policy conclusions for conflict affected countries. Policies to tackle poverty and social inequalities will reduce the likelihood of conflicts, while education activities will help people resolve conflicts peacefully. Reducing horizontal inequalities is detrimental in order to eliminate a major source of conflicts. No less important is the role of international actors, NGOs and other international aid institutions and agencies that can pave the way to cooperation and inclusiveness. Above all, there is a need for economic policies and a strong government to secure a flourishing economy. To add more, strong leadership and an emphasis on negotiations, including compromises, can make the difference on the international stage.

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