

African Research Review

An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 10(1), Serial No.40, January, 2016: 145-165

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v10i1.12>

Africa and the Principles and Theories of International Relations: Problems of Analyses

Salami, Adebayo T.

Department of Political Science

Olabisi Onabanjo University

Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

E-mail: adebayosalami2015@gmail.com

Phone No: +234-703-8218-588

Abstract

To what extent have the principles and theories of international relations (as formulated) accommodated the specific needs and circumstances of Africa? In other words, how can the circumstances and peculiarities of Africa be made to shape and influence the established principles and theories of international relations as already conceived and propagated? The article critically examines and analyses the principles and theories of international relations and places these principles and theories within Africa conditions and circumstances. Using qualitative data sources, the article presents those problems of epistemology that impinge on the discussion and analysis of these principles and theories with the objective of providing opportunities for creatively reinventing these principles and theories to serve adequately the peculiar needs of Africa as she strives to develop.

Key Words: International Relations. International Relations Principles. International Relations Theories.

Introduction

The subject matter of international relations is one that has continued to attract scholarly attention of which all kinds of treatises have emerged. Contained in these treatises are established positions which are now been referred to as principles. The principles, over the years, not only shape and influence the conduct of actors in international affairs, they have metamorphosed into practices and traditions with which standards are now set and assessments made. Africa is usually at the receiving ends of happenings around the world for a variety of reasons. Apart from been largely colonized for centuries, its leaders ever remain bankrupt in both ideas and morals and the inherited systems of education and values still perpetuate colonial legacies and neo-colonial, dependent policies. It is this condition amidst the principles of international relations that Africa currently conducts herself in international affairs. How should Africa in international relations be examined, studied, interpreted and evaluated in the face of the multiple and competing analytical and theoretical frameworks? What are the problems of epistemology compounding these analyses? To what extent does the knowledge of the problem give recognition to the topic of the essay? How, it can further be asked, do various answers to the questions herein provided help in the development and formulation of ideas with which to create and construct the place and position of Africa in international affairs? More importantly, what aspects and areas of the principles and theories of international relations that help to explain and understand Africa's conduct in international affairs?

Answering the questions above jointly require that Africa in international relations and affairs be approached from the broad and general understanding, study and analysis of the principles and theories of international relations. It requires further the identification and specific mentioning of the principles and theories which can ably help in the accomplishment of the chosen task. Finally, it requires the robust integration of the results of the reflection so as to provide a grand understanding of the knowledge of Africa in international relations and the problems and issues associated with the holistic knowledge.

Foreign policy analyses are generally governed, influenced and shaped by a whole of events of which the attitudinal disposition and idiosyncrasy of analysts stand out conspicuously. Africa in international relations, as a subject matter, is mostly determined by the interests being hold-on to by researchers and scholars. Generally, the topics, problems and issues covered range from specific individual foreign policies of the states of Africa to regional and global concerns within the frameworks of international organizations. All of these are, without argument and debate, important to the study, examination, evaluation and analysis of Africa in global affairs. A teacher of International Relations is hence faced with the fundamental question of how well to approach its teaching to the beginning students and to those who want to major in Foreign Policy of Africa. The background to the problem is further located in the bigger

problem of the knowledge of the principles and theories of international relations in helping to teach the understanding and analysis of Africa in global affairs. The article clearly focuses on the understanding of these general principles and theories, and in turn applies them to Africa. The article goes further to identify, examine and analyze the problems that impinge on this application.

To begin with, what are principles and theories of international relations? To what extent do the principles and theories constitute in themselves an important idea in the intellectual discourse on International Relations? And how can the principles and theories as an important idea be explained in particular to the beginning students of history and diplomacy, political and administrative sciences, strategic studies and international relations, international law and organizations, and general readers alike? Answering the questions for the purpose of the article requires that some other important questions are asked. This has become important because the question first asked presupposes the existence of consensus on what international relations is. What now needs to be explained, interpreted, analyzed and presented, by implication, are its principles and theories. The presupposition is unarguably wrong. This is the first submission. Also embedded in the presupposition is the existence of the same implied consensus on what principles and theories are in international relations. The understanding of what these principles and theories are no doubt requires immediate clarifications of some other ideas that are both interconnected and interrelated to the specific and actual meaning, understanding, interpretation and analysis of these principles and theories. This is the second submission. Consequently, what are these ideas, and to what extent do their existing misunderstandings blur the actual and specific understanding and meaning of the subject of explanation and analysis, “principles and theories of international relations”?

The starting-point, as usual, is to first and foremost clarify the meaning and understanding of International Relations. It is only in this regard that the article can be thoroughly understood and its purpose properly realized. Apart from the article explaining the meaning and understanding of International Relations as a prelude to the understanding of its principles and theories, it is equally important for one to seek an equal understanding of the ideas and concepts in International Relations that in turn help in the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations. The above can however, not be done outside the knowledge of the basic concepts and terminologies in International Relations that equally help in the understanding of the subject matter. Finally, it is absolutely necessary that important clarifications and distinctions are made between ‘approach’ and ‘theories’ in International Relations. What is common in literature is a confusing understanding between the knowledge of “approaches” and that of “theories”. Approaches and theories are consequently used interchangeably. This is the legacy. The confusion and misunderstanding need to be avoided. Approaches and theories of international relations do not amount to the same

thing. And if indeed approaches and theories of international relations do not mean the same thing, the most urgent and important question to then ask is: what is the difference between them? And how can the knowledge of the difference advance the study of International Relations as an intellectual engagement?

The difference between approaches to, and theories of, international relations, it is being argued, can only be made first in the existing semantic analysis and second, in their appropriate applications in the discourse on the subject matter. According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, approach means: "to draw closer to; to make advances to, especially in order to create a desired result; to take preliminary steps toward accomplishment or full knowledge or experience of the subject with an open mind". The Dictionary interprets it further as: "a means of access", etc. It is appropriate to ask: what can be gained from the interpretation and meaning of approach as given by the Dictionary? Approach, from the perspective of the Dictionary, simply means that which can be created for the purpose of aiding the understanding of the subject-matter of International Relations, pure and simple. The submission presupposes that at its creation as a field of knowledge, it was indeed difficult to formulate the necessary scientific niche for the study of International Relations. This is perhaps the origin of the confusion attending the interchangeability. With the addition of a bit of technicality to the semantic interpretation of 'approach', a technicality that is important to make the meaning relevant to the subject-matter of International Relations, approach simply means the mental and creative invention of scholars to be able to "access" the field and delineate its boundary.

From the analysis made above, approach is thus the summation of the whole of the intellectual efforts at ensuring the simplicity of the understanding of International Relations through the specification of the contents and the methods of study. It means further, the articulation of every bit that would in turn ensure the simplification of the processes and procedures of the contents and methods. It specifically involves the amplification of the processes and procedures of rigor associated with the understanding of the subject-matter of International Relations. Approach finally means the development of a framework with which to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of International Relations from perspectives that are both educative and enduring. Theories, on the other hand, are established formulations emanating from the procedures and processes of scientific testing. The above no doubt provides a partial analysis of what theories are. There are as well normative theories which need not be tested rigorously but whose properties and elements are equally capable of performing the roles of description, explanation and prediction. In relation to the field of International Relations, approaches and theories are two distinct explanatory, analytical and predictive models co-existing together yet retaining their identities for the purpose of facilitating the understanding of the contents and methods of studying events across the borders of the world. From the angles of semantic and technical, intellectual

analyses, approaches and theories, working independently, are both normative and empirical constructs with which to probe the actual meaning and understanding of International Relations. This specifically means that they need not be confused even in their interchangeability. Approach remains an organized mental activity formulated to aid the intellectual understanding of International Relations either from the traditional/normative or scientific/empirical perspectives. It is therefore bigger and larger than theory. It is from approach that theory derives its origin though with clear-cut roles which tend to give it its defining properties: description, explanation and prediction. The article is consequently organized into six sections/parts, apart from the introduction. Part one examines and discusses the elements and characteristics of international relations, while part two provides the necessary conceptual analysis that in turn facilitates the basis for the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations. Part three elaborately and exhaustively examines the specific theories of international relations. Part four addresses the futuristic implications and directions of the existing principles and theories of international relations and part five links the contained discussions and analyses of the principles and theories of international relations to Africa. Part six provides the conclusion.

International Relations: Defining Elements and Characteristics

As earlier said, the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations is incomplete unless in relation to the discipline. Therefore, what is International Relations? Every discipline expectedly should have its defining elements, attributes and characteristics. These elements, attributes and characteristics, properly understood, separate disciplines from one another and determine as well the relationships that exist between and among them. The boundaries of disciplines are hence understood and specified within these defining elements, attributes and characteristics. Problems, it must be noted and emphasized, however, exist in trying to define these elements, attributes and characteristics either because of the changing nature of life or because of the orientations and sensibilities of authors and writers, or both. There is, one must emphasize, the age-long debate bordering on whether or not International Relations is a discipline on its own or a sub-discipline of Political Science. Beginning students need be exposed to the debate and the various arguments which determine the nature and character of the debate. Social and management sciences thrive on debates. In other words, debates help to strengthen and shape the sciences of human behavior in particular. Not that debates do not exist in the physical sciences, they do, the point further is that, the debates do not lead to controversies and if at all they do, the procedures of the physical sciences help to ensure that they are easily resolved pending the time that the conclusion becomes irrelevant. The point of distinction between debates in the social and physical sciences is that for the physical sciences there is always a conclusion no matter how tentative. Debates in the social sciences are usually endless though not totally meaningless.

International Relations, according to school of thought, is independent of Political Science. The points adduced are that they differ in contents of study and methods. This explains why, in some universities of the world, there is a separate department of International Relations. Another school of thought holds that it is a complement of, and therefore an integral part of the discipline of Political Science. Their argument is that both disciplines concern themselves with the study of political power: its acquisition, consolidation and retention at both domestic and international levels. The premise further is that international level activities are extensions of domestic activities. The nature and character of the debate, it should be emphasized, no doubt impact on the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations. This is because if we accept to the argument that International Relations is a sub-discipline of Political Science, that equally means that the principles and theories of Political Science are equally the principles and theories of International Relations. The knowledge of the principles and theories of International Relations can only be approached from the knowledge of the principles and theories of Political Science. The argument and submission are both valid and meaningful to a particular extent. And the extent is the fact that the concept of “power” is common to them in terms of methods and contents of study. But because International Relations focuses on activities of nation-states across political and geographical boundaries, its understanding of “power” needs be looked at from this very perspective. The relevance of the debate stands only in how they continue to shape the sophistication of the two disciplines. Whether or not two separate and distinct departments help in the organization and shaping of the contents and methods of study of International Relations should not be the issue. The issue should be how to regularly determine and fine-tune the methods of studying phenomena to ensure accuracy of prediction and develop contents that capture the subject matter of International Relations.

Now back to the question. What is International Relations? The understanding of what international relations is can be approached from the angles of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. In other words, literature and intellectual analyses of international relations either see it as a field of study or as a profession of practice. As a field of study, International Relations is seen as a discipline with clear and focused contents and methods sharing boundaries between and among the fields of humanities using methodologies and methods that are unique to the social sciences in particular. International Relations seeks to unravel, explain, examine, interpret and analyze all the forces, processes and factors that tend to shape and determine how actors behave in the international arena. It utilizes the knowledge of law to predict and determine the outcomes and consequences of the actions and inactions of nation-states as they compete for power and influence in the international system of operations. The angle of ‘theory’ of international relations focuses on the teaching of International Relations by using the scientific modes of instructions. It is an attempt to identify, examine and

classify global issues of concern to both citizens in their individual capacities and nation-states alike, issues that tend to affect global peace and prosperity in such a way and manner that they are first and foremost itemized and taught as phenomena of study. The teaching, it must be emphasized, is done by organizing the issues of interest using appropriate theoretical frameworks. From the angle and viewpoint of 'practice', International Relations is seen as a profession and art where individuals, in their capacities as ambassadors, high commissioners, foreign affairs ministers, negotiators, etc. display diplomatic sophistry in the way and manner in which global issues and problems are resolved. The 'practice' of international relations happens within the frameworks of international and continental/regional organizations, bilateral initiatives and commissions, individual and governmental exchanges etc. The practice therefore involves activities in relation to decision-making and implementation taking place within the structures and institutions of politics and administration where foreign policies are either acted or reacted upon.

How true, it can now be asked, do the perspectives of 'theory' and 'practice' capture what International Relations is? When we talk of relations, we talk of at least nothing less than two things/entities working together. Relations convey the existence of either citizens interacting across boundaries and borders or governments across borders and boundaries. Whether citizens or governments, they can be perfectly described as actors, either governmental actors or non-governmental actors. From these relations are networks of interactions in areas such as science and technology, sports and culture, economy and development, social media, etc, all done with the view to advancing and consolidating interests. As networks, they become activities with the passage of time to the extent that they constitute the agenda shaping and influencing the way in which things are done. From either the perspectives of theory and practice emerge principles and theories with which the activities are conducted or the teaching done. In this regard, we have what might be described as the principles and theories of international relations. These principles and theories are however, better understood, explained and appreciated only when the ideas and concepts that give them meanings to them are first and foremost explained. This justifies the necessity and importance of the next section of the article.

Concepts as bases for the understanding of the Principles and Theories of International Relations

Concepts and ideas are important to international relations and hence in the understanding of its principles and theories. This is because concepts and ideas shape and influence these principles and theories to the extent that they determine their emergence. What are these concepts, and to what extent is the knowledge of the principles and theories dependent on them? Concepts, it must be emphasized, are the building blocks of science. This means specifically that they form the basis for the organization of research the outcome of which leads to the development and

formulation of theories. Even though distinction is made between the theory and practice of international relations, the emergence of a theory provides opportunity for its testing which in turn can be described as the practice of international relations. Concepts such as 'nation-states', 'actors', 'foreign policy', 'foreign policy analysis', 'national interest', 'international law', 'international organizations', 'international system', 'states', 'order', 'reciprocity', 'ambassadors', 'high-commissioners', 'embassy', 'negotiation', etc, help in the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations. They are important in the sense of helping for instance, to understand the principles of national interest and non-interference in the domestic affairs of nation-states by another nation-state. How, it might be asked, do they help in the understanding of these principles and theories? The concept of nation- states for instance is used in international relations to mean the totality of sovereign states existing and forming themselves into global community of states enjoying equal legal status, and free to seek and promote their interest in line with the established principles and practices of intervention law. Actors can be elaborately interpreted to mean the chains of individuals, groups, governments and non- governments interacting with one another with the view to shaping and influencing actions and reactions within the international system comprised of economy, politics and society of which they all remain permanently linked. Foreign policy is the pursuit of goals and objectives of nation -states within the international system using the instruments of diplomacy and sometimes war. It can be in the form of either action or reaction. National interest is here defined as the core values of nation-states domestic policies that are expressed and contained in foreign policies. The above concepts: 'nation-states', 'actors', 'foreign policy' and 'national interest', among others, have together some shared commonalities. First, they all convey the fact that international relations are most likely characterized by competition and struggle. This, without argument, is practically so. Second, they are all related and hence jointly describe the chains of activities in international relations. Third and final, because they convey elements of competition and struggle and still find themselves in a relationship, they jointly help to give meaning and understanding to the idea of "principles and theories of international relations".

International relations, to begin with, do not take place in a vacuum. In fact, we can only talk of the existence of international relations because actors are interacting and networking with one another. The interaction and networking, it must be emphasized, are either based on, or are the outcomes of law, economy, politics, or the pursuit of interests generally speaking. Relating and networking outside the boundaries of nation-states have both positive and negative effects and consequences which are capable of building peace and violence globally. The relationships and networks of interactions can in turn be organized for the purpose of study and analysis after some patterns of uniformities have emerged which now provide bases for predictions. From the patterns emerge the development or reference to practice in the way and manner in

which things are done internationally. The practice in turn provides the opportunity for the development of problem out which hypotheses can as well emerge from. The testing of the hypotheses indeed leads to theory formulation which, with time, develops into another problem of study. It thus creates a cyclical process of knowledge advancement. Knowledge advancement interestingly happens within established principles and practices of social research, the organization and conduct of which are based on the use of concepts. Concepts therefore provide the bases for the understanding of the principles and theories of international relations in many other ways apart from assisting in the organization of research. Concepts, especially those that do not lend themselves to ambiguities, help in the understanding of scenarios in international relations that do not demand or require any in-depth study for them to be properly understood. Why actors generally behave the way they do need not require any scientific study for us to be able to find out the rationale and motive. It is all about interests. The concept of national interest hence forms the basis for states relating with one another from which might develop the formulation of principles of inter-state relations. The principles, in turn, usually after long period of time, become accepted practices in inter-state relations. And the practices further form themselves into standards with which important assessments are made. Principles and theories of international relations are no doubt products of long period of assessments before they are so described. They have been tested and found worthy in the understanding and promotion of global peace and prosperity. Principles and theories are therefore the hub with which happenings in the international system can be situated. Happenings, events and other areas of attention in the international system are better captured when presented as concepts. We can consequently use the concept of sovereignty for instance to describe and justify the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of nation-states. Equality, as a concept, can as well be used to describe the respect for international law by nation-states.

Principles and Theories of International Relations

What do we mean by “principles and theories of international relations”? Because of the purpose and intention of the article, explanations, discussions and analyses of the two are here separated. Confusions, debates, controversies and disagreements, it is here noted, do not trail the understandings, explanations, discussions and analyses of the principles of international relations in literature. Confusions, debates and controversies surprisingly trail the application of these principles either in literature or open commentaries. The ensuing explanations, discussions and analyses of the principles are usually divided into two and consequently have developed into two emerging patterns. These patterns are here labeled as categories A and B. In category A are two principles. These are the principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs of nation-states and the promotion and advancement of interests of nation-states. In category B are the principles shaping

and influencing the foreign policy goals and objectives of nation-states. They are usually many but revolving around the advancement and promotion of development and democracy and the protection of the rights of the weak and poor citizens and states. How can the principles of the two categories be explained, discussed and analyzed? In other words, what do we mean by these principles? While non-interference principle is straight-forward and direct in meaning, that of national interest, though equally straight-forward and direct, however, still allows for competing interpretations because of the sensibilities of authors. Non-interference principle is the resolve of nation-states not to involve themselves directly in the affairs of other nation-states until invited to do so. Prior to the formation of both the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization, interference in the affairs of nation-states by others was responsible for violence and lack of peace globally. This explains why these organizations have enshrined in their Articles the principle of non-interference.

The developments in the discipline of International Relations coupled with the expanding scope of interests of nation-states both explain the need for nation-states to have their foreign policies anchored in particular principles which remain cherished by nation-states. Nation-states design, construct and apply their foreign policies in line with clearly and cleverly stated goals and objectives which remain both competing and conflicting in the international system notwithstanding the fact that most nation-states are signatory to International Treaties and pledge respect and loyalty to the observance of International Articles and Agreements. These goals and objectives, irrespective of how they are interpreted, shape and influence the foreign policies of nation-states. They are, it must be particularly emphasized, designed, constructed and applied in line with particular principles which are rooted in the philosophies and histories of mankind. Philosophies and histories of mankind relate generally to global processes of civilization which cut across nation-states. In short, the principles of international relations can therefore be defined and described as standards, traditions and practices in which foreign policy objectives and goals are both designed and implemented. Principles, apart from constituting themselves into standards of practices, have turned to ends and purposes of international relations. The ends and purposes argument, as they relate to philosophy of knowledge, define, justify and question the *raison d'être* which provide the bases for inter-state relations within the emergent international system of global civilization. National-interest, for instance, remains the defining and describing characteristics of nation-states actions and reactions in the international system. It has been variedly defined and described as the benefits accruing to nation-states for engaging in particular activities in the international system. It has however, been variedly criticized as the expressions of foreign policy elites only. This criticism, with due emphasis, can be said to apply only to the developing nation-states where levels of literacy and civic education are still low. Not only are the national-interests of these nations, it is being alleged, dictated to them by powerful forces within the

international system, the national interests, so-called, are indeed the interests of foreign actors and forces in the international system. Whether seen as the preoccupation of the foreign policy elites or not, national-interest remains the defining parameter for gauging the actions and reactions of actors, in particular nation-states, in the international system. It is the sole determinant with which nation-states conduct their foreign policies. What nation-states do, how they behave, who they support, what they sanction, etc, are all conditioned by their national interests. Theoretical and empirical connections can therefore be established between domestic factors and forces and foreign policy objectives and goals. This explains why sometimes foreign policies are described and defined as the extension of domestic policies. Because interests in the pursuit and determination of goals and objectives at the international level are conditioned by the internal peculiarities of nation-states, they are so described and characterized as national interests. Collectively, they are regarded to as the principles shaping and influencing international relations.

Now to the theories of international relations. What are “theories of international relations”? As earlier stated, literature is replete with the interchangeable use of approaches in place of theories and theories in place of approaches. The history of the confusion being created by the interchangeability can be traced to the 1960s following the influence and impact of the “behavioural revolution” which invaded International Relations from Political Science. In the attempt to modernize the study of Political Science, emphasis became shifted to the study of “political behaviour” using the attributes of science within the context of social science. All the eight elements of behaviouralism as formulated and propounded by Easton (1967) became the yardsticks for the measurement and refinement of the efforts at making the study of political behaviour scientific. Since the concept of power is common and dominant to the two disciplines, its study (along the “methodical debate” which is what the behavioural revolution was all about) became influenced by the crises of “relevance” and “interpretation” of the understanding of “science” in the first place. Political Science was made to focus its study of power on the domestic and International Relations focused its study of power on the whole of international system. The dividing line between the two disciplines became the study of the domestic and the study of the international with the concept of power as the basis for the organization of research. But how well to study disciplines, no doubt, hinges on the problems and issues of method and focus. The problem and issue of focus can be said to have been resolved. However, that of method still remains partly resolved. It is partly resolved in the sense that notwithstanding the impacts of both the “behavioural revolution” and the “post-behavioural revolution”, the study of Political Science and International Relations is still affected and shaped by the question of the most appropriate methods and means. Elaborately and expansively interpreted methods and means relate to the problems and

issues of approaches and theories. This is the beginning of the interchangeability and the ensuing confusion in literature.

Again, do “approaches” and “theories” mean one and the same thing? Answering the question requires probing into the meaning of the two concepts. Consequently, what are “approaches” and “theories”? Most appropriately, how can the answer(s) here provided serve in clarifying the confusion between approaches to, and theories of, international relations? Of all the meanings that the Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary gave and quoted above, none, perhaps with the exception of “a means to access...” best captures its use for the purpose of the ongoing discussion. Approaches, in International Relations parlance, should therefore be taken to suggest the “means to access” its contents and subject matter. Researchers and scholars of disciplines should no doubt be concerned with the contents of the area of their interests and how well to seek the understanding of the contents. “How well” can in turn be interpreted to mean how to gain access or approach the study of these contents with and without the use of theories. Technically speaking therefore, theories of, and approaches to, international relations are two separate things even though linked by what they both aim at studying. The foundation of scholarship on the subject matter confuses the two. Approaches and theories should obviously not be used to mean the same thing. This can be further explained from the roles they both play in the advancement of knowledge which remains the central principal purpose of disciplines. A shared similarity exists between the two which must be pointed out first. “Means to access” which is how Webster’s Dictionary explains the meaning of “approach”, can be elaborately extended and interpreted to mean as well the use of a theory. This specifically means that for the purpose of advancement of knowledge, a theory can serve as a “means to access” the unknown from the known in the study of International Relations. This perhaps helps to explain the starting-point in the use of theories interchangeably with approaches without necessarily meaning that the interchangeability is correct.

“Means to access” ordinarily cannot describe, explain and predict, but theory can. However, when a theory is used as a “means to access” it can perform the functions and roles of description, explanation and prediction. This means that some of the referred to theories of international relations are, technically speaking, not theories but approaches to the study of international relations. What cannot help us to describe, explain and predict social phenomena as they occur in the international arena should not be regarded to as theories. Beginners need to know this and teachers of International Relations should as well help in its teaching. It must be further admitted that using theories as “means to access” continues to create problems to the teaching of International Relations. The solution lies in the fact that we must always point-out or state when using theories as “means to access” the understanding of the contents of international relations. Yet the solution is limited by the existing legacy. Overcoming the legacy only enables the careful selection of “theories of international relations” in

the article. The selected theories which either exist as theories independently speaking, or as “means to access” when used within the umbrella of “approaches” include: (1) idealism, (2) realism, (3) feminism, (4) systems, (5) structural functionalism, (6) political economy, (7) balance-of-power, etc.

1. **IDEALISM:** As a theory of international relations, idealism has as its central postulation, the reasons and explanations for the conflicts between and among nation- states especially in the circumstances of World War 1. To the idealists (i.e. proponents of idealism), the absence of legal elements in international relations such as the existence of international organizations, international law and treaties, etc, help to explain the wars and crises between and among nations in particular World War 1. Their position especially as advanced by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States led to the formation of the League of Nations. The outbreak of World War II however, faulted the arguments and positions of the idealists and render scientifically ineffective the explanations and reasons behind the conflicts and crises between and among nations. The strength of the theory still lies in the fact that the central position of the idealists remains a lasting legacy in both the theory and practice of international relations. International relations is incomplete without the knowledge and perspectives of international law, organizations, etc.
2. **REALISM:** The theory of realism came to being following the failure of the League of Nations to be able to prevent yet another war, World War II. It represents an attempt to describe, explain and predict events in the international system as the events happened rather than as one might like them to be. It is obviously a reaction to the theory of idealism. Though the theory dates back to Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau, its popularity and refinement came with the contributions of Carr (1946), Morgenthau (1978) and Herz (1951). The central postulation of the theory is that the understanding of the operations of the international system depends on “power politics” between and among nations. The realists perceive of the central problem in international relations as insecurity particularly military insecurity, and power as “the prime motivation or driving force of all political life (Buzan, 1996). In the attempt to present lucidly the kernel point of the theory of realism especially in relation to the assessment of its chief proponent, Morgenthau, Akinbobola (1999: 337) submits:

Morgenthau, just like others in his realist persuasion, argues that a disadvantaged state in terms of the distribution of power will tend to keep and sustain the power equilibrium so as to make change impossible. Those that are not happy with the state of power distribution will seek to augment their situation by seeking for change

in the status quo so as to force change to maximize their power base. Morgenthau believes that states get involved in power struggles to either preserve the status quo, to achieve an expansionist interest or to gain honor or prestige. He insists that power has to be defined as interest.

Realism continued importance and relevance in international relations literature can be justified. Nation-states activities in the international system can be explained in terms of their capabilities militarily, technologically, economically and in scientific advances and attainments, among others. Looking at international relations from the angle of realism has the problem of helping to justify the seeming anarchy and disorder in which the international system finds itself. Lastly, it is doubtful if the games being played by nation-states are all about power. There are genuine concerns for peace and development globally outside the framework of “power politics”.

3. **FEMINISM:** The central focus of the theory of feminism and its importance in the discipline of International Relations still remain contentious as ever. While feminism, as a concept, captures the whole of gender relations, but when used as a theory for the purpose of studying, understanding and analyzing international relations, one finds it difficult to really specify its focus. According to one of the proponents of the theory in contemporary times Sylvester (1996:254): “There are many texts encrusted in this simple dialogue having to do with violence about to happen and the breakdown of security; having to do as well, with sex, cross species relations, gender relations, cross dressing boundary practices, and aesthetics. Perfect for an era of feminist international relations”. The submission attests to the fact that the theory is still at its offspring especially given the emotions in which it is both expressed and received by scholars. Notwithstanding, it can still be said that the theory focuses on gender relations in the international system. Specifically, it seeks to bring out important activities of the womenfolk and how these activities help in the understanding of international relations in theory and practice. Activities in the international system which the theory focuses on include: violence against women, women resistance to militarized international system, cold war aftermaths in relation to women, women activities and roles in peace camps etc. Within the causative framework of masculinity and femininity, the theory explores the motives behind gender imbalances and the consequences of such in the institutions and events shaping the contemporary nature and character of international relations. Recognized that the study, interpretation, analysis and participation in the varied events in which international relations as a discipline is expressed need be approached with sense of sex equality, the orientation and efforts of feminist scholars are rather

expressed in emotions and sensibilities that negate the essence and purpose of sex equality. The strength of the theory however, lies in the fact that it helps to promote the participation of the womenfolk in every area of the international system in which they are affected. A major limitation of the theory is that it seeks to personalize the study and interpretation of events in the international system.

4. **SYSTEMS:** With intellectual foundation in Political Science, systems theory application and use in International Relations owes its refinement and popularity to Easton(1965) and (1980) Even though Easton duly acknowledged the contributions which the disciplines of biology and sociology made to the development of the theory, his formulation of the idea of “systemic maintenance” and the use of concepts such as “stresses and strains”, “overloading”, “critical range”, etc. further help in the understanding of the international system away from the “equilibrium analysis” of Talcot Parson’s. Within the broad expression of “inputs” which must be processed as “outputs” through the process- machineries of governmental structures and institutions existing across the globe and which regularly and permanently respond to the “environment,” the systems theory or the “input-output model” which indeed is what the postulations of Easton are in the technical sense of interpretation and analysis, seeks to explain the various forces and factors (from both real and analytical senses) that help us to account for the crises and conflicts that exist globally. With his ideas of “stresses and strains”, “critical range”, “systematic persistence and maintenance,” the systems theory of the Easton’s brands points direction to how governments and international structures and institutions can still function and provide stability in the face of conflicts and crises threatening and afflicting the world. One of the advantages of this theory is that it sees the relations between and among actors in the international arena in the form of a ‘system’ that can be identified for study and analysis. The problem with it is simply that the network of relations and subsystems in the international arena are too many to be identified especially given the rise of social media networks.
5. **STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM:** The application of the theory of structural- functionalism to the nuances and games (best described as interests) which nation- states play in the international system and the attendant crises and conflicts can be better understood and comprehended when the internationally system as conceptual and analytical framework is first and foremost considered as system of relationship with structures performing designated functions. The crises and conflicts in the international system and the various successes recorded ;in the whole of the efforts at building global peace, prosperity and sustainable development which are ever

described and referred to as events and processes in international relations parlance, from the view-point and theoretical analysis of structural-functionalism, can be best described, explained and predicted when structures performing designated functions within the international system are first identified. The theoretical assumption in specific, clear term further is that either the non-existent of the structures or the in ability to identify the structures that perform what specific functions or the failure of the identified structures to perform the designated functions help to describe, explain and predict conflicts and crises in international relations. Just like the systems theory owes its refinement and popularity to Easton (1965), the theory of structural-functionalism owes it refinement and popularity to Almond (1960) and much later in conjunction with Powell (1966). Both Almond and Powell (1966) sought to know the structures within a political system for instance and the various functions that they perform. When applied to the discipline of International Relations, what this means is that international relations is a system of relations with structures performing specific and important functions. In that wise, international organizations can be likened to structures performing specific and important functions that help to promote global peace and prosperity. Useful as the theory is, it however, excludes the many structures in the international systems that have not developed to the statuses of international organizations such as the big United Nations, Commonwealth, African Union, among others. Civil society groups are examples of such structures. The strength of the theory lies in its simplicity of applications.

6. **POLITICAL ECONOMY:** To begin with, all the theories mentioned above concern themselves with the description, explanation and prediction of the nature and character of the events, processes, conflicts, etc, that characterize the international system. The theory of political economy however, approaches the totality of the study, examination, description and analysis of these events, processes, conflicts, etc. from a very unique perspective. It holds a unique perspective in the sense of having an holistic, integrated view of the many wandered factors and forces which it in turn makes use of in creating and conceiving the idea of the law of motion shaping and influencing the thinking and mentality of the international society. The theory of political economy is used to specifically explain and analyze the various crises that have continued to engulf the international system. Rooted in Marxism-Leninism philosophy of understanding and interpretation of social history, the proponents of the theory singled out capitalism and its evil of exploitation as the explanatory factor. The internationalization of capital through the lubricating forces of imperialism as multinational companies and enterprises

venture to capture global markets of both finished products and raw materials, to the proponents of theory, explain the crises and violence in international system. When global recession happens and prices fall in the stock markets, creating distortions and disarticulation, political economy theorists reason are due to the machinations of international capitalists supported by imperialists and local bourgeoisie. Notwithstanding the demise of puritanical ideological postures, the fact still remains that the theory is still of relevance in explaining contemporary crises in international relations.

7. **BALANCE OF POWER:** Even though this theory cannot be said to be a refinement of realism, it is however, related to it. A relationship exists between it and realism on the ground of its focus on “power politics”. The balance of power theory owes its popularity as well to Morgenthau (1978), a dominant force and personality amongst the realist’s school of thought. Following Bull (1977), the balance of power theory has undergone refinement without necessarily altering its central argument and position. Bull (1977) has added to the lexicon of the theory of balance of power what he calls “distinction between the general balance and local balances” on the one hand, and “that between the dominant balance and subordinate balances” on the other (Ibid:103). The central concern of the theory is how to maintain political equilibrium between and among states in such a way and manner that no single state or combination of states assume(s) permanent ascendancy over others. The explanation and analysis of the balance-of-power theory revolve around three existing patterns. The first pattern is the existence of multiplicity of states and the disagreements, differences and antagonisms they hold or harbor among themselves. These disagreements, differences and antagonisms are in themselves sufficient as a power balance. The second pattern of the balance-of-power theory exists when two states or countries A and B agree to allow country or state C to be part of the power relations and competitions in such a way and manner that country or state C is both powerful and independent and such is recognized by states A and B as a means of maintaining political power equilibrium. This means that state C is not of equal strength with states A and B but would act independently to ensure that balance-of-power exists between states A and B. The final and third pattern is to allow for states with approximately equal strength. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the balance-of-power theory? First, it is undoubtedly useful in the explanations and analyses of the dynamism and regular changes that characterize international politics and relations. Second, not only is the balance-of-power useful in the explanations and analyses of these dynamisms, the explanations and analyses are as well useful for the purpose of predictions. Notwithstanding, the theory has its weaknesses. First, it is difficult to

determine and estimate the potential source of power of countries. Second and final, it is equally difficult to determine the technical extent of implementation of how power is used to balance power.

Principles and Theories of International Relations: Futuristic Implications and Directions

Academic and intellectual study of International Relations no doubt rest on the extent to which ambiguities are reduced and minimized especially in relation to the formulation and use concepts. Concepts serve not only as the building blocks of science, they provide insights necessary for interpreting and making distinctions between what is and what ought to be. Distinctions between principles and theories can only be sustained to the extent to which the formulated standards and criteria are accepted as civilizations continue to clash and as counter- demands are made with respect to the understanding, use and application of science to situations. All of these contain in themselves implications in the future for the study of International Relations. One might boldly ask: What are the futuristic implications of the principles and theories of international relations? In other words, to what extent will the understanding of the principles and theories of International Relations continue to influence how the discipline is studied?

The principles of international relations are important in the shaping of its research agenda. Accepted that there are disagreements and differences with respect to how well to define and view national interest, national interest, as a concept, still remains instrumental to the organization of research in years to come. It forms the basis for which the theory and practice of international relations are to be regularly reviewed and redefined. Why nation-states and actors behave the way they do and the consequent reactions which attend the behavior will no doubt remain as expressions of national interests. Therefore, the concrete determination of the consequences and effects of the actions and reactions scientifically shall continue to engage the attention of scholars and researchers in the field.

The debate surrounding the appropriate determination of what distinguishes theories from approaches and the extent to what theories are as well elements of, and integrated into; the intellectual framework and understanding of approach shall continue to shape and influence how explanations and analyses are made in international relations. With the disintegration of the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and the embrace of capitalism by Communist China and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Romania, among others, and other developments encapsulated in globalization daily defining and shaping events in the international system, theories of international relations, irrespective of the levels of development in which they are, are most likely to be devoid of ideological contents and be more scientific than philosophical.

Africa and the Principles and Theories of International Relations

With the explanations and analyses accomplished in the proceeding sections, what are problems of analyses arising from linking the study of the principles and theories of international relations to Africa? In other words, how is the knowledge and understanding of Africa in global affairs better served by the use of these broad principles and theories? The two questions attempt to determine the extent to which the principles and theories adequately capture the stark realities of Africa in global affairs and relations. It is important that one focuses on the stark realities of Africa given the imperialism that informed the formulation of the principles and theories. Ake (1979) has once accused social science has being imperial especially when the science is placed within the world-view that hopes to advance a particular mentality and using it to assess others without considerations for historical and social differences.

It is true that contemporary statecraft in Africa is a product of colonialism. With colonialism, there emerged the patterning of governmental structures and conduct in international relations alongside the practices of Europe and North-America, the colonial masters and imperialists. Operated within either the presidential or parliamentary systems, African governments, as actors in international relations, inherited and took to the practice of appointing ambassadors and high commissioners as their representatives in other governments and political systems of the world. Within the system of inter-state relations supported by international law, African governments with other governments of the world relate and act together within the inherited colonial and imperial practices and traditions of contemporary international relations. The above is not however, to deny the existence of international relations in pre-colonial Africa. The various kingdoms, chiefdoms, empires and emirates of different sizes and sophistication then had among themselves treaties and agreements governing political, economic and trade relations. They had exchanged among themselves emissaries on important matters.

What are the problems of analyses arising from using the framework of the existing principles and theories of international relations? The problems are legion and the most important ones are: (i) how to determine whether or not the so-called interests are indeed the national interests of the individual African state; (ii) how to determine the equivalences of concepts as contained in the theories of international relations.

- i. **The Idea of National Interests:-** There are no permanent enemies but permanent interests in international relations so goes the maxim. This is indeed an established principle of contemporary international relations. It is still doubtful who indeed are being served by reference to interests in Africa. The former colonialists or the comprador imperialists and local lackeys? Illiteracy and poverty remain as solid impediments to the participation in foreign policy issues and debates in Africa. The foreign

policy decision making process is therefore dominated by only the elites who remain permanently influence by what the western media present to them.

- ii. **Equivalences of Concepts:-** Theories are no doubt organized around concepts without which they cannot serve their purposes in intellectual discourse. Applying these theories further requires that there are equivalences of them in political systems generally. This is however, not totally correct. And where are equivalences, it is not too certain that they perform equal and similar functions. The specific theories mentioned earlier have their contained concepts many of which are found from the realities in Africa. The “gate-keepers”, as formulated by Easton (1980), cannot be said for instance, to clearly exist in Africa. Of course there are resemblances such as the various professional and labour groups and unions, the facts still remains that they are being controlled and manipulated by governments underground to the extent that they are compromised and cannot therefore be said to be discharging their roles creditably and as envisaged by Easton (1980).

Conclusion

The article engages itself with not only the elaborate discussions and analyses of the principles and theories of international relations but as well the intellectual contexts within which the principles and theories can be properly understood. The confusion and crisis surrounding the interchangeability in the use of approaches and theories and the consequences associated with this have equally been reflected upon. The principles and theories of international relations shall continue to be the intellectual means with which to explain and analyze the dynamic events in which the entire world system can be described. Theories are likely to be less ideological and philosophical in the face of improvements in scientific methodologies. The principles and theories of international relations shall, notwithstanding the peculiarities and circumstances of Africa, remain both as the determinants and trends of analyses in international relations discourse. As Africa improves and develops, hopefully, her peoples are expected to have a better understanding of these principles and theories and to creatively reinvent and apply them to serve her needs.

References

- Ake, C. (1979). *Social science as imperialism: The theory of political development*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Akinbobola, A. (1999). International relations in Anifowose, R. & Enemuo, F. (Eds). *Elements of politics*, pp.328-342
- Almond, A. G. (1960). A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics. In Almond A., Coleman, G. James, S. (Eds.). *The politics of developing Areas*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Almond, A. Gabriel, P., Bingham G. (1996). *Comparative politics: A development approach*. Buston and Toronto: Little Brown and Co.
- Bull, H. (1997). *The anarchical society: A study of order in world politics*. London Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Buzan, B. (1996). The timeless wisdom of realism. In Smith, S., Booth, K. & Zalewski, M. (Eds.). *International theory: Positivism and beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.47-65.
- Carr, E. H. (1946). *The twenty years crisis 1919-1939: An introduction to the study of international relations*. London: Macmillan.
- Easton D. (1967). The Current Meaning of 'Behaviouralism'. In Charlesworth, J. C. (ed.), *Contemporary political analysis*. New York: Free press pp.11-31
- Easton, D. (1965). *A framework for political analysis*. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Easton, D. (1980). Systems analysis- political science today. *Political Science Review* xix, No.1 pp.1-25
- Herz, J. (1951). *Political realism and political idealism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Morgenthau, H. (1978). *Politics among nations* (5th edn..) New York: Knopf.
- Sylvester, C. (1996). The contributions of feminist theory to international relative. In Smith Steve et.al, op.cit, pp. 254-278