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Book Review: Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History

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“Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: an Introduction to Theory and History” (8th edition) – Chinese edition – was published by Pearson Education Asia Ltd and China Renmin University Press in 2012. Its original text was published in 2007 by the Pearson Education, Inc. The book was co-authored by Joseph Nye Jr. and David A. Welch. Joseph Nye Jr. is an American political scientist and a leading scholar of International Relations Theories particularly Liberalism; former Dean of John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology and served on various board as well. The foundation of Neo-liberalism is very much associated with him and the likes of Ikenberry and Robert Keohane with whom many related tenets of liberalism have been developed. J. Nye is famously known for his development of the concept of “soft power”¹ or “smart power” which became very popular with the administration of Clinton and Obama. David A. Welch is Professor of Political Science and a Centre for International Governance Innovation Chair of Global Security at the Balsillie School of International Affairs at the University of Waterloo, Canada. His research interest lies in International relations and International security. He has some award winning publications in his name.

The book is divided into 9 chapters ranging from modern history – chapters 1 to 5; current period – chapters 6 to 8; and the final chapter – 9 – gives some expositions into our future. The book provides an insight into our current world politics and international relations which is characterized by an era of complex interdependence and interconnectivity. Nye and Welch examine global conflicts and cooperation among global actors through lessons from history and subjected them to theoretical explanations and understanding that enables us to comprehend and analyze current global phenomena and effectively predict our future international relations outcomes.² As they stated, conflict is bound to occur in all aspects of life at “anytime that two or more people have different preferences”. Therefore mutual “cooperation is required to decide how to allocate and safeguard the use of private and club goods as well” to cater for the varied preferences. Apart from one winning and the other losing, conflict could be solved through compromise or mediating for the change of preference of either or both sides.

The authors discussion of Global conflicts started from the Peloponnesian War which the famous Thucydides trap tells us the cause of it as “what made the war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta”; and the logic of global cooperation started with the consequences of the Thirty Years War – Westphalian peace which the authors said “was actually a set of treaties, of which the two most important, the treaties of Osnabruck and Munster (1648), ended the Thirsty Years War” and although it “did not eliminate war from Europe, but it did moderate its severity and intensity”, replaced feudalism and strengthened the concept to statehood. As liberals, Nye and Welch evaluation and discussion of concepts and theories were influenced by their liberal perspectives. For example, their discussion of collective security favored a preference of a sort over balance of power.

Nye and Welch started from a description of international politics as “an anarchic system of states” which had succeeded the imperial and feudal systems. It was “composed of states that are relatively cohesive but with no higher government above them” thus international politics was defined as “politics in the absence of a common sovereign, politics among entities with no ruler above them...self help...nature of state”. Although, all international relations theories – realism, liberalism, constructivism, among others – begin with the concept of anarchy, they differ on some fundamental concepts.

The authors averred that Hobbes, Thucydides, Nixon, Kissinger and the rest of realists focus on continuity, the state as the only actor, clear distinction between domestic and international politics, only military force because “just as stormy weather does not mean perpetual rain, so a state of war does not mean constant war. Just as Londoners carry umbrellas on sunny April days, the prospect of war in an archaic system makes states keep armies even in times of peace”. While Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Ikenberry, Keohane and the rest of the liberalists’ focus on global society and non-state actors such as NGOs, multinational corporations, intergovernmental organizations, in addition to states as the actors, institutions and international contact and connectivity, war prevention through trade, globalization, common global threats such as diseases, terrorism, climate change, blur difference between domestic and international politics, nations want to just survive. They claim “the sales of companies such as Shell, Toyota, and Walmart are larger than the GDP of countries such as Hungary, Ecuador, and Senegal. ...in terms of economy, IBM is more important to Belgium than is Burundi, a former Belgian colony”. Constructivists also focus on the role of norms, culture, national interests. “They believe that leaders and other people are motivated not only by material interests but also by their sense of identity and morality and what their society or culture considers appropriate”³ thus anarchy is what the leaders, people and states make out of it.

However, should an examination of global conflict and cooperation and the study of international politics or relations start from anarchy? The view of anarchy as the central condition of international politics is quite problematic and needs reconstruction. On a superficial basis, the first meaning that anarchy carries is disorder or chaos or a lack of order.⁴ In this way, it resembles Hobbes’s state of nature of mutual suspicion and hostility, war of all against all, no law, no justice, no notion of right and wrong, with only force and fraud as the virtues and thus the “life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.⁵ Fortunately this is not what IR means by anarchy because there is a considerable amount of international order which Bull defines as “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of a society of states, or international society”.⁶ This connotes the existence of a body of rules, procedures and institutions that guide behavior in the international arena being states or non-states actors and of course the huge role of modern international organizations, NGOs, multinational cooperation and even international private individuals set standards and frameworks that constrain behavior and set orderliness and thus cannot be referred to as anarchy. In fact, the authors themselves recognized that “while the ordering principle of the international system is anarchic, the system itself is not chaotic. Most global interactions are orderly, in the sense that they follow regular, largely predictable patterns”.

Moreover, anarchy no matter how it’s defined evokes an idea of a lack of something. If international politics is anarchic, then what does it lack? Referring to international politics as anarchic and defining it as an absence of a central or common government or an overriding authority still evokes a sense of Hobbes state of nature prior to the creation of the Leviathan. What type of government? Waltz discussed government in terms of its legitimacy of the use of force as he said “an effective government, however, has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and legitimate means here that the public agents are organized to prevent and to counter the private use of force”.⁷ The international system does not lack legitimacy in the use of force. This use of force is provided by the global leadership or the powers that be. Today there are many regional and global military operations operated and commanded by the United States through the various arms and agencies and institutions and states of its liberal international economic order and sometimes supported by other global powers such as Britain, France, Russia or China. Ruggie observed that internationalization of political authority must be of a fusion of power with legitimate social purpose. Power which international politics has never lacked he argued predicts the form of the international order and not its content and says “this is not to say that authority is absent from such an order. It is to say that authority relations are constructed in such a way as to give maximum scope to market forces rather than to constrain them...” The content becomes the fusion of both power and legitimate social purpose – two variables which the international system lacks not.⁸ This means there is a sort of a shadow government that regulates global activities.

Government could also mean the existence of institutions and laws and rules and procedures to maintain order. Absence of common government therefore means absence of all these: no legislature to make the laws and procedures; no executive to enforce them; and no judiciary to adjudicate them. The global leadership or hegemony or whatever we may call it, provides institutional frameworks that ensure all of these. In most cases, there are many domestic laws and procedures that evolved from the international system or organizations such as jus cogens, human rights, law of the sea, etc. States adopt, ratify and sign them and transform them from their international nature into their domestic laws. In this case, there is no absence of a common government. Nye and Welch correctly

confirmed that “the marks of an orderly social system (such as the international system of sovereign states) are that institutions and practices exist for handling disputes; that most conflicts are resolved peacefully; that there exists an authoritative body of rules (laws, regulations, guidelines, acceptable practices, etc.); that there is good level of compliance with the rules; and that there are methods of dealing with noncompliance”. Such a system cannot be said to lack a government.

Their introductory chapter ends with a consideration of ethics and morality arguments in international politics as they argue a good moral argument tries to combine three pathways as “moral arguments can be judged in three ways: by the motives or intentions involved, by the means used, and by their consequences or net effects”. They stated that ethic’s role in international politics is smaller because of weak international consensus on values, states are abstractions, complexity of causation in international politics. Theoretically, they stated that realists either tend to adopt skeptic (Might makes right, Morals have no place, no choices exists) or state moralist (good fences make good neighbors, state sovereignty trumps all, society of states) approach in their description of international politics while liberalists favor either state moralist or cosmopolitan (no borders only humanity, redistribution, society of individuals) approach. Contrary to realists, Nye and Welch – liberalists – are with the view that “ethics do play a role in international relations, although not quite the same role as in domestic politics”. Lauren, Craig and George referred to ethics and morality as “self-imposed restraints” that need “particular careful consideration” but however I agree with their opinion that despite affirmation to certain moral and religious underpinnings, states external relations and foreign policy development requires amoral approach thus when expediency and morality conflict, the former should prevail.⁹

A discussion of global conflict and cooperation undoubtedly is a discussion of states albeit the huge intertwining role of modern non-state actors and global agencies cannot be relegated to the docket. The authors gave an exposition on the general characteristics of state – nation, legitimate government, effective recognition, system of laws or regulations or procedures and “has two crucial characteristics: territoriality and sovereignty”. The tools and techniques they used to analyze international conflict and cooperation encompassed the “level of analysis” – individual level, state level and system level – hitherto termed as the images of international relations – first image, second image and third image – by Kenneth Waltz in his “Man, the State, and War”.¹⁰

The individual level “focus on the features of specific individuals people (their personalities, their life histories, and so forth) ...look for explanations in people’s common characteristics” especially leaders. Considerations are given to cognitive and motivational psychology, prospect and psychobiography. The second image focuses on the state itself as a unit. It takes into consideration the outlook of the state being democracy, authoritarian, Marxist, capitalist, communist, etc. in simple terms “states will act similarly in the international system if they are similar domestically”. The system level analysis discusses international conflict and cooperation from the structural and process perspective. This involves the interplay of states in the international system and the distribution of power as well as the patterns and types of interaction among the units –states – and the outcome of this interplay systemic level says affect conflicts and cooperation. It is a kind of an outside-in effect. The tools and techniques of analyses also extended to the various dominant IR theories of realism – only state actor, self help, state interest is security and survival, power – liberalism – state and non-state actors, cooperation, institutions, economic interdependence – constructivism – identities, norms, culture, values, agent and structure interact and reciprocate – Marxism, since they are the frameworks through which we shall comprehend and analyze current global phenomena and effectively predict our future international relations outcomes.

A preamble discussion of anarchic state system and the tools and techniques for analysis sets the tone for a complete discussion of global conflict and cooperation. The authors transport us through modern history “from Westphalia to World War I”, in other words from cooperation to conflict or war – where the concepts of state sovereignty, national interest, non-intervention, development of international law and institutions of diplomatic exchanges, and balance of power all commenced and detailed; through “the failure of collective security and World War II”, in order words, the breakdown of another cooperation to conflict and war where the first attempt of a international community or society – League of Nation – and individuals such as Hitler were all discussed; ending at “The Cold War” and the current era of the war on terror and other non-traditional conflict areas. A particular focus was the imbalance of cooperation and balance of power that had existed in world – Europe – prior to all these wars. For an imbalance of cooperation, the authors averred “powerful European countries ventured abroad and directly or indirectly ruled virtually the entire world”. It must be noted that the medium of transportation used throughout this journey was Kenneth Waltz’s evaluation concepts of wars among men, states and the

international system – individual, unit and system level analysis – coupled with dominant IR theories – realism, liberalism, constructivism.

Cooperation started with the Westphalian peace which was in itself a product of the Thirty Years War of 1618 – 1648 which religious and a “number autonomous political units had fought to a draw”. The authors wrote “The Peace of Westphalia was actually a set of treaties, of which the two most important, the treaties of Osnabruck and Munster (1648), ended the Thirty Years War”. States were granted protocol treatment where kings were referred to as majesty and ambassadors as “Excellency” and each participant – state – was given its entering and exiting door. The peace of Westphalia effectively entrenched the principle whereby each ruler would have the right to determine the religion of his or her own state; affirmed the State itself; national independence; sovereign statehood; non intervention; non interference, institution of diplomatic exchanges, development of international law. “The peace of Westphalia did not eliminate war from Europe, but It did moderate its severity and intensity”. The treaties were not a full endorsement of sovereignty as we know it today, but they contained rights to enforce them. Comparing the Thirsty Years War to the French Revolution that ensued half a century later in terms of IR theoretical perspective, they wrote “we refer to changes like the French Revolution as exogenous to a structural theory because they cannot be explained inside the theory. This is an example of how a realist structural theory can be supplemented by constructivist work”.

The Westphalian system is highly acclaimed by many scholars due to the pace it set in terms of State affirmation; national independence; sovereign statehood; non intervention; non interference, development of international law. However, only few people talk about the double standard nature of the system. European states instituted sovereign statehood and national independence among themselves but right from there, they set out to find colonies throughout the world, referred to those places as virgin lands and denied the occupants of these lands any rightful claim to international law and sovereign statehood. In Africa for instance, it went as far as the inhuman and gruesome and barbaric Transatlantic Slave Trade that most European States used to enrich themselves and established the economic structures of their states. They depleted human, material and natural resources of the so called virgin lands; distorted traditional governance; instituted crime; delayed the growth of socio-economic and political institutions which most of these virgin lands until today have not been able to recover from. It is a mark of a good book that Nye and Welch were not oblivious to this fact as they stated “powerful European countries ventured abroad and directly or indirectly ruled virtually the entire world. Countries committed to respecting the autonomy of other polities in their home neighborhood, in other words, very much ignored it elsewhere”.

The operational framework of the Westphalian system was the Balance of Power and Concert of Europe in which “European great powers sought to maintain order in part by holding periodic congresses in which they deliberated jointly and attempted to strike agreements that would both preserve the balance of power and stem the revolutionary tide of liberal nationalism”; “meeting frequently to deal with disputes and to maintain an equilibrium. They accepted certain interventions to keep governments in power domestically when their replacements might lead to a destabilizing reorientation of policy”. Balance of power received detailed attention by the authors with three different but related distinctions – balances as distribution of power (maintenance of the status quo, equal distribution of power capabilities); balance of power as policy (keeping equilibrium); and balance of power as multipolar systems (a number of countries that follow a set of the game that are generally understood). States were prevented from achieving power preponderance as coalitions always evoked on behalf of equilibrium. As Neoliberals, the authors were very critical with the balance of power concept. They opined that states there are many exceptions such as states preference to bandwagon; threat of a failure to effect the balance due to the overwhelming power of the great power (they could later be the target of aggression by the dominant power); balance of threat effect; economic interdependence; ideological congruence; benign nature of the dominant power; Hegemonic Stability Theory (imbalance produce peace). They stated the balance of power was to preserve independence and not to induce peace. Another liberal, Woodrow Wilson for example, “disliked the balance of power because he believed it caused wars”.

On the basis of the levels of analysis (images of IR) and the dominant IR theories, the role of balance of power on the World War I is divided. All theories agree that war was not inevitable but it was a blame of balance of power. Realists suggest it was due to the breakdown of balance of power while liberals claim it was due to “the increasing rigidity in the alliance systems in Europe...the tightening of alliances accentuated the security dilemma that defensive realists emphasize in their analyses”. Balance of power did not harbor all the blame as unit and individual levels analysis also showed that internal crisis of Austro-Hungary and Ottoman Empire and

domestic politics of Germany; and personalities such as Kaiser Wilhelm, Franz Joseph, Franz Ferdinand, Czar Nicholas, etc respectively shouldered some responsibilities.

Although many scholars give lots of credit to the balance of power concept or theory I have some reservations about it. If balance of power is right in its acclamations of equilibrium and maintaining status quo, why haven't states in Asia or at least East Asia balanced the growing power preponderance of China? States that were antagonistic to China in recent past such as Philippine has even tilted economically towards China while it (Philippine) still maintains its posture towards the United States for its political or military security. Is it because the States cannot effectively effect a complete balance or it's the endurance of liberal economic interdependence? Balance of power invariably argues in terms of military power and in cases where it talks about economic power, it does so with its externality on politico-military power. Therefore in Third World countries, where economic and military power is not strong, balance of power cannot explain the alliance system of such areas. However, such areas engage in alliances in what could be called omnibalancing by Stephen David (identifying two threats of different magnitude and appeasing the secondary threat to deal with the more primary one).¹¹ Concentrating on power parity also ignores balances of threats¹² and interests¹³.

Since balance of power did not and could not preserve peace and only sought to preserve states independence (at least according to Nye and Welch), an alternative in collective security was sought through the League of Nation after the World War I which in one way or the other metamorphosed into the United Nations Organization with some modifications after the World War II. Like Woodrow Wilson, Nye and Welch favor "security had to be collective responsibility. If all nonaggressive states banded together ...preponderance of power would be on the side of the Good...in which nonaggressive countries would form a coalition against aggression. Peace would be indivisible".

Collective security was supposed to work hand-in-hand with the League of Nation. They meant making aggression and offensive war illegal; rejection the idea of using force to challenge the status quo; changes in the status quo must come via negotiation; submission of disputes to arbitration; trust each and deal with state that threaten or start aggression; aggression towards one means aggression towards all; states must not act on their narrow self-interest; open alliances make peace; shared interest in economic and security concerns; focuses on peace of the system not individual independence; focuses on aggressive policies of state not power capabilities; Coalitions are not formed in advance to wait for an aggressor. Not predetermined but once aggression occurred, all states must trust each other against the aggressor; It is to be global or universal. No free riders or neutrals. In effect, collective security involved sovereignty and international law. They wrote "by signing on to the League of Nations, states would voluntarily give up some sovereignty to the international community in return for the guarantees of collective security and international law". Like balance of power, collective security could not prevent a World War II which each of the three levels of analysis has an explanation.

The authors also discussed The Cold War which was a power struggle between two blocks – the United States and the Soviet Union which ended at the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Two foreign policy choices were utilized – deterrence and containment. As the authors explained, deterrence was an effort used to persuade each other to refrain from taking certain actions, such as an armed attack, that was viewed as highly dangerous to the interest of the side that hoped to undertake the action by making him fear the products of his behavior. Each side developed the will to counter aggression with aggression either on themselves or their allies. It was a matter of building resolve so that aggression could be stopped even before it started. Meanwhile, they explained that "containment referred to a specific American policy of containing Soviet communism so as to promote a liberal economic and political order". Some tenets of collective security operate under the United Nations until date.

As aforementioned, the authors' neoliberal postures averred some sort of bias for collective security and thus were not interested in the flaws of the concept. A major flaw in the concept is concerned with the issue of trust. States are managed by human beings and not angels. Thus how can people or states trust each other? How can states be certain of their counterparts' true intentions to the extent of trusting them? Moreover, it does not provide explanation for how states would overcome their fears and trust each other. States are to defend but not to attack. In this case, states could use defense as a smokescreen to attack when in the actual fact, there is no security threat. Also states must move towards only the victim of an attack. Therefore it must be able to distinguish who the aggressor or the victim is and this task could be very difficult. There is also the issue of collective action problem where states may pass the buck in terms

of burden distribution and get others to pay the heavy price of confronting the aggressor. Moreover, negotiations and arbitrations may lead to a difficulty in guaranteeing rapid response.¹⁴ It must be noted that these drawbacks are evident in the post Cold War security arrangement under the United Nations Organization.

The end of the Cold War did not bring absolute peace albeit interstate wars very much depreciated; while intra and extra state wars increased in the form of ethnic, religious, regional or clan. The authors argued that international law and organization are the two vehicles used in managing conflict and promoting cooperation after the Cold War. The post Cold War international cooperation based on Wilsonian liberal ideas needed “constructivist processes of socialization and norm-promotion to overcome realist obstacles to liberal ideals...and the world is a more orderly place today precisely because of progress in international governance and the deepening and thickening of norms of peaceful conflict resolution”. In fact, the international governance the authors alluded to is the framework of the United Nations and its various agencies and organs as well as the huge NGOs.

Post Cold War cooperation and collective security in the UN is more of preventive diplomacy, intervention and peacekeeping since state-state aggression is considerably reduced or arguably non-existence. The authors wrote “of the 116 conflicts that occurred between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the twenty-first century, 89 were purely intrastate (civil wars) and another 20 were intrastate with foreign intervention” where “more than 100,000 people have died in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Indonesia, Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda...more than a million have died in Cambodia, China... The idea of “norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect...civilians from the effects of war and human rights abuses” endorses intervention. As the authors confirmed, intervention and R2P have their attendant problems as they are “both descriptive and normative” and powerful states use them as a pretext to achieve their foreign policy interest of regime change abroad. As I always say, in my candid opinion, although there are critical issues with the concepts of intervention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P), we are better with them than without them because we cannot sit down unconcern for rogue leaders to perpetrate mayhem and atrocities on civil society or mankind.

A book on conflict and cooperation could not end without a discussion of the effects of modern trend of technology and globalization “defined as worldwide networks of interdependence” and its associated security threat to our current world. Due to current international activities and concerns such as environment, trading, study abroad, tourism, marriages, climate, military, migration, sports, foreign investment, among others, “globalization has made national boundaries more porous” however doesn’t “mean the creation of universal community”. The last three chapters talked at length on this topic with prediction into the future. The authors highlighted on the impact of the social media – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, WeChat – and the internet in general that is propelling globalization in a “thicker and quicker” manner that is even affecting governance in a form a spread of protest and democratization. The authors also averred that, although military and economic and social interdependence has accentuated globalization, interdependence is sometimes used as a weapon by the powerful states to sanction less powerful states. Moreover, interdependence could be abused with asymmetrical relationship. The roles of transnational actors such as multinational cooperation, international organizations, NGOs, international pressure groups, among others together with technology are the driving forces of cooperation and globalization in our current world of unlikely interstate wars, minimum intrastate wars and increased cooperation.

In conclusion, Nye and Welch maintained that although there are major security concerns that will live with us into the foreseeable future, such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; terrorism; cyber war; pandemic; and some domestic or civil violence or conflict; due to the thicker and quicker spread of information and technology and increasing global interdependence, we cannot “return to the unmodified Westphalian system” and that there would be an “evolution of a new world order beyond the Westphalian system...” which ... “is a project of decades and centuries”; a kind of a hybrid world order guarded by liberal tenets. They wrote “when people are better off, the animosities may be less tense. Part of the answer may be democracy, for when people have a chance to resolve disputes openly, passions can be better managed...and part of the answer lies in the regional institutions that pulled Western Europeans together in a larger framework in which the more extreme nationalist views were discouraged”. The problem is that the world has evolved and it’s no more about Europe. There are many places of the world today that has more to offer in world governance and order than Europe, for example China. Apart from power and capabilities, there are so many other variables that cannot be ignored by virtue of their complexities in current world politics, for example Africa.

Generally, it must be said that despite all the flaws, the book is a good read for its simplicity of issues and the ability to break down complex theories into understandable pieces. It is a number one book for undergraduate students' and all students taking introductory course in International Relations.

¹ Nye S J. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: PublicAffairs; 2004.

² Nye S J, Welch A D. *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation: An Introduction to Theory and History*, Beijing: Pearson Education Asia Ltd and Renmin University Press; 2012.

³ *ibid*

⁴ Milner H. *The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique*, *Review of International Studies*, 1991; 17(1): 67-85.

⁵ Hobbes T. *Leviathan*, Tuck R (Ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1991

⁶ Bull H. *The Anarchical Society*, New York: Palgrave; 1977, p. 8.

⁷ Waltz K. *Theory of International Politics*, Philippines: Addison-Wesley; 1979, p. 104.

⁸ Ruggie G J. *International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order*, *International Organization*, 1982; 36(2): 379-415.

⁹ Lauren G P, Craig A G, George L A. *Force and Statecraft*, New York: Oxford University Press; 2007.

¹⁰ Waltz K. *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press; 2001.

¹¹ David R S. *Explaining Third World Alignment*, *World Politics*, 1991; 43 (2): 233-256.

¹² Walt M S. *Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia*, *International Organization*, 1988; 42(2):275-316.

¹³ Schweller L R. *Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In*, *International Security*, 1994; 19 (1): 72-107.

¹⁴ Mearsheimer J. *The False Promise of International Institutions*, *International Security*, 1994 – 1995; 19(3): 5 – 49.