
The Main Differences Between Liberals And Realists In Terms Of Conflict

To fully understand why conflict occurs, it is imperative to understand the different perspectives when it comes to conflict. There are factors including economic incentives, gender and ethnicity. There are also people who have different solutions to conflict in regard to these factors. Conflict has become more advanced since the time of the Rwandan genocide. Technology has made it able for people to target specific individuals or places. This has led to the rise of what theorists call suicide terrorism and “new wars”. Conflict has come a long way from rebel regimes to demonstrative terrorism in which technology plays a major role in causing as much damage as possible to attract people around the world. Therefore, this paper will discuss the main differences between liberals and realists and what they argue about conflict and that liberals offer a more in-depth understanding as to why contemporary conflict occurs and its prospective solutions.

To begin, realists differ primarily because they have a very different perspective as to why conflict occurs, and its remedies as compared to liberals. Barry Posen a notable realist, and author of the security dilemma, states that when people obtain measures to maintain their security, they tend to make others feel insecure (Posen, p. 28). He continues to say that ethnicity is the basis of why wars are fought (Posen, p. 28). As to the prospective solutions, Posen states that people should try to understand the others around them respective to their security (Posen, p. 43). Posen also says that people engaging in conflict should be encouraged to talk about their situations and histories and he says this will discourage some kinds of aggressive behaviour (Posen, p. 44). In complete contrast to Posen is John Mueller. Mueller states that there is little evidence to show that people dislike each other because of their differences (Mueller, p. 62). He explains this by using the example of conflict in both Rwanda and Yugoslavia (Mueller, p. 62). He also states that the solution to conflict would be to gather a large amount of police or disciplined soldiers (Mueller, p. 63). He says this might be necessary to maintain order. He explains that most of the time people do not have much trouble getting along (Mueller, p. 63). He mentions using police or military action as a last resort to protect people from themselves and others (Mueller, p. 63). Somewhat similar to Mueller is Paul Collier. Collier is considered a liberal who instead bases his argument not on ethnicity but on greed and economic incentives. He has a very comprehensive argument where he lists what he refers to as the narrative of grievances (Collier, p. 95).

He lists these grievances as ethnic or religious hatred, economic inequality, lack of political rights and government incompetence (Collier, p. 95-96). He sees the solution as education and democratization. He explains that a society that is fully democratic is safer than other societies (Collier, p. 98). He does not state that solutions should include violence or military action. Finally, in contrast to Collier is Jeffery Herbst who is a very skeptical realist. He states that conflict begins because of anarchy and lack of a good government (Herbst, p. 275). He states that to stop the conflict the state must use force (Herbst, p. 283). He continues to explain that one of the causes of war is state weakness which makes states so weak that they cannot maintain their military forces which gives rebels an opportunity to use violence against the state (Herbst, p. 283). Finally, in relation to a new perspective and contemporary warfare is Robert Pape who talks primarily about terrorism and the ways it has evolved from simple deadly acts to

really deadly demonstrative acts of violence which is primarily because of advancing technology. He proposes solutions as lowering confidence in terrorists ability to carry out such attacks (Pape, p. 344). Another solution he proposes is that states should recognize that military action or compromises are not likely to do much good and should invest more in border defense and security (Pape, p. 344). Lastly, is Mark Juergensmeyer who discusses terrorism in terms of religion and philosophical ideologies. He makes frequent references to Gandhi and his philosophies on violence. He states that the solution is to see the conflict from both sides of the issue (Juergensmeyer, p. 33). He is against violence as was Gandhi but, he also states that violence according to Gandhi is sometimes the only necessary solution, but he argues for heroic violence which protects people from one another (Juergensmeyer, p. 34).

In relation to these points of view, liberals present a more thorough understanding of conflict and its respective solutions. They take the time to analyze the conflict and why it occurs. Realists seem very deadlocked that conflict occurs because of anarchy and lack of a governance and they ignore other possible factors. Liberals have much more prospective and insightful solutions than realists do. As previously mentioned, liberals mention solutions like education, democratization, understanding and border defence. As Juergensmeyer stated while quoting Gandhi, violence creates more violence (Juergensmeyer, p. 39). Now there is no guarantee this is a definitive solution, but violence does not seem like a good solution as it leads to destruction and terror. As Mary Kaldor states, belligerents of new wars do not want to end fighting because they profit from it (Kaldor, p. 3). This fact implies that using violence as a solution is a lost cause because the violence will never end, so adding more violence seems pointless. The main example for this would be the Syrian and Iraq conflict. The conflict has been going on for quite some time. The only notable solution was the military stepping in Iraq, which they liberated from ISIS in 2017 (Wright, 2018).

However, this proved to be a disappointment because ISIS had reclaimed the countries once again where their followers are now very active (Wright, 2008). Liberals only state that violence is necessary as a last resort before peaceful methods do not prove useful. Even Mark Juergensmeyer stated that according to Gandhi, violence is sometimes the necessary solution as long as it does not incur more violence and is a quick stop to terror which is also heroic in nature. (Juergensmeyer, p. 34). There is no real guarantee that violence and warfare are a permanent solution as realists suggest and it seems like a destructive solution. Lastly, there is a concept particularly new in nature involving advancing technology and new warfare. Mary Kaldor is the main proponent of these new ideas. She states that new wars have a different set of characteristics than old wars. Her ideology is somewhat confusing because as previously mentioned conflict should come to an end with the solutions proposed previously. However, she states that new wars necessarily do not come to an end (Kaldor, p. 3). She states that as long as the war persists, states gain economic and political incentives (Kaldor, p. 3).

Ultimately, she says there is no gain for ending the conflict. She also introduces new ways of financing wars and the respective criminal activities. She continues to state that new wars can be financed through even more violent activities like smuggling, kidnapping and looting (Kaldor, p. 3). With these new factors in mind, why would the conflict ever end? These activities would cause mass chaos and lead to violence and state disintegration. These characteristics of new wars make the old solutions for conflict somewhat outdated. New wars might never end because of the mutual political and economic incentives for both sides of a conflict. Since no one might want to win the war and finish fighting, using force might have no point. Although realists have a definite solution to common conflict, new wars will not likely be able to be

concluded through force.

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