

ANALYZING THE BOUNDARY PARADIGM BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

---

<sup>1</sup>Ishaku Hamidu and <sup>2</sup>Musa Abubakar

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Political Science

Yobe State University, Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria.

E-mail: [shaksham002@yahoo.com](mailto:shaksham002@yahoo.com), [abukherleel@gmail.com](mailto:abukherleel@gmail.com)

***Abstract:** Political Science as a discipline has multiple branches because it is related with many other disciplines within and even outside the social sciences. There are several concepts in Political Science that are often confused by the students of politics and other interested scholars. Concepts like state, democracy, power, authority, International Relations and International Politics etc are among the most confused. The lack of understanding their meanings, features, limitations and applications affects their proper usage in local and international politics by students and interested scholars of politics. This paper attempts to clarify the meaning of International Relations and International Politics, their natures, contents and similarities for proper comprehension by students and to assist them to choose and pursue their career without confusion. Such clarification will de-functionalize the already existing functionality in the two concept paradigm.*

**Keyword:** Political Science, Discipline, Boundary, International Relations and International Politics

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Ishaku Hamidu and Musa Abubakar (2014), Analyzing the Boundary Paradigm between International Relations and International Politics in Political Science. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 6, Number1, Pp. 106 – 114.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Political Science as a discipline is made up of various sub-disciplines. It has and uses several words and concepts that an outsider or novice of the discipline may not be acquainted with. Some of such words or concepts seem to pose a great challenge to fresh and potential students of politics. They often get confuse, use the concept loosely or out of context, which therefore affects the nature and quality of the concept in the discipline. For example, ask a new/fresh student of Political Science, what is a state or to mention any two states he/she knows. The answer one will get will force one to laugh. The students may not be completely wrong. The answer was based on his/her knowledge. That is why he/she is in the College/University, to know more and get a broader understanding of words and concepts, their unique features, applications and limit within and outside the discipline at both local and global levels.

International Relations and International Politics are two concepts that look similar, they can and are often used interchangeably but they are different. One is broader, the other is narrower; one is prominently academics, the other is passively academics. Never the

less, all of them are regular or common concepts in Political Science discipline. This paper shall attempt to distinguish these concepts in Political Science discipline. However, it will be better first to briefly examine the discipline itself

## HISTORY AND NATURE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The course has various definitions. For the purpose of this study, the definitions by Agarwal and Warby will be appropriate.

Political Science according to Agarwal (2007:7) is the whole range of knowledge regarding the state and embraces the theory of the state. It includes both theoretical politics and practical or applied politics

Warby (1970:8) on his part defined Political Science as identifiable field of study with often disputed scope and content whose practitioners are found mostly in institutions of higher education where they teach and conduct reaches on or in government

A cursory x-ray of the above definitions implied that Political Science is a course of study, which touches theoretical and practical knowledge of state and politics. The scope of the discipline is wide, the scholars of Political Science conduct researches on government and such scholars are people found in higher institutions. The focuses of the discipline include but not limited to the state, economics, political institution, elections, security relations among states and government etc.

Political Science as an academic discipline within the social sciences dates back to around 1850s in some Universities in the United States of America (USA) and it later spread to all Europe, Asia and African Universities (Anifowose & Enemuoh 1999:5). To the late 1950s, it was taught passively as part of Law, History, Philosophy, Economics etc. As nation/states began to be confronted with numerous problems of internal oppression, and subjugations, conflicts and other security challenges and the existence of varieties of forms of government in various countries and continents, Political Science became a distinct academic discipline in most Universities (Ejembi, 1983). In Nigeria for instance, there are over fifty Universities awarding Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degree in Political Science.

As an academic field of study, prospective students or holders of B.Sc Political Science can further their studies beyond the B.Sc to obtained both M.Sc and PhD in Political Science, specializing in either Political Theory; Comparative Politics; Political Economy; International Relations etc. Today, there are many Doctor of Philosophy and Professors of Political Science in the sub-discipline described above, from Nigerian and other foreign Universities.

Political Science as an academic field of study is related to other disciplines like Economics, Geography, Psychology, Ethics, Sociology, Anthropology, History, Law, Statistics, among others (Okoli, 2003:3). This explained why Political Science is versatile in it approaches to

issues and postulation. Political Science and Political Scientists (people that studied Political Science, that is, expert of politics) use the various scientific and non-scientific method in their political inquiries, analysis and doing research (Penning, Keman & Kleimnijenhuis, 1999:7). Corroborating, Enemno, (1999:16&17) mentioned some scientific method of political inquiry as: The Analytical; Quantitative and Qualitative; Inductive and Deductive; and Scientific Methods. Political Scientist uses these methods to comprehensively secure relevant information and critically analysed issue at stake and then come out with tangible results.

Besides, Political Science and Political Scientists use some approaches to holistically understand state behaviours, group behaviours and dynamics, action and counter reactions of state and non state actors in every issues/challenges. Enemno (1999) aptly summarise the approaches to the study of Political Science as: The Philosophical, Sociological, Psychological, Geographical, Political Economy, Institutional, Behavioural, System, Structural-Functional, Group and Decision Making approaches. With these scientific methods and approaches, Political Science and Political Scientists can identify, diagnose and analysed any local or foreign issues confronting sovereign nation-states and come forward with ample tangible solution for global development (Ejembi, 1983:21).

### **Conceptual Clarification**

International Relation is a branch or field of study in Political Science. It is an academic field that Political scientists may decide to specialized or major in and even excel to become a professor. There are many local and foreign Political scientists that are intellectuals or scholars of intentional repute in International Relations. Corroborating, Adeniran (1982:11) says, International Relations is an area of study which focuses upon the political, economic and other interactions among actors (operating across national boundaries) and the inter-state system for purposes of explanation and prediction. He asserted that International Relations was in practice several centuries back but its systematic study started only during the present century. During the more recent centuries, the contacts that were previously limited were extended. The world has since then witnessed some large scale war, violent revolutions, and international contacts in the form of trade, colonialism, foreign aid, imperialism, conference and other forms of diplomacy. All these and more (including the Olympic Games, immigration etc) fall within the scope of the discipline of International Relations.

International Relations in the view of Dunn (1948), 'is the actual relations that takes place across national boundaries, or as the body of knowledge which we have of those relations at any given time'.

The definition categorizes International Relations into:

- 'Body of knowledge' which is synonymous to field of knowledge that is or can be learnt in a formal school setting as described earlier.

- An act of relationship that is carried out by both state and non state actors which could either be military, political, economical, social, cultural, educational etc. (Corroborating, Ofegbu (1986) gives a more broader definition of International Relations=).

Wikipedia Encyclopaedia sees International Relations as an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the study of foreign affairs and global issues that affect states within the international system. It is the study of relations among countries, the roles of sovereign states, Inter-Governmental Organization (IGOs), International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Multi National Corporations (MNCs).

From the foregoing, one can clearly see that International Relations is both a field of study that one can pursue and excel in and it is also the action or activities that takes place between and among nation states and even non-state actors for mutual benefits. Some scholars viewed International Relations as a separate discipline even outside Political Science discipline. In some institutions, International Relations is taught or studied also in History department. As a further recognition to its contributions, National Universities Commission (NUC) had in 2011 approved the study of International Relations as a distinct field of study in Nigerian Universities.

International Politics according to Wikipedia Encyclopaedia (2013) is the study of the relationship among world politics, government, democracy, parliamentary, Unitary etc. How different states behave with each other in the International system: how the level of domestic development in a state affects war, participation or trade liberalization, how education and poverty level affect the integration of International Human Rights. Moon (2012), an apologist of International politics as a course of study, mentioned the contents of International Politics as:

- Nationalism and territorial conflicts and war,
- Imperialism and World Politics,
- Militarism and armaments,
- History of International Relations in two parts (before 1914 and after),
- A summary review of the policies of Great Powers,
- Economic problems in International Relations,
- Problems of Diplomacy, and
- International Organisations.

Johari (2012:9-12) views the term politics either explicitly or by inference to involve or consist of anything like struggle, strife, conflict and the like that invariably implies the use of power. To say that politics is a struggle for power is to conceive of it in terms not only of action but also of purpose. Power politics he said becomes the hallmark of International Relationships' assuming the form of International Politics.

International Politics according to Morgenthau (1980:31) is like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of International Politics, power is always the immediate aim. State men and people may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic, or social idea. They may hope that this will materialize through its own inner force, through divine interaction, or through natural development of human affairs. They may also to further its realization through non-political means, such as technical co-operation with other nations or international organisation. But whenever they strive to realize their goal by means of International Politics, they do so by striving for power. Power therefore is the distinguishing element of International Politics as of all politics; International politics is of necessity power politics.

In his generalized proposition about the nature of International Politics, Dunn (1948:142-148) states that International Politics are concerned with the special kind of power relationships that exist in a community lacking an overriding authority. International Politics is concerned primarily with knowledge that is relevant to the control and improvement of a particular set of social conditions. Its goal is not merely knowledge for its own sake but knowledge for the sake of moulding practical events in desired direction. The major contributors emphasised or associated International Politics with power and power relations

### **ASSESSING THE TWO CONCEPTS**

From the above conceptual presentation, there is one vital confusion and contention and some areas of similarities or points of conversions noticed. The apologists of the discipline are both claiming that International Relations and International Politics are course or field of study, which are either similar or passively different from each other. This perhaps explained why both of them are often used inter-changeably. These are some common areas of relations in the two concepts.

- a) The two concepts have 'International' as a pre-fix attached to them. 'International' is and can therefore be used for Relations or Politics. This perhaps makes them similar and easy to accept whenever and wherever they are pronounced.
- b) Both of them refers to what is being done or expected to be done outside a particular nation state. In other word, International Relations and International Politics are mostly engaged or exhibited by sovereign nation states as well as non-state actors at the international system.
- c) Both of them were defined as academic field of study by scholars, even with their contents.
- d) Both of them were and can also be described as an act or actions that state and non-state actors can engage or exhibits to get their desires or goals achieved.

- e) As an acts, both gives room for the establishment of rules, institutions and procedures to manage conflicts and cooperation.

## MAJOR AREA OF DIVERSIONS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

In spite of the close relationship and similarity of the two concepts, there are however certain vital noticeable differences. The study shall focus more on this by examining their unique features and applications.

- I. International Relations is the investigation and study of pattern of action and reaction among sovereign nation states as represented by their governing elites. It is the study of relationship of countries including the roles of state, intergovernmental organisations. While International Politics is the pattern of political interaction between and among states. It involves goal seeking behaviour and a process of 'deciding who get what, when and how'.
- II. International Relations involve more of diplomatic means of relating with other actors in the international arena for socio-economic, political and other mutual benefits. International Politics on the other hand, is the mobilization and deployment of state power to get her goal and interest achieved and sustained.
- III. International Relations is the management of conflicts and cooperation with absence of a single centralize regulating authorities at the international fora, while International Politics is the presence of conflicts, to cooperation and ways of getting them suppressed or eradicated, using whatever means available.
- IV. International Relations lead to the formation, understanding of theories that explain, predicts and describe the diverse socio-economic and political interaction in the global realm. Theories like realism; idealism; simulation; feminism; liberalism etc are found and used in International Relations. In International Politics however, realist theory is found and upheld, which emphases on power; Machiavelli, Morgenthau among others are the proponent of this power theory.
- V. International Relations is an academic field of study. At under-graduates level, Political Science students are taught a course called Introduction to International Relations, Foreign Policy Formulation and Analysis, Africa in World Politics etc which are to prepare the students for further studies in Political Science and specialize in International Relations. At the Post Graduate level, International Relations have well coded courses, course descriptions and course outline. There are courses like International Politics, International Economic Relations, Foreign Policy, Theories of International Relations, and International Law etc which are treated extensively (Adeniran, 1982:12&13). While such are lacking in International Politics except the ones mentioned by Moon as: Nationalism and territorial conflicts and war; Imperialism and World Politics; Militarism and armaments;

History of International Relations in two parts (before 1914 and after); A summary review of the policies of Great Powers; Economic problems in International Relations; Problems of Diplomacy, and International Organisations.

- VI. International Relation is wider or broad in nature, content and dimension, both as a course of study and acts. It includes or covers International Politics, while International Politics is narrower and involves power struggle among states and non- state actors (Johari, 2012:7).
- VII. In International Relations, the scientific method used in Political Science is applied to study phenomenon, form International Relations theories. The steps followed are information or data is gathered either through questionnaire, oral interview or by careful observation of the issue/ phenomenon being studied. This is followed by preliminary generalisation and thereafter hypothesis is formed by deductive reasoning which eventually leads to some implication by deductive logic. These are then tested by further observation and conclusion drawn from the original hypothesis successfully meet all the tested, the hypothesis becomes a theory of International Relations ((Adeniran, 1982:13&14). These may not be for International Politics as the events or phenomenon comes and passes in this socio-culturally diverse dynamic international system.
- VIII. In International Politics, wealth and material possession is the potent weapon and sources of strength in International Politics and power configuration, while these are not the ultimate in International Relations (Johari, 2012: 8). Less develop countries interact and relate with each other in and through various inter-continental, regional and sub-regional organisation/associations.
- IX. Many or most Universities both within and outside the nation have and treat International Relations as a field of academic study where people study to M.Sc and PhD level and even reach professor. There are lot of Professors of Political Science that are specialist in International Relations; there are also ample literatures and theories of International Relations. But for International Politics, there are few materials and personnel's in that area. For instance, in a book of International Politics, written by D'Anieri (2010:1-50), There was no theory of International Politics, but there are theories of International Relations, confirming that International Relations is more appropriate than International Politics.
- X. International Relations in view of it nature and theoretical teaching of idealists, feminist and liberalists, can ensure peace and security on the globe in line with the charter and objectives of the United Nations Organization (UNO). While International Politics with it realist philosophy can increase arms and armed race issues. The quest for other upcoming countries to get nuclear and chemical

weapons and the resistance by the developed countries can directly be ascribed to realism of International Politics.

## CONCLUSION

To say that International Relations and International Politics are intertwined is to say the obvious. International Relations is however more prominent and recognize as a course of study and acts of state and non actors in enhancing relationship, while International Politics is a course unit in Political Science and not a sub-discipline. International Relations is inspired by deep interest in how war may be avoided and a condition of peace is maintained or restored. In view of the significance and impacts of International Relations on states and non state actors in enhancing and promoting national and international socio-economic and political development and cooperation, International Relations is taught in several local and foreign Institutions across the globe. International Politics is perhaps trying to be a course of study in institutions of learning, especially in western Universities.

## REFERENCE

- Adeniran, T. (1982). *Introduction to International Relations*. Nigeria; Macmillan.
- Agarwal, R.C. (2007). *Political Theory*. New Delhi; S Chad and Company Limited.
- Anifowose, R. & Enemu, F. (1999). *Element of Politics*. Lagos; Tyuosho Publishers.
- Barongo (ed) *Political Science in Africa: A Critical Review*. London; Zed Press
- D'Anieri, P. (2010). *International Politics*. U.S.A.; Wadsworth.
- Dunn, F.S. (1948). *'The Scope of International Relations in World Politics'*, Cited in Johari, *International Relation and International Politics*. India; Sterling Publishers.
- Ejembi, H.I (1983). *Science vs Philosophy: The Need for a Relevant Political Science in*
- Johari, J.C (2012) *International Relations and International Politics*. India; Sterling Publishers Limited
- Moon, P.T, Cited in Johari (2012), *International Relation and International Politics*. India; Sterling Publishers.
- Morgenthau, J.H. (1980). *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Beijing; Peking University Press.
- Okoli, E.F (2003). *Foundations of Government and Politics*. Nigeria; Africana First Publishers Limited



Penning, P. *et al*, (1999). *Doing Research in Political Science*. London; Sage Publication Limited.

Warby, S. (1970). *Political Science; The Discipline and Dimension*. New York; Charley Scribners'.