



The Theory of Interdependence in the Service of International Relations

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Abstract

The creation of the universe and therefore humanity was profoundly anchored on the theory of independence as evidenced in the Bible in Genesis 1:26 when God said, “let us make man in our image....” and again in Genesis 1:18-23: “it is not good that the man should be alone....” Thus, relationships between man and woman, among nations – states and international organizations of whatever hue and epochs were and are still being built on the canons of interdependence of which international relations is the grand beneficiary. All the countries in the world today have striven to build their political, economic, social, cultural, military, technological, scientific entertainment, sporting, healthcare, etc are edifices on the bedrock of interdependence for their national interests. For instance, the exchange of Ambassadors between countries, issuance of visas, air travels, export and import of goods and services, the activities of international organizations such UN,EU,AU, ECOWAS, ASEAN, etc. are facets of interdependence theory in the service of international relations. This article therefore seeks to evaluate the theory of interdependence with regards to the practice of international relations. The paper used secondary data for analysis and availed the interdependency theory as theoretical compass and conducts by recommending that the costs and benefits of interdependent relationships should be maximized by nations –states, big or small so that conflictual situations can be nipped in the bud early and thereby conduce to peace for mankind.

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I. Introduction

The quest to understand and analyze international relations is and has always been predicted on the use of some germane theories which are the highest forms of knowledge known to man. Essentially, international relations is writ large by the power of explanation, prediction, organization, systemization, coordination, ability to suggest hypotheses and generalizations which theories provides. For as Grievies (1977:31) observed, “Theory and a modest dose of jargon are the tools of the trade. To study international relations, one needs at least a moderate understanding of the problems and organizing concepts of the field as specialists perceive them”.

This paper is therefore an attempt to utilize the interdependency theory as an analytical frame in the service of international relations. Infact, the interdependency theory is one of the contemporary theories of international relations that represents a buffer between the concepts of dependence and independence in relations between and among nation states in the international milieu.

To achieve this purpose the paper will be segmented in the following order after the introductory section:

- Conceptual illumination: Theory, interdependence and international relations.
- Theoretical foundation of interdependency theory.
- Application of the interdependency theory in international relations
- Limitations of the interdependency theory in international relations
- Summary and conclusion

Conceptual illumination

Below, we enunciate the three concepts of theory, interdependence and international relations imbedded in the topic of this paper.

Theory

Conceptualizing the word theory is rather problematic due to its nebulous nature. Despite this challenge, some scholars (Gibson (1960), Palsby et al (1963), Kerlinger (1973), Isaak (1975) have proffered very useful definitions that, have remained poignant to the illumination and understanding of the concept. Isaak (1975:138) defined a theory as,

“a set of generalization containing concepts with which we are directly acquainted and those which are operationally defined, but in addition and more importantly , theoretical concepts that although not directly tied to observation and logically related to those concepts that are”

Arising from the above, Isaak (1975) inferred that a scientific theory has two features, namely structural and substantive, whereas, the former refers to the relationship between its concepts, the latter addresses its empirical content. In furtherance of this notion, Kempel (1952) asserted that, “any scientific theory may be conceived of as consisting of uninterpreted, deductively development system and of an interpretation which confers empirical import upon the terms and sentences of the latter.”

Again, Isaak (1975) argues that a more fruitful approach to the nature of scientific theory is through an examination of the functions it performs, for one way to evaluate a theory is to determine how well is doing what it is expected to do.

Thus, the major function of a theory is explanation, that is to explain singular facts and occurrences including empirical generalizations

Another function of a theory is its ability to organize, systematize and coordinate existing knowledge in a particular area or field.

Theories also suggest potential knowledge by generating hypothesis. It can on the basis of its highly abstract generalization often predict an empirical generalization, that is, predict that a particular relationship holds. The hypothesis can then, be tested and accepted or rejected. Thus, it can be said that in addition to its explanatory and organizational functions, theory has an heuristic one to suggest, to generate hypothesis. In reference to this position. Bhattacharjee (2012) averred that

The goal of scientific research is to discover laws and postulate theories that can explain natural or social phenomena or in other words build scientific knowledge. The progress of science is marked by our progression over time from poorer theories to better observations using more accurate instruments and more informed logical reasoning.

The question that should interrogate our minds in this paper is whether the theory of interdependence is sound enough to address the myriads of problems facing international relations today. In answer Grievés (1977:33) admonished, in studying the provocative issues of our days there is no reason to write off intellectual contributions from any source. How one weighs those contributions depends on ones own values regarding methods. The interdependency theory is therefore profoundly relevant in our daily attempts to understand the planet we live in through the instrumentality of international relations. Indeed it is trite not to recognize that it is interdependence that wrought the United Nations and its agencies, international regimes and Non-governmental organizations, regional and bilateral relationships.

International Relations:

The study of international relations in our contemporary time is an initiation into the art and science of the survival of mankind which is plagued by uncertainty arising from the behaviour of nation states. According to Deutsch (1989:)

International relations is that area of human action where inescapable interdependence meets with inadequate control. We can neither escape from world affairs nor wholly shape them to our will. We can only try to adjust the world while adjusting to it. Within this limited scope, we must retain and where possible enhance our most deeply held values”.

Oche (2013:6) sees international relations as the study and practice of relations among nation states and their governments. It also encapsulates the interactions that take place between non-governmental organizations which have become increasingly significant actors on the global scene.

Similarly, Ofoegbu (1980: 1-2) posits that international relations is a term which refers to the sum total of relationships among actors in the international system. From the above definition, three designable interactions, manifest in political, economic, cultural, scientific, private international relations be deciphered thus:

- Firstly, there exists the international system.
- Secondly, there exist actors within the international system

➤ Thirdly, these actors relate to one another in the international system.

Legg and Morrison (1971) contends that the main attributes of international relations seems to be that it involves interactions between separate entities across national boundaries even when no conflicts is involved.

It is pertinent to note that as the practice of international relations has become more complex and decisive, its study has moved to keep pace. The dramatic advances in the field over the last century include changes in basic concepts and theories (interdependence) of the newer behavioural sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology with the longer established disciplines of political science, economics and history. These changes in theory have been accompanied by the development of new methods of research, the employment of statistical procedures for analysis, and the growing availability of testable empirical data. Thus, if our lives are so deeply affected by and our responses so essential to international affairs, then we must increase our capacity to understand, to decide and to act. (Deutsch 1989)

Interdependence

Interdependence refers to the concept or argument that because nation states in the international arena have become mutually vulnerable through an inter-relationship of socio-economic and technological issues (low politic), -energy, overpopulation, poverty, ecology, food supplies, human rights, monetary exchanges-their future behaviour will be oriented towards long term collaboration rather than the old 'balance of power 'security through the use of force mentality (high politics issues). In short, the maxim of "we will be stressed rather than his gain is my loss.

(Spanier, 1978:551). For instance, all international organizations (UN) continental (AU, EU, SEATO) Regional (ECOWAS, SADC, NAFTA, etc.),

Non-governmental Organization (Red Cross) bilateral (Nigeria-Niger Joint Venture on River Niger) and International Regimes (UNCLOS, I, II, and III), were built, on the premise and promise of the interdependency theory. It is infact, an attempt to synchronize the idiosyncrasies-ideology, race, religion, region, socio economic factors, technological prowess,etc. of the nation states or organizations. that make up these bodies.

Theoretical Compass

The emergence of a large number of sovereign states in the post Second World War period has generated a new class of issues and theories of analyzing the problem of interrelationships among countries. Seating between independence and dependence, interdependence offer a swathe of humanity especially the stranglehold into which they have been held by the developed countries.

Essentially, interdependence has long been a cardinal element in theoretical analysis of international relations, but its utility has been hampered by disagreements over both the meaning of the term and its link to changes in state behaviour. Al-Mashat (1985:14) emphasised this scenario thus:

"National security is more than territorial defence and should focus on the physical, social and psychological quality of life of a society and its members both in the domestic setting and within the larger regional and global systems".

Interdependences are therefore relations that are costly to break. Baldwin (1980: 490) have argued that interdependence should be seen as a question of a state's vulnerability, where two actors find themselves in a relationship that would create large costs for both of them should it break down (Brexit from EU 2017Morocco's withdrawal from AU and seeking read mission, 2017). If such costs are however unequally distributed, then one can talkof a dependent relationship. Baldwin stresses three reasons why interdependence is a function of vulnerability thus;

1. It matches historical usage.
2. Sensitivity interdependence can vary inversely with vulnerability, thus distorting common usage and
3. Sensitivity can be called just that, whereas interdependence should be reserved for vulnerability.

Other analysts {Tollison and Willet (1973) and Deutsch, (1978)} have offered an alternative view of interdependence, one that stresses the increased sensitivity states feel when their relations with one another increase. Under such a condition , two states become more interdependent when events that take place within one state have an impact upon events taking place in another state { Boko Haram in Nigeria have impacted Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroun, so did Ebola scourge in Liberia spread to Nigeria, Sierra leone, Mali, Guinea, Senegal etc}. Keohane and Nye (1989:12) contends that if vulnerability focuses on the costs of breaking relations, sensitivity can be said to focus on the costs of maintaining it.

Kelly and Thibaut (1978) in their submission argue that strategic relationship can be broken down into three constituent parts as follows:

Firstly actors can possess some independent control over pay off they receive, even in a strategic relationship: this they call Reflexive Control. It is the degree to which an actor can influence its payoff by its own choice of strategy chosen by its opponent.

Secondly an actors final pay off can be dependent upon the actions of its opponents: this is called Fate Control. With such fate control, an actor sees that no matter which strategy it chooses, part of its final payoff is determined solely by its opponent's choice of strategy.

Thirdly there can be an element of the total payoff that the actor can achieve only through interdependence or joint actions: this they call, Behaviour Control. The stronger such behaviour control is, the more an actor must coordinate its strategy with that of its partner to maximize its payoffs. In other words, Kelly and Thibaut (1978) sees interdependence from the perspective of what each member country within an interdependence relationship gains with or without losing its sovereign interest adversely.

Mayne (1975:5) avers that there is need for democratic governments to come together in an interdependent fashion to achieve collective allocation of values but noted also, that due to self-interest of nation states, achieving a common purpose is difficult. In his words, "our world is in crisis and men's minds are paralyzed by sense of drift. The democracies know they must pull together but they increasingly lack a sense of common purpose".

However, Mayne's proposition to only democratic countries is not fair enough, for he failed to recognize the existence of other forms of government in the world, such as socialist, communist, authoritarian, monarchical, etc, that are equally part of interdependent arrangements. For instance, the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS I,II and III) includes democratic states such as the United States, Britain, Nigeria, India and Brazil, as well as Monarchical nation-states as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Swaziland, etc, thus interdependence involves all countries of the world irrespective of the type of government they practice.

Agbese (1988) contend that for nation-states and international organizations to maintain cordial relationships the relative strength of each should be observed so that cooperation in all spheres of human endeavors can benefit both. He summarized his views thus:

"there are island nations, but no nation desires to be an island unto itself. Interdependence is a fact of life. It is also a fact of international politics, trade and commerce. Every nation needs every other nation. No nation, no matter how strong it is economically or politically can exist in isolation-threatening the rest of the world as if it did not matter. No nation wants that or to be seen to want it"

In the same vein, Russett and Starr (1985:500) posit that interdependence grows and increases as states become more vulnerable to penetration of various kinds. Interdependence can only occur when the hard shell of the state sovereignty becomes full of holes. Accordingly, because of both increased interdependence and increased awareness of interdependence, governmental decision-makers have to think about and take into account the effects that their internal policies have on foreign relations with other states.

While the interdependency theory sees cooperation as a necessary tool in the world system in view of the advance in technology (Nuclear weapons, Supersonic jets, Submarines, ICT, Medicines, etc.) and the international regimes of the Common Heritage of Mankind (Oceans, Outer Space, Seas, Ocean Beds, etc); it also imposes some constraints on actors. Being sensitive and vulnerable to the actions of other international actors' places limits on what any state is able and willing to do which could point positive or negative consequences.

They can lead to struggle, conflict and war or to even greater cooperation and stable areas of peace. For instance, since the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the emergence of the United Nations, no 'third world war' has been fought in the last 72 years, whereas, it took 20 years for the 2nd World War to break out after the birth of the League of Nations in 1919. Thus, the interdependence inherent in the UN has enhanced relative peace in the world since 1945.

Moreover, it is not in all situations that interdependence and cooperation between countries and organizations are called to play, rather, in such situations, nation – states assert their sovereign rights to act in self-interest.

For instance, North Korea's defiance of world pressure on its nuclear programme and the failure of the Commonwealth to impose sanctions on Nigerian Crude Oil during its face-off with the Abacha regime adumbrate this fact. To this Russett and Starr (1985:514) asserts

"in this anarchic system, lack of trust is built into the relations among the international actors. Lack of trust puts each individual actor in the dilemma of choosing between individual and collective welfare creating the possibility of trusting others and then being taken advantage of by them."

Despite the shortcomings, we find the interdependency theory a fecund, necessary and sufficient analytical tool for the explication of international relations in our contemporary world.

Application of the Interdependency Theory in International Relations

Interdependence is a fact of life and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Its service or impact to international relations is amply reflected in this observation by Kroll (1993)

“European Community (EU) in spite of some setbacks seems to have acquired momentum that is inexorably moving its members (and many states on the periphery) toward stronger economic and political integration. In addition, increasing international policy coordination at multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT-now World Trade Organization-WTO) and the Group of Seven suggests that all states are finding fewer areas in which unilateral action seems the most efficacious”.

Thus, interdependence is the anchor upon which international organizations and regimes were established and being natured to enhance peace, equity, equality and justice in the world

Interdependency theory is also the major driving force behind the quest by developing countries to adopt a strategy that will alter the structure of the international system. It entails a systematic move for the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) which will be based on premises of economic justice and balanced planetary growth. The strategy urges, optimistically leaders of industrialized states to choose the part of enlightened realism by adopting policies which in the short run, do not maximize the advantages of rich states but rather nurture and subsidize the struggling economies of the Third World.

The developing states justify their demands for a new economic order by sketching out with graphic regularity the statistics of global inequality.

They point out, for example, that the main per-capita income of industrialized countries was at least thirteen times larger than that of the developing countries in 1972. Since that time the situation instead of improving, has been deteriorating with the per-capita income of industrialized countries increasing by approximately \$ 120 per year, while the analogous figure for developing countries was increasing only by \$ 7 per year.

Other complaints include the growing concentration of world trade (about one-third of the planetary total) in the hands of three hundred giant multinational corporations whose rates of profits have more than tripled in the past 30 years (Coulombis and Wolfe, 1986:328).

The primary demands for the fulfillment of NIEO objectives have been expressed repeatedly in meetings and conferences of Third World economic organizations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the “Group of 77”. These demands are summarized below:

- The developed state should initiate a process for the drastic redistribution of international credit. It is unacceptable to continue a situation where over two-thirds of the world’s population, living in developing countries, have been securing less than five percent of the finance credit created by the International Monetary Fund.
- Technical and financial assistance should be directed to the building of raw-materials- processing facilities and transportation and insurance systems so that developing countries can process as well as distribute their products. It is unacceptable to continue with a situation where the developing countries receive \$30 billion for exports which are sold yearly in the markets of industrial countries for a total of \$ 200 billion. The \$170 billion difference goes into the pockets of intermediaries who process, package, ship, transport and distribute these products.
- Industrial countries should greatly increase foreign assistance to developing states. This assistance should not be viewed as charity but as a duty and an obligation-in form of global progressive tax.
- Industrial countries should drastically reduce tariffs and quotas on goods that are produced in the inexpensive, labour intensive markets of Third World countries.
- Developed countries should encourage and accept a more meaningful role for the developing ones in international economic decision-making. It is not acceptable for the world’s population to have less than one-third of the voting power in international economic organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The foregoing summary highlights the magnitude of global inequalities and interdependence and calls for the adoption of a global, rather than a restricted regional view of our planet’s economic environment. Unprecedented economic mobility, the inequality among different countries rates of economic growth and the deepening of patterns of interdependence are transforming the study of international relations.

Limitations of the Interdependency Theory in International Relations

Despite its relevance in the pursuit of international relations especially in our today’s world, the interdependency theory faces some challenges just like anything wrought by man. This dilemma is sketched by the Charter Economic Rights and Duties of states, adopted in 1974 by General Assembly of the United Nations and illustrates the difficulty inherent in achieving a just international economic order. Article 26 expresses the ideal of justice by asserting

“All state have the duty to coexist in tolerance and live together in peace, irrespective of differences in political, economic, social and cultural systems, and to facilitate trade between states having different economic and social systems”.

Again, it is not in all situations that interdependence and cooperation are called to mediate conflicts between and among nation-states or organizations, rather, the strategic rights and national interests take the centre stage. For instance, Britain did not accede to the common currency-the EURO introduced by the European Union on the 1st January 1999 and entered into circulation on 1st January, 2002, rather she retained her currency the Pound (£) sterling. Britain is on the verge of exiting the EU on account of a referendum by her citizen on the 23rd June, 2016.

Another limitation is the lack of trust among international actors in the quest to achieve interdependence. Each member in an interdependent relationship always strives to maximize its advantage at the detriment of other members. As an illustration, OPEC usually allocate quotas to all its members, but some members have often reneged on this agreement, thereby leading to oil glut and price dip in the international market. This indeed is the dilemma of choosing between individual welfare (bursting quota) and collective welfare (maintaining quota discipline) by OPEC members.

Aligned to this is the lack of instrument (police force) to enforce compliance by members in an interdependent relationship. This reinforces Deutsch's (1989) definition of international relations as that area of action where inescapable interdependence meets with inadequate control.

Schematic as much as this theory still is, it does attempt to take into account some of the structural political and economic changes that have occurred in recent decades, such as the declining importance of national boundaries and national economic decision-making in a world of increasing economic interdependence. Particularly, the less developed countries have experienced radical changes and developments in their political and social systems following their exposure to the world market and international economic influences which very often reached beyond the control of their state apparatus (Deutsch, 1989:308).

Reflecting on the agitation for the break-up of Nigeria by some groups, Senator David Mark (25th June, 2017) advised.

“the trend today is that nations are coming together and bridging the gaps for mutual cooperation under a new world order of globalization for a better society. Nigeria is part of the global community”.

Thus, at every level or unit of human existence, interdependence lurks around-from the family, community, sub-national, national, regional, continental and global, it defines our interactions and relationships in many ways, thus interdependence remains one of the cornerstone theories of international relations that will be cherished for many years to come.

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