# What is the Relationship Between Domestic and Foreign Policy? Should they even be Distinguished?

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NICK EVANS, MAY 16 2009

"Foreign policy is not immune from the impact of values, ideas, initiatives and upheavals."[1] From the aggressive foreign policies of Nazi Germany to early 20th century American isolationism, history has proven that the external ambitions of the state are far from homogenous. The realm of the foreign is an ideological concept, a product of international dynamics and domestic attributes. For one to suggest otherwise is primitive; there is no denying that international socialization has re-shaped foreign relations, and similarly, the permeation of national politics on the international stage cannot be discredited. Since both factors play a pivotal role in external policy formulation, the domestic and the foreign are easily distinguishable conceptions. But as this essay will argue, foreign policy is "primarily generated from within"[2]. The influence of the domestic forms the basis of foreign strategy, overshadowing but not discounting remaining elements. The correlation between both policy areas is one of great strength.

Successful politicians mobilize and retain public support as a means of maintaining public office. In other words, democracy encourages choice; political parties argue on a range of policy areas, with emerging governments reflecting the opinions and values of the majority electorate. Whilst the two environments may be different, the relationship between foreign and domestic policy is thus determined on a common level of populism, with the decisions of state leaders reflecting notions of common consensus and agreement[3]. Inevitably, this means that both policy areas share similar ideological aims and ambitions. One example would be Barack Obama's current pursuit of the liberal agenda in the United States. The President's advocation of troop withdrawal from Iraq, together with plans for healthcare reform promote values of social welfare and responsibility typically found on the left of the ideological spectrum[4]. Furthermore, they embody an overwhelming level of populism, with around 90% of American citizens favouring some kind of healthcare reform[5] and 63% of Americans believing that the dispatch of troops to Iraq was a mistake[6]. In short, domestic opinion plays a pivotal role in shaping governmental action, transcending across internal and external affairs of the state, and often, containing a sub set of differing values in accordance with the state in question. As Michael Medved notes, nationalism is a key factor within modern American society, and the formulation of US foreign policy has been heavily based on this concept throughout history[7]. America's entrance into World War Two, for example, responded to the threatening of national infrastructure established by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Similarly, the devastating events of 9/11 created a new level of 'islamophobia', with resentment to the Muslim populace becoming a staple, albeit a marginal staple, of national identity[8]. The retaliatory approach within America's domestic society permeated into its domestic political arena, with the passing of the USA PATRIOT Act expanding law enforcement powers as a means of protecting national identity[9]. Contemporary US foreign policy has heavily incorporated such ideals, with aggressive strategies in Afghanistan and Iraq reflecting a need to protect the American populace and American borders. Thus, a fundamental aspect in the relation between domestic and foreign policy is the prominence of national identity and a consistent need to protect such values. The concept of state sovereignty is still the persistent force in the international system, and with the continued persistence of nationalist governments in the global society (such as Austria), international socialization will continue to be an undermined and undervalued resource[10]. Similarly, the prominence of religion in domestic and foreign policy has proved pivotal. The relationship is most apparent within Eastern states like Egypt, where the current government has been accused of "pandering to religious sentiments to consolidate its hold on power"[11]. Domestic broadcasting

policy has incorporated an increasing amount of religious programming on state television channels, a move designed to "entrench the dominant religious frame of mind in Egypt"[12]. As Christopher Hill notes, foreign policy will inevitably be affected by national religious factors because particular moral codes exist within other countries[13]. This is evident from the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict, in which the country recently pledged support for the continued presence of Arab population in East Jerusalem[14]; the notion of this support rests on the defense of Islamic culture within the international society.

The relationship between domestic and foreign is also commonly linked by the influence of domestic culture, with heavy emphasis on social groups and social attitudes within states[15]. Throughout the 20th century, racial division characterized South Africa, with apartheid showing inherent levels of racism by the white minority. Yet South Africa's repression of black civil rights in its domestic sphere was ignored in its foreign policy structure; attempts to strengthen the countries' economy were executed via trade agreements with black African states[16]. Domestic and foreign policy can be distinguished as two separate concepts in International Relations, because a state does not have an homogenized set of aims; in South Africa, it was seen as the country's best interest to preserve elite social structures, but economic strength was vital to ensure the state's stability. However, distinguishing the two concepts was limited by the practicalities of the global society, in particular concerns regarding human rights and morality. Apartheid was condemned across the international spectrum, and as such the boundaries between the state's domestic and foreign policy broke down; external forces did not want to "associate with a system that was historically doomed"[17]. One could argue that international determinants play a vital role in influencing foreign policy. If specific issues are met with common consensus by the international community, a state is placed under pressure to adapt in a similar fashion; otherwise, any foreign ambition it may have will be crippled by external forces. The lack of a rule of law in Zimbabwe, together with the country's human rights abuses have resulted in several economic sanctions, such as those imposed by the European Union in 2002[18]. Zimbabwe's foreign agenda is thus limited, the structure of its domestic and foreign policy blurred in the face of social disorder and disharmony. Problematic domestic culture reflects on the image of government, overshadowing its internal and external actions; as such, the power of the elite to define its own image and ideology becomes diminished in both domestic and foreign affairs. Perhaps then, it can be concluded that the role of the domestic places "constraints on foreign policy makers", a theory also of great prominence in developed states[19]. The interests of French farmers inhibits any wish the Paris government may have in reforming the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy[20]; to lose the support of such an important group would have damaging effects on the French economy, not to mention the diminishment of France's prominent role on the international stage. Similarly, in 2008 an Irish referendum on the Lisbon treaty produced a definitive "No" result, with Irish citizens believing Europe had grown out of touch with domestic interests[21]. Here, the link between domestic and foreign affairs is evident; the domestic provides the connection between elected politicians and the citizens they represent. It stops the political elite from growing out of touch with society, and marginalises the influence of external forces (i.e. other states) in the creation of foreign policy matters.

Another crucial factor is how the foreign realm, similar to its domestic counterpart, is a product of continuity and sustainment despite "the vicissitudes of electoral politics"[22]. In the United States, conflictual approaches to foreign policy have been evident for much of 20th and early part of the 21st century, with wars such as Vietnam and Iraq having been executed under both Republican and Democratic presidents. In domestic terms, values of individualism, accountability and self-determination continue to persist in American society despite swings in the two party system. This can be attributed to the existence of hegemonic class structures that drive the formulation of policy within states[23]. Making up 47% of the population, the middle class are America's largest social strata, mostly consisting of professionals, craftsmen and managers; they desire a need to maintain private enterprise but support government intervention where necessary[24]. As such, the middle class exercise control over the policy agenda, shaping the formulation of ideas and values within government. In domestic terms, President Barack Obama's current healthcare plan is a clear indication of this, instigating basic healthcare provisions for all Americans, but also allowing private health insurance to remain as a viable option. The same can be said for US foreign policy. Intervention has often been viewed with suspicion in American society, demonstrated by American isolationism in the 1930s and the rejection to enter the League of Nations by Congress in 1919. As Noam Chomsky argues, governments must convince their populace that conflictual behaviour is necessary, often manufacturing messages through the media[25]. The threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) was a message designed to create hysteria amongst the American people, making entry into Iraq appear as the only possible solution[26]. Thus, there is little to

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distinguish foreign and domestic policy in the way of political expediency; the tactics used by politicians in democratic states maintains the role of interventional government, but legitimizes such intervention by preserving spheres of individualism and common good.

It should be noted, however, that foreign policy is not immune from the influence of international dynamics, in particular the role of international institutions and global economic policy. Within the European Union, policies such as the Maastricht Treaty (1992) have created common foreign and security values that all member states must follow; a desire to promote international co-operation and respect human rights are cornerstones of the Treaty's agenda, and will inevitably lay the framework to the foreign agenda of countries involved[27]. Within many states such as the United Kingdom, European law is placed above British law (as established by the 1972 European Communities Act) and so it is impossible to ignore the role of international actors in the formulation of foreign policy. Similarly, considerations must also be paid to the role of globalisation within the international society. The preconception that states operate in complete anarchy can be disclaimed by the movement of multinational corporations (MNCs) throughout the globe, often utilizing labour in developing countries whilst retaining their business structures in developed nations. The conduct of the state on the international stage can no longer operate on purely isolationist terms; in order to survive economically, it is vital that foreign relations are extended to countries across the globe so that the movement of goods and services can be a structured and efficient process. Thus, the relationship between domestic and foreign policy is separable in the sense that global institutionalism plays a major role in the modern global society and the conduct of states in modern international relations.

To conclude, the link between foreign and domestic policy is one of great strength despite being clearly distinguished. Politicians govern on a common level of populism, and in doing so they play on a sub set of values in relation to their specific state; embodiment of nationalism and religion can be found across both policy areas. The importance of domestic culture, whether through domestic atrocity or homogenized class structures place important limits on governments and provide a check on their actions. Despite this, the importance of globalisation and international institutions continue to shape foreign external relations, limiting the concepts of state sovereignty and isolationism, and making international co-operation an inevitability.

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[2] Ibid p.222

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[11] Magdi Abdelhadi "Egypt mixes politics and religion" bbc.co.uk, November 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4400208.stm Accessed on 14 March 2009

[12] Ibid

[13] Hill op. cit 243

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[16] Hill op. cit 227

[17] Hill op. cit 227

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[19] Hill op. cit 222

[20] Hill op. cit 222

[21] The Times "No Means No", timesonline.co.uk, June 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article4133301.ece Accessed on 14 March 2009

[22] Hill op. cit 221

[23] Hill op. cit

[24] William Thompson and Joseph Hickey *Society in Focus: An Introduction to Sociology 6th edition.* (Allyn and Bacon, 2007): p. 132

[25] Noam Chomsky, *Failed States (Metropolitan Books, 2006) p.87*

[26] Ibid. p.92

[27] Economic Expert "Maastricht Treaty", economicexpert.com, http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Maastricht:Treaty.htm. Accessed on 14 March 2009.

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