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On International Sponsorship

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PABLO DE ORELLANA, JUN 5 2009

The significance of political sponsorship between actors in international relations

A world without a hyperpower might quickly fall back into the Dark Ages, argues Niall Ferguson.[1] The inevitable corollary is that a unipolar system, even if imperfect, is preferable when one considers the bleak alternatives. The observer is compelled, as was Pangloss, to conclude that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. A critical view of international relations must problematise the patterns and distribution of influence and power exercised by the silent and unelected elites that determine the conduct of behaviour in international politics.

In a recent lecture exploring the motives behind US foreign policy, Thompson introduced the notion that the power and influence of a superpower, once its security is amply guaranteed, could become a 'luxury good'.[2] As a luxury good, influence over foreign policy can be lobbied for, negotiated and obtained by a variety of actors, varying from states to numerous non-state actors such as interest groups or international organisations. The availability of influence in international politics creates, for the observer, patterns along which influence is distributed. This distribution is not necessarily state-centric, and its dynamics may be found in multiple patterns that are contextual and transcalar. In this paper I explore a specific pattern identified as "sponsorship." A relationship between international actors based on sponsorship differs from classical notions of clientelism and soft power, and is critical of exclusively statist conceptions of international politics. Sponsorship, I argue, becomes a mutual determinant and accelerator of globalisation.

Influence is, for the purposes of this paper, to be defined as the capacity to shape decisions, opinions and most of all policies and events in the international political arena. Influence in international politics can be wielded by state and non state actors. It can be 'lent' or distributed, along different patterns, to other actors. The nature of influence is entirely circumstantial, and can be local, regional or global. An actor may wield more influence in one context than in another and towards certain actors more than others. The degree to which influence is transferable varies across different contexts, ranging from completely transferable (money, for instance) to untransferable.

The exchange of influence is not conventionally hierarchical; states and non-state actors may take on the role of sponsor and beneficiary. The transfer of influence is dependent on the context of the dialogue for its transfer and related events, policies, positions and identities. When one actor lends its influence to another consensually, their relationship is one of sponsorship.

A relationship based on sponsorship can be obtained through diplomacy or lobbying -which in this case can be indistinguishable. The discourse to obtain sponsorship can be structured as one of benefit to the sponsor – thus establishing a mutuality of purposes. The benefits constructed in the discourse can be imaginary, real, or tangible to varying degrees. A trade benefit is more tangible than purported advances in causes such as that against communism or terrorism. However, at moments of perceived systemic crises, ideological benefits may be of greater value. For example, the need to halt communism was employed by the French authorities to persuade the American administration, especially in 1949-50, to support their colonial war to keep Indochina French. Contextually, American policy makers would have been especially susceptible to such an argument after the "loss of China". Consequently, the sponsorship discourse varies in value relative to the perceived cost and benefit to the sponsor.

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The origin of the sponsorship dialogue may lie with the direct partners or in a third party. The dialogue can emerge from events, shifts in relationships amongst a number of actors or other circumstantial or constructed narratives. A perceived threat to the potential sponsor, for instance, might be the component of the dialogue that ultimately convinces policy makers. A relationship based on sponsorship is therefore mutual: it is the result of consenting negotiation that establishes mutual benefits. Thus an alignment of interest is crucial to the success of the relationship; even if it is rhetorical. Alternatively other elements could form part of the discourse, such as diplomatic linkage. France, in 1945, was a crucial element of any plans for Western European anti-communist defence. The French Government was able to use this position to engage the United States and obtained from Truman's administration a change of policy that abandoned the trusteeship program to support French recolonisation in Indochina.

A relationship based on sponsorship is by no means one that denotes a hierarchy in decision-making and initiative. In this manner it is clearly different from a client-patron relationship. The sponsored actor can even expand the degree of sponsorship once the sponsor has committed. As Mundy's research has demonstrated in the case of Western Saharan conflict, once Kissinger had committed America's influence to supporting Morocco's claims, King Hassan was able to go much beyond Kissinger's intended 'rigged U.N. Vote' and invade the territory.[3] The parliamentary investigations that took place in Spain after the 1975 crisis suggest that the United States not only helped Morocco directly, but extended its sponsorship in exerting pressure on Spain to capitulate to Hassan. I argue that the act of this sponsorship went as far as securing support or acquiescence for Morocco's actions within the international community. To this day, the Security Council has failed to force on Morocco any decision regarding the referendum of self determination. Other factors have led to international acquiescence of the Moroccan conquest, such as Britain's sales of military hardware to Morocco, but I argue that this is the result of a long-lasting sponsorship relationship, with the UK following the pattern suggested by indirect US influence on this matter at the UN.

A relationship based upon sponsorship is different from the use of soft power by major actors. Hard power is most often present in the sponsorship, usually against a third party, which is the target of the concerns of the sponsored actor. Unlike soft power as a unidirectional influence distribution pattern, a sponsorship relationship is consenting and mutual, necessitating a negotiated dialogue and action that is to some extent agreed upon.

If the influence donated is very large, the sponsored actor can circumvent international institutions, conventions and law, resulting in a seismic impact in the name of the agreed-upon mutual benefits. For instance, it is likely that it was Suharto's visceral anticommunism that brought about US sponsorship for his regime, and particularly its invasion of East Timor. The sponsorship for Indonesia's invasion at the UN affected UN discussion and procedures through Patrick Moynihan's blocking of the UN mandate for self determination, which he carried out 'with no inconsiderable success'.[4] Members of the international community were thus persuaded to acquiesce to the denial of East Timor's right to self determination which resulted in the massacre of as much as a third of its population. In the case of Western Sahara or East Timor, the same influence that allowed the US to circumvent the UN and international law to invade Iraq in 2003 was made available to Morocco and Indonesia.

A sponsoring relationship can be extremely dangerous whether exercised by states or by non-state actors such as Opus Dei. The latter made its influence and wealth available to the Vatican following the dramatic collapse of the Banca Ambrosiana and the subsequent cover-up and period of convalescence, including the murder of Calvi in London. The phenomenon of sponsorship becomes a more common pattern of influence distribution and management when influence is concentrated in the hands of fewer actors. More power is available and can be lobbied for when overwhelming superpowers or a unipolar power are present in the international community. As influence becomes more concentrated, its distribution becomes more arbitrary and therefore less accountable, for an increase in sponsorship relationships on a scale operating below the unipolar power opens an alternative space in international politics.

Consequently, the phenomenon of international sponsorship is a pattern related to the attribution and distribution of influence along consensual lines, and can be accessed and provided by state and non-state actors. A relationship based on sponsorship is obtained through discourse that utilises current issues, conditioning and benefits, or the appearances of benefits. The exchange is sometimes of very large proportions to the extent that, as for the aforementioned cases, the influence of the sponsor allowed the sponsored actor to circumvent conditioned

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international behaviour. The consequences can be catastrophic; excess in sponsorship relationships can have lasting repercussions on efforts for multilaterality and on the dynamics of international relations. Such developments in influence distribution can undermine statist international politics, leading to an acceleration of globalisation. Worst of all, sponsorship can allow crimes to take place with the acquiescence of the international community; disenfranchised masses languish in squalor, disease and exile whilst others lose the right to life.

Pablo de Orellana BA (Oxon), MPhil (Cantab) has research interests in diplomatic history, particularly the relationship of transferring influence among international actors. His current research explores the notion of 'sponsorship'; the diplomatic alignment and linkage that allowed France to obtain acquiescence and support for its Vietnam policy from the United States.

[1] N. Ferguson, 'A World Without Power', *Foreign Policy* No. 143, 2004, pp. 32-39

[2] J. A. Thompson, 'Fitting it all Together', Lecture on US Foreign Policy, Cambridge University, March 2009

[3] J. Mundy, 'Neutrality or Complicity? The United States and the 1975 Moroccan Takeover of the Spanish Sahara', *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol 11, 3, (September 2006), pp. 275-306

[4] Daniel Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place*, pp247