

A Dichotomy of Values in Foreign Policy

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Summary

This paper argues that while western and eastern notions of values in foreign policy might apparently differ, dichotomising relevant thoughts and policies into silos would be unrealistic. In a globalised world, borders between the two are tending to disappear. Today, while the natural predilection of a state actor in the global scene may be to try and shape its external environment in accordance with its own historical and cultural experiences, as well as precepts to advance its perceived interests, there would be restraints of various kinds, including size and capabilities.

Introduction

The Classical Greeks, prior to any debate or discussions, sought to define the key terms. Since then, this practice has hugely facilitated deliberations, so let us do likewise.

Foreign policy, and this is a definition I have culled from experience and readings, comprises strategies designed by a sovereign state to interact with others of its kind in a fashion so as to safeguard its perceived national interests, and also to achieve its goals within its international milieu. So, apart from the conduct of relations with other countries, it would also include the sum-total of all of its interactions with other international actors, including institutions, agencies and even groups and individuals.

‘Values’ on the other hand, at least for the purpose of this paper, may be defined as principles, ethical and moral, that would characterise rules of conduct and uphold standards of behaviour. The central purpose of this paper is to examine if the latter has a role in shaping the former, and if so, to what extent.

Idealists, Realists and Social Scientific Trifurcation

Professor Hedley Bull, who is also often called the father of the Anglo-Saxon School of International Relations, placed those who analysed or practiced relations among nations into three broad categories of theoretical activity: the ‘idealist’ or progressivist doctrines that predominated in the early years of the international relations discipline, that is, in the 1920s and 1930s; the ‘realist’ or conservative theories that developed in reaction to them of the late 1930s and 1940s; and the ‘social scientific’ theories thereafter, whose origin lay in the dissatisfaction with the methodologies on which both earlier kinds of theory were based.¹

Each would merit a brief description, but before I do that, while this trifurcation is applied to modern investigators, to my mind, their classification would cover historical actors, both of

¹ Hedley Bull, ‘The Theory of International Politics, 1919-1969 in Brian Porter (ed.): *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919-1869* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp 30-55.

theory and practice: rulers like Alexander the Great who sought to propagate Greek culture throughout Asia Minor, or Asoka, who aimed at spreading Buddhism throughout the Subcontinent and beyond could be considered 'idealists'; thinkers such as Machiavelli or Chanakya who ruthlessly propounded principles of 'raison d'être' could be realists; and Julius Caesar and Sun Tzu who introduced dispassionate rational rules of military engagement between states and forces could be considered votaries of the third 'social-scientific' approach.

Let me also enter the caveat that these classifications are not water-tight silos, both in terms of these individuals and in terms of the periodisation that Bull suggests in the evolution of literature. For instance, the three-fold division of the idealist, realist or the social –scientific analyst or practitioner could all apply to the contemporary age, despite the fact that their core related literature can be dated to distinct period in the past decades.

With regard to the idealists, Bull was essentially thinking of English writers like Sir Alfred Zimmern, Philip Noel-Baker and David Mitrany or Americans like James Shotwell, Pittman Potter and Parker Moon. It is to be understood that neither they, nor any others, would describe themselves as 'idealists'; it is a term used by their critics, who saw them as wide eyed and bushy-tailed. Actually their distinctive characteristic was their belief in progress. They believed that the system of international relations that had given rise to the First World War was capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order, that under the awakening of democracy and the growth of 'the international mind' it was in fact being transformed. Statesmen like President Woodrow Wilson, influenced by these values, helped establish the League of Nations in Geneva , though the 'realists' in the United States (US) Senate, chary of getting involved in far flung dispute, kept the US itself away from it. Eventually, the United Nations in New York, with its norms and standards, was yet another product of this set of values, at the end of yet another disastrous war. I have been a long time Ambassador to both Geneva and New York, and while recognising that the 'idealists' might not have been remarkable for their intellectual depths or powers of explanation, they were remarkable in the intensity of their dedication to a particular vision of what should happen.

The 'realists' challenged the 'idealist' view that 'power politics' was bad in itself. Indeed they presented it as the law of all international life. They sought to establish the legitimacy of the appeal to national interest. Interestingly, its proponents like Hans Morgenthau, did not entirely delink realist thinking from idealism. Indeed he spoke of the 'moral dignity of the national interest. But in his famous tome, 'Politics among Nations', he did argue that realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states. The individual may say 'let justice be done even if the world must perish' but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.² In other words, even if the individual has the moral right to sacrifice himself or herself for a perceived noble cause, the state does not. A famous realist work that we studied as we prepared for our profession was E H Carr's 'Twenty Years Crisis'.³ Writing in the fashion of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes, he explains the realist causes that led to the Second World War. In a method borrowed from

² Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, Reprinted -2011). This volume, originally published in 1948, is considered a classic work of realism in modern international relations literature.

³ E H Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Reprinted 2016).

Marxism, he argues that the 'elegant superstructures', such as the League of Nations, "must wait until some progress has been made in digging the foundations". The realists of that ilk sought to rediscover from history, the positive functions of state sovereignty, secret diplomacy, the balance of power and even limited war.

The third school, the social-scientific one, was large and amorphous. The adherents moved away from 'soft' social analyses to 'hard' ones for methodological guidance such as towards systems theory, game theory, cybernetics, communications theory and simulation. The theoreticians came from different disciplines – Thomas Schelling and Kenneth Boulding from economics, Herman Kahn from engineering physics, Arnold Rappaport from biology and Albert Wohlstetter from mathematical logic. They were often chillingly rational in their analyses. They provided the strategic theories of nuclear deterrence, among other things. Some would argue they provided the intellectual wherewithal to manage the mad rush towards nuclear proliferation. The advocates of peace studies also came from their ranks, which in some ways was a return to an idealism of sorts.

Post-Colonial Eastern and ASEAN Views

The overwhelmingly western bias in the theory of international relations, and its influence on foreign policy was moderated, or in any case, tempered by thought-leaders in post-colonial Asia. Initially during the Cold War years, the concept of "non-alignment" and its champions like Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Soekarno of Indonesia, Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Josip Bronz Tito of Yugoslavia and King Mahendra of Nepal championed the principle where issues were to be judged, each on its own rather than positing an a priori. While "neutrality" of the Swedish kind was termed as "immoral" by actors as America's John Foster Dulles, the socialist-oriented "non-aligned" leaders were also criticised by the communists as delaying the unfolding of the dialectical process by postponing the inevitable or inexorable revolution. Nonetheless, as Asian countries forged ahead, some of these principles found fruition in what has been called 'Asian Values'.

These have been seen as emphasising consensual approach, communitarianism rather than individualism, social order and harmony, respect for elders, discipline, a paternalistic State, and the primary role of government in economic development. These were seen to be patterns of behaviour common to many Asians. Obviously, the influence of Confucianism and other eastern philosophies of that ilk seemed pronounced. These were often pitted against so-called 'western values' such as those linked to transparency, accountability, global competitiveness, a universalistic outlook and universalist practices, and an emphasis on private initiatives and the private sector in economic development. The remarkable economic progress of East Asia in recent decades and, in particular, of the ASEAN was ascribed to the 'Asian Values'.

In applied terms, these values were incorporated into the ASEAN Charter. These included respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states; the peaceful settlement of disputes: non-interference in the internal affairs of other states; and

the right to national existence free from external interference. In effect, this practice allows for sore thumbs like Myanmar and Cambodia to stick out.⁴

In all fairness, however, while scrupulous respect for the principle of non-interference has been considered imperative to safeguard regional and domestic stability, recent times and events have witnessed some shifts in this position. While ASEAN's thinking and behaviour have usually tended to shun the idea of adopting punitive measures against members or criticising them too severely, in recent past, several members have dealt with the situation in Myanmar in a frank way. They have urged the rulers in Yangon to implement all-inclusive political reforms and to also focus on the resolution of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

The Charter also goes beyond the assertion of traditional ASEAN values. It states the ASEAN goal of ensuring that the member states and people should be allowed "to live in harmony with the world at large in a just democratic and harmonious environment"⁵. The ASEAN Charter also obliges the grouping to "strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the member states of ASEAN". This leads me directly to the next point, which is a core argument of my presentation.

Indian Civilisational Contribution

Historically, however, India has had a civilisational contribution to the use of 'values' in determining state policies including external behaviour.⁶ It dates back to 'Shanti Parva' of the epic Mahabharata. It prescribed a set of rules for the King. These were several fold: (1) Defence War; (2) administrative policies for good governance; (3) promotion of prosperity; and (4) fostering happiness of people. Foreign interventions were permissible to uphold 'Satya' (truth), or 'Naye' (righteousness).

The fourth-century Indian sage, Kautilya was best known for his work 'Arthashastra'. The centrality of his doctrine was to achieve the prosperity of the King and country, and to secure victory over rival neighbouring states, organised in concentric circles called 'mandalas'.⁷ The historical backdrop influenced the current values that helped shape some of the contemporary Indian external behaviour pattern. Some of these are evident in the past non-alignment, and present preference and caution, changing alliances to protect perceived national interests and a strong sense of identity with shared cultures abroad.⁸

⁴ Alfred M. Boll, The Asian Values debate and its Relevance to international human Law, International Review of the Red Cross. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1560775500106170>. Retrieved on 14 January 2019.

⁵ See The ASEAN Charter, The ASEAN Public Affairs Office, The ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia. Available at: <https://asean.org/storage/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

⁶ Political Ideas of 'Shanti Parva': https://www.Researchgate.net/publication/26209515_POLITICAL_IDEAS_OF_SHAN. Retrieved on 5 March 2019.

⁷ For a deeper understanding, see Roger Boesche, *The First Great Political Realist: Kautilya and his Arthashastra*, (Latham: Lexington Books, 2002).

⁸ 'The Influence of dominant cultural values on India's foreign policy', <https://minervaaccess.unimelb.edu.handle/11343/38555>. Retrieved on 5 March 2019.

Conclusion

One can and should argue that dichotomising thoughts and policies on foreign relations, whether between idealists, realists, and ‘social-scientists’, as between western and eastern, Indian or Asian values, is unrealistic. No school can claim exclusive possession of any particular value. Say, human rights, for instance. An attempt is made to portray these as a ‘western idea’. This trivialises the tremendous contributions that Asia and the east have made to the efflorescence of the human being, both individually and collectively. Protestant work ethics or the intense Calvinism that characterises parts of Europe can often be confused with many elements of Confucianism. Professor Han Sung-Joo, an important Asian thinker, has asserted that in a globalised world where factors of production need to cross borders unimpeded, all, be they motivated by either the so-called western or Asian values unless they adapt to the requirements of transparency, accountability, and limitless competition.⁹ So, governments and societies will apply values they deem necessary to the challenges they face. Needless to say, small size and lower military capability might be factors impeding a state’s choice between ‘values’, and more practical perceived self-interests in influencing external behaviour.

Henry Kissinger once said that Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic ones. It is probably true that the way every society or state actor relates to the world beyond would be actuated by its thoughts and behaviour, shaped by the preponderant values that pervade that society. Also our ideas of the kind of world we would like to live in will and does influence us to mould our own respective societies individually. As Mahatma Gandhi had famously observed, “you must be the change you wish to see in the world” – a prescription that all will do well to follow.

The Andaman and Nicobar, long-forgotten in India’s strategic circles, have returned to the fold. Through its tenure, the Narendra Modi government in India has both revived strategic interest in the islands and set out an ambitious agenda for their all-round development. With the looming prospect of the general election, the next government will likely have its work cut out for maintaining this momentum. Effective implementation of policy proposals, a perennial impediment even in mainland India, is bound to impede progress on the far-flung islands. It will take much political will and diligence to ensure that development continues.

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⁹ Sung-Joo, Han, “Asian Values: An Asset or a Liability”, in Sung-Joo, Han (ed.), *Changing Values in Asia-Their Impact on Governance and Development*, (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1994).