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MAKING VALUES MAKE SENSE:

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOREIGN POLICY*

For what is at stake here is actually the construction, by collective beliefs about human rights, of Western countries' identities (Adler 1996: 332)

Why do some states promote global human rights, protecting strangers from the abuses of their own governments and global crises? Contrary to the conventional counsels of national interest, dozens of global good citizen states contribute blood, treasure, and political capital to the international human rights regime. Sweden provides over \$3 billion a year in humanitarian foreign aid. Dozens of Canadian peace-keepers and aid workers have died in Afghanistan. Struggling South Africa has sacrificed U.S. assistance to support the International Criminal Court. These countries and others accept tens of thousands of refugees. Such human rights foreign policy is not blind altruism, temporary accident, or cultural idiosyncrasy—it is a rational pursuit of a socially constructed alternative vision of national interest.

A constructivist theory of foreign policy can help us to understand how cosmopolitan political cultures make values make sense, and how such cultures are learned and enacted. Constructivism analyzes world politics through the constitution and reconstruction of norms--global discourses, rules, institutions, and identities (Onuf 1997, Wendt 1999). For constructivists, “the identities, interests and behavior of political agents are socially constructed by collective meaning, interpretations and assumptions about the world.” (Adler 1997: 324) Constructivist approaches to foreign policy stress that the exercise of power is always directed and legitimated by social purpose, at home and abroad; values do not stop at the water's edge. (Ruggie 1983, Risse-Kappen 1995)

In principled foreign policy, policy-makers are neither Machiavellians nor idealists; rather, they seek to rationally maximize values and project identities. The identities of human rights promoters are global, modern, and democratic; their values are cosmopolitan, seeking a liberal, plural but universal, rule-governed world order (Appiah 2006). Instead of asking how they can pursue material interests—“what's in it for us?” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 914), global good citizens ask “what can my state do to build a better world--which will be a better world for *us* in the end?” A growing global culture of humanitarianism tells them what that better world looks like, and that democratic members of the community of nations have a responsibility to participate in

forms of international relations like foreign aid and international law to achieve it (Lumsdaine 1993). In practice, such constructed humanitarian identities shape foreign policies by filtering national perceptions of interests and needs, constructing foreign policy roles in the international system, building constraining international and domestic institutions, and providing rationales and constituencies for political leaders. (Saideman 2002; Kowert 2001)

States *can* become partners in the international human rights regime, but some are more amenable to this role than others. Candidate states are usually globalized, democratic, moderately developed, and secure middle or regional powers. Small, relatively consensual societies are structurally positioned for attention to principled arguments, while highly globalized and democratic states are linked to universalist communities of interest. For cosmopolitan commitment to prevail, normative linkage is critical. Notions of human rights must be connected to liberal and social democratic traditions, international standards of global good citizenship, and reminders of global interdependence.

The promotion of human rights in foreign policy is part of politics as usual, not an interest-free zone of altruism. It takes entrepreneurial leadership, calculating political parties, and transnationalized civil society constituencies to strategically mobilize historic norms and globalizing logics. Once mobilized, it takes domestic and international institutionalization to maintain states' incentives, momentum, and mechanisms for human rights policy.

Identities as interests

States are political communities that seek values and identities. All nations are "imagined communities"—and "imagined communities are not merely the sum of the beliefs of some national group; regardless of the physical existence of the individuals, they exist in symbols, practices, institutions and discourses." (Adler 1996: 327) Political culture is not genetic, nor are national values automatically projected into policy, but values and mentalities provide the tool kit that frames policy debates (Swidler 1986). "In other words, intersubjective meanings quasi-causally affect certain actions not by directly or inevitably determining them but rather by rendering these actions plausible or implausible, acceptable or unacceptable, conceivable or inconceivable, respectable or disreputable." (Yee 1996: 97) Looking outward, foreign policy is "a kind of social practice that at once constitutes and empowers the state, defines its socially recognized competence, and secures the boundaries that differentiate the domestic and international. . . ." (Hopf 1998: 179)

The realist tradition of international relations identifies national interest as the basis for foreign policy, but constructivism insists that what interests a nation is not always state security. Nations also expend scarce resources in pursuit of identity, which is often formed in international relationships. ". . . (N)orms are constitutive components of both the international system and states' interests." (Klotz 1995: 460) Prior to "defending the national interest," states must *define* the national interest. As Paul Wapner explains, "No

one questions that states act in their own interests. What is less clear, however, is how they perceive those interests.” (Wapner 1996)

Why does a particular state construct a particular identity, in this case, as a global good citizen? The answer lies partly in history, partly in structure, partly in the agency of meaning and myth makers, and partly in relations to Others. Internally, human rights promoter states have either a long-established or highly salient and hard-won rights tradition, that is seen as making a crucial contribution to other social goals such as peace and development. Such states are often small-to-medium sized and highly dependent on interaction, which fosters consensus and proposes a purposeful form of niche foreign policy. Within these societies, at some critical conjuncture charismatic figures or social forces frame salient problems in terms of cosmopolitan norms.

But foreign policy identities are also constructed outwards, in relation to others. “Identities perform three necessary functions in a society: they tell you and others who you are and they tell you who others are.” (Hopf 1998: 175) Construction of domestic and international identities are related, in both directions—national values are projected into international society, and international society socializes states (Klotz 1995; Katzenstein 1996). At the broadest level, constructivists observe that state identities are constructed in relationship to the wider international society. (Bull 1995) At another level, states build identities within regional and cultural communities (Brysk, Parsons and Sandholtz 2002), distinguish national identity from neighbors and enemies, and define the standards of “like-minded,” Western, or modern foreign policy (Donnelly 1998). For global good citizens, these layers of international identity construction are mutually reinforcing. “For example, it would be very difficult for a European state to consistently abuse human rights and still be deemed to belong to contemporary ‘Europe.’” (Adler 1996: 345)

National identities are historically rooted, but they are not fixed—rather, norms are continuously and dialectically reconstructed. At some points, such identities appear unconscious, when they have become deeply internalized, but socialized norms surface when they are contested by external change or internal challengers. For example, many European states’ post-war refugee regimes have been reopened for debate in response to growing numbers of immigrants along with shifting identities of state and regional communities and Others, as well as renewed security threat. The critical point is that external structures and events are always interpreted and filtered through long-standing notions of roles, relationships, and “lessons of history.” For global good citizen states, such notions have converged in a specific package of human rights identity and promotion as a fundamental orienting referent.

Global good citizen norms

What is the complex of beliefs and practices that constitute a global good citizen? “Human rights” is not a single concrete injunction, but rather an interconnected congeries of beliefs about our duty to protect strangers. These beliefs depend on the dual assumptions that we are rights-holding liberal agents, and that we identify as such with

demographically disparate but morally equivalent Others (Tan 2004, Monroe 1996). Such norms become accepted and internalized as they are clarified and gain historic status (Legro 1997), framed to fit with prevailing ideologies of liberal modernity (Boli and Thomas 1998), and connect to the humanitarian affective value-set of physical threat to innocent victims (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

The observed pattern of *humane internationalism* in foreign policy is defined as a combination of cosmopolitan values, long-term interests, and international projection of a domestic social welfare state (Pratt 1989: 14). Cosmopolitan values, initially articulated by Kant, include moral universalism, the status of individuals as rights-bearing global citizens, the aspiration towards a world community with the power to enforce those rights, and the desirability of democratization of both states and the international system of states (Fossum 2006). Cosmopolitan norms link national interest to universalism as they construct moral and strategic interdependence. The circle of moral identification is expanded from national to international community, as universal markers of human capacity and vulnerability transcend bounded signifiers such as language and kinship. Cosmopolitan doctrines such as human rights and human security assert strategic interdependence across space through a global commons of social action across borders, in which a threat to any touches all (Hampson 2002). Universalism also incorporates the shadow of the future in an inter-temporal interdependence of means and ends, so that long-term consequences of an action are built into its deliberation.

While this value package is based in human rights, it is also legitimated and influenced by a family of related norms with differing levels of national resonance: liberal democracy, social democracy, human security, and specific national historical traumas such as war and dictatorship. The chart is a “Chinese-menu” type map, with independent ascending columns—countries make choices within each category, but must choose one item/level within all categories to compose a full set. In the following map of global good citizen norms, the most general or least demanding properties ascend towards the most exigent universalist agenda, with all higher levels encompassing previous commitments. Countries can be compared in terms of their norm commitment along each of these dimensions, but also as their norm package may change over time. As with all norms, recognition, discourse and justification often precede full implementation (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2000), although some practice as well as rhetorical commitment must be present to qualify a country as holding a norm.

THE COSMOPOLITAN CATECHISM

WHO = WHY (“because we are”)

Global good citizens

Democracies

Western/European

WHAT (“we should promote”)

basic human dignity

non-discrimination

elections, rule of law

civil liberties

gender equity

children’s rights

right to food

education

health

collective and cultural rights

HOW (“by some or all of the following means”)

International law: *consisting of--*
humanitarian/laws of war
international human rights law
transnational codes of conduct

via--
adherence
mechanisms
expanding coverage

Peace promotion: conflict resolution
conflict prevention
intervention
reconstruction

diplomacy
funding
training
peace-keeping

Bilateral sanctions: pariahs
chronic violators

dialogue
diplomacy
economic sanctions
arms limits

Direct support to victims:

foreign aid
global civil society
asylum for refugees
armed intervention

WHEN AND WHERE

Where we are connected or implicated (former colonies, trade ties)

When others do

Wherever it meets a balance of interests and potential impact

Everywhere possible

Constructing foreign policy

How do these beliefs translate into the foreign policy practice of states? First, global good citizenship comes to constitute the identity of promoter states, and several domains of international relations, such as foreign aid. “. . . [T]he ability to create the underlying rules of the game, to define what constitutes acceptable play, and to be able to get other actors to commit themselves to those rules because they are now part of their self-understandings is perhaps the most subtle and most effective form of power. . . .” (Adler 1996: 336) Yet reproduction of these roles is not automatic; principled national interests are promoted, selected, disseminated, contested, and reconstructed through political processes (Weldes 1996). These processes operate simultaneously at several levels of analysis—inside and outside (R.B.J. Walker 1993), in a dialectic of structure and agency—and they change over time. Some suggest a life cycle of norm promotion, in which “moral entrepreneurs” spearhead persuasion and reframing of new norms (or new interpretations, Brysk 2005), followed by a cascade of socialization across states via imitation, belonging to international communities, and a quest for legitimation. (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)

Thus, at the domestic level, states construct principled foreign policy from inside. “. . . (I)nternational rules and norms can affect state behavior through the actions of domestic political actors.” (Cortell and Davis 1996) Foreign policy elites act as norm entrepreneurs, along with domestic “meaning managers” like churches and social movements. They refer to and promote the legitimacy of cosmopolitan norms like humanitarian intervention, and bridge them with national traditions and experiences. Moreover, elite initiative and social pressure can lead to the establishment of institutions such as human rights offices of Foreign Ministries, aid agencies, and international assistance programs within legal institutions and even militaries. These offices, in turn, become advocates as well as implementers of principled foreign policy.

Between state and society, political parties can be promoters or transmission belts for cosmopolitan values. In some cases, this will be linked to a party ideology such as social democracy, which also creates contact with transnational networks. At other times, political parties more generically use humanitarian internationalism as a political resource, to appeal to new constituencies, cement coalitions, or foster national pride in times of challenge on other fronts. For example, McKay shows how divergent political party coalitions in Canada and Denmark made a difference in the application of similar “like-minded” ideologies to decision-making regarding conflict in Iraq (McKay 2006).

Civil society also plays a systematic and frequent role in the construction of cosmopolitan foreign policy. Human rights advocates serve as pressure groups, sources of information and expertise, and sometimes implement principled programs like rule of law training abroad. Immigrants, women, and other disadvantaged groups often foster attentive interdependence with transnational peers. Meanwhile, value-oriented civic constituencies like churches play all of these sociological roles as advocates and service providers, as well as expanding moral universalism and legitimacy.

While domestic political processes foster a supply of human rights foreign policy, external structures and beliefs mobilize the demand side. From outside, states construct foreign policy identities as globalized democracies, as middle powers, and as mentor states. Roles influence policy-makers' parameters, commitments, rules, and functions at the global level and in regional or sub-systems (Walker ed. 1987; Jepperson in Katzenstein 1996). But also, system roles result from and reinforce the expectations of other members that a given state will serve as a broker, fixer, spoiler, or provider of some class of collective goods (such as peace-keeping or disaster relief). Role performance and reactions, in turn, feed back into a new round of self-definition; for example, when the Netherlands faced a crisis of its humanitarian peace-keeping after Srebrenica. (Fossum 2006)

Cosmopolitan norms derive from and contribute to perceptions of global interdependence. The objective presence of increasing international flows is interpreted by ideologies of globalization along several dimensions of strategic interdependence that condition national interest. Liberal institutionalists point to all states' increased sensitivity to the actions of others—from trading states to neighbors of countries in crisis (Keohane and Nye 1977), compatible with thin versions of human security and liberal democracy. More critical theorists see an interpenetration of decision-making capacity, resulting in a deeper permeability of sovereignty (Fossum 2006), which tends towards an interdependence of social democratic and full-spectrum versions of human rights.

Another layer of cosmopolitan commitment comes from state identities as democracies. As an ideology of strategic interdependence, the democratic peace hypothesis which states that democracies do not make war upon each other directs democratic states towards democracy promotion as a form of peace promotion (and self-protection). But human rights foreign policy may also be a more direct expression of liberal democratic identity as a community of values (Risse-Kappen 1995), as stated by the OSCE. In this interpretation, "friends don't let friends discriminate." Moreover, post-Cold War liberal democracies now believe and state that fellow democracies are more market-friendly, and thus better economic partners.

Beyond this, some globalized democracies have the role and mentality of "middle powers," which contributes yet another set of beliefs and expectations regarding global good citizenship. Middle power status is a loose blend of economic and geo-strategic standing and historic foreign policy role, which may be measured globally, regionally, or against an identity-based security community. Middle powers are typically avid multilateralists, and promoters of global governance and international law as a cooperative modality for a range of interests. Mid-range global citizen states tend to seek comparative advantage through the roles of catalyst, facilitator, and manager in the international system (Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 1993: 23). Beyond the process dimension of broker roles, middle powers generally favor the substantive goals of peace, law, and trade—each of which militates towards moral universalism. For such states, their structural position in the world system, role aspirations and interest perceptions, and the ongoing expectations of others are mutually constitutive. This is one reason that middle

power roles can linger decades or even centuries beyond any objective referent, as in the Netherlands.

Finally, the international system now offers a specific niche for principled promoters: the mentor state. In a somewhat pointed sketch of the ideal type: “. . . [A] *gidsland* is a nation that progressively guides other countries locked in pitiful nationalist struggles for power, dominance, and religious zeal to the proper international behaviour consisting of respect for the international legal order, the rights of men [sic], and free trade as the best way of ensuring prosperity for all.” (Herman 2006: 863) Although the concept originated in the Netherlands, Ann-Sofie Dahl suggests that it fits Sweden’s role as a “moral superpower” better than conventional cosmopolitanism (Dahl 2006), and the notion has been applied to Canada by its foreign policy analysts. Although these classic sponsors tend to incorporate social concerns beyond the U.S. liberal model, the mentor state notion can also be related to Protestant missionary visions of a “city on a hill.” (Hartz 1991) Such multivalent notions have served as a rationale for America’s episodes of democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention--which have ranged from sincere projection of liberalism to misguided cultural imposition to legitimization of cynical imperialism (Peceny 1999).

Reconstructing national interest

Even in foreign policy, another world is possible—in this case, a community of global good citizen states. Their construction of a principled national interest in taking care of strangers reminds us of an expanded notion of the political, in which politics is the construction of community (Arendt 1958). The cosmopolitan dream of extending such solidarity to the global level requires a parallel leap of moral imagination to the 19th-century revolution which turned neighbors into citizens. In the twenty-first century, it is the *lingua franca* of human rights that provides a way to make these values make sense.

The reconstruction of national interest is an ongoing, contested process, which must be continuously refreshed by national leaders, human rights movements, and international society. Within the established “mentor states,” moral entrepreneurs must develop and deepen normative linkages to consider new circumstances and address rival political cultures of nationalism, fundamentalisms, neo-liberal atomization, and post-liberal complacency. But domestic promoters of human rights foreign policy must also remember that good ideas do not float freely--they must be mobilized, enacted, and institutionalized by politics as usual.

A constructivist analysis also suggests that more states may be structurally situated to participate more vigorously in the international human rights regime. The dozens of relatively globalized, democratic, moderately developed and secure states may be considered latent human rights promoters. The global diffusion of cosmopolitan ideologies and communities of good citizenship will help to lay the foundation for their mobilization. But the reconstruction of national interest begins at home, with a voice and vision that makes values make sense.

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Comment: Please put this more as a conclusion and/ and or looking into the future.

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