

What is the relative importance of the foreign and external context of foreign po...



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' The behaviour of any human system, whether it be a single person or a complex society, results in part from cumulative weight of past experience and in part by current stimuli.'(Rosenau, 1972, p145)

When foreign policies are formulated three central determinants are integral: the international, domestic and governmental context. These represent the fact that foreign policy is devised from proceedings both at home and abroad. However the weighting of their influence can fluctuate over time and as such generate differing strategies as a result. The events leading up to the war in Iraq offer a compelling insight into the relative importance attached to each within the British government's decision to join the Americans in war against Saddam Hussein's nation.

The international context within which foreign policy is constructed is very important to its nature and focus. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War the major concern of larger and more powerful nations was the stable balance of power and status in the International arena. For instance the late 18th century British government were concerned with the expansionist nature of Napoleonic France. British involvement in the wars that raged at this time was predominantly caused by a desire to redress the balance of power in Europe rather than a perceived direct threat of invasion. Equally the ' triple entente' and ' triple alliance' prior to the 1st world war illustrates the way in which nations would ally together to maintain a balance of power.

Morton Kaplan identified six states of the International political environment; ' balance of power, loose bipolar, tight bipolar, universal, hierarchical, and

unit veto- each of which has certain “ essential” rules that must be followed by the national actors comprising the system to persist through time. Among the essential rules for each system state are stipulations that specify conditions under which its national actors should negotiate mobilise resources, fight stop fighting, join alliances, contest changes, and accommodate to other changes.’ (Rosenau, 1972, p155)

Kaplan’s model for the structure of the international environment illustrates in a scientific manner the breakdown of the international context that governs foreign policy decision-making.

Another central issue on the international scene is the nature of other nations respective policies. Aggressive and expansive foreign policies generally provoke a response from nations close by, both politically and geographically. For instance Hitler made it clear in his book ‘ Mien Kampf’ that he believed that the German people required ‘ living space’ and as such the nations on its Eastern frontier; Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia and Austria all felt vulnerable to invasion in the years leading up to that invasion. And, though they appealed for League of Nations aid all were invaded in the lead up to the Second World war as a result of the policy of Appeasement which allowed Germany to rectify the wrongs it had been dealt at Versailles.

The example of the Third Reich’s foreign policy and how the League of Nations responded brings me to another significant issue in the analysis of the international context which is the relationship between larger and smaller nations. As, though it objected, Czechoslovakia was ordered that Germany could reclaim the predominantly German inhabited Sudetenland

from them. However it was here which all the Czechoslovakian defence resided which rendered them unprotected when Hitler ordered for the invasion of the rest of the nation. Clearly in this period especially the larger and more powerful nations, in this case Britain and France, determined the destinies of the smaller nations. Smaller nations often ally themselves with larger ones for protection or join organisations that they believe give them a collective security such as the League of Nations, the Warsaw Pact, NATO or the UN.

In more recent years Iraq's invasion of Kuwait signalled a reaction by the UN in the Gulf war and a coalition of nations joined to drive the Iraqis out of their country. In this instance that the international context of Iraq's foreign policy was one of unity, large and small nations recognised that this contravened international laws set out in the Geneva Convention. Kuwait's foreign policy was one, as a small nation, put faith in the larger nations on the Security Council at the UN to come to its aid.

There have been two significant upheavals in the nature of the International context since the end of World War II, one was the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War and the second was the terrorist attacks on 11th September 2001. Both of these caused considerable change in the disposition of the International community. Obviously the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War signalled the end of the perpetual fear of nuclear holocaust and embraced a great deal of freedom for the world community. However the 11th September reiterated to a nation that felt untouchable that though the Soviet threat may have gone it had been replaced by terrorism and they were not afraid to strike.

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George Bush's 'War on Terror' was undertaken in both Afghanistan and Iraq with other perceived terrorists imprisoned without trial at Guantanamo Bay. This epitomises the change that occurred in the focus of the Bush administration especially. During the Presidential campaign both he and Al Gore were keen to stress their concentration on domestic economic issues, Gore in particular was keen to reduce the American role in the UN and NATO due to the American dollars it was costing and Bush was only interested in tax cuts. Patently without it America would have continued along the same isolationist path that Bush originally signalled when he pulled out of the Kyoto agreement on fossil fuels.

The Domestic context is the second major issue in the construction of foreign policy. Traditionally foreign policy is not seen as a prime concern to voters until major international crises occur, governments infrequently promote their foreign policy in order to achieve election victories. However the media has increased its significance to the Lehman, incidents abroad are brought into the living room via television, the Internet and newspapers like never before. The increased access to 'live' coverage of war and destruction means that it no longer seems so far away. As such ones' government's foreign policy becomes a far larger issue in the public sphere.

National identity, culture and public psyche also help shape foreign policy. This was evident during the build up to the recent war in Iraq. Large scale, vocal protests of mistrust and opposition to the war and anti-American sentiment was rife in Europe, both France and Germany were against military action. The German public are, due to their horrific military past, a relatively passive nation and I believe this was reflected in their misgivings <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-relative-importance-of-the-foreign-and-external-context-of-foreign-policy-making/>

over the war in Iraq, however many observers at the time believed the French opposition was not due to this but resentment against American domination and British pro-American stance rather than being seen as European allies. Whatever the truth behind the opposition it was certainly evident on the streets of Europe especially.

However such anti-war and anti-American sentiment was also felt in Britain and large demonstrations typified this. However pole after pole on the public's feelings on the war were divided some in support and some against. The media coverage too was plainly split between scepticism and support, Channel 4 news coverage especially appeared focused on the anti-war sentiment. It was a good illustration of the influence of domestic context in the shaping of foreign policy: public opinion is reactionary and as such the policy is generally already formed before it becomes an issue. Though governments might act upon the tradition or culture international incidents require action by governments quicker even than the media can beam them into our living rooms.

This brings me to the final of the three central context subjects, the governmental context. Webber and Smith are keen to determine that 'traditionally foreign policy analysis assumed that all governments were in principle the same...Governments were seen as representing national states, whose claims to sovereignty and security were the key issues in foreign policy. National policy makers, in effect, had to assume that all governments were out for the same things as they were: maximisation of their freedom of action and security in a competitive international system.' (Webber, M. & Smith, M. 2002, p33)

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As a result they describe Foreign Ministries as 'insulated...not subject to the hurly burley of normal politics.' (Webber & Smith, 2002, p33) Plainly from this and the nature of domestic context in foreign policy it can be seen that traditionally the foreign policy is the least transparent of all policies and, by that score, least democratic in formulation. Indeed, the ties to the Secret Services, organisations such as MI5, MI6, CIA, KGB etc, also give it an air of mystique and murk which distance it from the public domain.

It is also the case that legislation within many Western nations' constitutions allow the elected President to become Commander-in-chief of the armed forces in times of national crises, of course this alludes to the perception that the foreign policy is ultimately a decision taken deep in the corridors of power. Indeed, dictatorships, such as Saddam Hussein's in Iraq, often control their aggressive foreign policies from the top in order to preserve their regimes domestically as well as from the international community. Hussein often bluffed and lied about weapons in order to create a threat upon those around him to stave off invasion and by gassing the Kurds at Hallabджа emphasised his desperation for power and control.

The governmental context is also important as regards how situations are dealt with. In the Early 1980s for instance Margaret Thatcher's decision to fight in the Falklands against the invading Argentineans was, many believe, politically motivated. Prior to victory in the war her majority was precarious and many doubted her leadership however the resultant national pride gave her the popularity to implement a controversial domestic economic agenda.

A more stable political climate may have induced undertaking a peaceful solution to the problem. Conversely, President Kennedy's actions during the <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-relative-importance-of-the-foreign-and-external-context-of-foreign-policy-making/>

Cuban Missile Crisis were from a more liberal leader who knew the implications of his decision could lead to world destruction. Many advisors and Right wing people in the country believed that America should invade Cuba or even launch nuclear weapons however the blockade of Cuba was sufficient to cool hostilities and lead to compromise as regards American weapons in

Europe. Clearly had Kennedy not been in such a position politically he might have acted differently.

Tony Blair's insistence in British involvement in the Iraq war was undertaken with the backdrop of a large labour majority and success in Serbia and Afghanistan. A weaker or less bullish Premier may have crumbled under the pressure from vocal condemnation and the left of his own party and sought a continuation of inspections. Evidently the actors involved in the creation of foreign policy are integral to its construction however it is not just the leaders of the respective governments that control its course. The democratic western nations all have, in some form, Foreign Ministries to monitor the issue and respond on an international level. Equally all nations are represented in the UN so they must have representatives here to as well as delegates in other organisations such as NATO in order to discuss the international agenda. Foreign embassies within other nations also report back to their respective country with the issues that may affect them or other countries. Clearly information gathering for the policies throughout the world is a labour intensive task despite the magnitude and multitude of communication technology.

' National interest is fundamental to traditional notions of foreign policy. This does not mean that the national interest is always easy to identify and describe or its beyond active manipulation (the national interest may merely equate to whatever the policy makers say it is at any given time.)(Webber & Smith, 2002, p43) This goes a long way towards explaining the modern re-evaluation of the notion of national interest. It emphasises that while in theory it ought to be the main drive for policy making but in reality the manner in which the significant actors have viewed the main areas of context and chosen to react is the crux of national interest. In democracies such as Britain the people delegate their interests to the government in power and as such it controls, to a large extent, the direction of our national interest as regards foreign policy.

As is evident the context in which foreign policy is fashioned can find its roots with a predominance of each and any of the three accompanied by the influence of actors, issues and interest. Cultural and traditional national opinion is just as influential in the short to medium term, as witnessed by the German anti-war stance over Iraq. Plainly it was a more significant cause for the decision than the one its ally, the US perceived.

However this individual stance against American wishes contrasts with the path in which the German foreign policy followed during the Cold War and encapsulates just how a change in international context can affect foreign policies of nations further down the international corridors of power. The International context is generally regular in the short and medium terms though historic events such as the collapse of the USSR or the World Trade

Centre terrorist attacks profoundly amend its course. It is also clear that <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-relative-importance-of-the-foreign-and-external-context-of-foreign-policy-making/>

smaller nations who rely on more powerful allies such as the US compound their foreign policies in order to secure their help when required.

However having looked at the major international incidents of the 20th century I feel that much depends on the governments which implement the foreign policies and their leaders also and its influence on the international and domestic contexts. Had the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Chamberlain, Churchill, Khrushchev, Kennedy, Thatcher, Hussein, Bush, Blair and everyone else acted differently when shaping their respective foreign policies then both contexts would be very different today. By way of conclusion then I believe that the contexts are inextricably linked and though one may temporarily take precedence over the others the causality that created it or it creates will effect and be affected by all.