

Ethical foreign policy essay sample



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Introduction

Ethics is referred to the application of morals to human conduct. It can be applied to any aspect of the government policies or programmes to make it more adaptable to all sections of the society. It has been noticed that in the civilised society, moral and religious reasons for political decisions are often criticised as irrelevant. Public officials are charged of following atrocious policies. They are also criticised for adopting a hidden agenda and their motives are routinely questioned.

Diplomats, who advocate an ethical foreign policy emphasise on sympathy, fairness, self-control and duty. These are four aspects of moral sense considered by the powerful countries in the world while formulating their foreign policies. The United States and the UK are the two countries that are facing ethical dilemmas while dealing with certain global issues.

Need of Ethical foreign Policy

In the recent years, some policies adopted by the United States and Britain have raised eyebrow in the political and intellectual circle. Even the common people did not support these policies on the basis of humanitarian ground and lack of credible reasons for the adoption of the policies. “ The UK government had to face criticism from the opposition and the public on some policy initiatives. The growing discontent among people forced Robin Cook, then British Foreign Secretary, to add an ethical dimension to British Foreign Policy” (Robinson, 2002).

Traditionally, the foreign policies of the countries have focused on the issues that are of national interests. Most politicians and diplomats always believed that the government should deal with the issues concerning national interests and should not interfere in the matters of global concern. However, in the changing scenario, that perspective has been changed to a great extent.

The United States and the UK have taken the initiatives of working on certain global issues that have raised concern among people across the globe. In the current scenario, there are three major issues that are having ethical considerations. They are Human Rights, Democracy and Global Terrorism.

Protection of Human Rights

Humanitarian considerations in the foreign policy have become crucial because of the increasing number of human rights violations reported in many parts of the world. The ethical values attached to human rights are a part of new foreign policy initiatives. Under the new foreign policy, the government programmes are directed at building relationship with people around the globe.

A popular humanitarian foreign policy is always justifiable. Despite of distant geographical locations, people of one country may be emotionally attached with people of another country. The sufferings of people of a particular country are bound to generate a sense of moral obligation in other countries that advocate the values of human rights and freedom. The communications and transportation revolutions enabled the governments in making ethical foreign policy possible.

There is a debate whether it is ethical for individuals, states and international organisations to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states on humanitarian grounds or not. Justification of the use of force for humanitarian purposes has become very complex and vague. These questions have come up time to time before the world community. “ The events in Kurdistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Sierra

Leone, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Angola and East Timor witnessed foreign intervention on the issue of human rights violation” (Brown, 2001). To justify these interventions, it is necessary to justify the ethical aspects of human rights issue.

During the Cold War era, the power was centred on the United States and the erstwhile USSR. At that time, foreign intervention had a risk of triggering a bigger conflict between the two superpowers. However, after the disintegration of the USSR, the political scenario of the world has witnessed a sea change. Now powerful states can intervene without fear of the escalation of conflict between the superpowers.

“ Many countries in the world are facing the problems of internal strife, which makes the lives of their citizens miserable. The sufferings of civilians require some kind of intervention from powerful countries that have a say in global affairs” (Robertson, 1999).

Modern communication has reduced the gap between people living in far-flung places. Now people have easy access to the happenings of events all over the world. That provokes the public into believing that something ought to be done to address the concerns of other people. A global discourse of

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human rights has emerged, which warrants intervention where rights are abused on a large scale.

The NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia and the Gulf War I to liberate Kuwait from Iraq are the examples of changing foreign policy perspectives. On ethical grounds, the states will be able to help people who are struggling under the oppression of the authoritative regimes.

“ When the British government announced that it would pursue a foreign policy with an ethical dimension, it had the issue of human rights in its mind. Britain believed that the ouster of Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic was the biggest achievement of its foreign policy. Britain also interfered in East Timor and Sierra Leone to prevent human rights abuse” (Fierke, 2001).

The actions taken by the allies, United States and Britain in specific cases, have gone well beyond the boundaries of national interest. Critics may oppose their actions saying that they violate the spirit of non-interference principles. But the humanitarian aspects of their policies cannot be ignored.

All the signatories to Universal Declaration of Human Rights are committed to stop human rights abuse elsewhere in the world. They cannot remain mute spectators to the human rights violations and need to intervene when the situation demands. Without having an ethical perspective in its foreign policy, no country will be able to prevent human rights abuse.

Promotion of Democracy

When the questions of ethical foreign policy are raised, the significance of democracy comes into mind. Democracy is the hallmark of any society that

believes in offering more freedom to people. Democratic governments rarely implement oppressive policies that require external military intervention on humanitarian ground. Such policies are adopted only by authoritative and dictatorial regimes that hardly respect democratic values.

A major characteristic of an ethical foreign policy is the renewal of democracy. Promoting human rights and democracy are important parts of ethical foreign policy. The United States and some European countries such as Britain have a long history of fostering democratic development in foreign countries.

Governments have real motives for promoting democracy in other countries. They strongly believe that democracy is a good system of government. It is much better than other contemporary forms of governments. “ For the countries that propagate democracy, it is easier to deal with governments that share the same values. Democracy is associated with peace and security. It has been noticed that countries that do not follow democracy, often witness turbulent situations and internal disturbances” (Forsythe, 2001).

“ After the collapse of Communism and the victory of Capitalism, Western governments began to think that a market economy would generate democracy. They strongly believe that democracy is a necessary tool for successful economic reform and development” (Cochran, 2001). They promote democracy to make their economic assistance more effective and to generate healthier atmosphere for investment and trade.

The United States was the first country in taking the initiatives of promoting democracy in different parts of the world. Democracy remained an important goal of American foreign policy for decades. Later, countries such as Britain and India joined the US in promoting democracy on the global arena. “

Democratic states share interests as well as values. Shared democratic values are important because they make the world a better place for living and enhances co-operation between the states” (Cochran, 2001).

The new wave of democratisation in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia reinforced the view that democratic principles should be promoted globally. Several states including the US, the UK and France have made it clear that they would provide development aids only to those countries that respect and implement democratic principles. “ The US has adopted a special foreign policy on Latin America. It is determined to promote democratic values in the region. The US had intervened in Chile and Colombia in order to force these countries to restore democracy” (Bouvier, 2002).

“ When Pakistan witnessed a military coup in 1999 and the democratically elected government was overthrown, the US and other countries in the world imposed economic sanctions on it” (Robinson, 2002). Their main objective was to put pressure on Pakistan to return to democracy. In the new global economy, most countries are dependent on foreign aid and other assistance. Hence, the major powers can put pressure on them to follow democracy in work and spirit, which is one of the main objectives of an ethical foreign policy.

“ Considerations of democratic principles can meet the objectives of forcing states to undertake economic and good governance reforms, which will benefit the countries having investment potentials” (Wilson III, 2004). Most third world countries are dependent on the aid and assistance given by the US, the European Union and Japan. The United States, Japan and the European countries also have a major say in the UN bodies such as World Bank and IMF. Their pre-conditions for monetary assistance forced many countries to improve their human rights records and institute democratic reforms. This is an important victory for the ethical foreign policy.

“ Some countries have adopted a policy of sending election observers to third world countries in order to take stock of the free and fair nature of the poll” (Forsythe, 2000). Such measures put pressure on the concerned countries to ensure transparency in their election procedures, which is very important to meet the objectives of democratic principles.

Diplomatic initiative is another aspect of ethical foreign policy that promotes democracy. It has been acknowledged that only isolating a state internationally, won't serve the purpose of restoring democracy. It is very important to initiate dialogue with that state through diplomatic channels so that it restores democratic values in the country.

The relations between democratic and non-democratic states are always strained, which is detrimental to world peace. “ The proposition acquired practical policy significance when promoting democracy in the interests of security was proclaimed a goal of foreign policy. In his State of the Union message in 1994, the US President Bill Clinton acknowledged that the best

strategy to ensure security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere as democracies don't attack each other" (Fierke, 2001).

Response to Global Terrorism

Terrorism always has been a concern of many countries in the world. In the past, terrorist organisations operated within the country and carried out their operation. However, in the changing scenario, the terrorist organisations have become more organised and operate from different parts of the world. They have expanded their network to the countries that have soft policies towards the fundamentalist forces.

Some countries in South Asia, Middle East and West Asia have become hubs of terrorist activities. In such an event, the issue of global terrorism has become a part of foreign policies of major countries in the world. Counter-terrorism is the one of the important objectives of the ethical foreign policy.

The United States and its European allies are the worst-affected by the menace of global terrorism. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States has changed the global security concerns to a large extent. Most countries have acknowledged that it's ethical to strike at the terrorist organisations even though they are based in the territory of a sovereign country. " The US had justified its action against terrorist camps based in Afghanistan and Sudan by relating their activities to its national security. Similarly, Israel bombarded the terrorist camps in Syria, saying that these terrorist organisations are carrying out subversive activities in its territory" (Thomas et al, 2004).

“ The US war against the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan was based on the notion of internal and global security. In that war, the US received direct support from many countries including the UK, Canada, Australia, France, New Zealand, Italy and Germany. It also received indirect support from South Asian countries such as India and Pakistan” (Wilson III, 2004). The huge support received by the US proved that many countries are now focusing on global terrorism as part of their foreign policy initiatives. There were heavy civilian casualties in the war. However, they were justified by the ethical ends of the war.

“ Another significant aspect of an ethical foreign policy based on global terrorism is the right to strike at countries that harbour terrorists and allow terrorist activities on their soil. This is a controversial policy adopted by the United States under the Bush Doctrine. Under the doctrine, the US keeps the option of pre-emptive strike open” (Thomas et al, 2004).

The doctrine has been criticised by many countries as they fear that it would set a bad precedent for other countries. However, the US has justified its policy by arguing about the ethical principles attached to it. Countries like Britain and Israel have supported the US move citing the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the fast five years, global terrorism has become a major concern for people across the globe. The terrorist attacks on Western establishments and citizens in different parts of the world have forced the international community to emphasise on the need for strong measures to stop terrorism.

It is definitely ethical to maintain a foreign policy, which is crucial for national security and global peace.

Conclusion

The ethical foreign policy is always controversial as it allows intervention in the internal affairs of other states. The issues like human rights, democracy and terrorism are no longer considered as internal problems. In the current scenario, these issues have become international. The world community cannot ignore the bad plight of people and human rights violations.

Democracy and global terrorism are directly related to world peace and they must be included in the foreign policies of the countries that have power and resources to address these issues positively. Although the ethical aspects of these issues make them justifiable, it is most important to ensure that states do not exploit them for their self-gain.

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