

LIBERALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE LIBERAL FOREIGN POLICY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Liberal international order strongly claims to be the historical alternative to Realism (a dominant theory of International Relations). Liberal internationalism - embodied both in ideas and practices - refers to an approach to international politics that seeks to advance certain ideals or moral goals, for example, making the world a more peaceful or just place. Open markets, democratic society, the rule of law are the tenets of the liberal vision which have been transforming world politics over the decades. It offers an open and rule-based system where states interact with each other for mutual gains. Liberals believe that people and states have interests in the establishment of a world order based on the principles of restraint and sovereign equality. Liberal internationalism positively assumes that states can overcome constraints to create a stable system. Similarly, they assume that states will restraint in exercising power. Trade and

exchange between states will help strengthen the international community. Liberalism views institutions and rules as the basis for cooperation between states. The liberal international order has evolved over the last decade and the world witnessed an extraordinary rise of liberal democratic states and the liberal capitalist system influencing international governance. The possible identification of key dimensions in a liberal order can be manifested in terms of participatory scope, sovereign equality, and the rule of law.

Liberal principles and institutions make important variables to the conduct of liberal states' foreign policy. Liberal idealism in foreign policy holds that a state should make its internal political philosophy the goal of its foreign policy. It is an ideology that has shaped the foreign policies of political states across the continents.

“Liberalism is a distinct ideology and set of institutions that have shaped the perceptions of and capacities for foreign relations of political societies that range from social welfare or social-democratic to laissez-faire. Liberalism is not inherently “peace-loving”; nor is it consistently restrained or peaceful in intent. Furthermore, the liberal practice may reduce the probability that states will successfully exercise the consistent restraint and peaceful intentions that world peace may well require in the nuclear age. Yet the peaceful intent and restraint that liberalism does manifest in limited aspects of its foreign affairs announce the possibility of world peace” (Doyle, 1983).

Liberalism manifests restraint among states which in its foreign policy provides the possibility of world peace. The expansion of the liberal zone of peace is the fundamental principle of liberal foreign policy. This principle has strengthened the idea of world peace by the steady expansion of peace among liberal states. At the same time, this liberal practice establishes the fact that there are differences between the practices of liberal peace toward other liberal and nonliberal states in the international order. Liberalism has extraordinarily succeeded in the expansion of a separate peace among liberal societies of the world and at the same time has miserably failed in the expansion of peace toward nonliberal societies of the world.

Liberalism and Immanuel Kant

Individuals’ freedom is at the base of Liberalism. The individual is the most important unit of analysis for liberal theorists. Freedom of the individual is the most essential and important principle of Liberalism. This principle stresses the right to be treated and a duty to treat others as ethical subjects, and not as objects or means only. The principle of freedom of individuals has led to the liberal vision of generating rights and institutions. Liberalism is further interested

in explaining the conditions under which cooperation and collaboration among states become possible.

Liberalism is a commitment to a certain set of rights that form its foundational basis. The main set of rights has three dimensions; freedom from arbitrary authority (negative freedom), rights necessary to protect and promote the capacity and opportunity for freedom (positive freedom), and democratic participation (democratic representation). Among the three, the ‘negative freedom’ includes freedom of conscience, free press and free speech, equality under the law, and the right to hold property. ‘Positive freedom’ includes opportunity in education, right to healthcare, and employment. The third right, democratic participation is necessary to guarantee the other two.

Immanuel Kant has been the leading liberal idealist of the Enlightenment era. He elaborated the plans for perpetual peace, and his writings contain the seeds of core liberal ideas. Kant has identified a challenge for the three sets of rights discussed above. He writes in “Perpetual Peace”

“To organize a group of rational beings who demand general laws for their survival, but of whom each inclines toward exempting himself, and to establish their constitution in such a way that, in spite of the fact their private attitudes are opposed, these private attitudes mutually impede each other in such a manner that [their] public behavior is the same as if they did not have such evil attitudes” (Kant, 1795).

Liberalism has dealt with this idea of individual freedom and social order in two ways. One is laissez-faire or conservative liberalism and the other is a social welfare or social democratic or “liberal” liberalism. Both ways tend to organize individual freedom into a stable political order. This political order of both conservative and democratic liberalism is recognized by a shared commitment to four essential institutions. First, citizens possess

juridical equality and other fundamental civil rights such as freedom of religion and the press. Second, the effective sovereigns of the state are representative legislatures deriving authority from the electorate and exercise their authority free from all restraint apart from the requirement that basic civic rights be preserved. Third, the economy rests on the recognition of the rights of private property. Fourth, economic decisions are predominantly shaped by the forces of supply and demand, domestically and internationally, and are free from strict control by bureaucracies.

Conservative liberalism favors a constrained role for the state and a wider role for private property and the market, whereas welfare liberalism has expanded the role of the state and constricted the role of the market.

Liberalism and Foreign Policy

Liberalism has successfully created a zone of peace and cooperation among liberal states. But it has failed miserably in guiding foreign policy outside the liberal world. Historical evidence proves that liberal international relations, on one hand, have given incentives to liberal states within a separate zone of peace yet on the other these relations included imprudent aggression against nonliberal states in matters of security and economic cooperation. Michael W. Doyle in his book, “Democratic Peace Thesis”, puts this idea as:

“Liberal states, founded on individual rights such as equality before the law, free speech and civil liberty, respect for private property and the representative government would not have the appetite for conflict and war. Peace was fundamentally a question of establishing legitimate domestic orders throughout the World. When the citizens who bear the burdens of war elect their governments, wars become impossible” (Doyle, 1986).

Doyle argues that the features of ‘restraint among liberal states’ and ‘international imprudence in relations with non-liberal states’ are important in explaining the liberal foreign

policy. The imprudent vehemence of liberal states is the most familiar failure of liberal states. Despite the fact that liberalism succeeded in creating a zone of peace among liberal states, liberal foreign policy saw repeated failures while interacting with powerful nonliberal states and witnessed repeated attempts of failed diplomacy. Liberalism failed in negotiating issues of mutual interest with nonliberal states and raised conflict. This implies that peaceful restraint seems possible between liberal states only, and there are numberless wars fought by liberals against non-liberal states. Imprudent aggressiveness also refers to the liberal foreign policy towards weak nonliberal states. Liberal states have intervened in many Third World countries, though there is a clear difference in the styles of the intervention of conservative liberals and welfare liberals.

The most apparent influence of liberalism on liberal states’ foreign policy relations is the establishment of peace among them. Countries like France and England engaged in constant strife against each other which later found peace after joining the liberal regimes club. The same is the case with Anglo-American relations who after fighting a war in 1812, in which following the Reform Act of 1832, both states settled their disputes diplomatically, proving the influence of liberalism on the foreign relations of liberal states in the establishment of peace among them. Italy, during World War I - despite the liberal member of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria - instead of fulfilling its treaty obligations with Britain and France by avoiding war with other liberal states, subsequently declared war on Germany and Austria.

All these examples suggest that liberalism has increased the possibility of the establishment of peace among themselves. It also suggests that liberal thinking influenced policy-making elites and public opinion in a number of Western states after World War I.

The Challenge

Liberal foreign policy has a lot of challenges ahead although political relations between

liberal states and the bonds of liberal rights and interests have proved helpful for mutual non-aggression. But there are differences in the alliances which had the foundations of mutual strategic interests binding them. The strategic alliances between liberal and nonliberal states are broken and their economic ties are strained. Though a separate peace exists among liberal states, their relations with other nonliberal states are insecure due to the prevailing anarchy in the

international political system. There are grounds for conflict in the relations between liberal and nonliberal states because liberal states have not successfully solved the problems surrounding international cooperation and competition. Liberalism seems unable to prevent trade rivalries and it also has failed to guarantee collective solutions to international security and welfare.

References

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