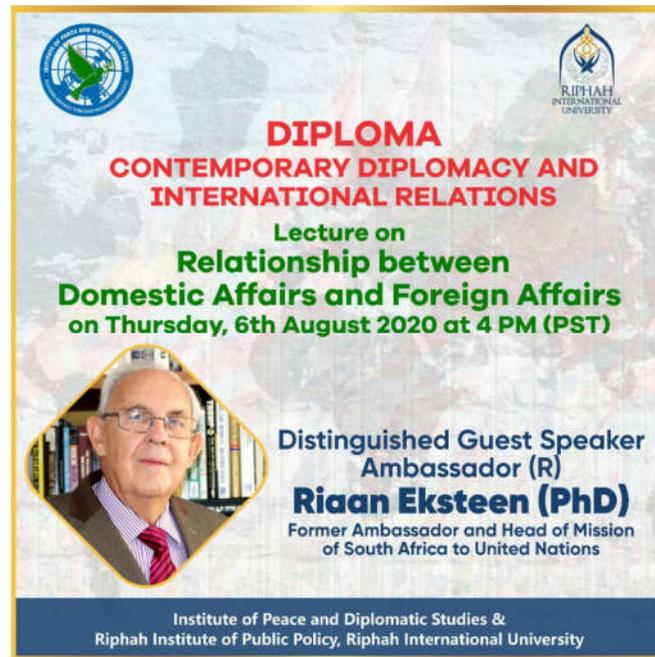


Relationship between Domestic Affairs and Foreign Affairs

[Virtual presentation to students completing their course]



The impact of domestic affairs on foreign affairs has always been crucial. The former affects and substantially influences the latter. A vibrant foreign policy depends on domestic support which is not confined to domestic policy, but also includes the endorsement by the legislature and understanding of the public at large.

It can be argued that foreign policy is the reflection of domestic policy. Henry Kissinger is of the opinion that foreign policy starts where domestic policy ends. One of his successors as U.S. Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance who served in the Carter administration, opined that there had always been an interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy and that that reciprocal relationship had become increasingly important. Vance's observation was not only valid in 1983, it carries still weight today. In his memoirs Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has given his view of this relationship:

In general, Carter rarely, if ever, thought of foreign policy in terms of domestic politics, while [Vice President Walter] Mondale rarely, if ever, thought of it otherwise. With national security my preeminent concern. I inevitably shared some of Carter's

predilection, though my experience in the White House gradually educated me to a much higher awareness of the importance of domestic politics to our effectiveness.

My article in the South African Journal of Humanities (September 2019) dealt with “The effect of domestic affairs on foreign policy”. Some of the pertinent points from it are worth reiterating here.

To understand a country one must comprehend that what its domestic affairs reflect. The main elements of and imperatives embedded in domestic policy resonate in foreign policy. Once that is grasped that country’s foreign policy can be appreciated. The reverse is not sustainable. Without domestic influence there could hardly be a foreign policy. Foreign policy seldom succeeds if it is not acceptable at home. Roy Macridis already made the profound statement 62 years ago that “foreign policy is nothing more than a by-product of domestic politics.”

Domestic pressures may take several different forms and the relationship between foreign-policy decision makers and domestic constituencies is shaped in part by the institutions of society. The inter-relationship of domestic and foreign policy and the relevance of domestic developments to foreign policy decisions are of the utmost importance. Therefore due regard is always to be paid to the domestic constraints within which foreign policy decisions are formulated and pursued. The impact of the public — domestic constituencies — does have a decisive role in influencing foreign policy. The domestic scene cannot be ignored in foreign policy options and their formulation and execution.

The Vietnam War still stands as perhaps the most important testimony to this reality. That war had a tremendous impact on the attitudes of Congress and the American people. At that time Congress, and especially the Senate, became adamant and determined to play a more assertive role in the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy. This forced a change in the conduct of foreign affairs. No longer would the executive branch have the power to formulate its foreign policy without greater consultation and support of Congress. Through this process the government was now forced to take the American people into its confidence to a greater extent if it was to win

their needed support. And this new era of consultation between the people and their representative and the executive that began in the 1970's still prevails today.

The results of that new relationship have been manifold. Foremost the realization that foreign policy should be understood and supported by the people and their congressional representatives. Without that broad base of support in Congress and amongst the American people, foreign-policy initiatives are vulnerable to misunderstanding, public disillusionment, and repudiation. The American people through their representatives would have to be a partner in the formulation of broad foreign-policy objectives if the executive was to pursue effectively long-range goals. Confidence in government is essential for national strength which in turn will encourage a vibrant foreign policy.

In the digital era the distinction between domestic and foreign is becoming even more blurred as citizens' migration to digital platforms creates on the one hand new opportunities for diplomats to rally domestic public support for foreign policy achievements, while on the other hand threats to traditional foreign policy approaches are exposed when issues that are of growing importance to domestic audiences are advanced.

Foreign policy is formulated neither in a vacuum nor in isolation. It is rooted in national interests. Its parameters are always shaped by a nation's own interests. With its core ingrained in domestic affairs, foreign policy is correctly regarded as an extension of domestic policy. It expands from domestic policies. The linkages between the international and national environments are considered crucial in the decision-making process of foreign policy. Consequently, foreign policy decision makers must have a comprehensive understanding of domestic policies before formulating and adopting a suitable and viable foreign policy. No country can pursue a foreign policy that is detached from its domestic base. It is therefore essential that domestic affairs are included in the analysis of foreign policy decision-making and to evaluate the influence of domestic affairs on foreign affairs and their consequential impact on the latter. Domestic political calculations influence foreign policy choices. Because international relations and domestic politics are so interrelated they should be analysed

simultaneously, as wholes. Thomas Franck holds the firm opinion that in today's world, no "affair" is any longer exclusively "foreign." For him every international initiative, every foreign expenditure of lives and treasure, has significant domestic repercussions. Consequently, there is no such thing as a discrete "foreign-affairs" enterprise.

Foreign policies are designed with the aim of achieving complex domestic and international agendas. They usually involve an elaborate series of steps in which domestic politics play an important role. Foreign policies are in most cases designed and finalised through coalitions of domestic and international actors and groups. The domestic political environment to a large extent shapes the entire framework of decision-making, also in an international context. That environment includes all laws enacted and their legislative decisions, and government agencies and lobby groups that influence or restrict individuals or organisations in the society.

One of the most pressing concerns in the study of international relations today is to develop a systematic account of the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy. Until this is accomplished, not only will explanations of foreign policy decisions be incomplete, but theories may often be less helpful to policymakers. With this as a firm point of departure for a case study on this subject no better examples present themselves than the developments during the past three years in respect of President Trump's foreign-policy drives and also of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union — Brexit.

Since taking office President Trump has coupled foreign policy to domestic politics. Therefore, the USA is an excellent example of how domestic pressure and the desire to placate a domestic audience and support base translate into foreign policy directives. The prism through which President Trump sees and develops his foreign policy is his populist slogan of "Make America Great Again" and his rallying call of "America First." For him his foreign policy only matters if it is compatible with national interests and the promotion of those interests. From his perspective he approaches international affairs in the most realistic manner by demanding that America comes first.

What ultimately matters to him is the effectiveness of U.S. policies and their compatibility with national interests and whether his policies promote U.S. national interests. With this approach he has challenged and changed intimate and long-standing diplomatic, economic, and security networks. With the domestic strength and vitality of the USA his aim is to ensure an enduring foundation of U.S. foreign policy based on what appeals to his support base. In essence his foreign policy is what his domestic supporters and admirers want and demand. It came thus as no surprise when Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, recently announced that the ethos of his Department's endeavours was founded on the following: "We protect the American people and promote their interests and values around the world by leading our nation's foreign policy." From his and the President's perspective they perceive global issues in a realistic manner with "America First" upper most in their minds — working with allies so long as it benefits U.S. interests and creates domestic opportunities. Observers are, however, fearful that while this may temporarily play well in domestic politics, its consequences will be lasting and harmful to U.S. interests abroad. However, returning the USA and its alliances to a time before Trump is probably unachievable, and only in part because he has changed the USA since his January 2017 inauguration in ways that may be irreversible, both domestically and internationally.

When It Comes to China, Americans think like Trump. A new survey suggests that American public attitudes toward China have hardened for good, which indicates that the Trump administration's aggressive approach could become the new norm, burying nearly 50 years of engagement kicked off with President Richard Nixon's famous visit to Beijing in 1972.

On Brexit it will suffice to record how the UK's withdrawal from the EU came about. In June 2016 the UK decided in a referendum to leave the EU. The siren call of the Brexit campaign was for the UK to "take back control" — to regain its sovereignty. Brexiteers mobilised around the slogan of regaining control which then became a policy objective to stubbornly regain for the UK a distinct identity in the world, how it chooses to proceed in the world and to formulate a previously untested approach. To achieve that Prime Minister Theresa May at the time adopted a hard-line approach in pursuing Brexit and thus to implement the voters' mandate in the referendum. She drew red lines and

endorsed previous ones. Each one of them was incompatible with the relationship between the UK and the EU. But, she drew them nevertheless. More so in an effort to appease the anti-EU wing of her party.

Seldom before has the impact of domestic affairs on foreign affairs been so vividly demonstrated as in the case of the UK's political divisions driving foreign-policy positions on Brexit. While Brexit has been a foreign-policy issue for the rest of Europe, in London, however, it revolved primarily around a battle for domestic power and the survival of the UK as a political unit. Now that the UK is out of the EU it is assessing the cost that the withdrawal will eventually mean to the country, its prestige and standing internationally.

The inter-connection between domestic and foreign affairs is undeniable. Foreign policy can never be detached from the domestic context from which it springs. The two-way flows which arise from foreign and domestic policies cannot be ignored with foreign policy having domestic sources and domestic policy having its foreign influences.

Internal aspects cannot be ignored when the foreign policy of a country is analysed. They manifest themselves in foreign policy matters. Domestic politics do play an important role when strategic foreign policy decisions are considered because of the threats anticipated or already executed in connection with national security issues. When the concept of public diplomacy is reviewed one cannot easily separate the domestic from the local challenges, such as climate change, terrorism or even employment.

The linkages between the international and national environments are considered crucial in the decision-making process of foreign policy. The symbiotic relationship between foreign affairs and domestic issues is a reality. Pragmatic leaders must balance the multiple issues that domestic and foreign affairs present. That is a fine art. To achieve that a successful practitioner of foreign policy must keep a keen and educated eye on domestic politics.
