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Explaining Foreign Policy Change

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ABSTRACT

Analysis on foreign policy generally focuses on its changes. These changes can be seen and examined on the main aspects of foreign policy. This article emphasizes the importance of understanding about the main aspects of foreign policy and the patterns of its changes before any effort to give explanation on foreign policy change.

Key words: *Foreign Policy Analysis, Foreign Policy Change, Patterns of Foreign Policy Change.*

The main task of foreign-policy analyst is to give explanation on the ways by which states attempt to change or succeed in changing the behaviour of other states (Modelski, 1962: 7). In other words, analysing foreign policy equals to giving explanation of foreign policy change. This is a challenging task mainly because foreign policy formulation involves a complex process that is affected by the international situation (Snyder *et al.*, 1962; Rosenau, 1972: 145-165) and psychological factors underscoring on the role of individual perceptions, values, and interpersonal relations (de Rivera, 1968; Morgan, 1991). Over certain period of time, furthermore, most aspects of foreign policy actually tend to change.

So how can a foreign policy change be properly explained? One standard answer is by having a clear and understandable theoretical procedure in giving explanation (Dugis, 2007). This article suggests, however, that apart from having a clear theoretical procedure, basic knowledge on the main aspects of foreign policy and the patterns of its change are crucial for its proper explanation. Based on this proposition, the first part of this article identifies the main aspects of foreign policy, while the second part presents the patterns of foreign policy change.

Three Main Aspects

Conceptually, foreign policy is often understood as authoritative action taken or is committed to take by governments in order either to maintain the desirable aspects of the international environment or to change its undesirable aspects. It is taken with

a proper calculation and a clear goal orientation to solve a problem or promote some changes in the international environment (Modelski, 1962: 6; Wilkenfeld *et al.*, 1980: 110; Holsti, 1983: 97), and its initiation is purposeful (Rosenau, 1974: 6). In its simplest form, foreign policy consists of statements and actions taken by state subjects to its relations with other external actors, states or non-state actors.

This conceptualisation, however, is far from adequate in understanding the complexity of foreign policy. Many scholars have suggested several ways by which foreign policy can be further elaborated. Modelski (1962) describes foreign policy as a system of activity. Within this perspective, foreign policy is seen as a system in which foreign policy decisions are formulated and planned to be executed. Looking from this perspective, decision makers are important element in the process of formulating foreign policy. As that system of activity relates to activities of the international environment, two other elements are embedded with foreign policy, namely a capability (power) of state to implement and the context in which formulated foreign policies are implemented. In addition, Modelski notes that policies are certainly formulated under the guidance of particular principles and must be made with specified objectives. The basic concepts in foreign policy, therefore, are: (1) policy makers, (2) aims, (3) principles, (4) power to implement, and (5) the context of in which foreign policy is formulated and implemented (Modelski, 1962: part one).

Another perspective looks at foreign policy as a result of complex interplay between state's orientation, commitments and plans for action, and

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behaviour toward other states. Within this perspective, Rosenau (1976) argues that foreign policy basically comprises of (1) a cluster of orientations, (2) a set of commitments to and plans for action, and (3) a form of behavior (Rosenau, 1976: 16). A cluster of orientation refers to attitudes, perceptions, and values, which derive from state's historical experience and strategic circumstances that mark its place in the world politics. It functions as guidance for state officials when they are confronted with external conditions requiring them to make decisions and take actions. In other words, these are principles underlying the conduct of states in the arena of international politics. Commitments to and plans for action are translations of the cluster of orientations. It incorporates spelt strategies, real decisions, and observable policies which are taken when states get linked to its external environment, and consist of specific goals and means through which they are achieved. Behaviour refers to the empirical phase of foreign policy consisting of concrete steps or activities, which follow the translation of generalized orientations of foreign policy. Viewed from this angle, in other words, foreign policy appears as the external behavior of states.

Different from the two previous perspectives, the third sees foreign policy as combination of orientations, national roles, objectives, and actions (Holsti, 1983: 97-144). Orientations refer to general attitudes and commitments toward the external environment, and it incorporates basic strategy for accomplishing domestic and external objectives, especially in coping with persisting threats. This strategy and orientations are rarely revealed in any one decision, but results from a series of cumulative decisions to adjust state's objectives, values, and interests with conditions and characteristics of the domestic and external environments. National role is decision makers' definitions of the general decisions, commitments, rules, and actions which are suitable to their state and the perception of how should the state perform in a variety of geographic and issue settings. Objective is an image or conditions that are expected to accomplish in the future by wielding influence abroad and by changing or sustaining the behavior of other states. Actions are actual policies that government of a state do to other states. While the first three components constitute images in the minds of policy makers, attitudes toward the outside world, decisions, and aspirations, the fourth component (action) is taken to affect certain orientations, fulfil roles, or achieve and defend objectives.

From the three different ways of looking foreign policy mentioned previously, it can be said that there are at least three main aspects of foreign policy, namely sources of foreign policy, the process of producing the sources become policy, and actions taken to implement it. There are three different labels that are used to distinguish the three main aspects. First, those who uses to differentiate it as the sources of external behavior, the process through which these sources are concerted into action, and the action itself. Second, those who term the three aspects respectively as the independent, intervening, and dependent variables of foreign policy. The third prefers to name them as the input, the decision-making, and the output of foreign policy. Given that foreign policy consists of three main aspects, efforts to analyse foreign policy change, should focus on these three main aspects; sources of foreign policy, the process of producing the sources become policy, and actions taken to implement it.

Since foreign policy has three main aspects, theories analysing foreign policy can be organized into three categories; systemic theories, societal theories, and state-centric theories (Barkdull & Harris, 2002: 63-90). The first category refers to theories that are seeking to analyse and explain foreign policy by emphasizing the importance and the influence of international system. In other words, foreign policy is seen more as a product of state efforts to adjust towards the external environment factors. The second category points to foreign policy being the product of combination between domestic politics and culture of a given state. These theories stress on the essence and importance of domestic political factors over foreign policy. The third category is theories that pursue the answers to questions concerning foreign policy within the structure of the state, and this also incorporates the individuals who transmit and implement foreign policies on behalf of their country. In other words, individuals and their occupying institutions are seen as instrumental in analysing foreign policy.

Patterns of Foreign Policy Change

As mentioned in the beginning, given that foreign policy is a goal oriented action taken by authoritative government towards entities outside state's boundaries (be it state or non-state actors), change is clearly become a pervasive quality of government foreign policy. In other words, foreign policy is not

something that is static, but it tends to change in order to achieve its objectives.

In general, foreign policy change can be divided into (1) change that is resulted from regime change or state transformation, and (2) change that happens when the existing government decides to push in different foreign policy directions. Foreign policy change that relates to the changing political system is by definition fall into the former, which is also labelled as foreign policy redirection. The latter, meanwhile, occurs when the existing actors change their course in foreign policy. Therefore, the nature of the change tends to be more “self-correcting” (Hermann, 1990: 5).

In relation to foreign policy change, Hermann identifies four graduated level of foreign policy changes; adjustment changes, program changes, problem or goal changes, and international orientation changes (Hermann, 1990: 5-6). The first level (adjustment changes) arises at the level of effort to achieve goals (greater or lesser). This can also occur in the scope of recipients or targets. In other words, “what is done, how it is done, and the purposes for which it is done remain unchanged” (Hermann, 1990: 5). The second level (program changes) refers to changes that are made in the methods or means by which goals or problems are addressed. This change could include the involvement of new instruments. Thus, “what is done and how it is done changes, but the purposes for which it is done remain unchanged” (Hermann, 1990: 5). The third level (problem or goal changes) refers to situation where “the initial problem or goal that the policy addresses is replaced or simply forfeited”, and “the purposes themselves are replaced” (Hermann, 1990: 5). The fourth level (international orientation changes) is the most extreme change form of foreign policy change because this will involve the redirection of the entire state’s orientation to the world, including its international role and activities. Major foreign policy change incorporates at least changes at level two to four (change in the means/program, change in the ends/goals or problems, and change in the overall orientation). Furthermore, foreign policy change, especially major redirection in foreign policy, can be explained by making inquiries in the areas of domestic political systems, bureaucratic decision making, cybernetics, and learning (Hermann, 1990: 6).

Types of major change in foreign policy, in Holsti’s language, reorientation and restructuring foreign policy, can be categorized on the basis of significant changes in “(a) the *levels* of external

involvement, (b) the policies regarding types and sources of external penetration, (c) direction or pattern of external involvement, and (d) military or diplomatic commitments” (Holsti, 1982: 4). On the basis of these, Holsti proposes four typology of foreign policy restructuring; isolation, self-reliance, dependence, and non-alignment-diversification (Holsti, 1982: 4-5). The first typology (isolation) is characterized by extreme low level of external involvement combined with policies of comprehensive exclusionist. Consequently, “military and diplomatic commitments are avoided”, and external directed transactions are few, which in turn lessens the importance of foreign policy direction. The second typology (self-reliance) is marked by diversification in trade, diplomatic and cultural contacts. However, levels of transactions are still low and military commitments are avoided. The third typology (dependence) refers to the situation where “external directed actions and transactions are at a fairly high level”, and concentration toward other countries also high. Consequently, the penetration of external actors, in various forms, is also high, while security is provided by chosen mentor external power. Extensive external directed actions and transactions with many different countries characterize the fourth typology (non-alignment-diversification). External penetration is also possible but the government tries to balance the diversity between “number and types of foreign agents”. In addition, “the government strictly avoids military commitments to any actual or potential mentor” power (Holsti, 1982: 4-5). It is important to note, nonetheless, that foreign policy change can occur from one typology to another.

One other way identifying foreign policy change is to look at the nature of the political system and its relationship to constituencies. According to Boyd, the former strongly influences the way in which changes in that system affect foreign policy (Boyd & Hopple eds., 1987). Goldmann’s work on this matter makes it clearer to where domestic political system can actually contribute to the change in foreign policy. He argues that there are three dimensions influencing the extent to which foreign policy is likely to change. First, the degree of institutionalization, meaning the extent to which the government of a state has become committed to the foreign policy. Second, the degree of support refers to the extent to which various actors in domestic politics support or oppose governments’ foreign policy. Third, the degree of salience points to the significance of issues in the domestic power struggle.

Therefore, Goldmann concludes that domestic politics may affect foreign policy through several different dynamics. One, in the struggle for domestic political power, foreign policy issues become a centrepiece. Competing political leaders and groups use foreign policy issues as means to differentiate themselves from other leader or groups. Within this situation, new incoming leader with new supporting groups could lead then to the foreign policy changes. Other alternative is that leader stays but decides to pursue “new” foreign policy. Two, beliefs and attitudes of the dominant constituent drastically change. This could be used as sources for explanation why foreign policy has to be changed. Three, transformation of the political system takes place, which could lead to various political changes, including in the areas of foreign policy (Goldmann, 1988).

Conclusion

Given the complexity of foreign policy phenomenon, doing an analysis on foreign policy change is a challenging task. Examining extensive aspects of foreign policy does not necessarily guarantee to achieve a clear and deep analysis. This has to be supported by a clear and understandable procedure.

There are several theoretical procedures that are needed to be considered in doing analysis on foreign policy change. First, an analyst has to have a clear definition of what he or she means by foreign policy. This is important as a starting point for an analyst on the one hand, and as a base for understanding for reader on the other hand. Second, having secured this, analysts need to have a clear grip on the patterns of foreign policy change. This will help analysts in identifying and examining patterns of foreign policy change of a certain state. The first second step in the end will help analysts to select relevant theories in doing a deep and comprehensive analysis. Moreover, the three steps will also help reader to understand the content of analysis.

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