



## Analysis

## The Domestic and the Foreign: Mutual Entanglement Through Social Diversity

By Christopher Hill

**Foreign and domestic policies have always interacted. But now, especially in developed democracies, they are mutually entangled in new ways, through the arrival of diverse, multicultural societies where many groups and individuals have permanent links abroad. Governments thus face new challenges inside and outside their borders.**

**D**omestic politics often seems inward-looking and incomprehensible to outsiders, while foreign policy has been historically regarded as a specialist matter of no concern to citizens except on the rare occasions they may be called upon to fight for survival. Thus the realms of politics inside and outside the state have seemed separate and distant from each other – ‘politics stops at the water’s edge,’ in British terms. But this is an outdated conception, most obviously because of the economic interdependence of liberal states, and the importance of economic goals to their societies. But there are other, newer, reasons for seeing the domestic and the international as mutually entangled, prime

among them being the growing diversity of society consequent on migration (both permanent and temporary) which in turn flows from the growing mobility of labour and from the desperation of people in developing countries to escape poverty and/or political oppression.

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Over the last forty years the idea of ‘multiculturalism’ has developed as a way of epitomising the changes in society which have resulted from migration into rich countries such as Canada, Australia and the members of the EU. The word implies a bridge between domestic affairs and the outside, bringing the diversity of the world into communities which think of themselves as relatively homogeneous. Many have welcomed this development, but others have increasingly come to react against it. Arguments have raged about such matters as the role of religion in society, different practices on gender, dress and education, and competing conceptions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. They have also flowed unstoppably across national boundaries, creating the sense of a global debate. Since the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001 the arguments have become seriously and dangerously mixed up with those about security, terrorism and ‘enemies within.’ But in this process, two key issues have been ignored or over-simplified.

The first is the fact that societies are multicultural in very different ways. Indeed, we should distinguish between those which explicitly pursue a **multiculturalist project**, where groups have certain rights and are even encouraged to maintain their traditional ways of life, and those which do the opposite – insisting on **integration** along the lines of a single, dominant definition of nationhood. Prominent examples of the first approach are Canada, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Notable cases of the second are France (which refuses even to collect statistics on ethnicity), Greece and Japan. Somewhere in between are the United States, which celebrates ‘hyphenated-Americans’ (as in Irish-American) and Israel, which in defining itself as a ‘Jewish state’ neither integrates its Arab citizens nor encourages their separate identity. But wherever a state is placed on this continuum between the multiculturalist and integrationist projects, all societies are characterised by multiculturalism, meaning visible diversity in terms of language, cuisine, religion and ties abroad. Thus the adjective ‘multicultural’ is commonly used for any society with a degree of ethnocultural diversity, regardless of the state’s particular approach to handling it.

The second issue which is often overlooked is that

whichever model of handling ethnocultural diversity a country adopts, it cannot avoid an increasing interdependence between international politics and domestic society. Foreign policy-makers in democracies might have had to take a generalised notion of public opinion into account from time to time, but now they are finding that international events can explode (sometimes literally) inside their own societies, and that their own external behaviour needs to take into account the reactions not just of other governments but also of other societies. Politicians now operate within not just the familiar realm of official diplomacy but in a dense transnational environment of many non-state actors – comprising the globalised business community, but also diasporas, religions, pressure-groups and political movements. Some governments have already learned how to play the game by appealing through ‘public diplomacy’ directly to foreign publics over the heads of their direct *interlocuteurs*. But even more at home in this world are criminals and terrorists, with no loyalty to any particular state, who exploit with facility the increased mobility of goods and people.

In this context the development of multicultural societies and their interaction with the outside world has provided a sharp reminder of how neither public passivity nor national cohesion can be taken for granted by those conducting foreign policy, particularly when the issue of interventions overseas is at stake. This can cut both ways: sometimes minorities can demand action on behalf of their diaspora interest, as with Tamil demonstrations in London and other cities against the government of Sri Lanka, or Russian émigrés calling for sanctions against the Putin regime. More obvious are the protests over foreign policy when a minority wants to disassociate itself from actions which are damaging families or co-religionists abroad (as with the effects on Muslim civilians during the Iraq and Afghan wars). Even where a government is not directly involved, it can still be embarrassed by some of its own citizens taking matters into their own hands – as has happened with the flow of European Muslims to Syria to join the fight against the Assad regime. At the least these private interventions create new headaches for their home governments. At most some of them may return as jihadists to inflict the kind of damage on their own people represented by the bomb attacks of 2004 and 2005 in Spain and Britain, when ‘home-grown’ terrorists with an international agenda rocked two societies which had previously been confident of their own stability.

It is too simple to attribute terrorist threats at home (or the lack of them) just to a state’s foreign policy. The emergence

of such problems needs placing in the wider context of relations between the West and the Islamic world, especially in the Middle East, and of tensions over aspects of social, economic and cultural policies. But generally speaking there now exists a two-way flow between foreign policy-making and political order in multicultural societies. The transnational nature of the threat from Al Qaeda and its associates has produced heightened security cooperation between western states on internal matters. The consequential securitisation of religion, of inter-group relations and of immigration has created serious difficulties for many law-abiding citizens, and for social cohesion over the longer term. For decision-makers, the more alert and diverse nature of their domestic publics has required more cautious instincts over foreign interventionism, after a decade of confidence in the West’s democratising mission.

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The intertwining of the domestic and the foreign is often manifest in surprising and indirect ways, but with consequences just as serious as those over war and terrorism. In 2005-6 for example, Denmark found itself immersed in its greatest foreign policy crisis since the Second World War following the publication of some satirical cartoons of the prophet Mahommed by a group of provocative enthusiasts for the principle of free speech. Danish missions were sacked in three capitals, trade was boycotted and relations with allies complicated as the country suddenly moved from being a model of democratic stability to the status of international pariah. This was possible because some Danish Imams, dissatisfied with the government’s response to their complaints over the cartoons, publicised their cause across the Muslim world, producing a political forest fire.

Another example, less visible and more slow-burning, is the change in attitudes among many EU member-states towards the possible accession of Turkey. The geopolitical arguments which had led many governments to support Turkish entry in the first years of this century, relating to Ankara’s position as a NATO ally, and as a source of moderation in the volatile near East, remain unchanged. But public opinion within Europe has moved on, in this case taking the form of a majority reaction against the growing size of their Muslim minorities and the perceived failings of

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multiculturalism, exacerbated by the rise in unemployment and cutbacks in welfare spending. Sufficient voters have concluded that ‘the EU is full up’ for governments – notably in Berlin – to have changed their positions, relegating Turkish accession to the most distant of back-burners.

Part of the difficulty here is that while in historical terms Europe is enjoying a period of stability and continuity, beneath the surface individual countries are in a condition of flux. Nor is this limited to the ex-members of the Warsaw Pact, relishing new freedoms but also exposed to some very unfamiliar currents. Countries like Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain which had

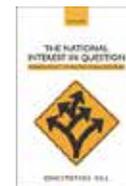
politicians then try to pre-empt further problems by responding to public concern over immigration and diversity they are led into negotiations with the states which are either the direct sources of population pressure or (much more likely) the transit lounges for those arriving from further afield. In Europe’s near abroad, Turkey, the Ukraine and the countries of the Maghreb fall into both categories, and as such have presented both individual states and the EU as a whole with serious dilemmas. Thus migration policy is now part of foreign policy, and vice versa – one of the best examples of the way the domestic and the foreign have become entangled.

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been used to losing sizeable numbers of people to emigration, have found over the last fifteen years that while many of their talented young people are still seeking advancement overseas, large numbers of the poor from the developing world were arriving to do the low paid jobs for which locals were not available. Even Germany and Switzerland, which have been accustomed to import large numbers of ‘guest-workers’ for that same purpose have faced difficulties, given that the ‘guests’ have often preferred to settle permanently. In doing so they have understandably tended to hold to their own customs and traditions, leading to conflicts over such fundamentals as the right to citizenship (*ius sanguinis* v. *ius solis*), or powerful symbols like the cross on school walls (Italy), the building of mosques and minarets (Greece, Switzerland), and the practice of circumcision (Germany). Given modern communications these issues spread instantly between societies, often producing copy-cat or hostile reactions which soon embroil governments. If

It is a mistake to think that there was ever an impermeable barrier between events inside societies and events on the international stage, even in the modern era where national sovereignty has been so highly prized. The spread of the ideas of the French Revolution, of nationalism and of science is ample demonstration of the fact that some people have always looked outwards for ways to change and that no peacetime democracy, however protectionist in trade or security, has ever been able to confine its citizens in a garrison state. But the terms of domestic-foreign interactions have changed notably over recent decades. Instant global communications mean that private statements provoke reactions in other continents before governments are even aware of what is going on. Increased labour and personal mobility, combined with a more liberal approach to markets and with the rolling back of the state, have produced societies which are highly diverse in their ethnic and cultural composition and likely to stay that way for generations.

For it is difficult to assume that the simple passing of time will produce a linear process of integration and homogenisation, as it did in the United States during the twentieth century. Given that Somalis in London can participate in politics at home through satellite dishes and 4G phones, that Moroccan workers in the Netherlands can return to their home villages for the summer at no great expense, or that large swathes of the best properties in the cities of the developed world are now owned by occasional residents from the elites of the emerging economies, diversity is here to stay. Thus, in seeking to attract rich foreign investors and to host major sports events the mayors of cities like Berlin, Madrid, Paris and London engage in ‘municipal foreign policy,’ while national politicians court the votes of expatriate citizens still able to vote in their home country’s elections. In the twenty-first century home and abroad do not just interact. They are inextricably entwined. The world has come to live in domestic society, while international politics increasingly has a social dimension. 



This article is based on the author’s recent book *The National Interest in Question: Foreign Policy in Multicultural Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

### About the Author



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