

*Department of Politics***COURSEWORK COVER SHEET**

Student Number: 12704161
Programme of Study: Nationalism & Ethnic Conflict
Module Code/ Title of Module: Nationalism in International context
Essay Title: How significant are ethnic and religious diasporas as foreign policy actors?
Word Count: 3136

For official use only

Mark:
Tutor signature:
Date:

How significant are ethnic and religious diasporas as Foreign Policy actors?

Ethnic and religious diasporas have played a significant role as foreign policy actors throughout history. A vast number of examples of international events and foreign policy actions could be used to illustrate the significance of ethnic or religious groups in a host country acting on behalf of their homelands. The strength of influence such groups can achieve is dependent on a number of variables such as the relative size, wealth, cohesiveness and organizational strength. Another important factor that will impact the effectiveness of a diaspora group's ability to act is that of the political environment of the host country. The United States frequently features in scholarly work assessing the role of diaspora groups in international affairs. The particular pluralistic politics of the United States empowers all types of interest groups to influence governmental policy and in doing so empowers ethnic groups to influence foreign policy in particular. Looking to the United States one can clearly note the impact of diaspora communities on foreign policy decision-making, a situation that increasingly become apparent since the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. Given the significant role of the United States as a global political power, the significance of diaspora activity in the United States is therefore of global significance. Analysing the importance of the ethnic and religious diasporas in the United States also allows points to certain negative aspects that have become apparent as a result of diaspora political activity such as ambivalent, inconsistent and often contradictory foreign policies, that may even at times have been negative for strategic interests. At the same time the political mobilization of diaspora communities may also be damaging for the consolidation of an American identity and may lead to a kind of dual loyalty that can put a strain on societal cohesion. As exemplified by the United States, diaspora groups can have a significant impact on foreign policy and international affairs. This role of diaspora communities as foreign policy actors is not to be underestimated and appears to be of increasing significance in the context of a post-Cold War globalized world.

The term 'diaspora' has long been associated with the dispersal of the Jews from Palestine, however in recent years the term has been generalized to encompass any population group that has migrated from a country of origin and settled as a community in a foreign host country. Diaspora groups can be of ethnic community such as the Armenians, or of religious group such as the Jews. It is worth noting that for many ethnic

diasporas religion becomes an integral part of their community identity, particularly when their religion differs from the dominant religion of the host nation. Migrant communities throughout history have maintained a strong sense of group identity, maintaining material as well as sentimental links with their country of origin. The continuing links between the diaspora and the homeland can be politicized, this of great significance to international relations. ¹Diaspora groups can be mobilized to influence the political environment of their homelands as well as the political environment of their host nation. Governments may attempt to use their diaspora communities to promote their own interest; at the same time host governments may use diaspora communities to legitimate their own foreign policy actions. Diaspora communities are often also often used as a political pawn to send messages between country of origin and the host country.

One particularly important historical example of diaporas as foreign policy actors, is the role of the Jewish diaspora in the creation of the State of Israel. An independent Jewish state was conceived of by Theodore Herzl in the diaspora, half a century before it was actually achieved. The advent of Zionist political thought within the Jewish Diaspora was to become of great importance. The 'Balfour Decleration' of 1917, a brief document sent by the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, to Lord Rothschild a prominent figure of the British Zionist movement, declaring the cabinet's sympathy for the Zionist aspirations. It was to become a fateful document that resulted in the contestation between the Jews and the Arab Palestinians for the small strip of territory in the Middle East, a contest that has become such a significant enduring feature in global politics. What is particularly interesting to note is that British government officials believed that the Jews in the United States and in Russia had the capacity to influence their respective governments attitudes towards the war.² Perceptions about the significance of the Jewish diasporas influence on US and Russian foreign policy determined the foreign policy of the British themselves. Allan Gal discusses the role of the Jewish diaspora in the conception and the creation of the modern state of Israel. Gal looks to the role of the diaspora Jew who had survived persecution and fled too and settle in the land that was to become Israel, and also the Jewish diaspora communities who had settled in Europe and the United States who supported the creation of Israel from overseas. Gal notes that the 'work of the American-Jewish diaspora between 1947-1949 towards the

¹ Smith & Hutchinson (1996) pp. 316-318

² Cleveland(2004) pp.243

establishment if the State of Israel and the continuation of a supportive Jewish and non-Jewish political milieu were especially significant.’³

The relative success and political strength of the Jewish diaspora community in the United States exemplifies how the scope of diaspora activities is determined by factors such as, material cultural and organizational resources, the opportunity structures in the host country and the motivation to maintain solidarity and exert influence.⁴ Organizations representing Jewish interests as well as promoting the cause of Israel, have become one of most influential diaspora interest groups in the United States. However as Smith notes,

‘ Jews are not the first ethnic or religious group in America that has sought to influence American foreign policy in favour of kinsmen or coreligionists....Ethnoreligious politics, the politics of interest groups in general, have been an inescapable consequence of the pluralism and multiplicity of interests in American life and are therefore a fact to be reckoned with’⁵

Smith in his book ‘foreign attachments’ argues the case that ethnic groups play a larger role in US foreign policy making than is widely acknowledged. Smith believes that there is an inherent contradiction the pluralistic democracy of the US that is particularly apparent in foreign policy-making. Smith argues that in a world where American foreign policy needs to be consistent and coherent the increased legitimacy of ethnic lobbying requires closer scrutiny.

Many other academics have discussed the influence that ethnic or religious interest groups have had on the foreign policy of the United States. One common feature of all analyses is that the significance and influence of ethnic lobbies has increased since the disintegration of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold-War. T Ambrosio neatly sums up the change too the United States foreign policy situation,

‘During the Cold War, American foreign policy formulation was largely insulated from influences outside the executive branch... with the passing of the Cold War, though, Americas grand strategy has been thrown into disarray, as the United States has been forced to confront unforeseen situations and challenges in a fluid international environment consequently, American foreign policy has moved squarely into the

³ Gal (2010) pp.63

⁴ Smith & Hutchinson(1996) pp.318

⁵ Smith (2000) pp.13

political debate... motivated interest groups in general, and ethnic lobbies in particular, are better positioned than ever before to exploit this confusion to promote the interests of their ethnic kin'

Not only has the influence of empowered diaspora groups grown post communism, the global surge of national independence movements in the third world and former Soviet Union has energized ethnic groups across the globe. Old and new ethnic groups are playing an increasing important role in the support for democratization and self-determination that is a key feature of Western Liberal foreign policy. 'According to Glazer and Moynahin 'since 1975 ethnic influences have become the single most important determinant of American foreign policy'⁷. There can be found numerous examples of the power of ethnic interest groups influencing US foreign policy.

As already mentioned above the American Jewry has exerted significant influence on US foreign policy. Through post-world war pro-Israeli organizations the American Jewry have simplified their role as ombudsman on behalf of Israel with the American government. A recent example of the influence of the American Jewry can be seen in the decision of the United States to send millions of dollars in aid to the war affected Israel during the second Lebanon war in the summer of 2006.⁸

Another Key participant in the efforts to shape the post-Cold War foreign policy of the US is the Armenian-American lobby. According to T. Ambrosio the Armenian-American lobby ranks amongst the most powerful of the ethnic lobbies in Washington, 'its effective lobbying infrastructure, combined with the absence of any significant opposition has allowed the Armenian-American community to frame perceptions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to the advantage of its ethnic kin.'⁹What is particularly notable about the Armenian lobby is that they were instrumental in creating a permissive international environment for Armenian irredentism. An example of their legislative success is that of section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act, which has prevented the United States from aiding Azerbaijan and limiting criticism of the Armenian role in the conflict. The United States official position and actions here contradicted the content of American policy that supports territorial integrity of successor states, which in this case was Azerbaijan, As Ambrosio notes

⁶ Shain (1995) pp.812-813

⁷ ibid pp.812

⁸ Waxman in Gal, Leoussi & Smith (2010) pp.95

⁹ Ambrosio (2001) pp.151

'The example of the Armenian-American lobby in Washington is instructive for showing how members of a diaspora not directly a party to an irredentist project may affect the international environment for an irredentist state. By lobbying on behalf of their ethnic kin, diasporas may help restrict or channel policies of third-party States toward their homeland and may prevent the enforcement of international law.'¹⁰

What is particularly interesting about the Armenian lobby is the advantage it maintains in terms of public opinion, 'because average Americans either lack the knowledge to form an opinion or care so little that American policy can be disproportionately influenced by a committed minority, without fear of a public backlash'.¹¹ Not only did the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict receive very little media coverage, the intensification of the Bosnian conflict overshadowed events, thus the Armenian-American lobby had greater ability to frame the conflict to promote their interests without interference of public opinion or alternative sources of information. Public perceptions are important as for example when the Greek-American lobby managed to move Congress to impose sanctions on Turkey; public perception was that this was irresponsible capitulating to ethnic group pressure. In such situations politicians would be careful not to create a public backlash and thus may opt for neutrality in future.

The Greek-American lobby represents another example of the influence that a powerful ethnic lobby can have in the foreign policy decisions of the United States. During the crisis in the Balkans The Greek-American lobby supported the Greek governments opposition to Macedonia, including denying them recognition. According to Saidmann President Bush 'was put on notice by the powerful Greek-American lobby that it would work against the Presidents re-election if the Untied States recognized Macedonia'.¹² As it happened the United States was to recognize Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia in the spring of 1992, but not Macedonia even though Macedonia did meet the Banditer Commision's standards for succession and self-determination. Such an example clearly highlights the significance of an ethnic diaspora as a foreign policy actor. The Balkan Crisis is an interesting example as one can see the importance of size and organizational strength for any given diaspora lobby's effectiveness as a foreign policy actor. While Croat-Americans pushed fro recognition of Croatia, Serbain-Americans protested against the US support for Bosnia, and Muslim groups protested against the weak and erratic support that American policy was offering to the conflict, as Saidmann notes,

¹⁰ *ibid* pp.197

¹¹ Ambrosio (2001) pp.152

¹² Saidmann (2001) pp.140

'because each group had ties to more than a few representatives, the overall effect was to cancel each other out. Since none of the groups was large or well organized they couldn't influence policy'¹³ The Greek Lobby however was well organized, had direct access to the decision-makers and was focused on a particular objective, opposition to recognition of Macedonia.

Smith argues that the negative consequences of ethnic involvement may outweigh the benefits. The activism of many ethnic or religious groups may underscore the fact that in the post-Cold War world, where the United States is the sole superpower but lacks a clear foreign policy agenda, interest groups are vying to have their concerns given priority in world affairs. ¹⁴Smith also warns that cases where groups, under the ideological mantle of 'multiculturalism', place higher priority on their sense of ethnic identity than on their sense of identity with the greater American community. Smith is concerned with the foreign policy implications of groups promoting their own ethnic interests,

'the greater problem is the loss of cohesion in our foreign policy and the degradation from the national interest when, factions among us lead the national interest toward excessive foreign attachments or animosities. The result would not be sound, cohesive foreign policy because national interest is not simply the sum of our special interests and attachments'¹⁵

Smith argues that a pluralistic democracy such as the United States needs to protect itself from the self-interested minority groups using their citizenship rights to push the foreign policy agendas in such a way that can make the United States role in world affairs inconsistent and incoherent.

The significant impact that ethnic and religious diasporas have had on the foreign policy of the United States demonstrates that this is a very important dimension in world affairs. The particular pluralistic democracy of the United States has empowered all types of interest groups to play a role in policymaking. At the very foundation of the republic a weak central government was favoured, institutional checks and balances were installed and a system of political organization, were all designed in such a way that enormously empowers social forces.

¹³ *ibid* pp.140

¹⁴ Smith (2000) pp.2

¹⁵ Smith (2000) pp.13

However the United States is by no means the only state in which a diaspora community can play a role as a foreign policy actor. As Saidmann observes, during the Yugoslav conflict, given the web of economic and security institutions in Europe, many expected more cooperation than actually occurred. Some commentators have pointed to the importance of ethnic ties as an explanation. For example, the German governments' response to Croatian succession may have been influenced by the Croats living in Germany who were able to mobilize support for their ethnic kin.

Saidman develops a theory of ethnic politics and foreign policy arguing, 'that the interaction of ethnicity and domestic politicians to support one side or another in ethnic conflicts in other states...the existence of ethnic ties between the decision makers supporters and the combatants in conflicts in other states will greatly determine the foreign policy of states'.¹⁶ As such ethnic politics does not always inhibit foreign policy but can serve as a dynamic compelling some politicians to support succession or irredentism in some cases while constraining others elsewhere.

As C Bordes-Benayoun states that, 'Nowadays more and more peoples define themselves as "diasporas" the term itself has become increasingly widespread in public life...in the context of globalization, the diaspora model has become a political reference which goes beyond claims of legitimacy to be made international public opinion', thus the diaspora may provide legitimacy to a people aspiring independence and recognition. This feature of diasporas is what makes them increasingly important as foreign policy actors as more and more countries across the globe have been calling for independence and recognition since the collapse of communism and decolonisation in Africa. According to Samuel Huntington 'in one way or another, diasporas and kin countries have been involved in every fault line war of the 1990s'. Huntington is by no means the only academic pointing to the significant impact that diaspora groups have had on ethnic conflicts across the globe. Huntington also highlights the importance of the religious diaspora by pointing out the major role that diasporas have played on both sides of the struggles between Israel and Palestine.

In a time of disruption to established modes of self-identity, 'diasporization' has resulted from the permeability of borders and the large-scale movements and relocation of people. In such deterritorialization long distance solidarities and identities have been created.¹⁷ Links between homelands and their diaspora community have become an

¹⁶ Saidman (2001) pp.12

¹⁷ Gal, Leousi and Smith (2010)

important feature of the world affairs. Countries have sought to exploit their own diaspora communities to promote their interests globally, host nations have used diaspora groups to legitimate certain foreign policies or have been moved to make decisions on the basis of a powerful diaspora groups demands. Diasporas outside the homeland have also been able to exert significant pressure on their homeland countries from their more powerful host country. The impact of diaspora politicking cannot be underestimated.

The significance of ethnic and religious diasporas as foreign policy actors can be observed throughout history. However in recent history the term diaspora has gained a certain degree of popularity and at the same time political leverage. Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet communism there was an upsurge in national independence movements and the right to self-determination became a key feature in Western foreign policy. Diaspora communities across the globe were energized and began to mobilize in support of their kinfolk. An analysis of Foreign Policy in the United States, particularly following the end of the Cold-War, clearly demonstrates the significant impact that large, well organized, and highly motivated diaspora interest groups can have on foreign policy decisions. While the significance of diaspora activity can be positive pointing to an increased space for previously marginalized and victimized groups in the political arena. At the same time there is also a note of caution emanating from some US academics, that the increased power of ethnic groups can be a negative for solidifying a national identity, and can also have a negative impact on the coherency and consistency of foreign policy itself.

Bibliography

Ambrosio, T. (2001) *'Irredentism: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics'* (New York: Praeger)

Cleveland, William.L. (2004) 3rd Edn. *'A History of the Modern Middle East'* (USA: Westview Press)

Gal, Allon. & Leoussi, Athena & Smith, Anthony (2010) *'Call of The Homeland: Diaspora nationalisms, Past and Present'* (Biggleswade:Brill)

Huntington, Samuel.P. (1997) *'The Clash of Civilizations And The Remaking Of World Order'* (Great Britain: Simon & Schuster)

Hutchinson, John. & Smith, Anthony. D. (1996) *'Ethnicity'* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press)

Saideman, Stephen. M. (2001) *'The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict'* (New York: Columbia University Press)

Shain, Y. (1995) 'Ethnic Diasporas and U.S Foreign Policy', *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 1994-1995, vol.109,No.5, pp.811-842

Smith, T. (2000) *'Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)