Noble International Journal of Social Sciences Research
ISSN(e): 2519-9722 ISSN(p): 2522-6789
Vol. 2, No. 1, pp: 1-9, 2017

Published by Noble Academic Publisher
URL: http://napublisher.org/?ic=journals&id=2

Open Access

The Role of Civil Society in Foreign Policy, a Study in the Liberal Democracy-Practical Policies

Dakhane Noureddine[a*] , Zerrouga Ismail[b]

[a*,b] Faculty of Law and Political Science-University of Mohamed Boudiaf -M'sila-People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Abstract: All liberal democracies, based by definition on the notion of pluralism, leave a large place for interaction with civil society in domestic politics. This space shrinks considerably when it comes to questions of foreign policy. Foreign policy is no longer the preserve of departments of foreign affairs and national defense, of security advisers and heads of government; it also brings in ministries dealing with industry, commerce, immigration, fisheries, and agriculture, to name only some of the more obvious suspects. Policy has thus become much more fragmented and offers much greater opportunities for the various forces of civil society to intervene and to attempt to exercise their influence. This study will examine the conditions that favor civil society access to the foreign policy-making process, since it is only there that extensive societal involvement in foreign policy has had any opportunity to develop in any meaningful way. Clearly this does not mean that non-governmental actors did not play any role in the political process before then. It is just a way of highlighting the growing involvement of these actors in some of the big issues of inter-state relations, such as trade, development and sovereignty. At the same time, changes in the nature of foreign policy concerns which have occurred in the last thirty years, in particular the blurring of distinctions between so-called high and low politics, have not only widened the scope of foreign policy but have also increased the number of participants in decision making. It will be argued that access, and hence the potential for influence, on the part of the forces of civil society to the foreign policy process is contingent on three factors: (1) the nature and source of the demands being made on the decision makers; (2) the degree of commitment of decision makers to particular policies; (3) the dynamics of the policy-making process itself. However, before looking at each of these elements in turn, there must be some understanding of two major concepts, that of civil society and of foreign policy, as they are being used here.

Keywords: Civil Society, Foreign Policy, Liberal States, Democracy.

1. Introduction

At least since the anti-globalization demonstrations at Seattle in 1999, the concept of "civil society" has become one of the major buzzwords of international relations ,Since the beginning of organized demonstrations against the World Trade Organization and any summit of world or regional leaders meeting to discuss trade and economic issues, there has been a lot of talk of an emerging "global" civil society, which tends to be conflated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and organized, but marginalized political groups. This is clearly an unjustifiably restricted view of civil society, which serves both the interests of these two types of group themselves, which then find they have been elevated to the status of unelected, but legitimatized representatives of the whole of society, as well as those of the political and bureaucratic leaders who would like nothing better than to separate them, and their multiple causes, from the rest of society. At the national level, civil society, a concept which has been around at least since Marx, can be simply defined as "the network of institutions and practices in society that enjoy some autonomy from the state, and through which groups and individuals organize, represent and express themselves to each other and to the state" (Hobden and Richard, 2001).

Most analyses of foreign policy make little distinction between the various components of what is in fact a very complex notion. As I have already suggested, the traditional separation between "high politics", i.e. such questions as security and political relations with other states, and "low politics", which covers almost everything else, is outdated, and more or less meaningless, especially with the rise to

importance of economic and commercial relations. For the purposes of analysis, I will distinguish between four major types of decision which all belong to a state's foreign policy, and which can affect in different ways the possible influence of civil society.

First and foremost there are the general guidelines which characterize a state's relations with the outside world, and which include: the traditional principles which have tended to underlie its foreign policy, often closely identified in realist literature as the "national interest"; the roles it claims to play or aspires to play in the international system and the place it considers that it holds there; its security policy; its alliances; how it grades its relations with its partners and its rivals; and the nature of its relationships with the other members of the system. Secondly, foreign policy refers to specific decisions made within these general themes. Thirdly, foreign policy may involve decisions that a state has to make to respond to an unforeseen international event which affect it directly or indirectly. Finally, foreign policy means interactions with other international actors, which are made up of routine decisions concerning day-to-day aspects of its relations with the outside world, and also its more extensive negotiations with other actors, and which, together, constitute a state's diplomacy.

Given the need to coordinate such a disparate set of activities, it is no wonder that foreign policy rarely appears to be very coherent, especially when so many ministries and agencies can be involved. This does not mean that policy is necessarily the outcome of bureaucratic politics (Allison and Philip, 1999), since bureaucracies are not necessarily directly in competition with each other, but rather that the foreign policy process in today's world is simply extremely fragmented. The more it is fragmented, the more any part of civil society can find ways of getting access to the part of the decision-making mechanism which interests it.

In his analysis of the politics of Canadian foreign policy, Nossal (1997) proposes an important distinction between two levels between too levels of societal influence (117-130), the decision-making process and the decision-making environment, and concludes that society has little influence on the former and is much more important in the case of the latter. Two closely linked areas of influence, agenda-setting and parameter-setting, are involved. What Nossal says about Canada is probably equally true of most liberal democracies. However, the separation between the two areas is not quite as clear-cut in practice. I thoroughly agree that civil society has much greater success in influencing decisions rather than in making them, or vetoing them, especially when a government is determined to go ahead with its plans, whatever the opposition, the media or public opinion say. Yet agenda-setting and parameter-setting can be very powerful tools in the hands of groups that are opposed to any change in policy, and therefore any particular decision that might suggest a change in that policy. It is true that getting a government to make a positive decision is rarely within the grasp of any one segment of civil society, but, as is so often the case in domestic politics, successful exercise of societal power, of which influence is such a vital component, tends to favor the status quo. But it is no less an exercise of power, as any group seeking change knows only too well.

2. Civil Society and Foreign Policy Demands

Just as in domestic politics, societal demands in foreign policy can assume many forms, and be made with varying degrees of intensity. At their most precise, and often most intense, they call for a particular policy to be initiated or to be withdrawn. But usually, these demands are much less specific, representing little more than an opinion on a particular aspect of foreign policy or a decision about what the government should or should not do. Decision makers' openness to the demands they receive will depend largely on the conditions surrounding them. These conditions include the scope of the demand being made, its source, and its degree of politicization.

Certain types of foreign policy decisions obviously offer more potential for influence from civil society than others. Routine, diplomatic decisions are usually dealt with by civil servants and hardly attract the attention of legislators or the media, unless they raise questions of principle and then become the object of a question in Parliament or an editorial. Extradition proceedings seem to be one of the preferred areas of routine decision-making that can easily hit the headlines. On the other hand, treaty negotiations often lend themselves to societal interventions from pressure groups and NGOs at all stages.

There was usually a consensus in most liberal democracies on what I have called the general guidelines of a state's foreign policy during the Cold War. So they often remained outside the political debate. There were important exceptions, such as the never-ending British debate on European integration or the question of a North American free trade area in Canada, but issues like security and alliances were rarely subject to discussion, at least within the restricted circle of the decision-makers, and were certainly impervious to demands for change from within society, as the failure of the anti-nuclear

movement in Europe showed. When governments feel the need to embark on changes in the direction of foreign policy, they will often try to control the debate by issuing a White Paper laying down the general terms within which policy can be discussed, by using their majority to limit debate in Parliament, or simply by dominating the debate through skilful manipulation of the media.

Responses to unforeseen events can provide some room for maneuver for societal intervention, since almost every major issue area attracts at least one organized group ready to react, but very often they require immediate action on the part of the government, which leaves little time for any meaningful mobilization to take place. The type of policy decisions which offer most opportunities for any form of involvement on the part of civil society are those which are specific and long-term. This is the case for several reasons. In the first place, these decisions are usually made within the general consensus on the direction of national foreign policy and therefore do not raise questions of principle behind which the decision-makers can hide. Secondly, formulating these specific policies can take several months, which allows groups to organize and mobilize, with some hope of success when they aim at particular aspects of the decision to be made. Finally, as with domestic legislation, governments also use the time to mobilize support for their position from as many sectors of society as possible, a process that usually implies making concessions.

The scope of demands also includes the issue areas, which are targeted. Trade, economic and now environmental questions are usually those that would seem to mobilize groups and public opinion most easily. But one should not underestimate the public interest in security policy. This might seem obvious in the post-11/9 world, but there are many other examples. Japanese decision-makers have always tended to meet problems when they try to get round Article 9 of the Constitution forbidding recourse to war. Thus intense public opposition prevented Japan from playing any military role in the Gulf War. In Europe the question of deploying so-called Euromissiles certainly mobilized fierce opposition in Germany, Holland and Britain in the early eighties, though in this case it had little effect on the final decisions that were made.

This last point opens up the question of who makes the demands of civil society in foreign policy. The source of these demands is very important. Those coming from groups or individuals perceived as normally hostile to the government of the day or to the general orientations of national foreign policy, have little or no the chance of influencing the decision-making process. On the other hand, criticism from within the governing party or parties, if it cannot be isolated, and from those groups seen as usually favorable to the government, will get the latter's attention. Of course, there exist groups, which no decision-maker can ignore, such as business or farmers, and, in many liberal democracies, governments have become extremely sensitive to the potential power of NGOs.

The influence of one very important source of demands, public opinion, is more difficult to gauge. There is every indication that it does exercise some influence on foreign policy. The Almond-Lipmann view that public opinion is unstructured, ill informed and extremely volatile has been convincingly challenged (Holsti, 1992; Nincic, 1992; Small, 1991), and certainly does not seem to be believed by politicians who appear constantly to refer to polls and have raised the practice of "spin" to a fine art. According to the findings of Powlick (1995), American decision-makers do not treat all sources of public opinion equally. The media and Congress were the preferred instruments for judging the state of public opinion in the first Clinton Administration, and there is little reason to think that this has changed. However, public opinion is not necessarily decisive in making policy in areas that the decision-makers consider to be vital to their vision of the national interest. As in the example of Japan just cited, public opinion exercises most influence when it reminds leaders of the parameters of the national consensus on foreign policy and of the dangers of going beyond them.

Finally, success in gaining access to the foreign policy decision-making process will depend to a large extent on how much an issue has become politicized, in the narrow partisan sense of the word. As soon as a demand becomes an object of controversy between the government and the opposition, or between the various members of the government majority, it becomes politicized. Decision makers will then find it very difficult to appear to yield any ground to their opponents without it being seen as a sign of weakness. In some circumstances, government leaders can attempt to take the wind out of their opponents' sails by adopting the policies of their critics. The Canadian Liberal Party has been particularly adroit at doing this, which probably explains why it has been in power for almost forty years since the end of the Second World War. Election time is particularly favorable for this practice for an incumbent government. President Clinton practiced it with great success against the Republicans in the period leading up to the 1996 elections. He limited in advance the presence of US troops in Bosnia, he did not use his veto against the Helms-Burton Act, even though it would have hurt his European and Canadian allies, and he opposed giving Boutros Boutros Ghali a second term as Secretary-General of the UN.

3. Commitment to Foreign Policy

All decision makers have to consider the cost of changing or maintaining a policy. The degree of their commitment to it represents one of the most important aspects of calculating this cost. From the point of view of those attempting to influence policy-making, the nature of this commitment and the intensity with which it is held to will affect their ability to push policy in the direction they seek.

Foreign policy commitments can be divided into at least three broad categories: firm commitments, which allow for little or no change; revocable commitments, which allow for some room for maneuver; flexible commitments, which offer a potentially large opening for some form of external input. There is no hard and fast division between the second and the third types of commitment, and it is the decision makers themselves who largely determine where to draw the line.

Firm commitments are above all associated with the principles and traditional claims which underlie a state's foreign policy and which all governments, whatever their political complexion, have to consider non-negotiable. Swiss neutrality, the Monroe Doctrine and the Argentine claim to the Malvinas all fall into this category. Liberal democracies also sign treaties and join international institutions which they can, in theory, denounce or leave, but which they cannot do in practice, whatever the pressures from within society. The British cannot simply exit from the European Union, whatever the Euroskeptics might dream, and there seems little likelihood of sufficient societal pressure to cause the US to leave the United Nations. On the other hand, the potential for change puts treaties and institutions on the borderline of firm commitments. For example, during the Cold War, there was little chance of any state leaving NATO, or of Japan denouncing the Mutual Security Pact with the US, though in both cases certain segments of society had called for it. But there existed some room for renegotiation and readjustment that could take some account of these pressures. France never made any secret of its desire to see changes within NATO, and did not hesitate to initiate some, and Japanese governments never allowed the Americans to think that the renewal of the Mutual Security Pact would not involve some concessions.

As soon as a government has begun to invest important resources into a foreign policy objective, it becomes very difficult to go back on a decision. These resources can be simply material. Then it is mainly a question counting the cost for giving up on a commitment in terms of economic and commercial costs, and, of course, reputation. They can also be human, in terms of the efforts made to negotiate and to organize meetings to reach the desired goal. But often they are moral or psychological. This happens when a leader gives his or her word publicly. To renege could mean loss of credibility and influence. A high investment of resources, particularly moral or psychological ones, will often determine that an issue becomes a firm commitment for a particular government, even though it cannot necessarily be justified in terms of traditional principles, or even of national interest in the sense realists mean it. These commitments become firm because of the intensity with which they are held. Thus Margaret Thatcher transformed the Falklands War, and the subsequent stationing of British troops in a territory thousands of miles away and whose inhabitants had lost their automatic right to British citizenship, a question of principle. In a rather different order of ideas, the French and German governments, despite serious reservations on the part of German public opinion, committed themselves to introducing the Euro as a symbol of European integration, even though it meant fudging budget figures and calculations of deficits and debts not only for certain borderline candidates, but even for themselves. And the Danish government was so committed to ratifying the Treaty of Maastricht that it had to hold two referenda before it got the "democratic" answer it wanted.

Revocable commitments are undoubtedly the most difficult of the three to define, because they depend so much on how decision makers interpret them. Very often, this type of commitment results from the pressures of pressure groups and lobbies, who could make the life of any government that ignored them rather difficult. One can cite the case of French and German farmers who can easily mobilize their forces within their respective countries and organize monster demonstrations in Brussels to make sure that they are not ignored when the time comes to discuss changes in the EU's common agriculture policy. These pressures make change difficult, but not impossible, especially if other equally important groups feel maintaining a particular policy is penalizing them. For example, Japanese farmers, a small, but often locally powerful pressure group, had managed to make the closing of the Japanese to food imports a firm commitment, until industrial and business interests convinced the government that it was hurting trade negotiations with the US and forced a gradual opening of this market.

Flexible commitments suppose relatively weak support on the part of decision makers. One must put election promises at the head of this list. Foreign policy usually represents a low priority amongst voters, except during international crises, and governments that do make promises about foreign policy,

can always claim that they cannot be kept, at least for the moment, because of sudden or hidden unfavorable international conditions. Thus, during the 1993 election campaign the Canadian Liberal Party claimed it would renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) when it got back into power, and then had to acknowledge publicly what most observers had said all along, that renegotiation was not an option.

Ongoing or future negotiations provide the most scope for societal influence, probably not on core objectives, but certainly on secondary issues or on actual implementation. As the debate over the Kyoto Protocol has shown, lobbying for changes, even major ones, can go on until a treaty has actually been ratified. Despite being signed ratified, NAFTA continues display all the characteristics of a project in permanent progress, subject to constant lobbying, as Canadians and Mexicans know only too well.

4. The Dynamics of the Foreign Policy-Making Process

Analysis of the formal procedure through which demands are translated into policy will tell us very little about how civil society can have access to foreign policy making. We have to look at the dynamics of a very complex process, which includes institutional and political structures and the relationships between them and the links between society and these structures.

One approach to this question has been offered by the research initiated by the Mershon Center at Ohio State University in the eighties, and which has given rise to a host of studies which have produced what has become known as the "decision units approach" (Hermann *et al.*, 1987; Hermann and Charles, 1989; Hermann, 2001). This approach focuses on the "authoritative decision unit" (Hermann, 2001) or "ultimate decision unit", whose members "have the authority and the power to commit national resources to a particular course of action in foreign policy" (Hagan, 1995). The nature and the composition of the decision unit in any state will vary according to the type of issue and the political situation.

This model identifies three basic types of decision-making units: the prominent leader, a "single individual who has the ability to stifle all opposition and dissent as well as the power to make a decision alone"; the single group, a "set of individuals, all of whom are members of a single body, who collectively select a course of action in consultation with each other"; a coalition of multiple autonomous actors, who are "separate individuals, groups, or representatives of institutions, which, if some or all can concur, can act for the government, but no one of which by itself has the ability to decide and force compliance on the others" and "no over-arching authoritative body exists in which all are members" (Hermann, 2001).

A predominant leader in a liberal democracy would be one whose authority is not questioned within the government, like Margaret Thatcher or General de Gaulle at the height of their power. The Cabinet in a British-style parliamentary system would represent a typical example of a single group. Most of the governments of continental Europe would belong to the category of the coalition of autonomous actors.

This model appears very attractive at first sight, but in practice the separation between the three categories is by no means clear-cut. It also suffers from two of the major weaknesses of the bureaucratic politics approach. In the first place, we rarely, if ever, have enough information to determine exactly who really made any particular decision until well after the event. Even then we often have to rely on anecdotal evidence and on memoirs, which offer only one version of the situation. It also begs the question of determining exactly when a decision has been made. For example, leaders, especially presidents and prime ministers, often like to appear decisive and to take the public credit for a decision which has been arrived at after a long process of consultation, discussion and lobbying, not to mention speech writing. There is surely more than a quibbling distinction between "ultimate responsibility", usually defined constitutionally, and the "ultimate decision unit". Secondly, it proposes a strictly structural explanation of foreign policy, with the inevitable danger of falling into the trap of determinism.

Despite these important caveats, the decision unit approach offers some insights into the potential access of civil society to foreign policy making. It indicates, in particular, that access is likely to depend very much on a decision unit's degree of autonomy. A truly predominant leader or a single group, unified behind a leader, can be expected to remain relatively impervious to domestic pressures, whereas any group of multiple autonomous actors will tend to be more open to societal interventions. However, one must also take the political setting into account. In liberal democracies, even predominant leaders can rarely ignore the parties they lead, and which are always subject to demands form within civil society. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt lost power partly because he was at odds with important sections of his party over the deployment of Euromissiles and Margaret Thatcher was finally overthrown because of a revolt within her parliamentary party against her rather negative policy toward an integrated Europe. Despite the

appearances of being a predominant leader, Tony Blair hovers between playing that role, as he did over Kosovo, and the one of head of a single group, as he does on the question of Europe. The Labour Party left also constantly reminds him that there are limits to his policy of support for US foreign policy, and he must make some concessions to this point of view.

Administrative structures can also constrain the autonomy of a decision unit's ability to make foreign policy. Federal states often leave some room for a provincial or state role in foreign policy. The Canadian federal government is in a constant battle with Quebec over the issue of relations with the French-speaking world, and the German Länder, who control the federal Upper House, the Bundesrat, often demand to have some input, or even the final word, into foreign policy questions impinging on their interests, especially European policy (Paterson, 1994). With the trend toward administrative and political decentralization in Europe, notably in Britain, Spain, Italy, Belgium and even France, regional demands for a say in foreign policy are likely to grow, thus reducing even further the autonomy of national decision units and increasing the space for societal pressures.

As Hagan (1987) has shown, liberal democratic governments are very sensitive to fragmentation and vulnerability. The concept of fragmentation refers to a government's general cohesion, which can be affected by rivalry between institutions, factions, parties or personalities, and the leader's ability to control them. When a head of government feels threatened by fragmentation, he or she will try to overcome it by making concessions, shuffling the cabinet, resigning or calling for new elections. Fragmentation creates a fluid political situation that can be exploited by certain sectors of civil society that can try to increase their influence as the balance between political forces changes. The Major government in Britain in the early nineties was very much subject to fragmentation as the various pro and anti-European forces constantly jockeyed for position, to the point where the prime minister was forced to resign and to run for the leadership of his party to reassert his beleaguered authority.

Vulnerability concerns a government's ability to remain in power or to resist attempts to overthrow it. In a political system where governments feel particularly vulnerable, for example where coalitions are inherently unstable, as they were under the French 4th Republic, or in Italy until the end of the Cold War, they can easily succumb to external pressures. On the other hand, if governments can be fairly sure of remaining in power for some time, because of lack of any credible opposition, as has been the case in Canada for most of the last half century and in Great Britain at the present time, they may feel less inclined to respond to societal pressures. However, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that lack of vulnerability automatically means that governments sure of their staying power can simply afford to ignore societal pressures. They can fight them off more easily, and they can be more selective in their choice of the groups that they allow to wield influence. But all democratically elected governments can lose elections, as happened to the Canadian Liberal Party in 1979 and 1983, and, as I have suggested earlier, governments all need to mobilize support for their policies – presenting a united front to the outside world is important – and some very influential groups are neglected at the government's peril.

A more fruitful way of analyzing the relationship between civil society and the foreign policy-making process is suggested by Thomas Risse-Kappen, who introduces the concept of political networks, which he defines as "the mechanisms and processes of representation of interests by political parties and interest groups which link society to political systems" (Risse-Kappen Thomas., 1991). These political networks help to form coalitions between groups, parties and decision makers to support particular policies. The way these three entities interact within the political system will determine to a large extent the capacity for civil society to influence policy. Risse-Kappen identifies three main types of regime, based on how interactions are structured: (1) those dominated by the state, where social organizations are weak and coalition making is confined to elites, thus allowing for limited involvement from civil society (e.g. France); (2) those which are dominated by society, and have weak state structures, where coalition making goes on between social actors, and which are very sensitive to societal pressures (e.g. the US); (3) those where political institutions and social organizations are at equal strength, a form of "democratic corporatism", where social and political actors are locked into a situation of permanent negotiation, a case where policies would tend to reflect the common denominator of public opinion (e.g. Germany) (Risse-Kappen T., 1994).

The Risse-Kappen model needs to be completed with a study of the constitutional and formal channels that allow for various political institutions and society to be involved in the foreign policy process. For example, Britain corresponds to a large degree to a regime where the state plays a dominating role. In this country, both tradition and practice ensure that Parliament has few means for controlling policy, let alone actually making it, despite the growth of select committees, and the wide possibility of asking embarrassing questions in Parliament. However, that does not mean that the executive can have it all its own way. Party discipline and the adversarial nature of the political debate

usually protects the government from external pressures, but opposition from within the governing party can be very influential in certain circumstances, as the case of European policy within the Conservative governments of the 1990s has shown only too well. On the other hand, one cannot appreciate all the channels open to societal influence on foreign policy in the US without also taking into account the Constitution, the separation of powers, federalism and the nature of the so-called two-party system.

One area where civil society can be expected to have some capacity for influencing directly and indirectly the foreign policy process is at the polls. In the first place, certain countries invite the electorate to make decisions through referenda. In the last thirty years, the Norwegian, Swiss, French, Danish, Irish, British and Spanish electorates have all taken part in referenda dealing with questions of foreign policy, mostly over the European Union. True, many of the debates have gone well beyond the immediate question at hand, but all have concerned what Campbell (1998) has presented as the main issue of foreign policy, the question of national identity. The important point here is that governments may well use all sorts of means, including formulating the question itself, to try and get the desired result, but success is not always guaranteed. Norwegian, Swiss, Danish and Irish voters have all rejected the questions asked by the government, and the French only narrowly ratified the Maastricht Treaty. On the whole, though referenda do allow for real public debate on important issues, and force governments to explain and justify their positions, they can only be used sparingly, and cannot be considered the ideal way to involve public opinion, and therefore civil society, in the foreign policy-making process.

Referenda are usually restricted to issues involving fundamental policy orientations and do not exist in all liberal democracies. Elections, on the other hand, constitute a fundamental part of liberal democratic institutions everywhere. Though it is almost axiomatic that foreign policy issues remain in the background in most election campaigns, it is no less true that elections provide a very important opportunity for societal groups to attempt to influence the foreign policy of a future government. The degree of this influence will depend very much on the nature of the voting system itself.

We must begin by distinguishing between presidential and parliamentary elections. In the first case, direct election of the head of the executive strengthens his or her autonomy and authority vis-à-vis the legislature, which allows for a lot of space for an autonomous foreign policy. In France, the Constitution gives the President large powers over foreign policy, which he can exert to the greatest extent when he also enjoys a majority in the National Assembly. Even when he has had to share the executive the opposition, which has happened three times since 1958 (for a total of nine out of forty-four years), the President still can rely on his constitutional powers, including that of approving the appointment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to remain within the foreign policy decision-making process. The widespread consensus in France on foreign policy has helped to make this an area where institutional rivalry has not led to any deep conflict between the presidency and the government. The two-ballot system forces the remaining two candidates to widen their support base and to forge coalitions with other unsuccessful candidates and their electorates. Even General de Gaulle had to make important concessions to those of the center right who did not support him on the first ballot in the 1965 presidential election on the question of European integration (Grosser, 1989).

In the US, no one dispute the president's role or his legitimacy in foreign policy making, whatever the conditions of his election or the state of the parties in Congress. Given the nature of the Electoral College system, every presidential election is in fact fought out in fifty separate, but by no means equal, constituencies. This fact of American political life, combined with the relatively poor electoral turn-out compared to most liberal democracies for an election of such great national importance, and weak control over election spending, gives certain well-organized groups, such as the NRA and farmers' lobbies, huge opportunities to be heard publicly, and behind closed doors, in an attempt to influence specific policy issues. Moreover, the concentration of certain ethnic electorates in key states, such as Florida, New York, California, New Jersey and Illinois, with a particular stake in foreign policy, makes sure that issues like intervention in the Middle East conflict, relations with Cuba and NATO enlargement cannot be ignored by any candidate.

Systems of electing legislatures also strongly affect societal influence over foreign policy. The most obvious case is that of proportional representation, and which usually leads to a situation where no party wins a majority and coalition governments are the normal practice. In the terms of the decision unit model, such a system favors the emergence of a coalition of "multiple autonomous actors", which often vie to distinguish themselves from each other to attract as many ideologically close voters as possible. Such a situation can often result in the hardening of policy demands on the part of parties which cannot be left out of governing coalitions, thereby exaggerating and distorting the influence the of the societal groups supporting them. This happened frequently under the French 4th Republic, which gave undue weight to the influence to settler groups in the North African colonies, and has often been the case in

Israel, where small parties representing settlers, orthodox religious groups or Russian immigrants have all taken part in negotiations led both by the Likoud and by the Labor Party, with the aim of bearing on security and foreign policy decisions.

The impact of first-past-the-post systems will largely depend on the political system itself. Hence, variants of the British parliamentary systems based on this type of election usually leave little room for influence on foreign policy issues. This happens partly because of the traditions of cabinet government and party discipline, and partly, also, because of the very nature of elections themselves, which normally present a choice between broad-based parties, or coalitions, rather than between the more narrow interests which parties may be inclined to represent in systems based on proportional representation. But this is not always the case. In the US, first-past-the-post voting has little effect on the power of pressure groups and well-organized ethnic minorities to use congressional elections to forward their point of view and to try and put into the legislature members sympathetic to their cause, whatever their official part affiliation. This means there are electoral districts where no one can be elected against the declared interests of certain groups. In foreign affairs, given the power of Congress, and especially of the Senate, to "advise and consent", which often means these days "approve and veto", individual members, backed by powerful interests, can wield extraordinary influence. One only has to mention the Jesse Helm era in the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs to be convinced of that.

The French variant of the simple majority system gives rather more room for some civil society influence on foreign policy than one would expect, given the tendency for the two branches of the executive to dominate in that area. In France there are, as in Britain, single-member constituencies, but a run-off ballot is held in all cases where no one candidate gets at least 50 per cent of the vote on the first round. Since candidates remaining in the racemust rally as many new votes as possible, small, but well-organized groups and minor parties can make the difference or be perceived as making the difference. For example, the far-right National Front, at least during its heyday in the early and mid-nineties, pressured parties of both the left and the right to harden their position on the question of immigration, thus influencing indirectly France's relations with the North African countries. President Mitterrand apparently suspended French nuclear tests in 1992, following the success of ecologist candidates in local elections, in the hope of keeping them onside in parliamentary elections the following year (Cohen, 1996).

5. Conclusion

In this study, we have deliberately shied away from embedding the reflections presented here within a specific theoretical framework, at least explicitly. Clearly, any analysis, which emphasizes the varieties of influences on foreign policy, making them very much dependent on systemic and cultural variables, rejects implicitly realist views of the rational, unitary actor or that of "politics stopping at the water's edge". At the same time, I have also avoided the question of relating access of civil society to that of democratic controls or influences on foreign policy making. The question is far too complex to be treated here, since it would mean defining exactly what is meant by democracy. Suffice it to say that, despite traditional theories of pluralism, openness to the influences of civil society constitutes a necessary but as yet insufficient condition for a democratic foreign policy. All I have suggested here is that domestic structures and practices do matter when it comes to assessing just how much civil society can have any say on the general orientations of foreign policy and on specific foreign policy decisions.

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