

POLITICAL CONDITIONALITY

**edited by
GEORG SØRENSEN**

FRANK CASS/EADI

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Introduction

GEORG SØRENSEN

Political conditionality involves the linking of development aid to demands concerning human rights and (liberal) democracy in recipient countries. Behind such seemingly innocent measures is a potentially dramatic change of basic principles of the international system: putting human rights first means that respect for individuals and individual rights acquires priority over respect for the sovereignty of states. It points to a system, in other words, where universal agreement on basic human rights sets a baseline against which the international community may legitimately intervene in domestic affairs of single states; that is, rights of individuals come before the rights of states. In the current context of development assistance, the parameters of such intervention are defined by rich donors formulating demands on poor recipients; but universally valid human rights may also become a weapon of the weak, a basis for criticising the way in which developed countries have set up the international economic and political system to serve their own ends. For the time being, however, universal values of human rights are being translated to demands for political, institutional and policy change in developing countries; and it is only understandable that this procedure raises doubts in these countries about the true nature of such measures: do they stem from a sincere aspiration of promoting democracy in the world, or are they a new way of dominating and disciplining the developing countries in the context of a so-called New World Order? (see Barya [1992] for the latter view).

An international basis for promoting human rights was established already in 1948, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration stressed the indivisibility of rights: civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights were treated together. Against this background, Western countries in the First World could stress civil, political and property rights, criticising their absence elsewhere. The Second World of Communist states gave priority to economic and social rights (and saw them set aside in the First World), whereas Third World countries stressed the right to self-determination in addition to economic, social and cultural rights [Donnelly, 1992: 253]. In this way, the declaration's comprehensive treatment of human rights became a smorgasbord from which each region could pick its favourite and defend the relevance of its particular ranking of different types of rights.

The linking of development aid to demands for human rights (with

emphasis on civil and political rights) goes back as far as 1975, when the US Congress passed legislation establishing such a link; the Netherlands included human rights considerations in its foreign aid policy in 1979; other countries took similar measures during the 1980s. But the cold war constituted a framework where such policies could make little headway in a wider sense. On the one hand, the international community could not act against human rights violations by the superpowers in their respective spheres of influence. On the other hand, in order to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the developing world, the United States and other Western industrialised democracies befriended a number of autocratic dictatorships in Asia, Africa and Latin America which were not exactly champions of the human rights cause.

With the end of the cold war the justification for such policies is gone and this is no doubt a major reason for the upgrading of policies concerning human rights and the promotion of democracy. A renewed commitment to human rights has been made explicit both by OECD donors in the DAC, and by the European Community. In addition, the international ideological climate has changed in the sense that universal human rights is the accepted starting point for discussion. But there are still policy dilemmas for donors: the promotion of human rights and democracy competes with security concerns and considerations of economic interests. China is the clearest (but not the only) example of this having led to a high Western tolerance for human rights abuse. As one observer has noted, American decision-makers are not in agreement about the proper weight to be attached to the human rights and democracy issue [*Diamond, 1992: 44*]. According to Jack Donnelly,

The prospects for a sustained American effort, though, are not bright. On issue after issue, public attention and U.S. foreign policy have typically lurched from crisis to crisis, punctuated by long stretches of neglect ... In the absence of dramatic short-term successes, the likelihood that the public and government will once again lose interest in human rights issues is great. Hard economic times at home are likely to deflect attention even further [*Donnelly, 1992: 272*].

Even with issues of policy priorities cleared away, there are problems left to deal with in the promotion of human rights and democracy. The story goes that English officials were unable to come up with a clear answer when asked by their minister to define the target for political conditionality, that is, 'good government'. This is indeed an elusive entity; as pointed out in Mark Robinson's contribution to this volume, the current usage of the term includes four components: sound economic policies; competent public

administration; open and accountable government; and respect for the rule of law and human rights.

In other words, if we posit that the aim of political conditionality is liberal democracy, we may conceive of several versions of this entity (a variety of models of democracy are set forth in Held [1987]). Two versions of democracy are of special interest in this context. One stresses the strictly liberal elements of liberal democracy, that is, a limited role for the state in an economy guided by market principles and open to international exchange. Another version stresses the democratic elements of popular participation, creation of an autonomous civil society, and accountability of rulers. One criticism of conditionality is that it has put too much stress on the former version of liberal democracy, thereby creating an economic and social environment inimical to the realisation of the democratic elements in the latter version. An editorial in *Codesria Bulletin* claimed that liberalisation 'completely undermines Africa's sovereignty, creates and/or further strengthens authoritarian regimes who will have to implement an inherently anti-democratic set of socio-economic reforms entailed in the programme' (quoted from Barya [1992]).

At the same time, such dilemmas should not be exaggerated. It is actually possible to formulate political conditionality targets in precise terms which stress the promotion of civil and political human rights and political democracy. It appears, moreover, that recent considerations on political conditionality move in this direction, in contrast to the measures taken in the eighties which emphasised liberal economics.

Yet this kind of clarification still leaves other problems to be dealt with in the pursuit of a human rights and political democracy conditionality. The most important question is perhaps whether it is at all possible to impose democracy from the outside? Before attempting an answer to this question, it is helpful to emphasise that the process of moving from non-democracy to democratic rule is a complex process involving several phases. In the typical contemporary case, the beginning is marked by the crisis and eventual breakdown of the non-democratic regime. If the transition to democracy begins with the realisation of the authoritarian rulers that they must leave office, then this phase ends with the installation of a new government, based on free elections. But the process does not end there. The new regime will often be a restricted democracy, that is, more democratic than the previous one, but not yet fully democratic. Several phases of 'democratic deepening' may be necessary before this latter stage is reached. And then the regime still has to be consolidated, meaning that democracy comes to be seen as 'the only game in town' by all major political actors. Furthermore, these phases are not necessarily negotiated in a smooth, linear manner. There may be crises and setbacks; the typical pattern for many developing countries has

indeed been one of a seesaw between authoritarianism and frail democracy. Finally, even if the full process of democratisation is completed, it may take a long time, often several decades, or even longer.

It is clear that pressure from the outside in the form of political conditionality has a limited role to play in the overall process of democratisation. Democratisation is first and foremost an internal process of societal change, strengthening groups in society that support the building of democracy. Political conditionality appears to be able to assist in two respects: first, in dissuading rulers, non-democratic and newly-democratised alike, from human rights abuse against opponents. With the important exception of situations of civil war and internal chaos, it is possible in this area to clearly define a number of rights which must be respected (freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture, imprisonment, etc.) and to identify the ruling groups which must be held responsible (see also Nelson and Eglinton [1992 41–3]). The second possible place for political conditionality is in discouraging backsliding towards authoritarian rule, for example in the case of a military coup or an aborted election [*Nelson and Eglinton, 1992: 44*].

Meanwhile, many donors have already realised that this alone is far from enough to secure a process of democratisation. Political conditionality thus needs to be supplemented by positive measures with the aim of strengthening groups in civil society (ethnic and kinship associations; self-help groups involved in housing, health-care, education, consumer- and producer-co-operatives; amnesty committees, civic associations, and professional associations). In the case of authoritarian regimes, such assistance is best channelled through NGOs. Projects of popular participation and empowerment are better taken care of by smaller organisations not closely linked with donor governments (see also Diamond [1992] and Clark [1991]). Assistance aiming at empowerment at the grassroots level working through NGOs thus solves some of the problems pertaining to foreign aid in this area; but it should be emphasised that it creates a number of other problems (the most important dilemmas of NGO activity are summarised in Anheier [1992]).

There is one additional aspect of conditionality to which donors, for obvious reasons, have paid very little attention, because it involves conditioning themselves. If the baseline of political conditionality is the notion of universal respect for basic human rights, then it is relevant to ask whether donors preside over an international system which is in several ways counterproductive to the extension of basic human rights to the roughly four billion of the globe's inhabitants living in developing countries. As emphasised in Peter Uvin's contribution to this issue, it is relevant for donors to consider 'moralising their own foreign policy'.

Consider the calculations by UNDP (1992) according to which a total ODA of \$54 billion stands against a 'cost of global markets to developing

countries' of \$500 billion stemming from a combination of restricted market access and unequal status in the international system. Even if the latter figure is based on rough estimates it leads to the question whether donor countries practice political conditionality with one hand while upholding an unequal economic system with the other hand, which in turn undermines the prospects for sustained progress in human rights. Another counterproductive item is continued large scale arms exports to developing countries, as pointed out by Uvin.

The promises, problems and pitfalls of political conditionality briefly outlined here are explored in further detail in the contributions to this volume. The message emerging from these contributions is that political conditionality will never be a magical solution to the problems of creating sustained democratic progress in developing countries. It may have a minor role to play in specific situations where leaders abuse political and other human rights, provided the country in question is susceptible to donor pressure and provided donors are willing to apply such pressure in a consistent manner. Otherwise, the notion of political conditionality may have a lasting effect if it can persuade donors to think about the broader moral foundation of their own policies towards the developing world. Given the current weakness of developing countries in the international system it is not likely, however, that this aspect of political conditionality will rise to prominence on the international agenda.

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Democracy, Authoritarianism and State Strength

GEORG SØRENSEN

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a substantial debate on possible consequences of democratisation/ democracy for economic performance [*Sirowy and Inkeles, 1990; Marsh, 1979; King, 1981; Dick, 1974; Weede, 1983; Donnelly, 1984*]. I have studied this question at length in earlier contributions [*Sørensen, 1991; 1993*]; here I wish to address a specific aspect of the issue, concerning the possible importance of the East Asian success stories.

It is clear that an important component in both Taiwan's, South Korea's and, in an earlier phase, Japan's success in economic development is the fact that they are strong states with a high capacity for promoting economic development, also called developmental states [*White and Wade, 1985; Deyo, 1987*]. At the same time, both South Korea and Taiwan have also been authoritarian states and one experienced observer has characterised the Japanese state as 'soft authoritarian' [*Johnson, 1987*]. Does this mean that we must consider authoritarianism as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the making and upkeep of developmental states? And if this is the case, must we, as indeed some observers do (see the summary of arguments in Sørensen [1993], consider democracy an expensive item in development terms, because democracy will mean a decline of the state's strength, that is, its ability to pursue economic development? It would be somewhat embarrassing for the whole notion of political conditionality if it could be demonstrated that important dimensions of 'good governance' are best taken care of by authoritarian regimes and yet this is indeed a possible claim on the basis of the East Asian experience.

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to introduce the concept of developmental state in further detail; this is the task for the following section. I proceed to set forth some hypothetical consequences of regime form for the developmental strength of states. An empirical analysis of cases from Latin America, Africa and Asia leads to two conclusions: (a) the East Asian experience, where authoritarianism helped promote a developmental state, cannot be widely generalised; in other words, the claim sometimes heard on the basis of the East Asian success stories that authoritarianism is necessary for the creation of strong, developmental states must be rejected; (b) a more democratic form of regime may lead to a state with more developmental strength, but this is no assured outcome; it depends on the

specific kind of democracy which is emerging. The democracy which is growing presently in many developing countries will not necessarily help promote a strong, developmental state. Current frail, elite-dominated democracies must change towards systems with a more solid, popular basis in order to secure a framework for increased state strength.

II. THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

There are a number of different contributions towards the identification of the developmental state [*White and Wade, 1985; Johnson, 1982; Deyo, 1987; Evans, 1985; 1989; Clark and Lemco, 1988*]. I shall comment on this debate in order to arrive at the understanding of the concept which will be employed here.

The reflections on the possible features of a developmental state have from the very beginning been plagued by the fact that they commenced, not with deliberations concerning state theory and the proper content or definition of states in general and developmental states in particular, but with the empirical assessment that some East Asian countries are remarkably more successful than other Third World countries in terms of a number of rather conventional economic indicators; the most important ones are economic (especially industrial) growth, manufactured exports, and trend/level of national income per capita.

While such information may be helpful in identifying interesting cases for analysis, it also contains two possible pitfalls when tied in with the notion of a developmental state. First, when a developmental state is simply defined by success in terms of certain economic outcomes, the developmental state cannot simultaneously be employed as explanatory variable for economic success without formulating a tautology [*Lauridsen, 1990: 13*]. Second, there is the problem of choice of indicators of economic development success. Even if they have also performed well in terms of welfare for the population in general, countries like Taiwan and South Korea (or even Japan) are less spectacular successes on this dimension. Furthermore, the working population in these countries have shouldered heavy burdens during the process of economic development [*Chan, 1990a: 53*].

If economic outcomes are useful indicators rather than definitional backbones of strong states, it is necessary to focus on the states themselves in order to situate their possible developmental strength at the proper locations, that is, in the states' *possibilities* for acting in promotion of development and the measures which they actually take towards this end, their *policies*. And it is indeed these elements which are at the core of the deliberations of the 'statists'.

The policy element is strongly emphasised in Chalmers Johnson's analyses, both of Japan and of Taiwan and South Korea [Johnson, 1987: 145]. However, there are three problems in making 'good policies' a core element of the developmental state. First, there is the danger of tautological reasoning here also, if developmental state = good policies = success in development. Second, it may be unwise to outline specific policy elements as characteristic of the developmental state. For example, the policy of 'investment in education for everyone' [Johnson, 1987: 145] may be optimal for development in specific contexts and phases, but not always and everywhere. Finally, a one-sided emphasis on policies may convey the false impression that decision-makers are not subjugated to any noteworthy structural constraints.

Yet the concrete actions of decision-makers should not be disregarded in identifying the developmental state. That would only lead to a one-sided focus on state structures and, as Chalmers Johnson has noted [1986: 557n], structures in themselves cannot explain anything. State and domestic as well as international societal structures define the boundaries or constrain the range of choices open to actors; but structures do not make policy choices. It is, moreover, possible to make 'good policies' an element of the developmental state without defining the specific contents of these policies. On a more general level, 'good policies' have to do with abilities to respond constructively to domestic and international challenges within the overall context of promoting economic development. What is meant here with 'good policies' is covered by the apt phrase of 'statecraft' used by Steve Chan [Chan, 1988a: 219]. Following this reasoning, statecraft is a feature of developmental states or, with White's formulation, states with developmental strength.

Structures define the possibilities, the range of options open to actors. The other element in the identification of the developmental state is thus structures, more specifically state structures. If the debate on developmental states had been guided by state theory rather than by concrete examples of development success, this is probably where it would have begun. The reason is, of course, that issues concerning state structures and the room for manoeuvre for state actors is at the heart of theoretical debate on the state.

It is not possible in the present context to comprehensively address the debate on different understandings of the state. On the other hand, it is necessary to suggest how the subject of developmental states fits in to the more general pattern of approaches to analysis of states. A recent contribution from Edward Greenberg [1990: 11–41] is helpful in this regard. Greenberg identifies three main approaches to the state. The first is 'The Citizen-Responsive State Model' which builds primarily on the pluralist and voter-centred literature concerning politics in liberal democracies. This approach