



Nigel Gould-Davies, “Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1 (Winter 1999): 90-109.

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This article seems to me to make an important and valuable contribution both to Cold War studies and to the study of international politics generally in four distinct ways. First, it revives in a systematic way the discussion of an often neglected motivating force and influence in international politics. Second, it (correctly, in my view) challenges the prevailing realist/neo-realist paradigm and the ways in which it tends to distort the terms of the debate and stack the deck in its favor. Third, it points out important misleading assumptions and false dichotomies often involved in the dismissal or downgrading of ideological motives or influence. Finally, Gould-Davies not only in my view makes good his claim that Soviet ideology was an important motivating factor in foreign policy throughout the Soviet era, including that of Stalin, but also identifies what needs to be done if the lesson drawn from the importance of ideology in this particular instance is to be extended to international politics in general, and if the analysis of the role of ideology is to be operationalized. His suggestion (p. 100) that what is needed is “a concept of ideological agency” which will “suggest evidentiary criteria for evaluating the role of ideology and . . . enable comparison on equal terms of ideological and nonideological explanations” seems appropriate, and he attempts in the latter half of the article to present a viable concept of ideological agency and adequate evidentiary criteria.

Unfortunately, this is the part of the argument which I, no expert on the Cold War but reasonably familiar with the history of European international politics in the three previous centuries, found unconvincing. Despite many sound observations, too much in it seems inconsistent with too much historical evidence. Assuming that a discussion like this should focus on areas of disagreement rather than consensus, I will direct most of my remarks to what I see as problems and weaknesses in the concept of ideological agency and the evidentiary criteria Gould-Davies offers.

To start, in his definition of what ideologies are and what they do in international politics, I am somewhat puzzled by the statement (p. 101) that ideologies are “distinguished by being . . . universal in scope.” Are all ideologies which play an important role in international politics universal in scope? Must they be? Was this true, say, of Fascism in its various forms or Japan’s imperial ideology before and during World War II? Are not many ideologies, including the various varieties of ethnic integral nationalism, particularist rather than universal? His succeeding statements, however, are even more doubtful and more fundamental to his general argument: “The object of ideologies, especially in this century, has in the first instance been the reordering of the polities, economies, or racial composition of other states, and only derivatively the transformation of the international system. . . . Just as there are traditions of normative discourse about ideal forms of domestic but not of international organization, so the ideologies of

states are directed outwardly at the characteristics of other states rather than of the international system” (p. 101).

The premise stated here, that ideologies are essentially about the domestic rather than the international order and target primarily the domestic characteristics of other states, thus only indirectly affecting the international system, underlies the whole rest of the argument. Yet as a historical generalization it seems to me untenable. Has there really been no tradition of normative discourse about the ideal forms of international organization? No contest between Machiavellians and anti-Machiavellians? No Sully, Grotius, Abbe de St.-Pierre, Rousseau, Kant, Gentz, Heeren, and others drawing up schemes for permanent peace right down to our own day? Or have these normative debates had no significant impact on the actual course of international politics? Did the disputes between Catholics, Protestants, and politiques over the true world order make no difference in the 16th and 17th centuries, or the appeals to the liberties of Europe and the balance of power against universal monarchy have no importance in the 17th? Were there no crusades to defend and rescue Christian Europe from the infidel Turk? Did ideological debate over the sources and nature of legitimate authority have nothing to do with the consensus on a new order reached at the Congress of Vienna? Did no ideological contest between legal rights and national rights in international affairs re-emerge thereafter?, Did the contest between Realpolitik and morality as the basis for international conduct, epitomized by the debate between Bismarck and Gerlach in the 1850's, have no ideological foundation? Was there no ideological clash between Wilson's, Lenin's, and Clemenceau's visions of world order after World War One?

Nor does the assertion that ideologies target the domestic characteristics of other states (presumably rival ones) rather than the international order itself stand historical scrutiny any better. Clearly the Ottoman drive to conquer southeastern Europe was powerfully motivated by Islamic ideology. Yet it aimed not to transform the domestic characteristics of other states through, say, mass conversions to Islam or the imposition of Koranic law, but to expand the Ottoman Empire, either by direct conquest or by imposing the Sultan's suzerainty. If they acknowledged his authority, Christians were granted considerable toleration and self-rule. In other words, the ideologically-driven goal was more international than domestic. Ideology clearly mattered to Charles V, Philip II, Philip III, and Ferdinand II; yet in my view (though scholars differ, and others are more expert than I) they were bent more on sustaining their own authority and the true religion against challenges within their own domains, and thereby upholding a legitimate, godly international order, than on imposing their beliefs and system on their opponents. For a brief period in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, it is true, French revolutionaries and their enemies both targeted each others' domestic systems. But most of the time throughout that period, though ideology (republican, monarchical-conservative, and Napoleonic) continued to be important, the main aim of both sides, especially France's opponents, was to get the other side to accept and obey its rules for international order, not to change its domestic system. The Italian Risorgimento, like many other nationalist liberation movements, drew much of its strength from the divergent ideological visions for Italy and Europe developed by Mazzini, Gioberti, Garibaldi, and even D'Azeglio and Cavour. Yet none of these aimed to change the domestic systems of the Habsburg Monarchy and the existing Italian states. The goal was to throw the Austrians out, perhaps even to destroy the Monarchy entirely,

to form a different Italy out of the existing states, and to replace the old legalistic-conservative European order with a new nationalist one. Other examples could easily be cited.

Thus the generalization that ideologically-driven foreign policies directly target the domestic systems of other states rather than the international system and its rules seems historically unsound. (I am not sure it applies even to the Cold War era--but leave that aside.) So does the converse proposition: that normal, security-conscious states with non-ideologically driven policies do not try to change the domestic systems of other states, but “seek influence only over the foreign policies of other states” (p. 106). Once again I see many contrary examples, but to save time will cite just one. In the 19th century, Great Britain devoted much energy and attention to trying to influence other states in Europe--Germany, Italy, the Habsburg Monarchy, Spain and Portugal, even Russia--to reform their economic and political systems and policies along British free trade and liberal-constitutional lines. In certain instances, in Greece, Belgium, and the Iberian Peninsula, this policy came to include direct, overt intervention in these countries’ internal affairs and even the use of force. The policy was frequently criticized by other states, especially Austria, as threatening their interests and undermining the international order. Yet even if one concedes, as I do, the influence of free-trade, liberal ideology on this policy, this hardly makes Britain an ideologically-driven state where normal security and other interests took second place. The British view, regularly presented with genuine conviction, was that far from attempting to interfere in others’ domestic systems or violate their rights, they were simply offering advice on the best way for others to achieve prosperity and to avoid war and revolution as Britain had, and that such reforms worked to preserve and improve the existing international order and advance the mutual interests of all countries in peace and security. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence of Britain’s willingness to cooperate with ideological rivals when its interests called for it to make this claim plausible. Something similar could be said, I think, of American attempts to promote capitalism and democracy in the 20th century.

This critique of Gould-Davies’ concept of ideological agency suggests that the criteria he proposes for distinguishing between realist and ideological policies and detecting the difference between the international behavior of “the security-seeking state and the ideology-implementing regime” (p.106) may also be unsound. So they are. He contends that *ceteris paribus* the security-seeking state will tend to “(1) accumulate power up to the point at which further increments would bring countervailing power against it; (2) conduct its relations with other states primarily through official channels sanctioned by established international norms and conventions; and (3) seek influence only over the foreign policies of other states.” Conversely, the ideology-implementing state will tend to “(1) accumulate power beyond security needs, even if this incurs the risk of retaliation from others; (2) systematically and directly influence the internal political processes of other states; and (3) seek to replicate its domestic system in other states.”

Some of the examples already cited indicate why these criteria for distinguishing realist from ideologically-driven policies do not work. So as not to burden the reader, let me quickly add more evidence. In many important instances, in which rulers and states clearly have attempted to accumulate power beyond their apparent security needs and thus provoked retaliation by others, the driving motives seem to have been not ideological in nature, but the normal power-political goals of security, expansion, power, wealth, glory, and internal stabilization of the regime. Some examples: Louis XIV, Charles XII of Sweden, Britain in the Seven Years’ War and the Crimean

War, all the major participants in the New Imperialism after 1870, especially Britain and France in Africa and Russia in the Far East, and both Imperial Germany and Tsarist Russia in World War One. Nor is it true that egregious violations of international norms and conventions and attempts to control and/or undermine opposing regimes domestically are particularly characteristic of ideologically-driven policies. These are commonplace devices of ordinary power politics. Promoting revolution and unrest in a rival state has been a time-honored practice in foreign policy since the beginnings of the European system. Examples: France, Bavaria, and Prussia against Austria in 1740-42; Bismarck and Cavour against Austria in the 1850's and 1860's; Russia against the Ottoman Empire in most of its 18th and 19th century wars. The list could be extended almost indefinitely. Finally, the best example I know of a state which consistently displayed the behavior Gould-Davies describes as typical of an ideology-implementing regime is Napoleonic France. Yet no major ruler I know was more cynically opportunistic in regard to ideology and more bent on power for its own sake than Napoleon. In short, the criteria proposed for distinguishing between the two kinds of policies and behavior are simply too universal to differentiate between them.

The effect of this critique would seem to be purely destructive, tending to stultify the enterprise. After agreeing with Gould-Davies that ideology is important and unduly neglected as a motive and influence in foreign policy and needs more analysis and discussion, I reject his concept of ideological agency and his criteria for defining and assessing the influence of ideology, without suggesting ways to improve them or substituting others. The implication would seem to be that ideological motives, though powerful and widely present, are so inextricably intertwined and mixed up with "realist" power-political ones, and the practices and behavior which both lead to are so similar, that no useful general rules for distinguishing the two and deciding which is uppermost are possible. The result must be that the once solid distinction between security interests and ideological impulse, already blurred and weakened by Gould-Davies' argument, further thaws and resolves itself into a dew.

I cannot deny this conclusion or help this outcome. It may well be that the historian or other analyst cannot do better than try to decide each case impressionistically on the basis of the evidence peculiar to it. What I can offer is not a different principle for distinguishing between the two or better general criteria for determining their respective influence, but merely a rule of thumb useful for judging individual cases. In trying to assess whether a policy is more driven by "normal" security interests or by ideology, it might be wise not to look primarily at the policy's aims, goals and objectives, but rather at their limits, what means the state is willing to use in order to reach them, and at how far it will go before abandoning or changing them. In other words, the extent of ideological commitment might (though clearly not in all instances) be better seen not in what makes a regime act in a certain way for certain goals, but in what will suffice to make it quit or change course. I think it clear that free-trade ideology was a factor in British foreign policy in the 19th century, and led to certain forms of intervention in other states' internal affairs; but it seldom took much to make the British quit. Metternich fought against revolution and liberal change with genuine ideological commitment--up to the point that it became apparent that continuing to fight it might promote war and revolution, and then he always yielded. Hitler's commitment to his ideology, on the other hand, is demonstrated by his pursuit of the Holocaust even at the expense of possible German victory and to the last moment of Nazi Germany's existence. Milosevic showed the extent of his commitment to Pan-Serb

ideology by pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing even if it brought war on Yugoslavia--and the limits of his commitment when he surrendered before total defeat. This rule of thumb, to be sure, is no substitute for what Gould-Davies offers, and it would be very useful if a sound set of principles and criteria could be devised. But in the meantime, this suggestion just might help.

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