Sovereignty, Cosmopolitanism, and the Case of Sweden's Foreign Policy

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The most defining feature of an interconnected world is not the exchange of goods and services but the proliferation of ideas, morals and thoughts across borders and oceans. The idea of a connected, globalized world or the so-called "global village" is one where the nation-states appear as a single entity with fluid borders that exists within the overarching interests and demands of a cosmopolitan world. Cosmopolitan principles are increasingly changing global practices as they continue to define the goals of international organisations, shape the perspective of citizens across boundaries and alter the autonomy that is preserved by states. To this effect, the paper seeks to examine the relationship between the notions of state sovereignty and cosmopolitan norms.

One of the most defining characteristics of state sovereignty is the autonomy of states to navigate their interests in the international political structure. However, the prevalence of cosmopolitan norms has led to a transformation where the interests of states are influenced by ideas of universal ethics and rights. Through the example of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, the paper highlights a co-constitutive relationship or co-existence between sovereignty and cosmopolitanism to move beyond a binary understanding of the two. The paper, however, does not intend to argue for the cosmopolitan idea of a world state and render national boundaries as obsolete, rather it argues that external sovereignty and state policy is further reconceptualized or shaped by the ethical considerations of cosmopolitan norms that seek to advance the egalitarian interests of human beings both within and outside the territorial boundaries of a nation-state, thereby, giving rise to a cosmopolitan state.

To facilitate the objective of the paper, it is divided into four sections. The first section examines the notion of sovereignty and the concept of foreign policy through the idea of national interest. The second section attempts to conceptualise the theory of cosmopolitanism and its various aspects while drawing arguments from the work of scholars like Thomas Pogge among others. The third section analyses Sweden's feminist foreign policy to understand how it integrates the notion of cosmopolitanism and sovereignty. Inevitably, there remain many limitations and contrary arguments apropos to the themes of the paper which are integral for comprehending the subject in a nuanced manner. Therefore, a brief attempt to examine this is made in the last part of the paper.

Understanding Sovereignty

The emergence of modern nation-states as the primary actors in world politics is rooted in the idea of sovereignty which became entrenched after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Although, historically, the concept of sovereignty existed and was debated by prominent philosophers like Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Jean Bodin, "it was at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that Europe consolidated its long transition from the Middle Ages to a world of sovereign states" (Philpott, 2020). While the current notion of state sovereignty has evolved, it is worthwhile to first describe sovereignty as espoused by early thinkers. Bodin in his 1576 work *De la république* believed in the consolidation of power in the form of an absolute monarchy and argued that the "sovereign body… was not subject to any external human law or authority within its territory" (Bodin in Philpott, 2020). However, this did not imply that the sovereign was free from all laws as,

If we insist however that absolute power means exemption from all law whatsoever, there is no prince in the world

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who can be regarded as sovereign, since all the princes of the earth are subject to the laws of God and of nature, and even to certain human laws common to all nations (Bodin in Parmar, 2017, p. 32).

Meanwhile, Hobbes, whose seminal work *Leviathan* published in 1651, believed that to overcome the "state of nature" people needed "a common power to keep them in awe and to direct their actions to the common benefit", the sovereign "must be absolute, illimitable and irresponsible" (Hobbes in Parmer, 2017, p. 32). However, it must be considered that Hobbes's idea of common benefit was just to overcome the anarchic nature of man and not the welfare of the population. Similarly, for Bodin, while certain human laws were above the sovereign, the sovereign itself was the source of those laws and "it was not subject to any external human law or authority within its territory" (Bodin in Philpott, 2020).

The contemporary definition of a sovereign state is essentially a government with "supreme authority within a territory" (Philpott, 2020). According to the first aspect of sovereignty, a state must have not only authority but supreme authority, that is, its decisions should not be guided by an outside authority. It does not entail that any state is supreme to other states, rather a state has the ability to pursue its desired interests and accordingly guide its actions independently and exclusively without any interference from outside forces. The second aspect of the definition focuses on territoriality, that is the boundaries through which a state and its members are defined. Modern states rarely constitute people of a single identity rather they encompass an extremely diverse population that happen to exist within a spatial location or boundary "belong(ing) to a state and fall under the authority of its ruler" (Fowler & Bunck, 1996, p. 383).

Most importantly, there exist two important aspects of sovereignty, that is, internal and external sovereignty. While internal sovereignty is "supremacy over all other authorities within that territory and population" (Fowler & Bunck, 1996, p. 384), it is the external aspect that primarily concerns the study of International Relations (IR). The external aspect mainly revolves around the *de facto* external independence of a state; thus, sovereignty does not entail only a claim over independence, rather an assertion of "its independence in practice" with "actual independence of outside authority in foreign affairs" or free to act as it desires in international affairs (Fowler & Bunck, 1996, p. 391).

It is both the external and the internal aspect of state sovereignty that is being altered every day as states consolidate their interest and position in the global arena which is filled with trade blocs, global governance organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations as well as military and diplomatic alliances. A state's participation in any such group always exerts enormous influence over their internal and external policies and practices. As Inis Claude aptly argued, "For all their vaunted sovereignty and independence, states are rarely lone wolves, intent upon going their own way heedless of the actions of other" (Fowler & Bunck, 1996, p. 392). Since the international political structure is formed by the interaction of sovereign states with one another, the paper now turns to the question of external policies or the foreign policy of a state.

Foreign Policy and National Interest

A state's foreign policy guides its interaction vis-à-vis other sovereign states in, to borrow from realist thought, an anarchic world. It is an apt manifestation of sovereignty as it showcases how an independent state decides to navigate itself in international politics and act according to its interest. It is, however, a very broad term as it highlights a state's "posture toward international law, its participation in the global economy through trade treaties… the provision of aid to other countries, including its support of international organizations that attempt to alleviate suffering in countries afflicted by war and natural disasters, and so forth" (Buchanan, 2002, p. 97). Meanwhile, in an attempt to pursue relatively similar universal goals such as global peace, economic prosperity and upholding International Humanitarian Law through significantly different approaches, states create a cacophony as their vested interests are often at odds with one another. As Hans Morgenthau, one of the foremost international theorists has noted that national interest is "the one guiding star, one standard thought, one rule of action" in the formulation of foreign policy (in Buchanan, 2002, p. 97), it is through this idea the concept of foreign policy and state sovereignty will be further understood. While the idea of national interest can still be considered vague and as broad as the idea of foreign policy, it is imperative since the pursuit of interest is closely embedded in the idea of state sovereignty.

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The realist school of thought which is synonymous with the traditional perspective of International Relations contends "that the conduct of nations is and should be guided exclusively by the amoral requirements of national interest" (Oppenheim, 1987, p. 375). Moreover, Government, according to George Kennan, a former American diplomat and historian, is the agent that guides or controls the sovereign state whose "primary obligation is to the *interests* of the national society it represents, not to the moral impulses of that individual elements of the society may represent" (1985, p. 205). From this perspective, if an ethical or moral conception of foreign policy which also deliberates the interest of the other, would not be deemed to be rational. For Kennan, a state's policy is guided solely by *raison d'état,* translated as "reason of state", moreover, the actions or duties of the state or the government has "no moral quality" and "not subject to classification as either "good" or "bad" (1985, p. 206).

Popular Sovereignty

As Kennan rightly observed, the sovereign does not necessarily represent the ethical inclination of the population it governs. Therefore, it is essential to note another notion of sovereignty that contrast with that of state sovereignty and considers the people to be sovereign. The School of Salamanca believed that while sovereignty originates from the divine it disperses to everyone equally rather than concentrating only to the monarch or ruling elite (Parmar, 2017, pp. 33-34). This notion of sovereignty, known as popular sovereignty, is based on "the idea of the people as subjects and objects of the law, or as makers as well as obeyers of the law" (Benhabib, 2004, p. 21). It was mainly pioneered after the French Revolution and theorized by Rousseau who, unlike Bodin and Hobbes, held "the collective people within a state as the sovereign, ruling through their general will" (Rousseau, in Philpott, 2020). The essence of popular sovereignty is that the rulers derive their power and legitimacy of rule from the people who are the true sovereign.

As Rousseau and Kant further observed that "the significance of rights is derived from citizens' participation in the collective political practices of deliberation and the exercise of popular sovereignty" (Ypi, 2008, p. 354). Moreover, while it represents the equal value of liberty of each, Etienne Balibar argues that:

State sovereignty has simultaneously 'protected' itself from and 'founded' itself upon popular sovereignty to the extent that the political state has been transformed into a 'social-state' … passing through the progressive institution of a 'representation of social forces'… (in Benhabib, 2004, p. 152).

Conceptualising Cosmopolitanism

The concept of cosmopolitanism is normatively opposed to the idea of state sovereignty and modern nation-states as it believes that:

We have duties and responsibilities to all human beings based solely on our humanity alone, without reference to ethnicity, race, gender, culture, nationality, political affiliation, religion, place of birth, geographical location, state citizenship or other communal particularities" (Brown, 2011, p. 53).

It challenges the abstract idea of nation-states and sovereignty as it argues for a shared and common universal morality and justice that transcends the political boundaries. Historically, "to be cosmopolitan was to think oneself citizen of the entire world. The implicit claim was that one's loyalty should be to a larger 'we' than that of one's local city-state, ethos, nation, or even empire" (Mendieta, 2009, p. 242).

According to Lea Ypi, "from a cosmopolitan perspective, prioritizing national interests in foreign policy would contradict the moral principles of impartiality and equal concern for all relevant subjects." (2008, p. 350). Furthermore, the view contends that due to decades of globalization and the advent of problems that are no longer national, rather global and collective, there is need for global cooperation and a "system of cosmopolitan governance beyond the state" (Brown, 2011, p. 54). Cosmopolitanism believes that the *raison d'état* nature of the sovereign is "inappropriately insular and that statist defences regarding the protection of culture, nationality and national patriotism ignore pressing issues of common humanity and planetary coexistence" (Ibid).

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There is a consensus among cosmopolitanism scholars that since the 1948 United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights, the world has entered an era where the global civil society has evolved from *international* to *cosmopolitan* norms of justice (Benhabib, 2008). Benhabib also notes that "state sovereignty, which is imminently tied to the ability to protect borders, now more than ever is revealed to depend upon skilful negotiations, transactions, agreements and flows with other states" (2007, p. 24). This is because the sovereignty of one state ends where the sovereignty of the other states begin. Moreover, "in becoming party to many human rights treaties, states themselves 'bind' their own decisions" (Ibid, p. 22). Due to the emergence of global institutions like the UN, which while composed and operationalized by sovereign states, also reconstructs both their internal and external prerogative as the sovereign and has been considered as the biggest challenge to the post-Westphalian notion of sovereignty.

Two different types of cosmopolitanism have also been proposed by Thomas Pogge (1992), a German philosopher and professor at Yale University. He draws a distinction between legal and moral aspects, where the legal cosmopolitanism represents a "global order under which all persons have equivalent legal rights and duties"[1] (p. 49), irrespective of the political membership or citizenry status vis-à-vis particular state. On the other hand, moral cosmopolitanism, as a more abstract concept in relation to the legal, believes that "we are required to respect one another's status as ultimate units of moral concern-a requirement that imposes limits upon our conduct and, in particular, upon our efforts to construct institutional schemes" (p. 49). The two are, however, not mutually exclusive, and can be further understood via two domains of moral cosmopolitanism that Pogge proposes, that is, *interactional* and *institutional* cosmopolitanism.

The two domains can be understood in the context of the two notions of sovereignty presented above, that is, popular and state sovereignty, respectively. The *interactional approach* puts the obligation for the realization of human rights on "other (individuals and collectives) agents" as it conceptualises certain "principles of ethics" that applies "directly to the conduct of persons and groups" (Pogge, 1992, p. 50). Whereas the *institutional approach* transfers the obligation of the fulfilment of rights to institutions schemes, making the responsibility of people as indirect, as it "postulates certain fundamental principles of justice" (Ibid). Additionally, for the interactional view, human rights impose constraints on conduct, while on the institutional view they impose constraints upon shared practices, the two are again not exclusive of each other. If both the popular (interactional) and state (institutional) notions of sovereignty consider that the responsibility of justice does not transcend the "national institutional scheme", such a belief is indefensible as political boundaries and the international political structure is not natural but developed and instituted overtime by humans upon themselves (Pogge, 1992, p. 51-53). Furthermore, as Pogge fittingly argues, we need to overcome the claim that:

One need only refrain from violating human rights directly, that one cannot reasonably be required to become a soldier in the global struggle against human rights violators and a comforter of their victims worldwide… we are asked to be concerned about human rights violations not simply insofar as they exist at all, but only insofar as they are produced by social institutions in which we are significant participants. Our negative duty not to cooperate in the imposition of unjust practices, together with our continuing participation in an unjust institutional scheme, triggers obligations to promote feasible reforms of this scheme that would enhance the fulfilment of human rights (1992, p. 52).

Sweden's Foreign Policy

In 2015, the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party formed a coalition and came to power in Sweden. It became the first country in the world to not only form a feminist government but also adopt a "feminist foreign policy" (FFP). The determination behind this declaration was to become the "strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls" as the former Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, former UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, who launched the policy, believed that it was "time to become a little braver in foreign policy… It [FFP] is about standing against the systematic and global subordination of women" and inculcating gender and feminist principles in all its activities (in Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 323). According to Wallström, FFP is based on three R's: Representation, Rights, and Reallocation. In other words, Sweden seeks to promote women's representation and participation in politics in general and in peace processes in particular; to advocate women's rights as human rights, including women's protection from sexual and

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gender-based violence; and to work toward a more gender-sensitive and equitable distribution of global income and natural resources (in Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 325).

Sweden's ambitious pronouncement came nearly fifteen years after the adoption of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 which,

reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 323).

This was, however, only one of the several resolution and declarations adopted by the UN. Additionally, the Swedish government recognised that gender equality is crucial for the country's larger foreign policy objectives in terms of prosperity, security and economic growth. This belief is complemented by research in academia and the defence as well as by prominent international organisations like the Council on Foreign Relations and the UN which argue that there is a strong co-relation between "women's inclusion and stability" and "when women participate in peace processes, agreements are more likely to last—and to be forged in the first place" (Vogelstein & Bro, 2019). Furthermore, a 2015 study by the McKinsey Global Institute calculated the potential benefit of closing gender gaps in the workforce at $28 trillion to global GDP by 2025, an estimated 19 per cent growth rate in Sweden alone—if women simply participated at the same rate as men.

After Sweden, more countries are now adopting or at least aspiring and moving towards a foreign policy formulated through gendered notions. For instance, Mexico formally adopted a FFP in January 2020, expanding "its purview of feminism to include not only women's rights but L.G.B.T.Q. people's rights, climate change, immigration and trade", and "pledged to reach gender parity within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by 2024" (Gupta, 2020). On the other hand, Canada had "pledged in 2017 that by 2021 it would earmark 95 per cent of its foreign aid spending on promoting gender equality" as part of their Feminist International Assistance Policy (2020). Meanwhile, the United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg and Canada continue to prepare a formal FFP.

Lastly, Sweden has made a substantial impact with its adoption of FFP. During its membership and subsequent Presidency of the UNSC in 2017 as well as while hosting the U.N.-backed Yemen peace in 2018, it emphasized on increasing female participation in critical Security Council debates, increasing the number of civil society representatives and eventually ensuring gender parity among those providing input (Vogelstein & Bro, 2019; Gupta, 2020). Moreover, by 2018, Sweden's aid to organizations focusing on gender equality was almost 90 per cent. It also made sure that during the COVID-19 pandemic, sexual health and reproductive services around the world continued to function by increasing its funding. However, FFP has presented a few challenges to the country. For instance, in 2015 Wallström denounced Saudi Arabia for its subjugation of women and public flogging of a blogger which led Riyadh calling back its Ambassador. For one of the largest per capita arms exporters, this displeased prominent businesses in Sweden as they thrived on trade with the Saudi, leading them the publishing an open letter against her (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 330).

FFP, Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty

By simultaneously acting both as a norm entrepreneur and a norm enhancer, that is, being "strongly committed to a certain norm, and… promote this norm to shape the behaviour of others" as well as by normatively transforming predominant ideas and constructs (Sundström & Elgström, 2019, p. 420), Sweden has proven that apart from civil society and international/global governance organisations, sovereign states can also be essential "sites of ethical transformation" (Aggestam et al., 2018, p. 5). The conceptualisation of FFP is based on a "normative reorientation of foreign policy that is guided by an ethically informed framework based on broad cosmopolitan norms of global justice and peace" (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 323). It focuses on determining international agenda and, correspondingly, represents Sweden as a sovereign that is shepherding a moral foundation of cosmopolitanism and human rights that seeks to shape global developments in a gender-sensitive direction" by "reframing and mobilization of international policy action" (Ibid, p. 324).

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Furthermore, Sweden's FFP can most fittingly be also understood in the context of Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State, framing "the status of women as a matter of national security" and declaring that "Women's rights are human rights" (Gupta, 2020). Similarly, research conducted by scholars like Valerie Hudson argues "that state security is intimately connected with the security of women" and increase in gender equality leads to a proportional decrease in corruption and violence, as well as militarism at home and abroad (Rosamond, 2016, p. 325).

Gender and cosmopolitanism

Sweden's policy reflects its claim to be a "humanitarian superpower" with normative underpinnings that showcase, "a commitment to feminist ethical principles of inclusion and human security, gender cosmopolitanism, and empathetic cooperation" (Rosamond, 2016, p. 326). By inter-relating, the idea of national security and interests to feminist principles, Clinton and Sweden have made the very idea of external sovereignty as more universal and inclusive. Furthermore, it exhibits not only a cosmopolitan ethic but also gender cosmopolitanism that "ensure(s) the security of all human beings and political communities by challenging embedded patriarchal power relations and practices beyond borders" (Rosamond, 2013, p. 326). This further reiterates Martha C. Nussbaum's argument of "a feminist practice of philosophy that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality and rights, and at the same time sensitive to local particularity" (in Rosamond, 2013, p. 320).

The ideals of gender cosmopolitanism are, however, not limited to ensuring the rights of women across borders, but there is also a "co-constitutive relationship between Sweden's promotion of women's rights, security, bodily integrity and justice at home and abroad" (Rosamond, 2013, p. 328). While the country is one of the most gender-aware and gender-equal societies in the world, it does not discount the country's rising cases of gender-based violence. Rosamond argues that Sweden's gender cosmopolitanism seeks to achieve equitable right and representation both beyond and within its border. Therefore, "Sweden's conduct of state feminism are inscribed into the country's foreign policy tradition" as the country represents a cosmopolitan and "normative outflow… about women's rights and welfare that are socially constructed at the domestic level" (Ibid, p. 329).

Moreover, even before 2015, feminist scholar Annica Kronsell noted the "conversion of the Swedish military into a cosmopolitan actor in an effort to meet the demands for activities that contribute to peace and security abroad" (in Rosamond, 2013, p. 327). This is further congruent with Sweden's broader interest and view of itself as a sovereign state that is "other-regarding and respectful of cultural difference, and which uses its external policies to transpose its ideas about good international conduct beyond the confines of the Swedish polity" (Ibid, p. 327). Sweden has redefined its position in global politics by aligning its interests (both internal and external) as a sovereign and constituting it with ethical and gendered notions of cosmopolitanism. This recapitulates the ideals of the solidarist branch of the English School of IR.[2] As it is based on the "progressive account of global relations and for normative considerations in global politics" and emphasizing cosmopolitan justice as "states' endeavour to overcome the constraints of anarchy in a fashion conducive to both international order and justice" (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 331).

Limitations and Counter Arguments

It is imperative to understand that like sovereignty, the concept of cosmopolitanism has also undergone severe changes. The paper deliberated only a certain view of cosmopolitanism that aligned with its argument. Historically and even contemporary cosmopolitan scholars like Pogge (1992) argue for the "deconstruction" of nation-states and the adoption of a single world state, that is, "a global order in which sovereignty is widely distributed vertically" (p. 75). This view leads to a fundamental problem of the concept, that is, it is inherently imperial in nature. The view stems from Kant's propagation of cosmopolitanism based on "privileges of his citizenship and location within the Austrian Empire in the eighteenth century" making "geographical and anthropological assumptions about the capacities of culture to meet the requirements of such a cosmopolitan legality and politics" (Mendieta, 2009, p. 244). This assumption is still present in Pogge's argument as well as in the proliferation of norms that were, and sill are western centric.[3]

On the other hand, David Miller (2010) reflects on the morally arbitrary and "platitudinous" nature of a cosmopolitan

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morality. He argues that the "weak ethical version", that is, the principle of equal moral worth and equal moral concern – can be accepted by everyone" except "a few racist and other bigots" (p. 84). Whereas, "the strong form", that is, "equal responsibilities to everyone in the world without exception" is true only if there exists a global government with "truly world citizens" (p. 84).

Conclusion

As the paper has showcased, Sweden has successfully reoriented its foreign policy to one which is not only normative and ethically guided but also aligns with its national interest both at home and abroad. This is a departure from traditional elite-oriented foreign policy practices to one which is extensively wide-ranging as it goes beyond existing ideas of ethical foreign policy and which are gender-blind and not. It highlights the shift from a policy based on human rights rhetoric to one embedded with co-constitutive rights of women (as human rights) "within and beyond borders" based "on a combination of universalist and particular conceptions of duty" (Rosamond, 2013, p. 335).

It is pertinent to understand that the proliferation of cosmopolitanism can lead to the erosion of sovereignty in one form or another, nevertheless, it does not signify the complete erosion of either of the two concepts. Both the concepts have significantly grown form their original conceptualisation and evolved with the changing realities of the world they intended to define. Similar to cosmopolitanism, sovereignty is also an abstract and arbitrary concept as the degree of autonomy that a state needs to maintain to be called sovereign remains unclear. The case of Sweden's FFP is testament to the conceptualisation of a sovereign which is shaped by a cosmopolitan morality. Importantly, a cosmopolitan state also circumvents the imperial nature that cosmopolitanism otherwise propagates. However, this is not to argue that a feminist foreign policy is the most appropriate way or even the only way to bring about a cosmopolitan state; a co-constitutive cosmopolitan state can manifest itself in diverse ways.

Notes

[1] Pogge originally defined legal cosmopolitanism as a "universal republic" or a world without states. However, for the scope of the paper, it will be understood as equal rights in relations to members of different sovereign states.

[2] While the beliefs of the solidarist branch strengthen the arguments of the paper, it remains limited and underdeveloped in its conception. For more see Buzan, B. (2001).

[3] The western centric notion of cosmopolitanism is also reflected by the countries that have or formulating FFP.

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