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**Essay Question: What most determines the strategy of a state: capabilities or history?**

History determines a state's strategy of a state more than its capabilities. China's strategies towards Taiwan over the periods of three leaders will be analyzed. Employing a constructivist approach in which history shapes or constructs the main ideas, moulds the public's sentiments to collectively interpret reality and thus set base for state strategies. State strategy must be understood in the context of history. However, no country can think about its own policy or strategy without considering its own capabilities. History decides the preferences of a country's strategies and its capabilities determine the limits or the boundaries within which these strategies can be adopted.

In the strategy-making process of a state, there are many things decision-makers need to consider, intangible factors such as history may have a more decisive influence than tangible factors. To answer the question, realists will claim that relative capabilities of a state, not history itself, determine the strategy of a state. Liberals may not be so direct but will agree the claim in the context of international institutions which reflect the capabilities of states. Only social constructivists assert the influence of history in the strategy-making process, they believe that history has its imprints in a state's identity and history determines strategy through the identity and norms of the state.

Realists explain state strategy using the concept of power, classical realists think that pursuing power is human nature while neorealists tend to think the anarchical structure of the international system prescribes the state's behavior through the variable distribution of power. Classical and neoclassical realists may focus more on the state's domestic politics while neorealists emphasize structural explanations. For realists, state's capabilities as measured by power, have more significant influence than history, they believe that capabilities determine the state strategy whether it is a position of bandwagon or compete with great powers in the international system. Realists do not especially analyze the different domestic causes of behaviors, even neoclassical realists who are

more prone to discuss the domestic politics of states will only emphasize material aspects, that is to say how much resources a state can mobilize from its domestic background.

The difference in history, identity or collective memory and expectations of each state are ignored or considered uninfluential. The state is not important by itself, neorealist Kenneth Waltz defines “A balance-of-power theory... with assumptions about states: They are unitary actors who, at minimum, seek their own preservation, and at maximum, drive for universal domination” (Waltz 1979, cited in Taliaferro, 2006:476). In their view, war is a natural outcome of power politics. Realism has greater more explanatory value in terms of warfares, however, realism can not explain the end of the Cold War.

If we follow up realism’s ideas, the world should end with endless competitions, where alliances are built up on the concerns of other states’ capabilities. On the other hand, liberals argue that “power politics itself is the product of ideas, and crucially, ideas can change”(Dunne,2017:117), so war is not inevitable and cooperation among states is possible through the formation of international institutions. When liberals try to design how the world should be, they, like realists, do not analyze a state’s behavior within a specific social context, they tend to view state strategy as rational calculation in the anarchical international system. Capabilities are considered as one of several factors in their rational decision-making process. Although liberals admit ideas can change, they do not discuss how ideas and norms are shaped or differentiated within each state, instead, liberals believe there are some common, universal values exist which every state should pursue. “Liberals believe that for certain purposes the liberty of the state must be compromised by the need for collective action, hence the priority that they attach to the coordinating role of international organizations.” (Dunne,2017:117). The bases of these international organizations or institutions are certain norms, principles, values and regulations. When liberals try to universalize “values such as democracy, capitalism, and secularism, they undermine the traditions and practices of non-Western cultures” (Gray 1995, cited in Dunne, 2017:127).

Realists analyze how the reality currently stands, liberals focus more on what reality ought to be, but social constructivists discuss how the reality is constructed and perceived by a state. Social constructivists consider the state as a social actor, it “ is embedded in social rules and conventions that constitute its identity and the reasons for the interests that motivate actors” (Katzenstein, 1996:22). In their view, power does not explain the choice of competitors, it is the identity of a state which defines where the threats lie and such threats reveal themselves through mutual interaction. The state strategies are guided by its national interests, but the interests are predefined by nature, they are instead constructed and shaped by practices, domestic and international. History indirectly determines strategy, history may appear in the language of the strategy, or it may shape discretely the way the public think and believe. Christopher Hill analyzed British foreign policies and claimed that “...‘historical thinking’ in the sense of attitudes which are rooted in images of the country and its interests as they were in preceding generations, has been particularly marked” for Britain(Hill, 1988:27).

I use China’s strategies towards Taiwan as a case-study to demonstrate that history, rather than capabilities, has greater explanatory power. China’s policy towards Taiwan since 1949 has always been focused on reunification, but the strategies adopted to achieve this goal have changed significantly. The strategies of three consecutive Chinese leaders, Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), Hu Jintao (2002-2012) and Xi Jinping (2012-present) towards the same policy goal-reunification with Taiwan are compared.

Jiang Zemin assumed power in 1989. He adopted military coercive strategies against Taiwan. Two cross-strait crises happened during the Jiang regime,

After the cold war the Taiwan Strait witnessed two military crises, respectively, in 1995-96 and 1999-2000. In both crises China conducted military exercises and missile tests in the Taiwan Strait to oppose Taiwan’s pro-independence movement(He&Feng,2009:502).

Jiang knew that using military force against Taiwan meant an unavoidable war with U.S in the region. China in Jiang’s period was not yet a competitor of U.S in terms of capabilities, and China

still needed Taiwan's investment at that time. However, Jiang took more hawkish strategies against Taiwan. Jiang assumed power in the same year of Tiananmen Square incident. China faced western sanctions after the incident, and they served "as an alarming reminder to China's leaders that internal and external troubles could easily intertwine"(Wang,2011:69). The more hostile international environment reminded Chinese people of humiliation of the past, threatened the identity of state, Jiang reacted strongly to sustain his legitimacy. Although the Taiwan issue is a de-facto international one, it is considered a domestic one in China. Chinese leaders are well aware of both domestic and international dimensions and use it to serve their political purposes. They can use Taiwan to promote domestic nationalism against the West when needed or to intimidate Taiwan to target the West. We can only understand this link between domestic and international policy through history. Li Hongzhan, a Qing dynasty official, hated by Chinese, who "signed several treaties that ceded Chinese territory and sovereignty, including Taiwan... to foreign countries under humiliating terms... No Chinese politician... would like to take on the political liability of losing Taiwan"(He&Feng,2009:516).

Hu Jintao took power in 2002, and was considered to have a softer position on Taiwan. Hu's strategy was to deepen economic relations with Taiwan and divide Taiwanese opinion towards China so as to place political pressure on Taiwan's pro-independence government. "Hu did not follow Jiang's military coercion toward Taiwan, but chose instead less risky policy-political pressure..."(He &Feng,2009:516). Under Hu's administration, China became the third largest economy in 2007 and then the second in 2010. China's capabilities in Hu's era were much greater than in Jiang's era, but Hu adopted more moderate strategies toward Taiwans and the conciliatory ones towards the world. Capabilities alone can not explain the strategy Hu adopted, this must be understood through the specific form of identity Hu attempted to highlight to sustain the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party(CCP).

For PRC population, capitalism means the west, and the PRC is the representative of communism, but ironically, China's rise depends more on capitalist principles than on communist ones. CCP hence faces a severe domestic legitimacy problem. So Hu engineered a yet more Chinese-centered ideology to sustain CCP's legitimacy by adopting elements of Confucianism.

Hu tried to find more support from the traditional Confucian culture, which stresses the harmonious relations between society and state... Hu proposed at the UN summit in 2005 a 'harmonious world' in which all countries maintain peaceful relations with one another (He & Feng, 2009:515).

Thus, the first Confucius Institute was established in South Korea in 2004, then expanded to more than 140 countries in the world. Under Confucian doctrine, "harmony" (*hexie*) is the essence, so Hu used Confucianism to maintain the CPP's legitimacy, desisted from adopting hawkish strategies against Taiwan.

Western analysts tend to view China's rise as an emerging great power, competing with U.S. for hegemony in international politics. We ought to analyze further why China would never accept western values such as capitalism, democracy or human rights.

Hu's priorities towards Taiwan were economic integration in order to advance reunification gradually. Hu's emphasis on the Confucianism constrained him from adopting aggressive strategies. Hu's successor, Xi Jinping, placed greater emphasis on political integration with Taiwan to fulfill his "Chinese Dream". Xi "shifted his emphasis to establish and consolidate a comprehensive strategic framework under the 'one China' principle" (Huang, 2017:244). Xi included Taiwan into his "Chinese Dream" and "the rejuvenation of the Chinese people". Xi also employs history to describe future plans, one such example is the "One Belt, One Road Initiative". China has 5000 years of history, was prominent in the past, but humiliated over the course of modern history as well. While Xi uses history to imagine a greater future of China, at the same time "...the stronger China's sense of history is, the stronger China's sense of being exploited and victimized may be" (Gong, 2001:48).

The more Xi Jinping addresses history, the more aggressive strategies he will adopt towards Taiwan. Like Jiang, Xi launched several military exercises against Taiwan, but unlike Jiang, who targeted the West through Taiwan, Xi viewed Taiwan as the obstacle in the way of his bigger Chinese Dream. “Taiwan issue” will always be a reminder of China’s sense of humiliation in face of the west.

“A unique feature of Chinese leaders’ understanding of their country’s history is their persistent sensitivity to domestic disorder caused by foreign threats”(Wang,2011:68). As long as Chinese leaders emphasize Taiwan as a domestic issue, they will always have mistrust and resentment against the those who consider Taiwan as distinct from the PRC.

When we talk about the strategy of a state in the framework of international politics, examine state capabilities or power is unavoidable. However, we should not be confused between determinants and limits. My argument is that the capabilities set the limits to state but do not determine its decisions; sometimes it is the intangible factors which have more leverage than tangible ones. History always has its own imprint on the decision-making process whether intentional or not.

One ought not claim that either capabilities or history determines outcomes entirely, however, one could contend that one of the two has greater bearing in certain circumstances. Power limits states’ behaviors as much as it enables and such limits can encourage alternative behaviors which may not conform to a stereotypical analysis of a historical path.

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