

A Future Tinted by the Past – South African Justification Strategies for Peacebuilding

Johanna Ohlsson, UCRS, Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University,
Johanna.ohlsson@ucrs.uu.se

Keywords: justification, justification strategies, foreign policy, external actors, peacebuilding

Frequent referencing to moral values and ethical principles within foreign policy discourses indicates that ethics has a role to play within the topic of international relations, in parallel as well as intertwined with legal and political reasoning. I am making this argument based on a case study on the foreign policy discourse of South Africa in relation to the country's engagements in peacebuilding missions abroad. The paper contributes both by shedding further light on the normative dimensions of foreign policy as well as with the findings from the case study. Foreign policy is often centered around the realist paradigm with a focus on national security, sovereignty and national interests but regardless of this main focus, ethical principles are continuously being used. Within the liberal paradigm, ethical principles have a more natural place even though still a limited role. In addition to paradigms of how international relations should be organised, foreign policy is also to some extent governed by international law.

The ethical principles being referred to in foreign policy are here operationalised into what I call justification strategies, used in order to justify and create legitimacy for certain decisions and initiatives. A crucial distinction that I make in the paper is the difference between justification and attempts to justify. This theoretical discussion is enriched by the findings from the case study. The analysis of the case study on South African foreign policy shows that three overarching approaches can be clustered into a typology of justification strategies. The typology is also a contribution made by the paper, which is drawn from the case study but which is also applicable to other cases. The analysis is based on reviews of South Africa's main foreign policy documents as well as interviews with decision makers and scholars.

The first justification strategy is the continuous reference to liberal values such as human rights, democracy and multilateralism. The second justification strategy is the African Agenda, or the African Renaissance, which is justifying the primary focus on the African continent. The third justification strategy is the referencing to south-south cooperation. This is explained as a way of taking distance from colonialism and imperialism, and is based on the importance of being in solidarity with the south. South Africa has taken on a role as a voice of the African continent in for example the UN, and has for example been lobbying for a reform of the UN Security Council into a more equal setting. The analysis show that the justification strategies are explained by historical, cultural and geographical explanations in each case they are being used.

The paper contributes to the literature on justification, the ethics of foreign policy and ethics of international law. This is done by the case study and also given the specific focus on the justification strategies of engagement in peacebuilding initiatives, shedding light to a fairly dark corner in previous literature. My analysis is in addition also relevant for the larger discussion on

the relationship between international law, moral and international politics in different countries across the globe.

References

- Chandler, David & Volker Heins eds. (2006) *Rethinking Ethical Foreign Policy – pitfalls, possibilities and paradoxes* Routledge: Abington & New York
- Forst, Rainer (2014) *Justification and Critique: Towards a Critical Theory of Politics* Polity Press: Cambridge & Malden
- Habermas, Jürgen (2001) *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* trans. C. Cronin MIT Press: Cambridge & London
- Landsberg, Chris & Jo-Ansie van Wyk eds. (2012) *South African Foreign Policy Review: Volume 1* Africa Institute of South Africa: Pretoria
- Masters, Lesley, Siphamandla Zondi, Jo-Ansie van Wyk & Chris Landsberg , eds. (2015) *South African Foreign Policy Review: Volume 2* Africa Institute of South Africa: Pretoria
- Namli, Elena (2014) *Human Rights as Ethics, Politics and Law* Uppsala Studies in Social ethics 43, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Uppsala
- Nyuykonge, Charles and Zondi Siphamandla (2016) *South African Peacebuilding Approaches: Evolution and Lessons* ACCORD, Rising Powers & Innovative Approaches to Peacebuilding - Policy Briefs Series
- Smith, Karen E. & Margot Light eds. (2010) *Ethics and Foreign Policy* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge