The Politics of International Intellectual Cooperation*

Sustain our Common Humanity

The 20th century saw the catastrophes of the First and Second World Wars. International intellectual cooperation was considered necessary if humanity were to renew civilized society and build a prosperous economy to the benefit of all. Such exchange also became an instrument of ideological "soft-power" or cultural diplomacy, using propaganda, and exploiting the arts, sciences, and intellectual life generally. Here we consider examples of idealism and realism in international intellectual cooperation and educational exchange. The aim is to identify and make coherent key issues and suggest lessons for today.

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Intellectual cooperation has taken many forms throughout history. It assumes readiness to engage other points of view in a common search for knowledge and truth. Throughout history, such cooperation has been frustrated by those who feel they are already possessed of intellectual certainty, by absolutism, and obscurantism, as the case of Galileo Galilei in 1615 shows. (Drake 2017). There are countless examples in recent history alone. They raise questions of academic freedom, speech, writing, and the dissemination of ideas for comment and challenge. Such cooperation is most effective through the work of individuals in collaboration with peers in teaching, research, and publication; but it has never been confined to the professional academic. Consider, for instance, the role of our contemporary "public intellectual" (Elshtain 2001). Again, prevailing cultural and social attitudes, themselves controversial, affect censorship official and unofficial, as do the commercial interest of publishers, markets, sponsors, and intellectual property rights.

International intellectual, cultural, and educational cooperation is important in the politics of international relations. In the modern world, this has been from the competing theoretical perspectives of idealism and realism. Idealists believe foreign policy should be guided by universal moral values within an agreed framework of legal norms. They assume a common interest in minimising conflict through peaceful cooperation in creating conditions in which humanity can flourish. It is fundamentally an ethical, legal, and humanitarian political philosophy. Realists assert the primacy of the nation-state in politics including foreign policy. They argue that this is not subject to a higher authority but engages in continuous relations with other states, sometimes breaking down. The national interest determines policy and action, requiring cooperation in military alliances and economic relations, cultivated through diplomatic influence including intellectual knowledge exchange.

The League of Nations

The League of Nations (1920), an outcome of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), was a declaration that international cooperation should determine relations among nation-states. However, as Peter Raffo, in a still useful brief analysis, explains, the League of Nations was a voluntary association of sovereign states that fluctuated in membership, with the United States being the only major power that never joined. The assumption was that its effectiveness would stem from "….the moral power of its decisions and from its ability to influence what was wont to be described as 'the public opinion of the world'"(Raffo 1974, p. 9). In short, it depended '….for its very existence and effectiveness on that unity of purpose and international goodwill which it was itself designed to promote' (Raffo 1974, p. 25). This was a fundamental contradiction that goes far to explain the League's failure to resolve the international crises with which it was faced. It is a prime example of philosophical idealism in international relations. The Second World War brought the organization to an end, but not its idealist philosophy.

As Raffo points out, the record of the League on humanitarian questions "…though never outstanding was solid and useful enough to be continued, in a much better organised and financed manner, by the United Nations" (Raffo 1974, p. 9). The Health Organization, the International Labour Office, the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) and its companion organization, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), are specific examples. The ICIC was an initiative of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, supported by intellectuals such as Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Jagadish Chandra Bose, and Gilbert Murray (Morgan 2020). The IIIC, sponsored by France and based in Paris, delivered specific programmes and projects (Renoliet 1999).

A review of the monograph by Renoliet says that France used the IIIC to make up in cultural influence what it lacked in economic power but did not have the political will to sustain such cultural diplomacy. International intellectual cooperation, again despite some achievements, for example in educational cinema, failed to develop either an international public opinion favourable to world peace or sustained common programmes. Two reasons are given: the indifference of the major powers; and the consistently elitist perception of culture by the ICIC and the IIIC. Most importantly, Renoliet's book together with others reviewed are said to "…reveal the illusory nature of functionalism, the idea, proclaimed by David Mitrany [of Princeton University's Institute of Advanced Study] in 1943, that international economic and social cooperation could be conducted on purely technical, politically neutral lines" (Ghebali 2002; Mitrany 1975; Groom/Taylor 1975).

The historian Edward Hallett Carr was a prominent critic of the idealist perspective and an exponent of realism in international relations during the interwar years. In "The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939", Carr argued that the idealist perspective was wishful thinking and dangerous utopianism (Carr 2016). Compare this with the international relations theories of Carl Schmitt, the German legal philosopher and National Socialist. Schmitt argued that politics, including international politics, was fundamentally about distinguishing between 'friends and enemies' and acting accordingly (Schmitt 2004).

The United Nations

The end of the Second World War saw new global and regional institutions based on international cooperation, most notably the United Nations with its Specialized Agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), (Lee 2009), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Educational, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), (Singh 2011; Duedahl 2016). These continued the idealist philosophy of the interwar years but in a more favourable political and financial environment. The United Nations was still dependent on great power acquiescence if not always unanimity. Its structure, with five Permanent Members of the Security Council, China (later the People's Republic), France, the Soviet Union (later Russia), the United Kingdom, and the United States, ensured a hybrid of idealism, realism, and also political stasis. (Mazower 2009).

The period was also one of ideological "Cold War" between capitalist parliamentary democracies led by the United States and a state-socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union. This was accompanied by a retreat from colonial imperialism and the emergence of loosely organized "non-aligned" countries, with India and the then Yugoslavia prominent. Armed conflict continued to varying degrees of intensity, often as national liberation movements, and as Cold War proxies. As the ideological conflict developed, there was an emphasis on propaganda to potential sympathisers in rival camps and, crucially, in non-aligned countries.

The aspiration of international intellectual cooperation for the common good, UNESCO's ideal, was blurred by the realist cultural diplomacy of rival powers and an exercise of "soft power" known as the "Cultural Cold War" (Romijn/Scott-Smith/Segal 2012). In UNESCO's case, it led to allegations, especially by the United States questioning it as a disinterested vehicle for international intellectual cooperation. Yet, the United States, had also attempted to direct UNESCO and its staff (Behrstock 1987). It withdrew from the organization between 1984 and 2003, and again in 2018. Such controversy was damaging both to UNESCO's financial capacity and its idealist mission.

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft-Power

There is now extensive literature on these concepts (Fisher/Brōckerhoff 2008). Cultural diplomacy is about how states and multi-state organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Warsaw Pact (1955-1991), the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance or COMECON (1949-1991), the Commonwealth, or the European Union present values and policy objectives as benign. The objective is a simple one: to make friends and influence

foreign public opinion through a complex of indirect appeals in which intellectual cooperation, cultural, and educational exchanges, including recruitment of international students, are important components. This was a major activity of the United States, the Soviet Union and their respective allies during the Cold War, as we have noted.

This may be done through state sponsorship of cultural or media organizations, such as, for example, the British Council (1932), the British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service (1932), and the United States Information Agency (1953; incorporated with the Department of State in 1999). There are also programmes for individuals, such as the long-standing Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, and the Rhodes, Marshall, and Fulbright Scholarships. More recently there are the Turing and, for Wales, the Taith (Journey) programmes, both substituting for the EU's Erasmus. In Germany there is the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD) or German Academic Exchange Service. The DAAD, founded in 1925, claims to be the world's largest funding organisation for the international exchange of students and researchers. The scientific and educational exchange programmes of the European Union, such as Horizon, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, and a network of European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) are regional examples. The European Union's policy direction was set out in 2016 (European Commission, 2016), with an external commentary published recently (Dâmaso 2021).

All major countries offer similar programmes either directly through state agencies or indirectly through the sponsorship of non-governmental organizations and individuals. The People's Republic of China's Confucius Institutes provide an example. First established in 2006, the Institutes now play a significant role in China's cultural diplomacy (Starr 2009; Repnikova 2021). They are also examples of 'soft power', a term coined to illustrate the difference from 'hard-power' which is coercive rather than persuasive, using military or economic sanctions to reach international policy objectives (Nye 1990; 2021). Soft power operates essentially through economic and social development relations in which trade and education are major components and is an integral part of foreign policy. It is a velvet glove covering an iron fist. For example, it may be used to wage what is now described as a hybrid war, reminiscent of the Cold War (McCuen 2008).
The United Nations' Specialized Agencies such as UNESCO remain examples of global cooperative programmes. However, they still depend on the political and economic support of affiliated states, especially those advanced economically, and are a mix of idealist and realist motives. As the American diplomat Richard Holbrooke said, one can: "Call it public diplomacy, call it public affairs, psychological warfare if you really want to be blunt, propaganda" (cited in Fisher/Brōcker-hof 2008, p. 5). Although the degree of control may vary between forms of the state and over time, these remain the politics of international intellectual cooperation whenever state or state-affiliated and maintained international organizations are responsible for it.

The Right to Freedom of Expression

In 1980, Sean MacBride, president of UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, and 1974 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, wrote of the growing importance of public opinion. He attributed it to higher standards of education, especially literacy; and to the instant availability of mass media, print, and audio-visual. MacBride quoted Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 23 March 1976. This said: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his (sic) choice" (MacBride 1980). It echoed the 1946 motto of UNESCO in the preliminary to its Constitution which now reads: "Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed" (https://www.unesco.org/en/introducing-unesco).

Seven decades later this remains an idealistic, utopian, and unfulfilled aspiration. It assumes normatively that the purpose of intellectual cooperation is to understand the human condition and ways in which it can flourish. Yet, the Internet and the ubiquitous spread of social media operated by commercial interests, have led to "…a world of soundbites, of Twitter, of shouts-down of speakers at universities; and in a retreat from discourse based on evidence and reasoned argument" (Morgan 2018, p. 1613).

However, living as we still do in times of armed conflict, fundamentalism, political authoritarianism, obscurantism, and intolerance of other points of view, intellectual cooperation remains essential to our common humanity. It is justified both historically and by the humanitarian ideal of a global common good as the threat of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic again demonstrate. (UNESCO 2015;

Zimmermann/Morgan 2021). Yet the theory and practice of international intellectual cooperation are still marked by ambivalence, and by tensions between humanitarian objectives and perceived national interests. Cultural diplomacy and "soft-power" continue to be key weights in this balance as the United States' reaction to China's Thousand Talents international recruitment programme shows (Normile 2022). Finally, it is worth noting that, in a statement condemning Russia's criminal aggression against sovereign Ukraine, the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES), which has many international members, including Russians and Ukrainians, reminded us that "... genuine intercultural dialogue and understanding offer our best hope of a more peaceful world, and we commit to doing all we can to preserve them in this dangerous moment" (BASEES, 2022).

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