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**Independence of Nations and the Role of Libraries:
The American Library System as the Stakeholder
for Freedom of Information**

Lana Zink

Abstract

The nations of the world community are independent of each other. There is no higher authority to bring together like and unlike nations for the betterment of world order. Each nation stands alone. It is realized, even in America, that international affairs dictate there is no one moral code common to all people and to all governments of the world. Political order in the world community depends upon an independence of nations, but an independence that recognizes a moral, reasoned mind. The so-called American library system plays a role in the assurances toward tempered, human behavior at the international level by assuring public access to information. The natural order of world groups recognizes the American library system as the stakeholder for a reasoned, moral mind.

Introduction

Democracy is malleable. It is tempered by the human behavior called free public access to information. As the major ideology on the international horizon, America stresses the reciprocal relationship between the two, i.e., democracy and human behavior based upon public access. Democracy epitomizes equality. It stands guard, allowing relationship with public access to information to be strengthened, not only nationally but also internationally.

What is the public duty or public domain of democracy toward the free flow of information? As a country whose cornerstone was laid upon the concept of democracy, America has a mutual role in the international community that can best be accomplished through sustaining the institution called the American library system. This article will first discuss the reality of international politics and the independence of nations as given, broadly, by Fromkin (1981). It will then connect the reality of the independence of nations to the role of the American library system.

While a peaceful world order is an agenda for democracy, the diversity of the international community suggests it may be otherwise too hard to accomplish.

Fundamental to international relations is the independence of states, i.e., the national state is the only fundamental unit in the world today. The independence of states shows the fragmentation of political order resulting from the rooted patterns of individual, human behavior with all of the nations making a diverse world community.

Competing claims of unity and diversity among and between nations must be coped with in American's journey toward a world of justice and peace. Democracy, in this effort, tries to demonstrate that war, military takeover, and political aggression is self-defeating. Democracy calls on the principle "Warfare shall be abolished through truth and justice.

The question becomes academic. Socrates and Plato discussed politics in terms of an imaginary ideal state. However, as academe points out, international science continues to ignore the fundamental reality of international relations as a united front. Each state is separate and individual.

Additionally, the fact is that national entities, or states, as the principal actors in the world community, are independent of higher authority or each other. Fromkin (1981) indicates that the meaning of independence, even as an aspect of democracy (or freedom), is negative. Independence means that an entity is not ruled by anybody else, that there is no entity above it, no political superior, no authority it recognizes and obeys. This is a special enigma. Independence describes a unique state of international relations. Most countries are a prisoner of their own circumstances, i.e., their geography, relative power, wealth, nature and number of inhabitants and disposition of their neighbors, etc. In contrast, in the domestic affairs of most states, the state is beholden to its people, or if not to its people, then to the group in power, whereas in international affairs, there is no one authority over the group of independent states. Each state is beholden only to itself. In a simple sense, independence means only the freedom to choose between such alternatives as fate may offer, few and disagreeable as these may be. Independence can be more than this, in the sense that it is the right to choose. At the same time, it does not bring with it a guarantee that any of the available choices will be acceptable. Most human activity and behavior falls into a pattern of group activity. Most groups have some elements of organization in terms of rules and leadership, just as a state has a government and a leader. International affairs are generally an irony. Politics are conditioned by the experience of living within a political entity. All political interests are self-interests ensuring one's own welfare. This is as true of one nation as it is of another.

The world of independence nations is therefore most perplexing because the characteristics of international politics is basically the lack of political structure, lack of justice, and even the possibility of war, all of which are repugnant to civilized values and human ideals. Yet, in a democracy like America, we must recognize the reality of

international politics to survive. The first two concepts a democracy must recognize are (1) politics is always about power and (2) international politics is always power politics. Contrast this with domestic politics and it must also be recognized that within a civilized political community such as America, no person needs any power in order to physically survive--for his government purports to enclose him with a matrix of security. Police and armed forces protect him from harm. One can live, thrive and be happy without being powerful. In a democracy it is not necessary to be powerful in order to have an equal vote. Voting is enfranchised as a right to all. Voting gives us all the power that we need. Thus, in domestic politics a great deal of what goes on is pursuit of influence rather than pursuit of power. But, as Fromkin notes, in international affairs, among nations, in politics, there is no influence without power.

Indeed, there is no influence without power in politics. There is also no enfranchisement as of rights. There is no entitlement to a voice or a vote in the making of international decisions. This is easily explained by the basic fact that there is no world government to guarantee and secure the rights of states or even their right to survive.

Thus, Fromkin's conclusion suggests that the essential condition that allows an entity as a nation to participate in international politics, or to stand as an independent state, is the possession of an adequate amount of power. He states this is the price of independence, the price of gaining a minimum amount of power politics so it can engage with other independent states as an independent state itself. International politics of independent states is not only power politics because states are independent, but also because the government of these states must act in accordance with the moral views of their constituents. This is wise not only in terms of helping the government remain in office but also in terms of strengthening a country's foreign policy by mobilizing popular support behind it. Thus, morality plays a role in international politics.

More specifically from an historical perspective (Fry, 1996), the 19th century began America's development of foreign relations for one reason – the need for foreign markets. This developed the dependency theory with its attention to American's impact abroad and commercial expansion. Business, like missionaries and teachers, became forces for furthering our nation's presence and influence in other countries. The whole picture of Western History (Bacevich, 1998), pointing to expansion of freedom, equality and opportunity, serves to suggest the notion that the United States possesses a mandate to spread the blessings of liberty to others. Even dominant foreign policy theories, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism, have as their main interest the spread of American ideals, trade policy and human rights. Both theories enjoin with the belief that people around the world thirst for freedom and authentic self-government.

From an international perspective the United Nations General Assembly (Voeten, 2000) reports four dominant themes in the global division that separate the independence of

nations: (1) everlasting struggle between the rich and poor countries, (2) global conflict dominated by classes between different civilizations, (3) dominant mode of conflict in global politics between liberal democracies and nondemocracies, and (4) states seeking to challenge the dominant power of the United States. As America's myopic view is perceived, international communication (Chang, 1998), coined as the flow of news and information among nations, is a manifestation of the world system arrangement, a two-tier concentric world, with the Western-developed countries at the center and the rest of the world at the periphery.

However, it is realized even in America, that international affairs dictate that there is no moral code common to all people and all governments of the world (What seems right to Russians may seem wrong to Americans). There is no real higher authority, no substantive world government to articulate, interpret and impose moral values. This leads to the basic premise of this article: There is no way for the world to deal with the wrongful conduct of states, for there is no world community to define what constitutes wrongful and no world political community to impose such a definition upon the states that disagree with it. The question is, "Can the primacy of power in international relations be tempered by the forces of ethics and justice, and whose role is it to lead the banner to make sure that it is?"

The Role of Libraries

In relating Fromkin's tenets of independence to the basic belief in library systems there are certain democratic guarantees that set up within societal structure to ensure freedoms has a backbone. Among these are a free press, an open government, and an educated populace. All three of these intertwine with the library system in America, to ensure justice in power politics. As a depository of knowledge, a repository of research and invention, an armory of opinion, a vault for fact-finders, a treasure of theory and doctrine, a reservoir of history, and a safety-deposit box of ideas, thoughts and beliefs, the library is the stakeholder for a reasoned, moral mind. It is this reasoned, moral mind upon which the principle of freedom is built. Since there is no moral code that is agreed upon by all the people and government of the world, there is a need for freedom of information, gained mainly through information management structured in the library system. Not to indicate otherwise, even an open government or a free press cannot guarantee impartiality and unbiased information gathering and seeking. While the library does not also guarantee freedom of information that is impartial and unbiased, the library is more diverse, open and flexible than the subtle undertones found in the free press or assembly of government.

A reasoned mind is the only guarantee for knowing what constitutes wrongfulness whether committed by either a person or an independent state in a world community. To function effectively in a worldly domain, a government needs the citizens to agree

with the political power at hand and what it is doing. Libraries offer the best source of knowledge to import fact-finding information on a government, what it is doing, whether it is moral and in agreement with the basic fabric of societal beliefs. It offers written, seasoned perspective to the order of independent nations and their thinking within a historical perspective.

The basic political fact is that humans live in groups. Libraries are organized to respect this fact. The pattern of group activity natural to human behavior is natural to the classification scheme within libraries, making information gathering habits of people just as natural as people living in groups. Just as human groups have organizational rules, libraries have the basic organizational elements true to everyday life information-seeking behavior.

Within the organizational ideal and the freedom of action of independent states are limitations. Libraries offer the free expression of these limitations. As given, independence, whether of people, or of states, gives the right to choose even when it does not guarantee that any of the available choices are truly acceptable. Library services offer access to information on choices, that are both partial or impartial, definitive or indefinite. The library is still the best source to access, to allow a person to know the differences between the above two.

As Fromkin (1981, p. 63) points out, “the irony of the independence of nations means that knowing how to deal with one’s own group is different from knowing how to deal with outside groups; and knowing how to deal within a political and legal structure is different from knowing how to deal with independent entities outside the framework of any structure.” As the premise given here was to supply an overview of basic tenets to the notions of independence of nations found in the world community, an opinion is also given to support the safeguard of moral, reasoned judgment toward peaceful world order among the independence of nations through the kind of activities ensured by the library system. Libraries and librarians make a difference in the knowledge age. They protect the independence of nations from itself and others so that resource and idea sharing allows transmission of knowledge at the user level to transcend to the international level.

While the American Library Association’s (ALA’s) role (Doyle, 1989) in international relations program is unofficial, the ALA many times responds to international issues. Access to information, intellectual freedom, public awareness, and library services, development and technology are the major thrust of the association. With its wealth of resources, ALA provides opportunities for problem solving among nations. One of its major goals is to encourage the exchange, dissemination, and access to information and the unrestricted flow of library materials in all formats through the world. ALA serves

as a force for change and as a model of intellectual freedom, with as much to learn from global exchange as to share with it.

American libraries ensure everyday life information seeking activities whereby there is no right or wrong, no better or best, just an information brokerage exchange based upon the fact that, while politics is power, influence is also part of a reasoned, moral mentality.

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