

NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

National Self-Determination: A Contradiction

One of the most used concepts in discussions of international affairs today is the "right to national self-determination". It is defined as the right of a nation or people to choose its own system of government without outside interference. But, in fact, the "right" of national self-determination is not a right at all. It is a confused, self-contradictory principle that is being used to aid in the destruction of freedom throughout the world.

The essential flaw in the doctrine of national self-determination is that there exists nowhere in reality such a singular entity as "a nation" or a "people" which can be treated as if it were a single unit possessed of a single mind or a single purpose. What does exist is a large number of individuals with differing values, goals and ideas.

Not all people are going to agree on what form of government they ought to have (or whether there ought to be a government at all) and on what policies it ought to carry out. Which people will decide and what, if any, are the limits on their choice? To what degree will their will be imposed on the dissenting minority? These are important questions, so far as the lives and the property of the citizens are concerned.

Most individuals believe in letting people run their own affairs as they see fit, so long as they do not infringe on the equal rights of others. This attitude, philosophically justified and formalized into a set of consistent political principles, is the essence of the doctrine of individual rights and the basis of free and peaceful human relations. But it is fallacious to expand this principle to relationships between nations . . . nations are not units with single minds, desires or goals.

A nation may hold some or all of its citizens in terror and slavery, yet never do the slightest harm to any other nation and thus, under the principle of national self-determination, be free from all fear of upset.

National Self-Determination & Government

Invariably, the idea of national self-determination is linked with the political

process of election of parties into power by democratic majority vote, which is said to represent the "will of the people". In fact, it represents the will of only some of the people, that of the most powerful and numerous political group, which may well choose (and, in history, often has chosen) a system which slaughters, enslaves or robs the minority. Yet the advocates of national self-determination would call the political ability to do these things a "right".

It is worse than absurd to claim such a right as national self-determination which permits the wholesale violation of the rights of the individual. Rights are a moral-political concept protecting the individual from coercion by more powerful individuals or groups. To uphold the "right" of a majority to impose its will upon minorities is an absurd perversion of the concept. The only rights of a group are those of the individuals who make it up, and if individual rights are denied, on what basis does the group claim any rights? What good is the "right" of national self-determination to a man who may be arbitrarily robbed, killed or enslaved by his own government?

The most deadly aspect of the principle of national self-determination is the implication that the particular form of government chosen does not matter, as long as the majority has chosen it . . . that is, as long as it is the "will of the people". Thus, if the majority of the people vote for communism, fascism, socialism, nazism or any other form of government that practices wholesale violation of rights, it is their "right" to do so, not only for themselves personally but for everyone else as well.

As an analogy, picture a small, predominantly religious community somewhere in the United States where one day the people decide, through a democratic vote, that all religious dissenters be rounded up and jailed because they constitute a bad influence upon the community. Of course, this claim would be rejected as an absurdity and the state and federal government would step in to free the "offenders".

Mob Role

The contradictory nature of the principle of national self-determination is exactly what makes it so useful in international politics and propaganda . . . it can be used to defend almost anything. It is especially useful to those who are waging and supporting wars of "national liberation". All they need to do is loudly proclaim that they are the true representatives of the "will of the people", that they are fighting for "national self-determination", and any outside nation that aids the existing government or attempts to interfere in any way is immediately denounced for aggression and for violating the "right" of national self-determination."

"The will of the people", where it means anything at all, means simply that might (or numerical superiority) is right. What national self-determination means in practice is that whatever gang happens to come out on top has the right to rule without interference.

Observe also that any nation which honestly (and blindly) tries to follow the principle of self-determination is bound to become hopelessly confused about the morality of its international policies and actions because of the contradictions in the principles it is trying to act upon.

The principle of national self-determination can be and generally is used to protect and justify governmental systems that explicitly deny individual rights. But it is nonsense for a government or revolutionary group to claim immunity from outside interference on the grounds of "national rights" while at the same time violating the individual rights of its own citizens. Yet it is precisely such governments that give the loudest, most consistent support to the principle of national self-determination.

This is not by accident . . . they are most in need of some pseudo-justification for their actions. Red China and the Soviet Union with the citizen-slaves and "wars of national liberation" are prime examples.

Interventionism & Liberty

Consider what would happen if the United States decided to invade, and overthrow the government of a foul dictatorship.

If it was a left-wing dictatorship, immediately the cry of "aggression" and "violation of national rights" would arise from a hundred countries and the United Nations. But how often do they cry out against the violence that governments perpetrate against their own citizens? What is their actual motive when they raise a furor the instant any established tyrannical government is threatened from the outside, but ignore the daily misery of millions living under such governments?

It is not concern for the rights of the people. The "Third World" and communist bloc nations are the biggest hypocrites in this respect.

I am not recommending that the U.S. or any other semi-free nation attempt the armed liberation of the world's slave states. It would not be in our interest to try to do so . . . the erosion of freedom in our own country is a much greater danger to us at this time than the existence of tyranny elsewhere, and this should be our greatest concern.

Nor do I think that armed intervention is ordinarily a good policy even in the case of the worst governments, unless they directly threaten us.

It is much better for the people of a country to fight for and win their own freedom than to have some outside power do it for them. For if too few people understand and value freedom highly enough to fight for it, then it is not likely that freedom would long be maintained.

If we should wish to aid people living under tyranny, probably the best and most effective method is through propaganda which spreads the ideas and ideals of freedom within those countries. Then, should a revolution succeed, there will exist the intellectual foundation necessary for the establishment and maintenance of freedom.

The "right" of national self-determination is not a proper principle by which to guide our international relations. To the degree that we do so, we are acting for our own destruction.

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STEVE LORD



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