

**Angelos Chryssogelos. *Party System and Foreign Policy Change In Liberal Democracies—Cleavages, Ideas, Competition* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2021). 196 pages.**

Reviewed by Constantine P. Danopoulos

Despite the fact that in recent decades elections or referenda in competitive as well as more restricted political environments have proliferated and seem more consequential than ever, little attention has been paid to the role and impact electoral contests have on political parties with respect to the formation and implementation of foreign policy. This is especially germane to liberal democracies where competitive elections are the only legitimate avenue of power succession—Do winning political parties have a free hand to respond to the international environment, or to specific developments in the world order and introduce substantive/meaningful change in their states' foreign policy in line with party ideology, perceptions, or pronouncements.

Substantive is a major change/reversal in an important issue. An example is President Richard Nixon's decision in 1972 to engage with communist China after many years of non-recognition. In other words, substantive means more than mere rhetorical, cosmetic, or procedural gesturers but far less than wholesale, fundamental foreign policy reorientation, which usually is associated with revolutionary upheavals. The announcement of the French government to recall the country's ambassador to the US in response to the exclusion of Paris from the recent Pacific security partnership agreement between Washington, London, and Canberra is an example of the former, while the decision of the Ethiopian regime that emerged from the 1974 revolution to align the traditionally pro-Western country with the Soviet bloc exemplifies the latter.

Chryssogelos' brief but pithy volume is a serious and well-conceived effort to shed some light on this rather important issue. The author postulates that political parties who

come to power pledging to bring about change in foreign policy are constrained by partisan competition. As a result, international pressures for foreign policy change materialize only when the “party system undergoes its own fundamental kind of change.” This involves “the transformation of the language of party competition towards new understanding of the issues and stakes around which parties compete.” In coalition governments, the junior partner may end up exerting more political weight than its numbers would justify. Chryssogelos seeks to illustrate this thesis through three carefully chosen examples.

West Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SPD) led -government in the late 1960s-early 1970s recognized communist East Germany and post-World War II borders in Eastern Europe, known as *Ostpolitik*. A second example given is the reversal in the 1980s of Canada’s century-long protectionist policy by its signing a free trade agreement with the United States. Lastly, Chryssogelos cites the 1999 decision of the socialist government of Greece to lift the country’s long-held opposition towards Turkey’s candidacy to join the European Union (EU). In all three cases, the decisions involved a protracted process but constituted major departure from previous policies, were grounded on the respective states’ “core perceptions of national interests,” maintained key international alliances, and promised not to compromise national unity, economic prosperity, or domestic and external security. The author justifies his case selection on the grounds that all three faced a changing international environment The core ideas for change had been circulating for some time, and the new policies were “adopted and implemented when new stakes of party competition emerged and political parties embraced new meanings of their identity.”

Utilizing existing literature and his own ideas, Chryssogelos sketches out a fairly detailed theoretical framework. In consolidated liberal democracies institutions perform different and frequently interrelated functions; these functions can be cooperative or competitive but are not stand-alone entities. This is true in domestic as well as foreign policy arenas. Being integral parts of the system, parties are not exempted. In fact, competition is the very essence of party government, often referred to as Westminster. International developments generate pressures and the ambiance for change in foreign policy, but political parties are constrained by the party system in which they operate and do not have free hand to introduce immediate change when they come to power. Although parties tend to react quickly to changing international conditions, the arena of party competition determines the “precise content and timing of the response.” Even

party ideology and perceptions are frequently defined and articulated “in a complex interrelationship with the broader context of party competition.”

Foreign policy is not divorced from domestic realities. Instead, domestic interests, perceptions, and developments influence how international pressures are perceived as well as the nature and timing of the response. In the author’s words, “The pace and content of domestic change dictates how international pressures on a state will translate into foreign policy change; and the international systemic shifts will produce change in the issues most intertwined with domestic cleavages and the dominant issues of party competition.” Only when party competition digests and fleshes out the key issues and challenges at hand-- usually a lengthy and often slow-moving process--“new foreign policy ideas will be adopted and articulated in party programmatic terms by party actors who try to adapt and take advantage of the new language of politics.” In liberal democracies, then, substantial foreign policy changes require “public legitimation about their fit with the states’ long-defined core interests.”

Of the three cases the author selected to focus, Germany relates directly to WWII and the subsequent division of the country between the pro-Western and NATO member Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) referred to as West Germany and the communist, Soviet dominated, and Warsaw Pact connected German Democratic Republic (GDR), referred to as East Germany. Besides two hostile German states, WWII bequeathed Bonn unresolved border issues with Eastern bloc neighbors, especially Poland and Czechoslovakia. The conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), in coalition with the centrist Free Democratic Party (FDP), ruled the FRG uninterrupted from its inception and pursued a hard line of non-recognition towards the GDR and border issues.

The relaxation of Cold War tensions between the US and the USSR, known as “*détente*,” provided the backdrop for foreign policy change in the FRG. The catalyst was when the FDP abandoned its association with the CDU in 1969 and formed a coalition with the SPD (Socialist Democratic Party) under the banner of reform and modernization. In fact, foreign minister and FDP leader Walter Scheel handled the negotiations that eventually led to normalization of relations with the GDR and the settlement of border issues. Even though the socialists had floated the idea of normalizing relations with their neighbors to the east since the early 1960s, foreign policy change materialized only when the German party system was able to intertwine international pressures with domestic cleavages and party perceptions.

Unlike Germany, Canada's situation was not the product of war, but had deep and long-held fears of economic and culturally related fears of domination by its giant neighbor, the U.S. Chrysogelos asserts that the 1988 signing of a free trade agreement with Washington jettisoned "a century-long policy of protectionism that had become the symbol of Canada's identity and independence." Globalization and privatization movements that gathered worldwide strength 1980s provided the ambiance in which Canadian party politics dealt with the country's domestic political situation. Departing from the barely distinguishable positions regarding the question of national unity, the country's two major political parties--Conservatives and Liberals—viewed differently how international developments should affect the country's constitutional structure and power arrangement. In view of their own political priorities the Conservatives advocated decentralization and more power to the provinces, whereas the Liberals supported more centralization and pan-Canadian nationalism. By interweaving the international environment with domestic constitutional issues the Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was able to start negotiations and eventually sign a free trade agreement with the US, which constituted a substantial departure from the country's protectionist foreign policy orientation.

Finally, the Greek case has to do with the country's perennial adversary to the east, Turkey. Hoping to use as leverage against Ankara's on the Cyprus quagmire and a host of other disputes between the two countries, Athens threatened to veto Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union (EU). But the pressures of the post-Cold War environment and the increasing importance of the EU throughout the 1990s provided enough ammunition to the pragmatic government of Prime Minister Kostas Simitis to overcome opposition within his own socialist party (PASOK) and alter Greece's widely supported foreign policy regarding Turkey's EU membership: from opposition to support. This major change, argues Chrysogelos, emanated from Simitis' fervent desire to reform, modernize, and Europeanize the country as well as his party; and this included the much sought-after entry to the EU monetary union, Eurozone. In this sense, international developments acted as bait and ammunition to entice his PASOK colleagues to abandon the populist position of the 1980s and "adopt an understanding of its left-wing identity more in tune with European social democracy." At the same time, the move enabled him to score points against the conservative opposition (New Democracy) painting them as "reactionary and parochial." Like the other two cases, the decision to support Turkey's application for EU membership exemplifies the very essence of substantial foreign policy change.

Chryssogelos has produced an interesting and worthwhile piece of scholarship. The author's modest claims notwithstanding, the volume makes a welcome contribution to our understanding of the value and the workings of liberal democracy, especially in foreign policy making and implementation. What comes out loud and clear from this work is that liberal democracies are not static and frozen in time and can be rather adept at intertwining domestic and international developments. The foreign policies of liberal democracies evolve and change, but the change is methodical, institutionalized, and not abrupt and revolutionary. The book also demonstrates that liberal democracies are able to absorb developments and adapt to changing international and domestic realities; and political parties are indispensable components in Westminster type of government. Finally, his findings throw cold water on the international relations and comparative politics dichotomy. One could take issue with Chryssogelos' choice of case studies and point to a few other relatively minor methodological issues, but these do not diminish the tome's value and scholarly quality.

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