

## Exploring the Ethical Crossroads: American Exceptionalism in Foreign Affairs

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: May 24, 2024 Revised: June 27, 2024 Accepted: June 29, 2024	This article deals with the connection between the ethics, diplomacy and American exceptionalism in term of United State foreign affairs. In addition, the study inspects the chronological origins of American exceptionalism and its impact on the United State foreign policy. Also, provide a focus on historical event, policymaking and their moral and ethical implications. Furthermore, it provides analysis of challenges and dilemmas faced by United State. It aims to explore the role of American exceptionalism in transforming the United State actions on global stage and its impact on international relation with different examples. This article delves into a broad and clear understanding with how American exceptionalism affects decision-making process in foreign concerns. Additionally, the analysis also provides that how implications of different policies evolve the world order. The article concludes the tension between the national interest and other ethical principles. The goal is to give deep understanding between ethics and exceptionalism in United State foreign affairs.
<b>Keywords</b> <i>American exceptionalism</i> <i>Foreign affairs</i> <i>United States policymaker, dilemmas ethical challenges</i>	

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### 1 Introduction

American's exceptionalism is intensely rooted with their dogma and played important role in transforming the America's policies in international arena. Because they belief that the United State has a special and unique place in the history and also holds specific place in world order. Furthermore, their ideology guide policy makers in past to deal with international affairs. However, their inhumaneness can be seen in ethical consideration and moral dilemmas that has major effect on policymaker's attitude or behavior when they deal on global stage. The American's is not another nation but they have different fortune and have right to spread its values globally. No doubt, their ideology often refers into interference to secure and promote democratic regime, dealing with human rights but behind the scene, they secure their own interest to maintain its status quo. In addition, it looks like that the United State act as a good maintainer in the world and they show that they are trying to maintain global order aligned with democratic doctrines.

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As American's exceptionalism is back-and-forth among nation's self-perception, moral deliberation and ethical concerns. The stiffness between respect to other state's sovereignty and democratic values impose moral challenges. The legislators tackle with questions about the justifiability of interference and the limits of military power. The tracking down American exceptionalism is not upfront and tension arises to uphold the democratic norms and faced tension with respect to diverse global perspective. The legislators faced a difficult task to maintain balance between the American's influence and interest and identify sovereignty of other nations. No doubt, when the campaigning the American values if it does not align with the international politics can cause significant clash on global stage. Moreover, the nature of international relations evolves day by day, so the new additional layers are also introduced within the global arena as in ethical concerns and redefining the approaches and policies.

## 1.1 Historical Background

To understand the American exceptionalism through history, it can be divided in following eras, as:

**Colonial Roots:** The American exceptionalism can be traced in 17th and early 18th century, when the early settler have faith in have a unique values for American colonies. During this time the European colonies were established with new world order based on their own politics, culture and religion but later on became the United States colonies with their own democratic institution and economic independence. Later on, this sense of great revolution leads to individualism with different renewals respectively. As the American exceptionalism take shape with time and suggested the America plays a pivotal role on world stage and they are different nation from others according to their norms, values and civic virtue. So they have right to spread the institution like liberty etc. In addition, later on which affect the other country's foreign affair. All events like The English civil war (1642-51), The Glorious Revolution (1688), The Great Awakening (1730-40) and the Enlightenment 17th to 18th century take place during this time period which leads to unique role on Americans in world's foreign affairs (Tyrrell, 2021).

**Manifest Destiny and Civil War Era:** During the 19th century the Manifest destiny term was coined and there believe was based on that they have right to expand their territory across the North America continent. Moreover, this ideology was close to the exceptionalism ideology and based on idea that America have sole mission to promote democratic institution and civilization as well. Nevertheless, during the expansion of United State as a colony they had faced ethical challenges like displacement of natives and extension in slavery, so they also criticized for their act of colonialism (Greenberg, 2022, pp. 1-20). The civil war in second half of 19th century was most important moment in the United States history because that war was the test of United State exceptional principle. The war tussled on issues of slavery and basic rights of the individual. However, by the Union's victory the country dedication leads to liberty and equality in real sense. However, the war caused the major division within the American society and reason of many challenges. While following the civil war the reconstruction period started during which US tried to restructure the South and free slaves into the society (Maurantonio, 2019).

**Post World War-II and Contemporary Era:** By the end of the World War II the United State became emerge as a super power, which strengthened Americans exceptionalism because, United State saw itself as the protector of democratic institution and capitalism. In addition, US belief that they are on special mission to transformed the world throughout the history. In other word after the World War II the “Pax Americana” concept began through which the United State have right to maintain peace globally and promote their values often through intervention. Furthermore, in this era United State by economy and military proven their presence globally and formed the international institution like United Nation and alliance like NATO. Moreover, this period saw United State tries to contain the communism especially in perspective of cold war, also by providing aid and rebuild the war torn of Europe through Marshall Plan. During this period Americans exceptionalism striking a major impact on foreign affairs to shape the world order in favor of United States interest and values. Furthermore, by the end of cold war the United State emerged as stronger superpower and enjoys hyperactive power by unilateral actions to shape the world affairs according to its interest. However, the countries like China and Russia enhance their military and economic strength and these transitions can be challenged for the Americans exceptionalism. Also in contemporary time, the world is more complex and more interconnected so traditional view of uniqueness has been challenged. As the US, first slogan was focused on national interest and international cooperation. So the United State moving away from the illiberal hegemony and tries to be more cooperative, nuanced and perhaps multilateral approach to its foreign policies to treat nations equally (Cambanis, 2020).

## 1.2 Role in Shaping Foreign Policy

American exceptionalism played crucial role in shaping United State foreign policy all the way through the history. As they believed that, they are on special mission so they have right to influenced diplomatic decision military intervention and international relation. An ideological context defines the role of nations in the global affairs. While the application of United States exceptionalism in the foreign matters upturns ethical problems. The policymakers faced questions or challenges related to interventionism, respect of sovereignty of other nations and balance maintaining between the American exceptionalism and culture diversity. The interference of military forces, economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure in the label of exceptionalism has need of careful deliberation. As Americans tries to maintain their status quo regarding human rights, promotion of democratic institutions and the global governance. Therefore, policymakers faced challenges while dealing with universal values and the autonomy of other nations. In addition, it leads to unending challenge in international affairs between the national interest and ethical participle. In short, American exceptionalism established two main theme within the foreign affairs; as United State as an exemplar nation and United Nation as a missionary nation. As an exemplar nation, United State is absolute of perfect nation so they right to promote their values regarding liberty etc. As a missionary aspect the United State have right to take influential action on global stage, not only in aim of protection of its own interest but also promote world order based on its values (Mccartney, 2019) (Restad, 2012).

American exceptionalism leads to many challenges for the policymakers because world politics nature has been evolved day by bay so the global environment also changed and circumstances of international affairs also shifted, such as cold war era to post-cold war era. Because the world changed in global village and nations are interconnected with each other. Therefore, policymakers need to maintain balance between the moral values and there

interest with its exceptionalism. However, the culture, moral codes and social norms varies nation to nation so here policymakers also faced challenges to respect other sovereignty and norms (Volle & wallenfeldt, 2023).

### 1.3 Research Questions

- What are the primary ethical complications faced United State to promote democracy in other states to justify their exceptionalism in foreign affairs.
- How democratic nation's (US) policymakers confronted with moral dilemmas in intervention policies?
- In what way the balance between promotions of human rights with national interest poses significant challenge for the United States.

### 1.4 Objectives

This study aims to provide a brief analysis regarding ethical consideration surrounding Americans exceptionalism and involves comprehensive examination of the values, principle and consequences with exceptionalism belief system. Moreover, provide how policymakers inspect the potential impact on international relation, sovereignty and human rights, and emphasized on clear understanding of ethical dimensioned are involved. In addition, an in-depth examination of the ethical implication of American exceptionalism is necessary for informed decision-making. This attitude often leads to involve inspecting the actual justification of interventionism, the impact on global governance and challenges associated with promotion of a specific set of values on the international stage. No doubt American exceptionalism stuck policymakers in moral and ethical dilemmas and these dilemmas may revolve around questions of culture sensitivity, respect for diversity and ethical use of economic or military power. By examining these problems provides vision into the rigidity of policy making in foreign affairs. Also provide a clear insight into the decision making process of policymakers. Furthermore, provide understanding how values and beliefs system affect the foreign affairs and provide that how it motivate and justify the policy decision behind the seen. Moreover, this study addresses how American exceptionalism, when intertwined with democracy promotion leads to ethical challenges in searching the equilibrium between democratic values and divers political system. In intervention policies, it aims to provides analysis about responsibility to protect, the use of military forces etc. the ties between human rights and national interest represent a major ethical challenge in United State foreign policy and this part of study aim to provides, how national interest guided by exceptionalism idea and hoe its intersect with the promotion and protection of human rights.

## 2 Analysis of Ethical Challenges in Promoting Democracy

In recent decades, the promotion of democracy abroad has been a central element of United States foreign policy. As polarization is significant challenge for United State but some polarization is healthy for the democracy because it enhanced the democratic norms within the society, as opponent with different ideas. Furthermore, it extend the political system in which every citizen has individual right, commitments and responsibilities towards others. Unfortunately, democracy has been summoned with questionable practice including interference in other states and exploiting the environment for the specific state interest over

other people or state. No doubt, democracy is an ethical ideal that have principles like nondiscrimination, no repression and stressed on justice equal civic education. To make stronger democracy there is need to absence of exceptionalism attitudes. The ethical challenges remain in balancing the promotion of universal values with cultural sensitivity. In addition, these challenges arise when one state interfere in the internal affairs of other sovereign states. The promotion of democracy is somehow related with destabilizing exiting political structure and it goal to maintain the long-term democratic institution but it can lead to risk of and social instability that can result rapid changes. The idealist approach emphasize that the promotion of democracy align with universal values while realist approach argues that promotion of democracy can lead to power vacuums, instability etc. The ethical basis of promoting democracy related with legitimacy of democratic institutions and makes sure the free and fair elections, protecting the minority rights, account able governance and critical ethical consideration. But United State grapples with tension between promoting democracy and safeguarding its own exceptionalism. Let us explore some examples to understand that how ethical concern can cause of hurdle for policymakers while promoting democracy abroad, as:

- **Iraq (2003):** The United State interference targeted to launch a democratic government but after it leads to significant challenges such as sectarian issue and political instability. It raises an ethical challenge about the outcomes of democracy and Iraq war aftermath justifiably left American doubtful about democracy promotion. The American democracy has many flaws at first it's hypocritical and also far from perfect democracy; secondly, it consistent because they argued that they care about democracy but they aligned with some monarchies like Saudi Arab; thirdly, they failed in policies to promote democracy; last but not the least democracy is difficult to maintain because aid program not directly go where they needed the most (Bush, March 30, 2023). As the 60% of population of Iraq under the age of twenty-five and they have nothing knowledge about authoritarian rule and need to learn about democracy so different strategies such as citizenship and learning program in Iraqi institution aimed instill for the democratic principle among the students (Davis, 2005).
- **Ukraine (2014):** The western provision for pro-democracy in Ukraine elevated the question about the democracy promotion and cause of tension between other nations. Since by the end of cold war the United State has met with nuanced ethical dilemmas. In recent two decades, the United State actively provides back provision to civil society, independent media institutes and other critical democratic institution. However, this groundwork leads to 2013 Maidan demonstration. Furthermore, it not one day task but its long efforts and role for shaping the fertile ground for the promotion of democracy. Moreover, this ongoing unresolved conflict in eastern Ukraine highlights the terrifying consequence for democracy promotion (Korenke, 2017).

### 3 Analysis of Moral Dilemmas in Intervention Policy

The ethical foundation of intervention policies increases intensely moral dilemmas. The policymakers when navigating treacherous water is face moral challenges by guarding their exceptionalism. A central theme of United State is paradoxical dance between the strategic interest and moral imperatives. The concept exceptionalism is deeply connected with the American psyche that they are unique and superior nation in the world. Like in history, they show that they are expert in the governance and true leader of world and they are promoter of liberty etc. In addition, Americans believe that they have constitution contains groundbreaking features like bill of rights, freedom, federalism and separation of power. So

they have right to inspire globally that they are one and only hope for the peace and freedom. That is why they also have right to promote their values worldwide. Due to all of these exceptionalism ideas the policymaker grapple with ethical and moral challenges when deals with intervention policies. To understand the moral dilemmas examples are following, as:

- **Bosnia (1995):** in perspective of humanitarian intervention, particularly during the Bosnia conflict, the moral threats produce a consequence of emerging norms of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The aim of this norm to protect the citizens forms the ethnic cleansing and genocide. However, the root problem of genocide violence often due to state retaliation against sub-state group such as armed forces. Also the expectation of diplomatic and military intervention to protect these groups, success can be attain on some little expected cost but sometimes met with failure due to retaliation of civilians and they cannot attain their political interest. In short, the norm of responsibility to protect ensures a genocidal violence and enhance the moral threat of revolt but not provide the complete defensive mechanism against intervention or retaliation. The cases of Bosnia Kosovo provide an example that how moral threats hypothesis comes out and how it leads to genocidal retaliation after the rebellion of specific groups. This is still challenge to modify the intervention policies to less kind of violation and moral threats (Kuperman, 2008).

#### 4 Analyzing Human Rights vs. National Interest

The challenges faced by the policymakers to balancing between the human rights and national interest also it leads to tension between the universal principle and practical consideration. The promotion of human rights are central theme of democracy and United State uplift itself as guider of democracy and justice so also positions itself as a champion human rights on global stage. Therefore, policymakers tackled in promoting the human rights as a core element of United State foreign policy while justifying their national interest. In addition, legislators deal with rigidity between universal human rights values and demand of realpolitik. Furthermore, policymakers faced exceptionalism when choose a specific region on the name of human rights concerns. Because sometimes United State overlook tension by allies, strategic relation or national interest etc. Such as intervention in Kosovo in 1990's on humanitarian concern, while not intervention in other region with similar issues and this attitude leads to the double standard of United States foreign policy. No doubt, public opinion has significant impact on policy making so it is difficult to handle the policies for long time while dealing with human rights concerns and national interest. That's why two argument build up; first, is that human right should be foremost priority in foreign affairs and national interest should be related with ethical and moral concerns and this argument stand up for the universal rights; second, is that national interest is the absolute priority in foreign affairs even it means to compromise on human rights issues because this argument in favor of strategic alliance and economic partnership like Saudi Arabia. Some advocacy for the multilateralism means that collective action in promoting and protecting human rights (Zvobgo, 2019, p. online).

#### 5 Analytical Statement

The American exceptionalism in foreign affairs exposes rich issues in ethical and moral complexities. The United State has historical narrative and that is genuinely connected with the concept of exceptionalism and effect decision-making process worldwide. So by analyzing these ethical and moral issues demands a clear understanding related to past, and fully acknowledge of present problems and commitment with the future foreign policy of

United State that actually reflect the balance between the American values and other changing aspects of connected world. As United State continuously engaged with the international community and upholds itself for true promoter of democracy, liberty and other values, so they must done collaboration with other nations through diplomacy and other inclusive approach to global affairs.

## 6 Recommendations

To deals with the ethical problems linked with American exceptionalism, need a multi-layered approach that prioritizes inclusivity, multilateralism, humility, cultural sensitivity and public opinion engagement. Some recommendations are fowling, as:

- The United State need to promote diplomacy because emphasizing on the shared values and mutual respect in diplomatic relation can help to build a more accommodating and unbiased international order.
- The United State should increase commitment with global governance and work with other nation's mutual effort to address different issue like climate change, global health crisis, economic inequality and this multilateral platform leads to effective decision-making and global responsibility.
- To provide a clear guidelines and criteria for intervention policies and universal principle should be adopted in any intervention action such as respect for sovereignty and also international laws should be fowled in the decision making process.
- In addition, United State need to be balanced between the democratic values and the cultural diversity is necessary. Because the nations are different in their cultural, social and political context, so the policymakers must be aware of diverse nature of nations.
- Also established a mechanism that continuously done ethical review of foreign policies. Because global nature of values changes day by day so there must be flexibility in foreign policy.

## 7 The Future

The future of American exceptionalism demanded for considerate and flexible approaches. As the United States connected with world so their ethical actions play a vital role in shaping the other nations positions and influence the international community. Traditionally, United State believed that they have unique and morally higher position due to historic, sociopolitical and religious causes. However, in future the three multiple dimension of American exceptionalism can be seen: First, liberal internationalist that advocates for the global engagement; Secondly, retrenchers that supports for the withdrawal from the institutions and alliances; Thirdly, America first that in favor of isolationist America role in global politics. Moreover, the socio-economic sites revels the disparities, so it is time to retire the label of United State are fully developed nation.

## 8 Conclusion

The promotion of human rights is central to democracy and the United States positions itself as a global champion of these values. U.S. foreign policy is integrated human rights and

often-encountering rigidity between universal human rights values and the demands of realpolitik. Exceptionalism arises when the U.S. prioritizes certain regions based on strategic interests, leading to perceptions of double standards. Two main arguments emerge one advocating for prioritizing human rights in foreign policy, aligning national interest with ethical and moral concerns and the other emphasizing national interest, even at the expense of human rights, favoring strategic alliances and economic partnerships. American exceptionalism in foreign affairs introduces ethical and moral complexities, influencing global decision-making processes. A comprehensive understanding of past, present and future issues is essential for a balanced U.S. foreign policy that reflects American values and adapts to a connected world. The U.S. must engage with the international community through diplomacy and inclusive approaches to uphold democracy, liberty and other core values.

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