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Hutus and Tutsis: A Case for Cognitive Complexity and Social Intelligence in Foreign Policy

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Foreign policy departments usually include all or part of ministries of defense, intelligence, state, interior, energy, agriculture, finance, commerce, and the like. Within these departments are many professional niches. And these niches seem to comprise three classes of functions-analytic, operational, and bureaucratic. Analytic and operational functions are applied external to one's own country, nation-state, or other political entity be it supranational, transnational, subnational, or anational. Analytic denotes developing opinions about political issues and the best ways to resolve them. Operational denotes implementing the ways to resolve them. Bureaucratic denotes applying analytic and operational functions within one's own department, ministry, among ministries, or among one's own people-- the last often a violation of law or public policy.

The current crisis in Africa encompassing mainly Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire, but affecting adjacent countries as well, is taxing the analytic abilities of political leaders, diplomats, security officials, and aid representatives. The number and type of facts necessary to inform and effect foreign policy towards this crisis are extraordinary. (1) The countries have a distal history of indigenous political and social cultures being disrupted, subverted, and exploited by colonialists and imperialists. (2) The countries have a proximal history of corrupt, ethnocentric/tribal, and nepotistic rule imbued with political violence and atrocity. (3) The two most significant peoples in the present crisis, Hutus and Tutsis, often can't be physically differentiated. (4) Within each of these two main peoples are differentiators of political affiliation, history, class, geography, and life style. For example, there are (a) Hutus in the current Tutsi-controlled Rwandan government; (b) so-called moderate Hutus who survived a murderous campaign by military, police officials, and paramilitary personnel under the previous Hutu-controlled Rwandan government and who may be dislocated within their own country; (c) other Hutus who have been living in refugee camps in eastern Zaire, who are being labeled as tragic refugees in need of aid, who were actually the murderers alluded to in (b) above, and who--until very recently-- have continued to launch raids into Rwanda and Burundi in an attempt to disrupt existing governments in those countries; (d) Hutus who have been living in the camps in eastern Zaire and have been the prey of the Hutus described in (c) and sometimes (f) below; (e) Hutus who have served and are serving in the current Tutsi-controlled Burundian government; (f) Hutus who are now fighting the Burundian government as insurgents and at least somewhat independently as separatists; (g) Hutus who have been living in eastern Zaire for many years without significant contact with Rwandan and Burundian political events; and, of course, (h) Hutu expatriates from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire and other adjacent countries who are serving as political consultants to media representatives reporting on the crisis and who present many varied points of view and personal agendas. It's somewhat more complicated for the Tutsis.

One implication should be clear. If one can't, and many can't, perceive the different players, situations, and phenomena occurring within a crisis, how can one develop a coherent and effective foreign policy towards it? (Save for luck, serendipity, some Jungian moment of synchronicity, or some primeval resonance with the Cosmos.) How can one even react in a coherent and moral fashion towards news accounts of particular events or issues within the crisis? (Unless, of course, in a misinformed, wrong-headed, or delusional manner.) To the latter question, does one berate the U.S. as heartless and cold when one reads that the United States Government is impeding deliberations at the United Nations

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Security Council to provide aid and support--including an international military force to protect aid and support-- for the refugees who have been uprooted from the camps in eastern Zaire, some moving westward away from their homes of origin and compounding the difficulty of aid and support operations? As indifferent? As morally bankrupt? As ambivalent about helping murderers who hide amongst people who are not? As positing that complying with French and German aid plans may actually recreate the precipitating factors to the crisis and plunge this part of Africa into even further chaos and crisis? And does the most recent U.S. concurrence to support a Canadian-led force and provide troops including the force's deputy commander suggest a change of heart or change of mind?

The psychological concepts cognitive complexity and social intelligence are germane here. Cognitive complexity can denote the trait of how many different opinions about an event or issue one can imagine, how different each opinion is from the others, and how accurate each may be. Social intelligence often denotes the trait of how accurately one can identify contingencies affecting the motivations and behavior of people. Both concepts seem to have face validity as skills that would prove valuable for foreign policy analysts. (These concepts, as concepts or conceived as traits, are hypothetical constructs which describe how people seem to be. Their ontological reality is neither necessary nor sufficient for relevance to foreign policy.)

Although there are psychological instruments which attempt to assess these traits, certain issues remain problematic before foreign policy departments hop on the band wagon and make the requisite changes to their personnel selection procedures. (Depending on the personality traits of leaders, systemic features of the foreign policy department, and social and cultural values, use of the psychological instruments may necessitate "too-low" and "too-high" cut-off scores. Too-high scores also may precipitate one's early demise, while a too-low score for one already laboring within the foreign policy department may warrant a promotion.)

For the assessment of cognitive complexity there is still not adequate resolution of the "reasonability" factor, i.e., how "way-out" or patently ridiculous some of one's opinions may be. Moreover, assessing for cognitive complexity without appraising emotional dynamics and their interaction with cognition may result in an analytic corps which arrives at peculiar, quirky, and even morally bankrupt decisions. Social intelligence is less researched than cognitive complexity, perhaps more permeated by cultural biases, and more tenuous as a concept because of the practical improbability of inferring social intelligence while only directly measuring social achievements. In other words, is a person demonstrating social intelligence itself or what social intelligence hypothetically allows one to accomplish? And finally educational technologies to nurture cognitive complexity and social intelligence may charitably be termed in the experimental stages.

In any case, post-Cold War events are proving more-- not less-- complex. The bipolarity of the Cold War was the tie that bound much that has since been loosened. Whether or not there is an end of ideology, an end of history, or just the upcoming end of a millennium, psychological preparedness to perceive and act on international events is an area in need of further research. (See Crossette, B. (November 13, 1996.) Canada offers to lead force to protect Zaire relief teams. The New York Times. (http://www.nytimes.com/y...news/ world/zaire-un.html.) Guttieri, K., Wallace, M.D., & Suedfeld, P. (1995.) The integrative complexity of American decision makers in the Cuban missile crisis. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 39, 595-621. Mayer, J.D., & Salovey, P. (1993.) The intelligence of emotional intelligence. Intelligence, 17, 433-442; Mitchell, A. (November 14, 1996.) U.S. offers troops for mission to aid Zaire refugees. The New York Times. (http://www.nytimes.com/y...news/world/zaire-us.html.)) (Keywords: Cognitive Complexity, Social Intelligence, Tutsi, Hutu, Foreign Policy.)

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