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FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Most articles that examine the issue of tourism focus upon the economic impact. There are many social and psychological benefits that are the direct result of people interactions. This article explores the impact of policy development from a tourism perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between foreign policy and tourism is sometimes overlooked as we seek to emphasize the economic benefits. I in no way want to de-emphasize the economic impact resulting from the 23 million international travelers who visited the country last year. However, most of you are already aware that these visitors spent \$15 billion, generated \$700 million in federal tax revenues and supported 700,000 jobs. What you probably are not aware of, and what I have been asked to share with you is the importance of tourism in foreign policy. This aspect of tourism has become more important since the signing in October, 1981, of the National Tourism Policy Act. Under this act, two of the twelve national tourism policy goals are to: "...contribute to personal growth, health, education, and intercultural appreciation of the geography, history, and ethnicity of the United States," and "...encourage the free and welcome entry of individuals traveling to the United States, in order to enhance international understanding and goodwill..."

IMPACT

Foreign policy implications for tourism can take many different forms. For example, on the front page of a recent The Washington Post, there was an article entitled "Six Tourist Held in Africa are Reportedly Seen." This article has to do with six tourists kidnapped last July by political dissidents in Zimbabwe. Such an act has both political and foreign policy implications.

Over 100 years ago, John Stuart Mill wrote in his Principles of Political Economy that: "it is hardly possible to overrate the value, in the present low state of human improvement, of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar." Tourism does just that, and the results of such contacts on countries throughout the world are far reaching.

IMPLICATIONS

Perhaps the French economist, Jean Maurice Thurot, best summed up the relationship between foreign policy and tourism when he wrote: "tourism is an extension of politics by other means." In short, tourism is, or can be, a tool used not only for economic, but for political ends.

In some corners of our globe, inbound tourism is used to showcase the accomplishments of the government-or-party-in-power and to increase understanding abroad of the government's policies. Sometimes this approach is successful; sometimes, it backfires. The point is that tourism expands the horizon of the tourist and presents the host with a unique opportunity to influence visitors from abroad.

Perhaps we should examine some of the foreign policy implications of ethnic tourism. Obviously, ethnic communities within a country have, or can have, an enormous influence, both on the domestic political and foreign policy decisions of the host country. The views of our citizens from various ethnic backgrounds help to shape this country's foreign policy.

The same is true of ethnic communities living in other democratic societies which respect and value public opinion. Therefore, one way in which a government can influence other government's policies toward it is to maintain contact with--and encourage tourism by--its expatriates--and former nationals--residing abroad. Closer ties with expatriates is, indeed, one of the objectives of some of the 175 national tourist offices operating within the United States. For at least one country, and there may be more, returning nationals constitute the second or third largest category of inbound visitors.

The importance of the ethnic ties is not limited to only democratic societies. A new study by the census bureau has documented the number of Americans that trace their ancestry to eastern European countries. The following are ancestries reported in the survey and the estimated number of Americans who list each derivation: German, 51.6 million (about 28 percent of the German population is now behind the Iron Curtain); Poland, 8.4 million; Hungarian, 1.6 million; Russian, 3.5 million; Ukrainian, 525,000; Slavic, 722,000; and Romanian, 335,000.

While it may be an illusion to believe that visits of tourists from western Europe and North America will change Communism, there is some evidence that tourism and cultural exchanges have a profound positive impact. The U. S. Information Agency sponsors numerous exchanges, cultural programs, lecture series and other events to make people of the world aware of U. S. customs and standards of living.

Tourism's ability to shape the political views of individuals and to influence the foreign policies of nations has had far-reaching consequences in the last 40 years. Following the Second World War, our attention as it related to travel, turned to encouraging Americans to travel abroad. Such encouragement was founded on a philosophy of assisting European countries to restore their economies which had been so severely disrupted by the war. Likewise, it was felt that Americans spending abroad would eventually result in the purchase of American goods by foreigners. At the same time, many countries were placing travel restrictions on their own citizens in an effort to keep their currency at home. Unfortunately, some governments, thankfully not ours, have continued to respond by restricting the number of their nationals allowed to emigrate or to travel abroad as tourists.

This is done in at least two ways. A permit called an "exit visa" may be required; or, the government may prohibit purchases of exchange for foreign travel--unless the travel is to be to a country, or countries, whose culture, religion and/or politico-economic system are similar to those of the country of origin.

A point to be made is: the government which allows its nationals freedom of travel invites those nationals to compare their standard of living with standards of living in other countries. This may have positive or negative results, but the decision itself is very much a political one.

That is equally true of the decision not only to permit, but to promote, inbound tourism. To open a country to foreign tourism is to highlight its flaws as well as its accomplishments to international, public scrutiny. That is one risk. Another risk is that the host population is exposed to the behavior, the values, and possibly the ideas of visitors from other nations. This has not proven to be a major problem in our country. It has been a problem in some developing countries: unskilled, low income workers have been thrown together with highly-affluent, urbanized foreign tourists. As a result, they have become dissatisfied with their own economic opportunities--and sometimes with their system of government. During the seventies, at least one government in our own hemisphere began to seriously question whether the economic benefits of tourism outweighed its political and social costs. Agencies such as the World Tourism Organization have since begun to conduct studies into how tourism's more disruptive impacts on less developed countries might be minimized.

Tourism--or, rather, the prevention of tourism--has some times been used by governments as an economic sanction for political ends. The most well-known international tourism agreement provisions are contained in the human rights section of the 1975 Helsinki Accord, which was the final act of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe. The better-known section of these provisions deals with rights of people to migrate freely, but in the tourism section the thirty-five nations--including the U. S. and the U.S.S.R.--acknowledged that freer tourism is essential to the development of cooperation between nations. The Soviets, instead of reducing restrictions on the outflow of its tourists, following its signature of the Helsinki Accord of 1975, has failed to live up to the travel-easing provisions of the Accord. A number of other east European countries have also failed to facilitate their citizen's ability to travel, despite their signatures to the Helsinki Accord.

Admittedly, tourists from abroad generate export revenue for the United States. But they are also potential advocates--in their respective homelands--of U. S. policies, of democratic institutions and of the free enterprise system. They are transmitters of ideas and impressions about our country, and they have the capability to influence, to some extent, their own country's views about the U. S.

I would like to mention a recent positive aspect of tourism on foreign policy, so let me tell you a story about tourism and China. In 1972, the United States and China normalized relations. In 1978, China opened its doors to foreign tourism and began to allow in tourists from the United States, among other countries. This was an enormous step for a nation just beginning to develop its tourism resources and potential.

U. S. tourism to China grew rapidly--to roughly 50,000 in 1981. Subsequently, issues surrounding Taiwan caused political relations between the two countries to deteriorate. During the debate--perhaps I should say, despite this debate--the China International Travel Service opened an office in the United States. Two major U. S. tour operators filed applications with China International Travel Service for permission to register resident offices in China. At that time, no non-Chinese tour operator had ever been allowed to be registered to conduct business in China.

Negotiations on the registration issue took place between the two governments last summer in Beijing. During the talks, the Chinese agreed to register the two U. S. companies. This was significant for two reasons:

because, for the first time, foreign tour operators are now being registered, but more importantly,

because those operators are U. S. enterprises, and the Chinese did not allow political considerations to interfere with their long-term goal of increased foreign tourism and increased foreign exchange.

In short, even at a time of serious political disagreement, tourism issues were treated normally, and both sides recognized the value of tourism as a political instrument.

SUMMARY

Let me leave you with two final thoughts which relate to the earlier mentioned National Tourism Policy goal to "encourage the free and welcome entry of individuals traveling to the United State, in order to enhance international understanding and goodwill..." First, a policy matter of interest to you regarding the non-immigrant visa waiver section of legislation which is currently before Congress. As you know, the United States is one of only three developed nations which still requires a nonimmigrant visa of incoming foreign nationals. The only exceptions are for visitors from Canada, and for visiting British nationals who reside

on certain islands of the Caribbean. Most western European countries eliminated the visa requirement for Americans and other tourists in the post-World War II era.

Research conducted by the former U. S. Travel Service showed that anticipation of difficult entry procedures or difficulty in obtaining a visa "inhibits some nationals of other countries from visiting this country as tourists." A study conducted by American Express indicates that at least 400,000 more international visitors would come to the United States if the nonimmigrant visa requirement were lifted. These visitors would generate \$300 million in foreign tourism revenues and create 7,000 new jobs in the U. S.

Legislation currently before the Congress would establish the authority--on a test basis--to waive the visa requirement for certain nonimmigrant visitors seeking entry to the United States for 90 days or less. One version of this legislation has already passed the Senate as part of an omnibus immigration reform bill. Similar legislation would have to pass the House during the upcoming Lame Duck session of Congress for the bill to become law. The administration and the travel industry have already testified in favor of visa waiver legislation. Second, and the final thought, related to the motto of the World Tourism Organization and, before its creation, the International Union of Official Travel Organizations, which is: "Tourism: passport to peace." This is probably an overly-optimistic interpretation of tourism. However, there is probably no other activity in the world today that does so much to teach us about the contributions and aspirations of citizens of other countries as well as enhancing international understanding and goodwill. This concept was dramatically brought out during last week's American Society of Travel Agents presentation of the Tourism of Peace award. In brief, when peace prevails, tourism flourishes. The foreign policy implications for tourism were never greater, and it is important for each of us to understand that fact, and to act upon it.