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## **PubPol 580: Reading Notes for Class 3 (Sept. 15, 2009)**

Tomorrow we'll take up the issue of morality and international affairs, a topic we'll return to a number of times in the course. This is the arena in which arguments about "dirty hands" are most important. Justifications of actions that involve dirty hands usually rely heavily if not exclusively on the argument that "the ends justify the means," with the end in mind being the promotion of a nation's interests (or, in the most dire circumstances, its survival). This claim is made most starkly in the international arena, more openly and less apologetically than it is with regard to domestic politics. This is an incredibly complex set of issues, so my goal is to get us started on a discussion of them, not to come to firm conclusions.

It is usually argued that the international political system is fundamentally different from domestic political systems. It is basically anarchic--it lacks an authoritative legal structure and there exists no body with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As a result, political morality at the international level is a more complex and difficult matter than political morality at the domestic level and diplomacy is a different enterprise than domestic politics. Some may claim that there can be no morality in the circumstances that characterize the international political system, but more often the claim is that there is a different morality (just as political morality in domestic politics may be different from "ordinary" morality among individuals). This is the thinking that lies behind Machiavelli's statement: "Hence a prince who wants to keep his post must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires." The notion that necessity requires certain actions is much stronger in debates about affairs among nations than in domestic politics. But it is often over-used.

In place of the norms and processes of democratic domestic politics (formal governmental structures, rule of law, and so on, backed up by the police power of the state), the principal forces at the international level tend to be moral leverage, economic leverage, and force. Moral leverage is of relatively recent vintage: the Nuremberg principles, the Geneva conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, genocide conventions, war crimes tribunals, and the International Criminal Court have all arisen since WW II. They represent important steps in laying the foundation for a world legal order, but on the scale of history they are brand new and enforcement issues will be with us as long as strong nation states exist. Issues that raise the prospect of the use of force (political violence) remain with us on a regular basis.

### **Realism vs. Idealism**

There is a longstanding divide among observers of international affairs between the "realists" who focus on national interests as the guide to a nation's foreign policy (and, importantly, as the most reliable guide to how other nations will act) and "idealists" who think that matters like general human welfare, human rights and justice among nations ought to influence the decisions of nations. Kofi Annan has been one of the most outspoken and eloquent proponents of the idealist view in recent years. Henry Kissinger has probably the most well-known American proponent in recent decades of the realist view--that it's a

dangerous world out there and national leaders are irresponsible if they run significant risks with their national security or interests. From this viewpoint, the limits on national power are few, mostly those generated by considerations of long-run national interests.

Thucydides provides a particularly stark view of the relationships between polities when he reports the Athenians statement to the Melians following the latter's defeat in the Peloponnesian War in the 5th Century BC:

"since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

This is a statement about how Thucydides thought the world was (and how many today think it still is), not a normative statement. Such thinking certainly does not drive all foreign policy decisions, but in many cases this view is at the center of decision making. In most cases involving the US (e.g., in the war with Iraq, the invasion of Afghanistan), it is the US that is strong and the other nation that is weak. Earlier this year, in Gaza, it was Israel that was strong and the Palestinians who were weak. How do these circumstances condition your thinking about the ethics of these cases?

### **National Sovereignty**

For much of the time since World War II the focus has been on establishing respect for national sovereignty, which is one of the most effective arguments against the interference of one country in the affairs of another (which until recently had been the principal problem most observers thought needed to be solved at the international level). Since the end of the Cold War, ethnic violence within a nation and the violation of basic human rights by individuals' own governments have moved to center stage and humanitarian intervention has been put forth as the solution to the problem. In these instances, national sovereignty has often been seen as part of the problem rather than the solution. So part of the challenge in thinking about these issues is to resolve the tensions that exist between a commitment to national sovereignty and a commitment to human rights. The issue of unilateral vs. multilateral intervention on humanitarian grounds is an important one here-- one we'll take up later.

### **Terrorism**

International terrorism carried out by non-state actors (e.g., Al Qaeda) presents a new challenge. The national sovereignty argument does not apply to non-state actors. What norms should constrain governmental actions against such actors? Focus your attention on actions by a democratic regime (which, most believe, needs to hold itself to higher standards than a totalitarian regime), keeping in mind that such a democratic regime interacts with many regimes that are not democratic and may not have to live with some of constraints that operate in a democracy.

For you, what examples best illustrate these issues? Try to think of one where you're close to being on the fence concerning the morality of a state action.