

## REALISM DEFINED

by Risa Grais-Targow and Daria Solovieva

*There can be no political morality without prudence: that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics.*

—Hans J. Morgenthau

*[A Prince] must proceed with prudence and humanity, so that too much confidence may not make him incautious and too much distrust render him intolerable.*

—Niccolò Machiavelli

Each semester on the pages of *BardPolitik*, students at the Bard Program on Globalization and International Affairs engage in dialogue with scholars, journalists, activists, and their peers regarding controversial themes in global affairs. This edition of *BardPolitik* is being published at the height of the U.S. presidential campaign, at a time when American engagement in Afghanistan, its occupation of Iraq, and its “War on Terror” have dramatically reshaped the debate about the proper course of American foreign policy.

In four short years, the two major political parties in the U.S. have reversed their traditional positions, provoked (in part) by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the response of the Bush Administration.

Back in 2000, then presidential candidate George W. Bush attacked his Democratic opponent, Al Gore, for supporting wars of nation-building and for “imposing democracy” in the Balkans, famously arguing in the presidential debates for a more humble, more modest foreign policy.

The Republicans today, driven by a small group of neoconservative thinkers, are crusading as idealists, advocating the investment of \$200 billion (and counting) to create a model democracy in Iraq that will lead to a flowering of free societies throughout the Middle East. The Bush Administration speaks, of course, in black and white terms; “us” versus “them;” “good” versus “evil.” “Our principles will guide our

government's decisions," notes the Bush Administration's oft-cited "National Security Strategy." "The national security strategy of the United States must start from these core beliefs and look outward for possibilities to expand liberty," it notes.

This is a long way from the party's post-Vietnam position as advocates of a foreign policy based on realism. As Hans J. Morgenthau put it in his work *Politics Among Nations*, "Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe....the blindness of crusading frenzy destroys nations and civilizations—in the name of moral principle, ideal, or God himself."

As early as December 2003, Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry has positioned himself as a realist, critical of the Bush Administration's crusading tactics and unilateral policies. Addressing The Council on Foreign Relations, Kerry described the Bush Administration as "the most arrogant, inept, reckless, and ideological foreign policy in modern history." He argued, as Philip Gourevitch has detailed in the *New Yorker*, that America is safer and stronger when it is respected around the world, not feared.

According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, attitudes towards the U.S. in Europe have dropped over the past two years, with worse ratings in the Muslim world. Other studies, including U.S. State Department data, suggest terrorism is waxing, not waning.

Faced with the imminent threat of terrorism, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission acknowledged the post-September 11 world as "a more fluid international environment with uncertain changing goals and interests," and urged the U.S. government to rethink its strategies for combating the threat of terror. In response, Kerry has called for a "more effective, more thoughtful, more strategic, more proactive, more sensitive war on terror"—a strategy that was heavily criticized by the Bush Administration. "A sensitive war will not destroy the evil men who killed 3,000 Americans," was Vice President Dick Cheney's response.

Regardless of how U.S. voters see the candidate's views on terrorism and the role of United States in the rest of the world, the November election will undoubtedly have a profound influence on a diverse array of global concerns. As you read this edition of *BardPolitik*, we hope that our articles—examining femicide in Guatemala, U.S.-North Korean relations, the Coalition Provisional Authority's democracy building role in Iraq, and the debate over genocide in Darfur—will challenge the typical debates that occur in an election year and offer insights into global issues that will most certainly remain important after November 2.

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