Introduction to Law and Policy in Current Affairs

Sophia Craiutu

From alliances to treaties to broad organizations established to negotiate peace and bring about development, policy surrounds us. It is extremely complex, yet crucial in maintaining a (somewhat) stable world in the age of increased globalization and international development. The future of policy is always in flux, although it is primarily instituted to maintain peace and uphold basic principles. We see policy at a local level such as in local school systems, at a state level involving the regulation of state corporate taxes, at a federal level involving anti-corruption or issues involving artificial intelligence, and at an international level including humanitarian aid and general prosperity.

What supports and regulates policy decisions, however? Law. Both foreign law and international law are the true backbone- both historical and modern- in today's world. For those who do not recognize the difference between the two: foreign law applies to a singular nation that creates and regulates laws, while international law applies to multiple nations and is treaty-based, that is upheld by negotiations and legal documents that countries both sign in a promise to uphold the (given) principles. Another crucial thing to note is that countries' manners of both creating and further passing legislation varies. For example, let us pick two countries: Canada and the United States. The United States is one of the only three countries (which include Mexico and Guatemala) that maintain a constitutional right to own a gun. This has caused policy debates to arise over the true right to bear a weapon– specifically if this constitutional right applies to today's society. We therefore have not enacted strict gun laws based upon this constitutional right, although there have been many motions and calls to tighten the grip in the face of increasing national shootings. Canada, which is on the opposite side of the spectrum, has firearms federally regulated. Therefore, gun safety has become less of an issue for the country in the midst of other legislative concerns. This brief example is one of different legislative issues in separate countries, where international law does not apply and can therefore not make a widespread decision for more than one country.

Let us first consider a world in which sovereign nations were only created and withheld their own laws, but did not exist in the international sphere by co-existing with other countries in large organizations (which would therefore mean the signing of treaties). What would happen in terms of wars? Would there be more? Could that spiral into further conflict involving more and more countries? What if there was a humanitarian crisis in a country and, without the interference of another, there could be no support or money sent to that country in need? What about territorial disputes? What if two countries were unable to resolve their border disputes via a treaty and other countries could not play a role in helping to negotiate some peace? These

questions all revolve around the role that international law plays in maintaining democracy, peace, and prosperity. Organizations such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Alliance) and the UN (United Nations) were created to both support allied countries in times of need and questions of security as well as to propose diplomatic efforts to solve international problems involving economic, social, humanitarian, and further issues.

Taking examples from ongoing events may help us better understand the application of international law in these affairs. The ongoing conflict between Israel (a country in the Middle East) and Hamas (a Palestinian political and military organization) is an example of potential violation in the sphere of international law. In this case, the focus of many policy experts and others is in international humanitarian law, rather, the lack of precautions taken to minimize harm to civilians living in the place of conflict (in this case, the Gaza strip). If we take into account what the Human Rights Watch states in its article about IHL (international humanitarian law) in relation to the recent Israel/Hamas conflict, it is stated that, "The fundamental rule of international humanitarian law in conflict is that all parties must distinguish, at all times, between combatants and civilians. Civilians and civilian objects must never be the target of attack; parties may only target combatants and military objectives.". This means that recent targeted attacks during the conflict (such as the recent attack on civilians at a music festival in Israel) are a violation of international humanitarian law. Now, we must acknowledge that the conflict is not this simple, but this example does provide reasoning as to how international law can be broken.

Why should we care about both law and policy at both the national level and in the foreign sphere? The reality is that, without laws, our rights would not be ensured and general safety may not be guaranteed. We rely on both our country and international organizations to maintain diplomatic relationships with other countries in addition to making important decisions and upholding our freedoms and basic rights. Understanding policy in current events can help us realize where our world is potentially flawed in addition to where the international community has brought about positive change.

References

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