IGA-365: Human Rights and Foreign Policy

Michael Ignatieff

Fall Semester 2015

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:45-4:00 PM

Classroom: L-230

Course Outline:

This course offers students a critical evaluation of the role of human rights as law, ethics and politics in the foreign policy of contemporary states. It is designed to help future foreign service officers, serving military, human rights activists and politicians understand how human rights NGO’s, UN and regional human rights bodies and media-driven human rights narratives shape the conduct of modern states, large and small.

The course will focus on what is controversial and contested about the role of human rights in modern foreign policy.

Some states use human rights as a guiding principle in their aid and foreign policy; other states relegate it to a side-constraint in the pursuit of their national interest, while a third group of states reject human rights as an illegitimate interference in their internal affairs. Using concrete case studies, we will examine the competing, contradictory and contested impacts of human rights law and discourse on the conduct of 21st century states.

The course is designed for human rights skeptics and believers alike and no previous experience or knowledge of human rights law is required.

Biography:


Between 2006 and 2011, he served as an MP in the Parliament of Canada and became leader of the Liberal Party and Leader of the Official Opposition. He is the Edward R. Murrow Professor of the Practice of the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Shorenstein Center, Harvard Kennedy School.

Admission:

Cross-registrants from other schools and programs, undergraduates and auditors will require the instructor’s permission to participate in the course. Priority goes to HKS students.

Grading:

The Academic Council, with the support of the Dean, has issued recommendations on grading policy including the following suggested curve: A (10-15%), A- (20-25%), B+ (30-40%), B (20-25%), and B- or below (5-10%). Grading will follow this HKS grading curve.

Evaluation and Assignments:

1. **Assignment 1 (10%)**: *All* students will complete a 500 word analysis, identifying the human rights abuse in their own country that they’d most like to stop and how they would go about doing so. The due date is **Friday September 11th at 5:00 PM**.

2. **Class Presentations (30%)**: Classes marked with a * are available as student presentation sessions. Students can sign up on the Canvas course page to present as a group on these days. The objective is not to rehash the reading material, but to widen the frame of discussion, to focus on a key human rights and policy dilemma and to take the class into new and challenging areas. A meeting between the instructor and the group is mandatory before each session. The group can be as small as 2 and as large as 4.

3. **Assignment 2 (30%)**: Students who do *not* do a group class presentation will write a 1000 word policy memo. The due date is **Friday November 6th by 5:00 PM**.
4. **Assignment 3 (40%)**: *All* students will complete a 3000 word policy analysis paper, critically evaluating a state’s response—or failure to respond—to a particular human rights challenge. The due date is **Friday December 4th by 5:00 PM**.

5. **Class Participation (20%)**: The class combines lecture and discussion. Come to class prepared. You are expected to read approximately 40 pages for each class. Be ready for questions and challenges. Your participation in class will be assessed and will figure in your final grade.

**Deadlines and Extensions:**

All assignments should be submitted to the Canvas course page as Word documents. No PDFs or Printouts please. Deadline extensions must be requested from the instructor. Late papers will be penalized.

**Plagiarism:**

Students are expected to do all their assignments themselves and to footnote ideas, quotations, facts, data and other material that they take from any other source. Failure to do so is theft and constitutes an act of professional dishonesty. If plagiarism is proven, students may be asked to withdraw or face expulsion. Please avoid any possibility of penalty by consulting with the instructor in advance to clarify the guidelines you need to follow.

**General Office Hours (by appointment):**

*Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-4:00 PM*
*Taubman 240, Shorenstein Center*

Students are encouraged to use office hours to discuss memos, assignments, presentations, paper topics, as well as any other matter, including their future professional development. Appointments will be scheduled on other days as needed.

Please arrange all appointments with my Faculty Assistant:
brandon_ward@hks.harvard.edu
The Course Assistant is also available, by appointment, to advise in respect of assignments and class presentations.

Course Assistant: Ilke Kiral
Ilke_Kiral@hks16.harvard.edu

Readings:

All reading materials are available on the Canvas course page. If students experience any difficulty accessing material, they should contact the instructor immediately.

Syllabus:

1. Foundations: Law, Ethics and Politics

1. Thursday September 3: Human Rights as Ethics

   What are human rights? How did they come to shape the foreign policy of states after 1945?


2. Tuesday September 8: Human Rights as Law

   What do human rights treaties require states to do?

   Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

   International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966

3. Thursday September 10: Human Rights as Law

Why do states sign up to human rights treaties? Do they ever keep human rights commitments?


**First Memo Assignment -- 500 words --
due Friday September 11th by 5:00 PM**

4. Tuesday September 15: Human Rights as Politics

How do citizens and NGO’s put pressure on states?
Is human rights politics just ‘slacktivism’?


2. American Foreign Policy and Human Rights

5. Thursday September 17: American Exceptionalism and Human Rights

Why does the US promote human rights while refusing to sign on to major human rights treaties? Is the US really that exceptional?


6. *Tuesday September 22: U.S. National Interests and Foreign Policy*

Is human rights just window-dressing for national interests? Does the Iran nuclear deal sacrifice Iranian human rights?


7. *Thursday September 24: Human Rights and Democracy*

**Should democracies promote democracy?**


8. *Tuesday September 29: Human Rights and the War on Terror*

**What limits do human rights impose on states combating terrorism?**

Kathryn Sikkink, “Is the US Immune from the Justice Cascade?”


9. **Thursday October 1: Human Rights and Terrorist Emergencies**

_When we balance liberty and security, must human rights always be the loser?_


**3. International Justice and Human Rights**

10. **Tuesday October 6: Peace, Justice and Human Rights**

_When states promote international justice for human rights violations?_


11. *Thursday October 8: Peace and Justice in South Africa*

Did South Africa sacrifice justice for peace?


4. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

12. *Tuesday October 13: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*

Are these rights or just aspirations? Do rights actually help poor people?


**[DATE CHANGE: THURSDAY’S (10/15) CLASS RESCHEDULED FOR FRIDAY OCTOBER 30th – Class location is still TBD]**

13. *Tuesday October 20: Human Rights and Trade Policy*

Buying oil from autocrats makes us complicit in their human rights abuses. Can ‘clean trade’ policy end our complicity?

5. Human Rights in Europe

14. *Thursday October 22: The European Court of Human Rights*

Why do European states obey rulings of the European human rights court? Why does the UK want to opt out?


How should states decide when commitments to respect religious pluralism conflict with women’s rights?


7. Human Rights and Global Migration

16. *Thursday October 29: Migration Along the Mexico-U.S. Border*

How do you balance the rights of citizens against the rights of migrants?
http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/1_UAC_Children%20on%20the%20Run_Full%20Report.pdf


17. *Friday October 30: Europe’s Migration Crisis*

What are the international human rights obligations of states to rescue migrants?


18. *Tuesday November 3: Refugee Crises in Myanmar and Syria*

Why are Asian states indifferent to the suffering of refugees?


7. Gender Rights in a Global Age

19. *Thursday November 5: Gay Rights*

What should democracies do when discrimination against gays is defended as a cultural or religious norm?


**1000 word Policy Memo Due—for students not making presentations—Friday, November 6th by 5:00 PM**

20. *Tuesday November 10: Missing Women*

What should democracies do when women choose boys over girls?


8. Human Rights and the New Authoritarianism


Is China a spoiler in international human rights?


22. *Tuesday November 17: Internet Censorship and Dissidence*

Can China keep human rights out of China?


23. *Thursday November 19: Russia*

How can democracies support human rights defenders in authoritarian states?

The case of ‘Memorial’, the Russian human rights organization.
http://www.memo.ru/eng/

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-justice-ministry-targets-memorial-a-human-rights-

24. Tuesday November 24: End Times for Human Rights?

*Is the human rights era coming to an end?*


**Thursday November 26: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Recess)**

25. Tuesday December 1: Evaluation

26. Thursday December 3: No class

**Final paper -- 3000 words --
due Friday December 4th by 5:00 PM**