

## A Short Machiavelli-flavored Argument for Political Realism

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1. War is inevitable (cf. *The Prince*, ch. 3).
2. War usually ends either in defeat or victory.
3. So the issue is not whether to fight, but whether you will win or lose the inevitable fight(s) (by 1, 2).
4. Defeat is much worse than victory, and could involve the annihilation of yourself and your people.
5. So, for your safety and your people's, you should ensure victory (by 3, 4).
6. Morality involves restraints; i.e., it demands that you refrain from doing some things.
7. Some of the things morality prohibits might help ensure victory.
8. So, being moral might help bring defeat (by 7).
9. So, with regard to war, you should be willing to dispense with morality (by 5, 8).

The “should” in step 5 can be taken to be either moral or prudential. We could interpret it morally by taking it to mean, “As the leader, you have the duty to your people to protect them.” For example, upon taking office the President of the United States swears an oath to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States,” and the Constitution was created to, among other things, “provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Thus, strange as it may sound, a moral argument can be made that it is the President's duty to win in war even if it means resorting to immoral acts: Presidents have a sworn duty to the citizens of the United States but not to citizens of other nations; thus, according to somebody like Hobbes, the President has no duties to our enemies except not to treat them in such a way as to harm US interests (see *Leviathan* 15.19-20 and especially *The Elements of Law* 19.2).

On the other hand, we can interpret the “should” in step 5 in a purely prudential way. If you are a leader, your power depends on your followers (Hobbes argues for this in *Leviathan* ch. 19). So if your people are destroyed, your goose is cooked. So to the extent that you care about your own power, not to mention your own survival, you must ensure victory in war.

Questions:

1. Which proposition(s) might a pacifist disagree with, and why?
2. Which proposition(s) might a just-war proponent disagree with, and why?