The Effects of Anarchy

Traditionally, political theorists have accounted for interstate war by pointing to the anarchic nature of the international system. In the domestic realm, by contrast, disputants can look to their governments as a guarantor to resolve political conflicts and ensure the well-being of winners and losers alike. It is assumed that conflict resolution is much more difficult in the international realm where there is no higher authority to adjudicate issues of conflict or impose a decision on the disputants. With no higher authority to back up their claims, states cannot trust their adversary to fulfill their obligations under a peace agreement. The fact of anarchy in the international realm in a sense forces states to look out for themselves and to, if need be, forego cooperation in favour of protecting their own interests.[16]

However, in cases where there are weak or collapsed states – where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart – the distinction between international and domestic politics is not so clear.[17] The viability of African states has always been in question given their vulnerabilities *vis-à-vis* the developed world, but state *collapse* has been particularly apparent in the post-Cold War era because regimes may have lost the patronage of the superpowers. In any event, conflict resolution in collapsed states is at least as difficult as it is internationally. Under these conditions the state is frequently unable to act as a guarantor and, in many cases, may be an actual participant in the conflict. Moreover, because the resolution of civil conflicts almost always requires at least one of the parties to relinquish their weapons, they are extremely reluctant to commit to an agreement. With no external guarantor nor any means to protect themselves should their opponent "defect" from the agreement, parties have little reason for confidence in either the peace process or their adversary. In other words, in weak or collapsed states the vulnerability associated with anarchy in the international realm is replicated in the domestic realm and is further complicated by the expectation that parties will have to disarm as part of a peace agreement. It is no wonder, then, that settlements are so difficult to achieve in civil wars.[18]

A Lack of International Will to Intervene

In the face of state failure, the international community can have an important, even essential, role in building confidence. It can do this by verifying compliance by parties to an agreement, providing administrative resources and solving other problems associated with peace processes. On the other hand, the prospect of casualties in distant foreign countries and the sheer magnitude and

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[16] For a lucid theoretical examination of these two realms, see Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University, 1954), and *Theory of International Politics* (Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), chapter 6.

[17] On this issue, see I. William Zartman, "Posing the Problem of State Collapse," in I. William Zartman ed. *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 1.

[18] See Walter, pp. 335-64.