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Speakers: Marco Cesa, Professor of International Relations, Johns Hopkins University SAIS Bologna Center and University of Bologna, Italy and John L. Harper, Professor of American Foreign Policy, Johns Hopkins University SAIS Bologna Center, Italy

Chair: Mark Gilbert, Visiting Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins University SAIS Bologna Center, Italy; Associate Professor in Contemporary International History, University of Trento, Italy

“Machiavelli and International Politics”

The works and life of Niccolò Machiavelli, argue Professors Harper and Cesa, can provide important lessons on an illustrious school of thought in International Relations. This lecture examines both Machiavelli's general relevance to International Relations and how his legacy was maintained in Alexander Hamilton's influence over the United States' formation.

Professor Cesa intends to shed light on two issues: was Machiavelli interested in International Relations, and are his writings relevant for the study of the theoretical dimension of the field? A good deal of Machiavelli's Realism is rooted not so much in the separation between the ethical sphere and the political sphere but in his awareness of the difference between domestic affairs and international affairs. From a semantic perspective, it has recently been suggested that in Machiavelli's vocabulary the term *stato* refers to a political unit in its relations with other political units -- those relations being always conflictual -- just like *cose di stato* refers to foreign policy and security affairs. Thus, when Machiavelli presents the Prince as a work on the *arte dello stato*, what he implies is that his book is really just as much about international politics and foreign affairs as it is about domestic politics.

If we accept this view, the long-debated contradiction between Machiavelli's «monarchical» profile of the Prince and his «republican» outlook of the Discourses might well fade away. All states, after all, and not just republics or principalities, need «good laws» and «good armies». The binomial laws-armies corresponds to the binomial internal affairs-external affairs: laws are necessary to manage relations among the citizens, armies are necessary to defend the state from its enemies outside. This crucial insight precedes the Prince and runs across many of Machiavelli's writings: with no «good armies», even the most perfect domestic arrangement cannot be maintained, for the simple reason that while at home laws are normally sufficient to make citizens keep their promises and commitments, among states only military force can perform the same function. Machiavelli's international context is structured around the relation of

forces, power and security, competition and rivalry, the precariousness of cooperation. These happen to be also the most relevant issues addressed by contemporary Realist theory.

With respect to the second point, «Theory», in Machiavelli's thought, comes first, and «facts» come second - contrary to what has often been held. In other words, «laws», or generalizations, do not derive from the analysis of events. Quite the opposite: the «laws» of politics make «facts» intelligible, and facts are recognized for what they are precisely because they illustrate some «law». Although Machiavelli refers to examples drawn from classical antiquity and illustrations from his own times, he shows a clear inclination to look at «facts» in a stylized form, after extrapolating them from their historical context, in order to confirm some pre-existing «law». Such «laws» constitute the corpus of his doctrine. Politics has its own laws, and that those laws can be disregarded only at one's own risk. Great leaders are great leaders as long as they are aware of the «laws» and act accordingly; but they lose immediately their status as soon as they violate them, and human beings, in general, cannot resist Fortune.

Professor Harper takes a different approach to his analysis of Machiavelli. He chooses to focus on what he calls the “flesh and blood” Machiavelli, the man who travelled the rough roads of Europe, negotiated with the French, and called for a drive to regenerate Italy and overcome its humiliation. Interestingly, many comparisons can be drawn between Machiavelli's experiences and philosophy and those of another influential figure of a fledgling nation: Alexander Hamilton.

Both men shared an outlook on human nature that is symptomatic of their formative experiences. They had difficult childhoods but still became child prodigies with a great deal of responsibility thrust onto them at an early age. Consequently, they can be seen as having a pessimistic view of human nature: Machiavelli labeled men as ambitious and cutthroat, and Hamilton thought of men as ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious. These similar attitudes undoubtedly shaped their approaches to international politics.

Furthermore, their importance to their respective vulnerable republics meant that this pessimism was reinforced with a necessity for prudence and risk-minimizing strategies. The embryonic Florentine Republic after 1494 and the United States after 1789 needed to play their cards carefully or they risked being “strangled in the cradle.” Moreover, in order to build their respective nations toward positions of strength, Machiavelli and Hamilton looked toward models of power in world history. In Machiavelli's case, he admired the Roman Republic, while Hamilton sought to model the US after contemporary Great Britain. Finally, neither man was particularly religious but they still saw the importance of religion and fear of God as a tool with political utility.

Overall, Professor Cesa and Professor Harper illustrate Machiavelli's striking relevance. His theory provides a distinct lens through which to view international politics, while his similarities with Hamilton are illustrative of how these lenses can be shaped by our personal experience and environment.