
The Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition

HANDBOOK FOR COMPETITION JUDGES

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FOREWORD

The Jessup Competition has become an immense undertaking, involving more than 10,000 law students at 300 schools in about 60 nations each year. The Competition is managed by a staff of two in Washington D.C. and everyone else involved, from Administrators around the world, schools hosting the Competition, to the courtroom bailiffs and judges is a volunteer.

To assist all the volunteers worldwide, the ILSA Executive Office has developed support materials for the competition. The Handbook for Competition Judges is one of those guidelines. It is designed to offer basic international legal direction and guidelines for judging. It does not purport to be primer on international law nor does it set forth all of the issues, approaches, or problems raised in the Competition. Much of the success of the Competition depends on the judges, specifically on their listening closely to the participants and, as in all courts, eliciting the perspectives of the contestants as to the applicable law, the facts to which it is applied, and the legal implications of their efforts. This document is intended to help judges understand their role, especially in relation to the other judging processes of the Competition, as well as to provide some basic background on international law and legal research for those judges not familiar with the subject.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, established in 1959, provides law students around the world with an opportunity to argue important and timely questions of international law. Each year, over 300 teams from about 60 countries participate in the Jessup Competition, making it the largest moot court competition in the world. The Competition is named after Philip C. Jessup, former judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The competition involves a hypothetical case written by leading international law scholars. Past cases have involved space law, human rights, international antitrust law and GATT, environmental law, terrorism and protection of privacy among other pressing issues. The problem also typically addresses practical and procedural issues such as standing, jurisdiction and damages.

The competition is held annually, with Regional and National Competitions taking place around the world from December through March. The International Rounds and World Championship Round are held each Spring, usually in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Spring Congress of the International Law Students Association (ILSA), which administers the Jessup. Teams are composed of two to five members from a single law school or international law-related faculty. Each team argues prepared memorials (briefs) and presents oral arguments on both sides of the question. The

Competition is judged by a series of three-judge panels, comprised of judges, scholars and practitioners who simulate the practice of law before the International Court of Justice. Competition winners are selected on the basis of the cumulative scores for their oral arguments and written memorials.

The Jessup is more than a moot because international law is at a stage where much needs to be done at the philosophical or conceptual level. This effort can be stimulated through Jessup Competitions. Stimulus in part arises from deep-seeded and long enduring effort in a law application context, but it may also be aroused by a realization in all participants that the Jessup can be the means to promote international law itself.

Competition Procedure

Each year, Jessup materials and invitations are mailed to interested law schools around the world. Each school is provided basic organizing materials, Competition Rules, the Competition Problem and registration information. Each participating school selects its team through its own internal procedure. In the US, ILSA member societies are given the right of first refusal to field the school's team. Should they decline this right, the school can administer the team as part of the moot court program or another academic program, such as a course or seminar. In other countries the competition is administered by a volunteer National Administrator, who, in conjunction with the ILSA Executive Director, determines the policies and procedures for participation.

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Teams must be officially selected and registered by November/December of each year. During the fall, teams work on their oral argument procedures and research and write their team memorials. Clarifications to the problem, based on questions submitted by participating teams, are issued in November. In December, all teams are assigned numbers to ensure objectivity throughout the Competition. Once all team registrations are received, the Executive Director of ILSA assigns registered teams to Regional or National Competitions. These competitions are usually held in February. At each level, teams will argue against three opposing teams. Teams are scored on the basis of their written memorials and their oral advocacy skills. The winners of these Competitions advance to the International Rounds.

The International Rounds of the Competition are held in early April of each year. Each nation is allowed one representative for every 10 participating universities. Each team will face four other teams drawn at random in the preliminary rounds. Based upon the scores achieved in these rounds, the top teams will advance to the International Quarterfinals and Semifinals. These teams, through single elimination rounds, argue until a World Champion is determined.

Judges' Materials

The Jessup Compromis

The Jessup Compromis (also called the Jessup Problem) is the hypothetical case upon which the participants base their memorials and oral pleadings. The Compromis will be distributed to the Judges by the National/Regional Administrator for the National/Regional Competitions or by the Executive Director of ILSA for the International Competition. It can be downloaded from the Jessup website at www.ilsa.org.

The Bench Memorandum

The bench memo contains two general categories of comments: those intended to assist judges in judging the Jessup Competition generally; and those intended to assist the judges in evaluating the participants' performance. Neither set of comments is intended to be either dispositive or exhaustive. The comments are merely guidelines to, hopefully, make the Jessup Competition rewarding for judges and competitors alike.

Rules

The substantive rules of judging the Jessup Competition are set forth in the rules promulgated by the International Law Students Association, and, as they are available to judges through the ILSA Executive Office and the website, shall not be repeated here. Judges should try to be familiar with these rules to avoid controversy during the competition by consulting with their Regional, National, or International Administrator. Judges are also asked to review carefully the instructions provided with the Memorial Scoresheets or Oral Argument Scoresheets, as these contain an abbreviated list of general judging criteria upon which judges should formulate their opinions.

JUDGING THE JESSUP

Philosophies on Judging the Jessup

There are differing opinions as to the role of a judge in a moot court competition. On the one hand, there are those who believe that a judge should do whatever necessary to ensure that the competitors complete their entire presentation. At the other extreme are those who believe that competitors are tested only when they spend their entire allocation of time responding to questions.

There is no "correct" position on this issue. However, when judges ask questions sufficient to prevent the competitors from merely giving a rehearsed speech, many of those involved with the competition in the past agree that such an approach works well. In any event, a rehearsed presentation is not particularly interesting from the judges' standpoint, and, when asked,

competitors have indicated that they do not enjoy passive benches--it is to each judge to balance these two extremes.

Judges in the Jessup Competition play a different role than those in the real world. They are there to assess the validity of the participants' arguments, the persuasiveness of their presentation and the thoroughness of their preparation. Judges are expected primarily to judge the performance of the participants as outlined by the criteria noted on the judging forms for the written and oral aspects of the competition. Once submitted, participants may not revise their written memorials. As they advance through the competition, however, participants are sure to revise their argumentative style and legal presentation. It is important that judges in the oral rounds keep this fact in mind, as their questions and responses to the participants should be formulated so as to encourage that learning process. **MOST IMPORTANTLY, JUDGES DO NOT ANNOUNCE THE WINNER OF A ROUND UNLESS THE ROUND IS A SEMI-FINAL OR FINAL ROUND.**

There are certain tactics judges in the oral rounds can employ to test a competitor's flexibility without unduly interfering with the competitor's performance. These include asking a competitor to resolve apparent internal contradictions between her position and that of her partner; or asking about the particular remedy sought for a particular international delict. In these ways, a judge can make a meaningful contribution to a performance without being unduly intrusive. A judge should refrain as much as possible from insisting upon an answer to a question when it appears as if a competitor has already made a good faith effort to respond. In the final analysis, a moot court competition should, as much as possible, emulate a real courtroom to maximize the learning experience for the competitors. Just as there is no truly "correct" judging style in a courtroom, there is no correct judging style in a moot court competition.

As concerns the legal arguments to be made by the competitors, it is important to keep in mind that the competitors choose neither the problem nor the side of the issue that they argue. In spite of every attempt to make the *Compromis* factually and legally equal as between the parties, inevitably international law favors one side or the other. As such, a competitor may be forced into making a weak legal argument. This by itself should not be held against the competitor. On the other hand, if the competitor incorrectly states the law, mis-cites a holding, or is unaware of an obvious source of relevant international law, a judge should bring it to the attention of the competitor through questioning and scoring.

It appears that, in the past, judges who do not have a strong background in international law have hesitated to ask questions during the oral rounds for fear that such questions are too fundamental. It is important, however, to have fundamental questions asked to ensure the competitors have an understanding of the basic issues and are not merely regurgitating memorized details. Further, in a real courtroom, it is often the case that a judge is not expert in the substantive law at issue. Pertinent fundamental questions are as appropriate as the more complex questions.

Recommended Lines of Questions

One of the challenges presented by attempts to apply international law is determining what authorities carry the greatest weight. Judges are encouraged to review the Statute of the Court prior to the competition to familiarize themselves with the basic jurisdictional and theoretical nature of that body.

The following are some specific suggestions for questioning:

- 1) Frequently utilize questions that call for a "yes" or "no" answer. They test a competitor's ability to answer a question directly, and the questions themselves tend to be shorter and more concise.
- 2) Since time is limited it is important to focus inquires from the bench on areas that will allow you to distinguish the quality of the competitors. Avoid asking rhetorical questions or making statements.
- 3) As much as possible, the interaction between the competitors and the bench should be in question and answer format. Avoid lengthy debates with the competitors.
- 4) Try as much as possible to interject your questions evenly throughout the round. Do not focus all of your questioning on one competitor or team.
- 5) Avoid detailed questioning about a co-counsel's argument. Each competitor should outline the beginning of his or her presentation the points he or she will cover. Although it is sometimes difficult to avoid questioning on a co-counsel's argument, such questioning should be general in nature when necessary.
- 6) Try to keep track of how much time has expired. The Bailiff will be holding up signs showing how much time the Competitor has left to speak. Avoid extensive questioning after time has expired.
- 7) If there is a competitor in the round who is not a native speaker of English, it is important to word questions carefully and avoid asking questions with overly complex sentence structure.

The Jessup is not a tutorial or a lecture course. It is not intended to set the stage for up-staging the participants. It is not a platform where the judges are expected to monopolize the time, either in formulating complex questions, or providing commentary, or asking questions and failing to get answers, to provide their own. Judges should not attempt to show the participants and the audience how much they know about the Problem, the arguments, their grasp of international law, and possible solutions.

Evaluating the Arguments and Scoring

Competitors should be evaluated in two primary areas. 1) Their knowledge of international law, and their command of the information relevant to the case. 2) Their ability to communicate their knowledge in an understandable and organized way. When evaluating the arguments, particularly

the oral arguments, the judge should consider how well the competitor has grasped and explained the international issues involved in the case.

Keep in mind that the material presented here or in the bench memorandum is not exhaustive, but merely illustrative of the legal issues and authorities that may be discussed by the competitors. The illustrative nature of these materials should be kept in mind when evaluating competitors--as they have been researching the problem for several months, they may have found issues and authority not presented here that are equally relevant to the proceedings. While judges should not typically inquire into remote or even irrelevant tangential issues, judges should reward competitors for imaginative treatment of the Problem.

Judges are also encouraged, prior to each round, to discuss with their counterparts on the bench their areas of specialty and where they expect to be the most active during the arguments, and to share their views on judging and any interesting points they may have noted in previous rounds. The Jessup Competition is, first and foremost, an educational experience. Just as no professor would present a lecture without first reviewing background materials and outlining an approach, we hope that the judges in the Jessup Competition will take a similar view of the role they play as part of the student's education in international law.

The Jessup Competition uses a rather elaborate scoring system that is weighted to ensure that all aspects of the written and oral performance are taken into consideration. In brief, the memorials are scored separately by a variety of judges, three judges reviewing each team's written submissions and three judges scoring each round of oral argument. The judges evaluate each of the team's memorials on a scale of 50 to 100 (100 being highest). An average score should be 75. A standard is provided on the scoresheets to guide you in choosing the most appropriate score or range of scores. **Even if you disagree with the range of scores recommended on the scoresheet, it is important to follow the standard to keep scores consistent throughout the competition.**

The role of the Jessup Judge is to help the participants learn as they pass from one level to the next from information they gain from questions raised. They build on this process until those who reach the final round find that they have refined their thinking and oral arguments substantially. They cannot, of course, modify their written briefs.

GENERALLY APPLICABLE LAW

The Jessup Problem was drafted to allow participants an opportunity to address current law and to encourage legal imagination in its application. The relevant international instruments were kept to a minimum here to allow participants to discover and come forward with a variety of international legal instruments that arguably bear on the issues, as evidence of customary law.

This memorandum does not purport to be a primer on international law nor does it set forth all of the issues, approaches, or problems raised in the main Problem. It is designed to offer guidelines only. Much depends on the judges, specifically on their listening closely to the participants and, as in all courts, eliciting the perspectives of the contestants as to the applicable law, the facts to which it is applied, and the legal implications of their efforts. This may compensate for the fact that most judges have not had an opportunity to serve on the bench over a period of time and they will also gain the collegiate experience such an opportunity affords.

Background in International Law

The judges may wish to consult the texts and opening chapters of casebooks on international law to refresh their own recollections about the law. Those by Ian Brownlie, Luis Henkin and Rebecca Wallace are frequently updated and thus more likely to provide current thinking on a particular issue. During the judging, they will be questioning the participants concerning customary international law and the shared expectations of states.

Participants will be invoking treaties, and judges may find the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties especially useful. Although some of its major provisions are controversial, it may provide a more precise framework for analysis. Judges may also draw upon general principles of law and use those principles to fill gaps in the law or to question the participants about the direction they are attempting to go. Although judges may be mindful of certain prominent jurists or important cases involving the issues, caution is recommended. The Problem is not designed as a "United States" domestic law problem, intended for U.S. solutions. The Problem does not raise questions concerning the domestic jurisdiction of the United States, the application of its law or Constitution, or its domestic policy. The Jessup Court is governed by the rules and regulations of the International Court of Justice. Judges should skim the Statute establishing the Court, its jurisdiction and competence. Note that cases brought before the Court are generally limited to disputes between states and individuals have no standing before the Court.

Resource Materials

Judges needing familiarity with international law in general should peruse the major casebooks on international law, and in particular the introductory chapters dealing with international law as law or with the "sources" of international law. For those who seek more detailed or philosophical treatment, Oppenheim's International Law as edited by Jennings and Watts may prove to be a valuable source. The goal is to gain familiarity or refresh recollections about international law. To a very limited extent, attempt is made in this Handbook to provide the needed background, with the expectation that the judges will be able to work with (or against) the arguments of the participants, or to compel them to provide proper authority for their arguments. **Presumably, improper use of authority by one side will be detected by the other, but the judges may need to encourage this sort of contest.**

THE SOURCES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

International Law vs. Municipal Law

It cannot be emphasized enough that international law is a system of law separate from the various municipal systems. Its rule creation and enforcement mechanisms are quite different from the municipal system, where authority is imposed upon the subjects of a given State by their government.

International law is founded upon the consent of States. Although an evolving concept, it is still very largely the case that States are the subjects of international law. Except in certain extreme situations, or situations in which State conduct threatens the very fabric of the international community, an international legal obligation may not be imposed upon a State without its consent. This is both a cause and a consequence of the system of sovereign equality.

When the International Court of Justice is requested to determine whether a State has committed an unlawful act, the Court must first determine whether an international obligation has been violated, because States may engage in whatever activity is not prohibited by international law. Case Concerning the S.S. Lotus (Fr. v. Tur.), 1927 P.C.I.J. Ser. A/B, No. 10.

To ascertain whether a rule of international law exists, the Court looks to Article 38, paragraph 1 of the Statute of the Court, which sets forth the sources of international law:

1. The Court, whose function is to decide in accordance with international law such disputes as are submitted to it, shall apply:
 - a. international conventions, whether general or particular, establishing rules expressly recognized by the contesting states;
 - b. international custom, as evidence of a general practice accepted as law;
 - c. the general principles of law recognized by civilized nations;
 - d. subject to the provisions of Article 59, judicial decisions and the teachings of the most highly qualified publicists of the various nations, as subsidiary means for the determination of rules of law.

Although the sources of international law appear to be listed in a descending order of priority, they are in fact dynamic. This concept is more fully developed below.

Treaties

There are two types of treaties (or conventions): bilateral and multilateral. Bilateral conventions are clearly a source of law as to the two Contracting Parties. Bilateral treaties are not usually considered a source of general international law when the reason for concluding them was to create an international obligation that did not exist under general international law. For example,

bilateral extradition treaties, fall into this category of contract-law. Absent a bilateral agreement, and leaving multilateral conventions aside for the moment, general international law would not usually require the extradition of an alleged offender. The mere existence of a network of bilateral extradition treaties in and of itself has no general law-creating effect.

On the other hand, multilateral conventions with a large number of States Parties may be a source of international law, either as evidence of what these States declare the law to be, or by setting forth a new rule of law by implication affecting all States. An example of a multilateral convention declaratory, rather than amendatory, of general international law is the 1948 Genocide Convention which declares that genocide violates international law. The International Court of Justice, in the Case Concerning Reservations to the Genocide Convention (Advisory Opinion), 1951 I.C.J. 15, held that all States were bound to observe the law respecting genocide — not just States Parties — since the Genocide Convention codified rules of international law from which no State may derogate.

In contrast, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, for the most part, creates new rules that cannot be said to have existed under general international law. Its terms are binding only upon States Parties. Perhaps the leading case on third party obligations under contract treaties is the Case Concerning Free Zones of Upper Savoy and the District of Gex (Switz. v. Fr.), 1932 P.C.I.J. Ser. A/B, No. 46, involving a dispute as to France's ability to adjust its customs frontier in light of the 1815 Vienna Conference Final Act. France, of course, was a party to the Act, but Switzerland was not. The Court confirmed the rule that such multilateral conventions bind only States Parties and States that might otherwise have accepted those obligations through affirmative conduct.

Many multilateral conventions contain both elements. For instance, the Third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea declares the existing law with respect to most issues, including "innocent passage," fisheries, "exclusive economic zones," and so forth. In other parts, it creates new law, such as by declaring the seabed and subsoil of the oceans (outside territorial jurisdiction) to be the "common heritage of mankind." Another convention that contains both new and existing rules of law is the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. In virtually all respects, the Vienna Convention declares the rules of general international law applicable to treaty interpretation, such as the customary international law rule of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be honored) or the general principle of international law *rebus sic stantibus* (fundamental change of circumstances vitiating treaties). However, the Vienna Convention also contains the principle of *jus cogens* (peremptory norms) — a disputed principle of international law that might emerge in due course as an accepted principle or might prove to be a hollow concept. Therefore, when the Court looks to a multilateral convention that is both declaratory and amendatory of international law, it must avoid application of a newly-created international law rule to States which have not — expressly or by implication of their conduct or diplomatic correspondence — consented to be so bound.

As a final point, a conventional obligation need not be written. This was decisive to the Court's holding in the Case Concerning the Legal Status of Eastern Greenland (Den. v. Nor.), 1933 P.C.I.J., Ser. A/B, No. 53. Denmark claimed that Norway was precluded from asserting sovereignty over Eastern Greenland by virtue of assurances given by M. Ihlen, the Norwegian Foreign Minister. The Court found that in July 1919, the Danish ambassador at Christiania informed the Norwegian Foreign Minister that Denmark would not object to Norway's claim to Spitzbergen, then under discussion at the Paris Peace Conference. He also observed that the Danish Government, which was anxious to obtain recognition by all interested Parties of Danish sovereignty over the whole of Greenland, was confident that the extension of Danish political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland "would not encounter any difficulties on the part of the Norwegian Government." On July 22nd, after he had informed his colleagues in Cabinet, M. Ihlen declared to the Danish ambassador (the so-called "Ihlen Declaration") "that the Norwegian Government would not make any difficulties in the settlement of this question." Denmark raised no objection to the status of Spitzbergen, which was granted to Norway.

Norway later asserted sovereignty over a part of Eastern Greenland. The Court concluded that it is "beyond all dispute that a reply of this nature given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on behalf of his Government in response to a request by the diplomatic representative of a foreign Power, in regard to a question falling within his province, is binding upon the country to which the Minister belongs." Thus, the elements of a conventional obligation — consent of the Parties to a particular undertaking — were present and binding, even though unwritten.

In the Case Concerning Nuclear Tests (Aust. v. Fr.), 1974 I.C.J. 253, the Court went further with respect to unilateral acts, stating:

It is well recognized that declarations made by way of unilateral acts, concerning legal or factual situations, may have the effect of creating legal obligations. Declarations of this kind may be, and often are, very specific. When it is the intention of the State making the declaration that it should become bound according to its terms, that intention confers on the declaration the character of a legal undertaking, the State being thenceforth legally required to follow a course of conduct consistent with the intent to be bound, even though not made within the context of international negotiations, is binding. In these circumstances, nothing in the nature of a *quid pro quo* nor any subsequent acceptance of the declaration, nor even any reply or reaction from other States, is required for the declaration to take effect, since such a requirement would be inconsistent with the strictly unilateral nature of the juridical act by which the pronouncement by the State was made.

Thus, a State may create an international legal obligation as a purely unilateral matter.

Finally, it should be noted that should a new peremptory norm of general international law (*jus cogens*) emerges, the norm would render an inconsistent treaty obligation a nullity. This principle is set forth in Article 64 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which provides: "If a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates."

Custom As A Source of Law

The critical element to the creation of a customary rule of international law is that States generally conduct themselves in a certain way not as a mere policy choice, but because they believe they are bound to do so by international law. Therefore, the conduct of States can be evidence of a customary international law rule arising from "a general practice accepted as law." The most complete discussion by the ICJ of this concept can be found in the *North Sea Continental Shelf Cases*. Custom, as discussed in that case, has two distinct elements: 1) consistent and virtually uniform practice by states, 2) engaged in out of a sense that the practice is legally required. The length of time required for a rule to ripen into custom varies because some concepts, such as issues dealing with computer technology/security or terrorism, are relatively recent and thus custom in these areas may ripen more rapidly if the practice is sufficiently uniform and consistent. Custom may also not require the participation of all States if it is a subject, such as international anti-trust regulation, that may not affect all States. Finally, a State may escape the effect of customary rules of law if the State has persistently, promptly and consistently object to the application of that rule from its inception. Many scholars argue that a State may not avoid application of a *jus cogens* or universal norm by objecting; however, it is generally agreed that these norms are few and far between and include the prohibitions against genocide and piracy.

Evidence of custom may be found, *inter alia*, in: diplomatic correspondence, official instructions to diplomatic agents and military officers, acts of municipal legislation and decisions of a State's courts (upon the assumption that they would not knowingly violate an international legal obligation), and the published opinions of legal advisers to governments. It is not unknown that a State may say one thing but conduct itself in a precisely opposite manner. In such a case, the State's conduct is the relevant factor.

General Principles of Law As a Source of International Law

International law is based upon the consent of States. This consent may be found in general principles of law found in a majority of the municipal law systems of States. In this sense, near universal private law rules may be indicative of principles of public international law. In the *Gentini Case* (Italy V. Venez.), Mixed Claims Comm'n (1903), *reprinted in* J. Ralston, *Venezuelan Arbitrations of 1903* 720 (1904), for example, Venezuela argued that the Italian claim, based upon injury to its national, was barred by prescription. The umpire found that prescription was a general principle of law.

In another example, a State may be bound by the general principle of law respecting estoppel. In the *Case Concerning the Temple Preah Viheah* (Cam. v. Thai.), 1962 I.C.J. 6, the Court found that an ancient temple lay on the Cambodian side of a boundary which by treaty was to follow a specific watershed but was to be delimited by a mixed commission. The Court emphasized the fact that Thailand (then Siam) had requested from France in 1907 a map indicating the French view of the boundary. The map showed the temple to be on the French Indochina (now Cambodian) rather than the Thai side of the boundary. Thailand failed to raise an objection to the map or the French assertion. The Court thus found that Thailand had acquiesced in the Cambodian assertion of sovereignty for 40 years and was estopped from raising the claim.

Another illustration of a general principle is the international law principle of *rebus sic stantibus*, under which a State may be relieved of its obligation to be bound by the terms of a treaty when there has been a fundamental change of circumstances. This rule of treaty interpretation has its origin in municipal contract law and has been incorporated into public international law. (The principle of *rebus sic stantibus* has been codified in Article 62 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.) It also has been applied to international arbitrations between a private party and a foreign State. The critical element to the recognition of a general principle of law is its existence in most (but not necessarily all) legal systems.

Judicial Decisions and Publicists As Sources of International Law

Article 38(1)(d) of the Statute of the Court recognizes judicial decisions and the teachings of the most highly qualified publicists as *subsidiary means for the determination of rules* of international law. The judgments of the International Court of Justice and its predecessor, the Permanent Court of International Justice, are but one source of judicial decisions. Also included in this category are the decisions of international arbitral tribunals and the highest courts of States.

Because the international legal system is based upon the sovereign equality of States, from a theoretical point of view there may not exist (without the express consent of States) a rule of *stare decisis*. However, it should be noted that any court can overrule itself, but the ICJ does so rarely for the same reasons that the U.S. Supreme Court does so rarely. Reasoned ICJ decisions are highly persuasive, even though not technically binding. The Court may be influenced by its own reasoning in previous cases and decide cases in a manner consistent with prior relevant rulings. Finally, the Court may look to the decisions of international arbitral tribunals and the highest courts of States as evidence of a rule of international law. If a large number of these municipal courts are in agreement — and if there is little or no similar authority holding to the contrary — the Court may conclude that the municipal judicial decisions reflect the position of States or general principles of law recognized by civilized nations.

The Court also may look to publicists as a subsidiary source of law, not for their opinions on what the law should be, but rather as a statement of what norms constitute customary international law.

Perhaps the best formulation of this principle was set forth by the Supreme Court of the United States in *The Paquete Habana*, 175 U.S. 677 (1900), in which it observed that

where there is no treaty, and no controlling executive or legislative act or judicial decision, resort must be had to the customs and usages of civilized nations; and as evidence of these, to the works of jurists and commentators, who by years of labor, research, and experience, have made themselves peculiarly well acquainted with the subjects of which they treat. Such works are resorted to by judicial tribunals, not for the speculations of their authors concerning what the law ought to be, but for trustworthy evidence of what the law really is.

While Article 38(1)(d) refers to “the most highly-qualified publicists,” it is not always easy to discern which scholars rise to this level. Some scholars are considered highly qualified without question, Oppenheim, Brownlie, D’Amato and Henkin spring to mind; however, others may have developed expertise in a particular area, e.g. environmental international law, and can thus rise to this high standard.

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