

Sample of Review Essay

Review Essay for Western International Relations Theory

Student Name:

Student ID:

Email:

Article: Krasner, S., D., 2001, Rethinking the sovereign state model, *Review of International Studies*, Volume 27, Page 17-42 Available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=163527> Accessed: 15 October 2011

In academic literature, the treaty of Westphalia is seen as a defining moment, where the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* was established. Taking a classical –realist approach in his 2001 paper entitled Rethinking the sovereign state model, Krasner delivers what can be said to be a critical assessment of the sovereign state model. Krasner argues that the Westphalian model has never been an accurate representation of the concept of sovereignty, claiming that the ‘basic principle of autonomy has been constantly violated in the name of other norms.’ The sovereign state model is thus an unstable equilibrium, from which countries deviate every time they can and have the power to. It is therefore regarded as a form of “organised hypocrisy”, where the norms associated with sovereignty are mere “cognitive script”. Offering a pessimistic view on sovereignty, Krasner raises more questions than he answers. Divided into three parts, this paper offers a critical review of Krasner’s article, encompassing views from the general literature.

The sovereign state model

The author’s notion on the applicability of the concept of sovereignty in international relations stands in stark contrast to that of traditional literature. Krasner in his 1999 paper, defines sovereignty as “an institutional arrangement for organizing

political life that is based on two principles: territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority structures.” Conversely, unlike most scholars who attribute the Westphalia treaty to be the foundation of sovereignty, Krasner in this article argues that the birth of this concept (non-interventionism) can be found in the works of Emmerich de Vattel. Building on this notion, he further demonstrates that in fact most subsequent treaties were characterized by the circumscription of sovereignty. Krasner attributes this to the lack of authority structure allowing States to indulge in self-interest and to the endorsement of ‘mutually inconsistent norms’ i.e. Universal Human Rights. This violation can be seen in the very make up of the Utrecht or Versailles treaties, through the use of conventions, contracting, coercion and imposition. This view is not however shared by Sorenson, who debates that whilst the constitutive rules of sovereignty have remained identical (affirming that sovereignty does indeed exist), the regulatory rules of sovereignty (non-intervention) have changed. Further supporting this view are constructivists such as Jackson (2007), who believe that sovereignty should be treated as its historical usage has determined it to be applied: without the preconceptions of that time. It therefore seems more reasonable that the meanings of the principle of sovereignty should be disciplined by the usages of today than those of the 16th and 17th centuries. From this, one may question that given that sovereignty is an ever-changing institution, why Krasner deems that the concept should be disciplined by the initial historical usage of sovereignty if the institution itself has been altered.

Sovereignty Typology

Flowing from the idea of sovereignty violation, is Krasner’s sovereignty typology, where each is declined according to a specific level of the international system; a state must have a monopoly over all four to be considered fully sovereign. Conversely,

Krasner states that one type of sovereignty can be more predominant than another. Though this serves to better understand the academic debate surrounding sovereignty and the difficulty in providing one definition for the concept (Thompson, 1995), Krasner fails to indicate that some of these typologies may bear greater importance than others and therefore that there can be varying degrees of sovereignty (Dacyl, 1996). For example, Domestic sovereignty which goes back to Bodin and Hobbes definition of sovereignty -in that it is absolute and includes affairs pertaining to territory and unconditionally, can be considered to be one of the most important of the 4 types of sovereignty. Can states effectively function without authority? On the other hand, in today's era, Vattelian sovereignty, especially in the West, appears to be especially weak; international organisations such as the United Nations are testament to this (Raustiala, 2003). The same applies for International legal sovereignty, which Waltz (1979) sees as a relationship between States where "none is entitled to command; none is required to obey." Though a dictator could achieve domestic sovereignty, attaining international recognition is crucial if that state is to survive in the long term-especially if the authority wants to conduct external trade. Through this typology, Krasner thus describes a range of authority relationships, which prove useful in understanding international relations, but leading to a very narrow definition of sovereignty. His argumentation, going back to that of the classical realist and neorealist schools, provides a static and exogenous description of sovereignty. Does this therefore signify that a State who violates sovereignty should live in autarky? Given the globalised and modernised in which we live, this seems hardly feasible.

Organised hypocrisy

In summing up his paper, Krasner concludes that International relations cannot be idealised. Given the historical antecedent of sovereign state model violation, he argues that sovereignty would be best understood as an example of what he refers to as “organized hypocrisy”: States not acting in a consistent way. Indeed, when international norms are working it would indeed be senseless for a state to act inconsistently; “A logic of consequences can always prevail over a logic of appropriateness” (Krasner, 1999). Nonetheless as pointed out by Philpott (2001), Krasner pays little attention to the extent to which States go out of their way to act consistently – actions which could result in a violation of sovereignty. In this paper, Krasner has highlighted sovereignty violations however in no way has he highlighted nation state’s attempts to enforce it. A comparative study of sovereignty compliance would therefore have been useful in presenting both sides of the argument.

Conclusion

Though his article, Krasner has attempted to justify that Sovereignty has never existed. While his interpretation of sovereignty violation and typologies greatly contribute to the debate on whether Westphalian sovereignty is indeed dead or merely mutating, in his argumentation three major flaws can be distinguished. Firstly, he does not take into account that institutions of the 16 and 17th century have changed; this signifies that sovereignty cannot be applied in the same way. Secondly, he fails to take into account the different weightings of sovereign typologies: some are definitely more important than others. And finally, that whilst considering sovereignty violations is important, Krasner has not considered nation state’s attempts to enforce sovereignty, meaning that one is provided with a one sided view of the situation.

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