

The Relevance of Structures in International Society: A Critique of Krasner

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JACK GREIG, SEP 6 2011

The international system is a complex make up of actors and structures that exist, at the bequest of scholars, to demonstrate how international society can be governed. Within this systemic analysis exists the topic of much debate: what governs the actions of a state?

In this essay I will present my case as to why I do not agree Stephen Krasner's argument that

"the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness... In most cases, domestic roles will be more compelling than international ones, because domestic rather than international logics of appropriateness are most likely to dominate the self-conceptualization of any political leader."

I will do so by focussing on sovereignty, and will argue that Krasner's perception of the sovereign state is static and outdated, and that states, in fact, are constructed entities, co-reflective of ideas and norms that are continually constructed and re-constructed throughout time. Secondly, I will demonstrate through the agent-structure debate that sovereign states are a mutually constitutive variables that exist within the wider structure of the international system and that rules guide states, as well as cultivating new outcomes for societal progression. Finally to consolidate my argument, I will illustrate the shifting paradigm of the state in historical context, to demonstrate that it is social norms that have dictated the direction of a state throughout time, and that contrary to Krasner's argument, international logics of appropriateness actually outweigh domestic logics of appropriateness.

Krasner argues that 'logics of consequences trump logics of appropriateness'; let us explore what these terms mean. Logics of consequences (LoC) sees the emergence of political order as being directly due to rational negotiation among actors who are looking to pursue their own interests, and it accepts, implores March and Olsen, "that there may be gains available through coordinated action" (2009: 1). Therefore, under the pretext of LoC, all institutions are derived from a product of rational calculation which seeks to maximize the state's preferences (Krasner 1999: 5) Logics of Appropriateness (LoA), on the other hand, is vastly different. The LoA perspective sees political order as being determined by a set of rules of appropriate behaviour, organized into institutions. The LoA places an emphasis on the role of actors within a structure, guided by rules that are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected and legitimate (March and Olsen, 2009: 1). These actors tend to seek to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role that is appropriate to a given structure or situation. Therefore, LoA is heavily driven by existing social structures, as Finnemore points out, actors tend to, "internalize the roles and rules as scripts to which they conform, not out of conscious choice, but because they understand these behaviours to be appropriate" (1996: 29).

Krasner's argument that logics of consequences dominate logics of appropriateness can be extracted from his view of the sovereign state and its role, actions and influences within international society. Krasner argues that sovereignty exists in four different ways; domestic sovereignty, interdependence sovereignty, international legal sovereignty and Westphalian sovereignty (1999: 2). He generally, however, focuses on Westphalian sovereignty, defining it in terms of 'non-intervention'. Krasner goes to great lengths to demonstrate that action taken within the domestic political sphere is by no means constrained by the rules that are prescribed by his definitions. In other words, he says if actors find themselves in a situation in which they have multiple and contradictory roles and rules, or no rules at all, a logic

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of consequences will prevail (1999: 6). This is characterized by his assertion that, "Rulers can recognize a state or not; they can recognize entities that lack juridical independence or territory. They can intervene in the internal affairs of other states or voluntarily compromise the autonomy of their own polity" (1999: 7). Krasner's point therefore, is that decisions taken by the state are no more than a product of rational calculation, which seeks to maximize the states preferences. In layman's: states will just pick and choose which direction is most appropriate to their domestic interests, meaning logic of consequences far outweighs logic of appropriateness in international society, contrary to constructivist discourse. His conclusions seem to assume that the state is not privy to outside influences, and furthermore, are not driven by norms or rules. He fails to recognize anything other than the static definition of Westphalian sovereignty, and the state as a hypocritical actor, that can, when it wants, violate its own terms of sovereignty in pursuit of its interests (for example, non-intervention vs. promoting democracy). This is in no small part due to Krasner's inability to abandon his highly categorical conception of sovereignty and instead treat it as a variable, a practically constructed institution, as Smith reiterates, "if states fail to justify and legitimate their behavior, then they risk censure and sanction, and they also risk others doing the same. This is why the rules of the game matter, and Krasner misses this because he thinks that norms are only epiphenomena" (2001: 210). Krasner's argument that logics of consequences trump logics of appropriateness, and that domestic logics of appropriateness outweigh international logics of appropriateness, emanate from his definition of sovereignty and his denial that sovereignty is a socially constructed institution rather than an existing agent working against or with international norms, based on which greatest maximizes its utility.

In stark contrast, Reus-Smit, very much defines sovereignty in terms of its contribution to societal 'expansion'. He admits that progressive international norms are by no means always adhered to, but that their simple recognition and active definition of legitimate state-hood has been crucial in the development of post-war international society. Reus-Smit therefore understands sovereignty as being mutually constitutive with human rights discourse, rather than in contradiction with, as Krasner suggests (2001: 520). We can see these thoughts ascertained in his sentiments that, "the principle of sovereignty and human rights norms are best conceived as two normative elements of a single, distinctly modern discourse about legitimate statehood and rightful state action" (2001: 522). He uses the dissolution of colonial rule as a prime example of this. As states came to define colonialism as morally wrong in post-WWII society, they voluntarily succeeded land to their formal colonies, therefore playing a cooperative role in the production of new and strengthened international social norms grounded in human rights discourse, which did not previously exist. Reus-Smit shows us that fundamental institutions are critical in providing the 'rules of the game', playing a vital role in the development of the institutional framework of international society, of which sovereign states are a part (2001: 528). Such institutions are, "'generic' structural elements of international systems. That is, they provide the basic framework for cooperative interaction between states, and institutional practices transcend shifts in the balance of power and the configuration of interests, even if these practices' density and efficacy vary" (1997: 557). Therefore states are not static entities but are mutually constitutive agents that have been constructed and re-constructed throughout time, leading us to believe that international logics of appropriateness outweigh domestic logics of appropriateness in determining the direction of a state.

In order to better understand how agents and structures work together to create new norms within society the agent-structure debate must be examined. Wendt suggests that there are two truisms of social life; that human beings and their organizations are purposeful, whose actions help reproduce or transform the society in which they live, and society is made up of social relationships, which structure the interaction between these purposeful actors. Central to the debate are ontological claims about the make up of individuals and society (1987: 357). Rationalist logic, such as that put forward by Krasner, claims that individuals are rational and self interested, and therefore it is assumed that they will engage in rational decisions to maximize their own utility in isolation from outside influence or other extraneous factors. Competing constructivist theorists would ascertain that individuals are constrained in their decision-making by norms and institutional arrangements that emanate from wider society, therefore claiming that society and institutions govern social relationships, which are privy to ontological status. Wendt proposes that, the first, individualism, can be characterized by social scientific explanations reducible to the interactions of independent individuals. And the second, Holism, is indicative that greater society cannot be reduced solely to agents and their self-fulfilling interactions, but rather the construction of agents in a mutually constitutive environment (1987: 350). This can be seen in the discussion above, in relation to Krasner's view of the sovereign as a static agent of self-fulfilling principles rather than that of a, "practical category whose empirical contents are not fixed but evolve in a way

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reflecting the active practical consensus amongst co-reflective statesmen" (Ashley, 1984: 38). But how and why do structures and agents combine to complementarily construct institutions and norms?

Dessler argues that rules play a critical role, which, he says, are responsible for both enabling action and constraining possibilities. This is because when actors are guided by rules within society they conscientiously create new outcomes, thus any given action within an institution with prescribed rules will in turn work to reproduce or transform some part of the social structure. This is because, "Rules are not concrete girders constraining action but instead, are a medium through which action becomes possible and which action itself reproduces and transforms" (Dessler, 1989: 467). Reus-Smit tells us that a system of rules and structures, married with the organizing principle of sovereignty, equates to the moral purpose of a state as a knowledgeable social agent, exhibiting progressively regulative behavior (1997: 560). Therefore, rules are adhered to because of their benefits for cooperation and the preservation of international order. Neither the agent (as the state) nor the structure can be dismissed or collapsed into one another, as they are mutually constitutive – the sum of the two equate to the action of a state. This is embodied by March and Olsen in their description of the system of constitutive rule making within democratic institutions;

We assume that new experiences may lead to change in rules, institutions, roles and identities and yet we are not committed to a belief in historical efficiency, i.e. rapid and costless rule adaptation to functional and normative environments and deliberate political reform attempts, and therefore to the functional or moral necessity of observed rules democratic institutions, for example, are both arranged to speed up and slow down learning from experience and adaptation. Democracies value continuity and predictability as well as flexibility and change, and usually there are attempts to balance the desire to keep the basic rules of governance stable and the desire to adapt rules due to new experience (2009: 6).

Ruggie argues that rules are reproduced through a system of habitual use and compliance until they become imbedded to the point that actors no longer view them as rules at all, because their 'durability remains based in collective intentionality' (1993: 873). As Dunne puts it, this means that, "states will adhere to the rules and norms of the society of states even when these conflict with their non-vital interests" (1998: 144). This mutually constitutive relationship of rule making, and consequent rule abiding, is indicative that international logics of appropriateness outweigh domestic logics of appropriateness due to the inherently interlinked relationship the sovereign state, as an agent, enjoys with mutually constitutive structures in international society.

When the emergence and development of the sovereign state is examined in historical context it becomes evident that international logics of appropriateness do hold precedence over domestic logics of appropriateness. States are 'geographically contained' structures whose agents claim ultimate political authority within their domain. Tilly defines states as coercion-wielding organizations distinct from households and kinship groups because they exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories (1992: 12). This conception of the state does not imply it is a 'timeless principle', in fact, as Weber describes, it is a unique amalgamation of authority, territory, population and recognition. That is to say, until the state is recognized at the international level, it in fact, does not have sovereign status (1996: 48). If we look at how the state came to appear over time we can see that the process was not merely an act at the bequest of an internal polity or monarch, but rather an adherence to emerging ideas and norms, such as the creation of the sovereign. Jean Bodin's first conception of the sovereign in 1576 was that of a complete, perpetual and indivisible power emanating from the divine right of rule, ordained by God. International society came into being around this time, playing a role in the regulation of rules and norms inherited and adhered to by the state. In 1576 the norm of state-to-state interaction between sovereigns was that of a right to wage war in conquest. Gradually, and with the Peace of Westphalia, states became bound to certain rules, including the protection of the people located within the sovereign. John Locke's conception of sovereignty as being vested in the people, with the existence of a social contract to ensure their safety and security was radical in thought but led to the social norm of universal rights and the democratic polity, characterized by the French and American revolutions, and embodied in the Declaration of Independence (Osiander, 2001: 255-285). Sovereignty was birthed to be a means by which inter-unit behavior could be structured, allowing for easier organization within international society, as authority is exactly specified by its territorial parameters. The state became increasingly seen as an effective model, and because of this, actors from other institutional arrangements defected to states or copied their

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institutional makeup. Gradually, other organizational models disappeared until the international system was only composed of states (Weber, 1996: 82). This therefore shows us that international logics of appropriateness dominate the formation of the sovereign state, meaning leaders have little influence on the direction of the state as they conform to rules and norms that exist within the structure of international society, constitutively defining the role of the sovereign.

This essay has served to illustrate my disagreement with Krasner's argument that,

"the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness... In most cases, domestic roles will be more compelling than international ones, because domestic rather than international logics of appropriateness are most likely to dominate the self-conceptualization of any political leader."

I have done so by depicting Krasner's conception of the sovereign state as static, and consequently have illustrated that the sovereign state is a social norm co-reflective of changing structures with the institutional framework of the international system. Secondly, through examining the agent-structure debate I have demonstrated that sovereign states are a mutually constitutive variable within the structure of the international system and that rules guide states and subsequently allow for new outcomes and societal change. Finally I have used the emergence and development of the sovereign state in historical context to justify all of the above and show that international logics of appropriateness far outweigh domestic logics of appropriateness in determining the direction of a state.

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