

Martha Finnemore and Judith Goldstein (eds.)

## ***Back to Basics: State Power in a Contemporary World***

2013. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Pages: 376. ISBN 9780199970087.

The title of this book could be misleading because this is not a book on realism, as the editors Martha Finnemore and Judith Goldstein admit, but rather a tribute to Stephen D. Krasner and his contribution to international relations (IR) scholarship. The book itself is divided into five parts, each part containing, with some exceptions, three chapters written by different authors (15 chapters altogether). The chapters were originally proposed for the conference held at Stanford University in December 2009. The five parts are entitled as follows: Part One: Power and Realism as an Intellectual Tradition; Part Two: Theoretical Reflections on Power, States and Sovereignty; Part Three: State Power and the Global Economy; Part Four: The Subversive Effects of Globalization; Part Five: Sovereignty and Power in a Complex World. I will now give a short summary of the book chapters that are contained within the five parts of this book.

Part One contains three chapters. The first chapter, entitled "Puzzles about Power", is written by the editors themselves. Finnemore and Goldstein ask themselves why state resources sometimes create power and policy success, and sometimes not. For them, this is a puzzle. Even when state resources create power this does not always translate into policy success. This means that the links between power and the outcome of the policies are not clear. In this sense the book tackles two concepts that are central to IR scholarship – states and power. But at the same time the editors warn us that this is not a book on realism, but rather a book on different approaches and different types of power that we can observe in contemporary international politics. They also tell us that this book tries to give an answer to the question: "in what world do states live"? What kind of world is it? The second chapter – "Power Politics in the Contemporary World: Lessons from the Scholarship of Stephen Krasner" – is also written by the editors themselves. This chapter is a "sheer tribute" to Krasner and his work. They remind us that Krasner "wrestled" with "Morgenthau's disciples"

and with realism's premises and limitations. Krasner abandoned, or rather challenged, the structural realist approach on state sovereignty in the international system. He started as a defender of realism, but later, in his empirical analysis, found the "limits of realism". He realised that state power is important, but so are ideas. The third chapter, entitled "Stephen Krasner: Subversive Realist", is written by Robert O. Keohane. This chapter could also be described as a tribute to Krasner's scholarship. Here, Keohane describes different "phases" of Krasner's work. Krasner could be called a "subversive realist" because he "flirted" with other approaches to IR such as institutionalism and constructivism. Therefore, Keohane believes that Krasner could be described as a realist, institutional theorist, and constructivist theorist as well. He states, as Krasner himself did, that Krasner belongs to a "modified realist orientation".

Part two of the book is comprised of four chapters. In the fourth chapter – "Authority, Coercion and Power in International Relations" – David A. Lake argues that IR cannot only be explained by material capabilities of the state and coercion. Therefore, the concept of authority deserves a comeback to the field of IR. Authority can also be seen as power. A can make B do something that B might otherwise not do without using coercion. Coercion comes into play only to defend authority or to restore it. In the fifth chapter, under the title "Governance under Limited Sovereignty", Thomas Risse explains that "limited statehood" is not the same thing as "failed" or "failing statehood". Risse argues that in the case of "limited statehood" international recognition (of the state) exists but domestic sovereignty is somehow lacking. Domestic sovereignty is here understood as the central government controlling some parts but not the whole territory. In this sense sovereignty is limited. On the other hand, failed states have no domestic sovereignty at all. Here, Risse poses the question how governance is possible and who governs in areas of limited statehood? In the next chapter – "Three Scenes of Sovereignty and Power" – Etel Solingen shows us that sometimes when states are trying to hold on to their sovereignty with a firm grip, they actually lose power. This is the case with North Korea, a state which has lost power due to its nuclear programme. On the other hand, when states abandon some forms of their sovereignty, as was the case with Germany and its military or China and its economy, that makes them more powerful. "States and Power as *Ur-Force*: Domestic Traditions and Embedded Actors in World Politics" is

the final chapter in this part of the book. Here, Peter J. Katzenstein argues that the rulers, and not the states, are the basic units of the international system. The question is then, are the rulers autonomous and rational? Katzenstein believes that US foreign policy, by adopting liberal values, is often ideological and irrational. But this also extends to the rulers of other traditions, making them not autonomous from value frameworks and thus irrational.

Part three is again comprised of three chapters. In the next chapter – “Currency and State Power” – Benjamin J. Cohen reminds us that monetary power is “a neglected area of study” in international political economy. This chapter addresses the effects of international currency on state power. Today we have several states (the BRIC countries) in the international system that are trying to amplify their monetary power. In the chapter that follows, entitled “International Trade Law as a Mechanism for State Transformation”, Richard H. Steinberg argues that power shapes international law, which is then a mechanism for state transformation. In a nutshell, European and US power shaped the GATT/WTO rules, and by doing so they also used international trade law to transform other (weaker) states. Basically, for states to be able to join the GATT/WTO they first need to transform their institutions. “Choice and Constraint in the Great Recession of 2008” is the name of the last chapter in this part and the tenth chapter in the book overall. Here, Peter Gourevitch focuses on strong states and how the failure of their policies can endanger both themselves and other states as well. Units of his analysis are internal nation state (economic) policies. On the macro and micro level poor economic policies led to the 2008 crisis. They originated within the strong states, but then later spilled over into the weaker states of the international system.

The fourth part of the book also contains three chapters. In the eleventh chapter, “Power Politics and the Powerless”, Arthur A. Stein states that weak states have no fear of attacking strong states. The opposite does not apply. According to him, strong states fear the weak ones. For him this is a conundrum in contemporary IR. The weak states use force for political mobilisation in their own communities and, in return, the strong states expand their definitions of security and respond with counter-political mobilisation. In the following chapter – “Globalization and Welfare: Would a Rational Hegemon Still Prefer Openness?” – Lloyd Gruber writes how

globalization may lead to inequality, but inequality need not necessarily cause political strife. The political elite is not necessarily divided even if there is a large cleavage in the society. Still, spatial cleavages may produce secession tendencies within states and/or cause conflicts. In chapter thirteen, under the title “The Tragedy of the Global Institutional Commons”, Daniel W. Drezner asks himself: “does the proliferation of rules, laws, norms, and organizational forms lead to an increase in rule-based outcomes, or merely an increase in forum shopping?” His answer is that institutional proliferation will encourage all actors to exploit the complex environment to advance their own (selfish) interests. Therefore, there will be no increase in rule-based outcomes, but rather, by using forum shopping, power outcomes are more likely, at least when great powers are concerned.

The fifth and final part of the book contains only two chapters. In chapter fourteen – “Causation and Responsibility in a Complex World” – Robert Jervis tells us that several pathways could lead to the same result. This is known as multiple sufficient causation. The question is: are there alternative ways to reach the same outcome? If one policy was a success (policy A), why shouldn’t other policies (B, C, D...) also result in a positive outcome? This chapter deals with the causation, responsibility and chronology of the policies that states pursue in IR. The final chapter of the book, entitled “New Terrains: Sovereignty and Alternative Conceptions of Power”, is written by Stephen D. Krasner himself, the man this book is a tribute to. Krasner argues that power is what really counts in international affairs. However, states are not the only players in the international arena today. Much has changed since 1945. Power is not only material (tanks, ships, planes) but can also be manifested in non material ways. This is why, he argues, we have different kinds of power, and these concepts can still be broadened.

In my humble opinion this is a much needed book and its timing could not be more perfect. The main topic of the book, as noted above, is the role that state power plays in the contemporary world. As Krasner himself tells us, much has changed since 1945. Furthermore, much has changed since 1989, and again since 2001. Although there are limits to realism, we can now witness a return to “power play” politics in IR. The cases of Russia and the Ukraine, Gaza, Iraq and Syria are clear examples of these

changes. Still, as Krasner and his “followers” show us, there are many faces of power and they cannot be clearly perceived only through realism, thus other theoretical approaches are needed to “paint the whole picture”. Theoretical eclecticism is the name of the game. I think this book should be mandatory reading for all IR scholars, graduate and PhD students that focus on international studies.

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