Changing Norms through Actions: The Evolution of Sovereignty

Jennifer M. Ramos, Oxford University Press, 2013, 224 Pages.

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State sovereignity is one of the central and decisive concepts of international relations and has also been one of the most significant norms of international law since the Peace of Westphalia. Considering the various meanings attributed to sovereignty, it is not a static or absolute term. Jennifer M. Ramos's recent book, *Changing Norms through Actions: the Evolution of Sovereignty,* offers a comprehensive and thoroughly engaging analysis of the normative change of sovereignty.

The primary objective of *Changing Norms through Actions* is to demonstrate the normative change in sovereignty from absolute to contingent. Ramos adopts an interdisciplinary approach and skillfully traces the process of normative change through theories of social psychology, law, and politics. Ramos focuses on normative change as a result of political or military actions, in which she stresses the idea that international norms change not only by evolution of ideas but also as a result of state actions. Therefore, a military intervention--antithesis to state sovereignty--against a state reluctant to fulfill some domestic or international obligations, opens the door to change in the formation and understanding of "state sovereignty". In other words, some states rely on other widely-accepted norms to justify their interventions, and thus shift norms. Ramos examines this change with regard to counterterrorism, human rights, and the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In order to achieve this, Ramos uses an appropriate methodology

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through which she analyses the U.N. Security Council speeches and policy responses of China, Russia, the U.S., the UK and France. The author's language and approach are concise and accessible for a wide audience. *Changing Norms through Actions* is divided into six chapters with a conclusion in which the influence of different topics (counterterrorism, human rights issues and WMD) upon sovereignty are discussed.

The book starts off with historical background that chronicles the development of the notion of sovereignty over time, and also constructs a theoretical framework for the following chapters. After drawing the historic and theoretical debates on sovereignty, Ramos address normative change as result of functions of both structure (environment) and actors. Then she lays out the specific conditions necessary for norm change to occur, and suggests "prominence, coherence, and environmental conditions" as three important factors.

Regarding normative structures that guide and shapes the behavior of states, the author presents a theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory explains tension between the two norms--the sovereignty norm of nonintervention and the norm of maintaining international peace and security. Finally, Ramos prepares a data set for assessing the changes in the understanding of sovereignty since the end of the Cold War. Beforehand, in the traditional view, states had the *right* to conduct their internal affairs independently, "behind the shield of sovereignty" and the international community had the *obligation* to respect and not to intervene. After the Cold War–this is an evolving view--states have *obligations* to fulfill in order to maintain sovereign and the international community has the *right* to intervene in the internal affairs of states under certain conditions. In the following chapters Ramos applies that approach to specific issues: counterterrorism, human rights, and WMD.

Considering the global terrorism, Ramos takes the case of Afghanistan and assesses official statements from interveners (U.S. and UK) as well as non-interveners (Russia and China), before and after the military intervention. The case of Afghanistan is important for several reasons but primarily because it is the first international intervention that violated the sovereignty of a state because of its failure to comply with international counterterrorism norms. Somalia is taken as an example to examine the relationship between human rights and state sovereignty; again, statements from interveners (France and the UK) are contrasted statements from non-interveners (China and Russia). According to Ramos, the Somalia case is a first as the international community united not for geostrategic interests but moral concerns--to address humanitarian needs and establish order.

Lastly, Ramos examines the military intervention in Iraq to illustrate the link between WMD proliferation and state sovereignty. This time arguments from coalition members, the U.S. and the UK are juxtaposed with those of non-intervening Russia and France. The intervention in Iraq also established a precedent because "there had been no previous military attempts by a coalition of states to thwart a state's progress in this area." The main finding of the author is sovereignty rests somewhere between absolute state sovereignty and the zero state sovereignty of world government--contingent sovereignty. In this scheme when a state fails to fulfill certain obligations a military intervention becomes possible and is usually undertaken. Besides Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, Ramos has examined the cases of the Libya intervention, the Lockerbie bombing, the 9/11 attacks, the attempted assassination of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Rwanda, and Bosnia, along with others.

In summary, Jennifer M. Ramos provides an interdisciplinary approach for understanding how normative changes occurs and a trajectory for the future of sovereignty. She successfully covers a wide range of official documents and examines them under her data set. The notion of sovereignty is revealed to be dynamic, and the actions of states affect the context and application of norms. When the necessary conditions for normative change are met, interventions contribute to redefine norms, specifically sovereignty. Regarding the three different cases, Ramos concludes with the counterintuitive observation that the "more arduous and costly the intervention, the more contingent sovereignty was reinforced". When faced with difficulty, Ramos finds that political leaders will defend their an intervention with its principles, thus strengthening the transcendent norms of contingent sovereignty. Ramos's work, while a thorough introduction to the concept of sovereignty and its present-day applications, would have benefitted from examining the concept through the lens of public opinion rather than solely through official state discourses. Nevertheless, students of IR would be well-advised to add to it their library.