

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN IR NOW ARE QUESTIONS TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Stephen D. Krasner

Stanford University

Stephen Krasner took part in the 8th Congress of Russian Political Science Association in Moscow (December 8-9, 2018) devoted to issues of development policy, state and world order. On the margins of the Congress he was so kind to give an interview to the managing editor of our Journal. Maxim Kharkevich.

Maxim Kharkevich (M.K.) I reviewed your recent publications in journals and it looks like you are involved in a project by Thomas Risse on studying limited statehood. How do you view the interaction between inside and outside, between the domestic state structures and outside international structures? What is more influential now – the domestic issues or the international ones?

Stephen Krasner (S.K.) I do think that domestic issues are more important than the international ones. I think that traditionally international politics has been about state-to-state relations and it's been very much complicated by, I think, two developments that occurred since 1945. One was decolonization, which led to the creation of many states which had quite limited resources and artificial boundaries. And the second development is this principle of sovereignty, which has developed in Europe over several hundred years, is regarded as something unalterable. So, you have this situation, in which boundaries are fixed, where in the past places got conquered all the time. French conquered Alsace and Rein in 1648 and Germans conquered them in 1870 and then French took them back after World War I. So, boundaries changed frequently. Boundaries are fixed, and decolonization has produced many states with relatively weak resources. So rather than having organic development of state institutions that occurred in Europe, many states in developing world look at the things they should do and it's a very long list – things like social security, minimum wage, building infrastructure – things that have been developed in Europe only over the period of several hundred years and been developed in the states that had capacity to do that. Now the problem is that many states with quite limited capacity have accepted a range of responsibilities which they simply don't have resources to fulfil. One of my colleagues now in George Washington University Martha Finnemore has written about the fact that every state now has something like national

science foundation, even states that have no scientists. I think that this is a huge problem that developing countries have. But I still think that the domestic factors are much more important than international ones.

M.K. Doesn't the agenda of international relations now look much more like a domestic agenda?

S.K. I agree with you. I think that developing world has really had much too ambitious an agenda. The most countries in the world, if you look at the places, the areas of limited statehood, which is Risse's term, are countries that are closed-access exclusive international regimes. Political leaders stay in power there because they are able to pay off people that are critically important for them. I think that best that we can hope for in these closed-access regimes is good enough governance, not good governance. You can't get rid of corruption entirely, but some kinds of corruption, for instance, patronage and clientelism I think is better than gross theft in which the money leaves the country. I think unless the results of elections don't match the distribution of weapons in the country, they won't be honored. So, it's better to view elections as ratifying agreements that have already been made among elites. If we speak about United States, it's quite difficult for American public to buy this. The American public thinks that places should be just like us, good governance, not good enough governance. But I think it'd better if we aim at good enough governance, because I think most places in the world are never going to become sort of modern prosperous states given the incentives that exist for political leaders.

M.K. There is an idea of universal laws of development supported by such figures like Francis Fukuyama.

S.K. To quote Tolstoy all happy marriages are happy in the same way, but unhappy are different in many different ways. But I do think this idea of reaching Madisonian sweet spot, having a spot, where government is effective and also constrained. It is something that you really need, that's critical for development. If the government is ineffective, situation is just chaotic, you're in a kind of situation which Hobbs was preaching against. On the other hand, when the government is able to effectively control everything and can act in arbitrary way, the development is also very difficult, because people are too anxious about you know being killed or having their property taken away from them. So, reaching a Madisonian sweet spot I think that is something that countries actually need to aim for. How do you actually get there? There may be several different paths. But getting there is where you want to be.

M.K. Building on that, let's look at the possibility for development of non-Western IR theory.

S.K. I definitely think, it's possible. But I think the real challenge in contemporary period is not state-to-state relations, which we actually have a pretty good grasp of, but it's a situation of how stronger countries alter domestic political institutions in weaker countries, it's the problem of state building or it's a problem that Risse refers to as a limited statehood. And there I think we should have a set of limited objectives. I think that a mistake that United States has made over its history is to try to do too many things that are too ambitious. We would be much better if we had more modest objectives. Because you can't possibly be successful as an external state builder unless your interests are complementary or compatible with the interests of local elites. And even in these rare situations, where countries are kind in between being open and closed access – Brazil and Mexico are two countries that come to mind – you have to know a

lot about those countries to actually understand where you can place your bets. All the recent developments in Brazil – Lula ended up in jail, he was actually prosecuted and Bolsonaro was elected – were very surprising for me, though I'm not an expert on Brazil. But I think you really have to know a lot about a place which I think external actors rarely were able to do, to be able to place bets on the right people.

M.K. In 2013 in a journal called *European Journal of International Relations*, there was a special issue devoted to the question of the end of IR theory with the question mark. Is there an end to the IR? And their argument was that if there's an end to something, this is the end to metatheory and the predominance of middle range theories of international relations. Do you agree with it?

S.K. I think if you look empirically in what's happening in scholarship that's definitely accurate. This sort of Realism-Liberalism-Constructivism-Marxism debate I think it did end. I think it ended with a triumph of Liberalism. But people are skeptical to those kind of metatheories and they're much more comfortable with middle range theories and even smaller theories. And you know the problem is – here is the real trick and it's really difficult one to actually manage – can you get a definitive empirical evidence about something which is actually important. Many of my colleagues are doing experiments, where they're (because it's so inexpensive now) asking people questions on the web. You can get large samples, thousands of people. The question is – do those experiments have external validity? Are questions asked on the web really reflect what people actually believe – that's one central problem. And if you actually can get something which looks like an experiment which has external validity than you tell something important about the world. So, I think that as you're describing a middle range theory and even small theory that deals with smaller issues definitely where IR is going. But I also think that the most important questions now are questions which traditionally have been associated with comparative politics.

M.K. Why do you think the Great Debates have ended?

S.K. Because I think, this is my personal view, liberalism won. This idea that world wasn't zero-sum, that you were really looking for the situations in which agreements can make everybody better off, the problem was getting to the Pareto frontier and moving along it, I think this position triumphed. That's actually why metatheory ended. If you were talking with someone who rejects this kind of isms debate, they would say no, they just ended up, because they were inconclusive.

M.K. Is there any connection between the fate of those metatheoretical debates and the absence wars among great powers?

S.K. It's possible. I think that if you look at the developments over the last sixty years since the end of WWII, it's not only that boundaries haven't changed, but it's also the longest period in history of no-war among great powers. Well, why is that? There's lots of debate. One idea is that people's fundamental attitudes have changed. I think that nuclear weapons are extremely important. It's clear that decision makers think if you actually have a war among nuclear armed states, it would be incredibly destructive. Before WWII you might have said that it would have been impossible that Germany could conquer France in a few weeks and conquer half of Russia. But of course, the Germans did that, and many-many Russians died. Even though American President wanted to enter the war, until Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor it didn't happen. But

since 1945 we haven't had a war among great powers and I think the most compelling explanation for that is that nuclear weapons are not just incredibly destructive, they are unambiguously destructive. Will there be a war between China and United States? I doubt it, because it's too dangerous. Will Chinese engage in salami tactics, as long as they continue to grow economically? Yeah, I think so. But I think they'll be cautious.

M.K. Now moving to, I believe, traditional questions for you about the sovereignty. Is it more or less of organized hypocrisy now than it used be?

S.K. That's a good question. I don't actually know. But there's a lot of organized hypocrisy. The rules are very clear, but if you take this rule of Westphalian sovereignty, there's been lots of internal interventions in the affairs of other states. And I think that's been pretty consistent, because policymakers when they are looking at the options that are available to them... Well, if you can manipulate an election or manipulate an official or get more foreign assistance, what can stop you from doing it? At the same time, nobody wants some alternative system. So, I think rulers in weak states are very powerful in defending principles of sovereignty. And I think rulers in stronger states don't want this obligation to demean, because most places don't make any difference. I think as the interests of states change, their actual behavior changes, even if rhetoric doesn't change. Take for instance the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. They're investing billions of dollars in other countries and there are hundreds of thousands and millions of Chinese citizens living in other countries. They're going to start worrying about what's happening in these places. They don't want their people arbitrarily killed. I think their rhetoric will stay the same. I think they'll stay big defenders of sovereignty, but they'll be violating it in practice right and left.

M.K. Is there any possibility, or maybe it's actually happening right now, of not national sovereignty, but transnational or even supranational sovereignty?

S.K. I'm skeptical. The thing that's happened in Europe, the formation of European Union was unique and reflected the situation in Germany – it was the most powerful state in Europe, after the Nazi experience what did it mean to say you're German. I think Germany wanted to bury itself in Europe and France was happy to have Germany do that. Now of course everybody would have said 10 or 15 years ago Europe would be wider and deeper, with Brexit it's not exact. The British still might take it back. But it's not clear that it will happen. I think that situation in Europe where the most powerful state was also this huge supporter of an international agreement which limited its own freedom of actions, it's not something that it's going to be replicated in other parts of the world. The situation of United States in North America or Russia in Central Asia – why would you limit your own freedom of action, when you're the most powerful state in the region? I don't think that will happen. I think Europe is really unique.

M.K. I ran across, I think it was in Martha Finnemore's edited book "Back to Basics" that you were not happy with your original definition of international regimes. This is a classical definition now. Why you are not happy with it?

S.K. I believe now the way you think about international regimes really depends on what metatheoretical perspective you have. So, if your metatheoretical perspective was liberalism, you'd reach agreements, and agreements would last for long time, even if your interests changed. If you're liberal, you'd say international regimes are kind of laws and principles and decision-making procedures which are developed to help people get to the Pareto frontier. If you're real-

ist, the world looks more zero-sum, you'd say regimes are principles, laws and decision-making procedures which are developed by the most powerful states in international system. If you're constructivist, you would say, one possible definition – regimes are principles and rules which are deeply imbedded so that people can't imagine violating them, really taken for granted. So, I was dissatisfied with the definition. Not because I didn't know what I was doing, when I wrote it originally, but because I think the definition I use depends on metatheoretical perspective that I have.

M.K. How would you formulate the definition now?

S.K. If you have to choose one thing, I think that realism is the right thing to choose. So, I think you have the set of rules, which powerful states impose on others. They last as long as their power lasts. It doesn't last much beyond that. If you take the United States, we haven't even ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Even though the presidents wanted to ratify it, the Senate never ratified it. And yet those are the principles which US articulates if you look at the South China Sea. But things change. If China becomes more powerful, I think they will ratify it.

M.K. There's the problem of formation of international regime in the sphere of cyber or information security. It's a very hot topic right now in Russia. What do you think about it? Is it possible now?

S.K. I don't have much understanding of this. I don't understand the technical aspects of the problem. And number of people who really understand the technical aspects of the problem and public policy is pretty limited. I think it's possible. But it doesn't mean it will actually happen. I don't really know. I'm very uncertain, because I feel that I don't have enough technical grasp of what is actually going on.

M.K. Getting back to the interstate relations. Interstate wars are practically absent now, though it depends how you define war. But still there are lots of conflicts, which are called societal conflicts. Might it be that studying interstate types of conflicts is outdated. Should we talk more about these societal conflicts? And how are they related – the interstate and societal conflicts?

S.K. I think that the societal conflicts are very important, especially in poorly governed states. They're important, because there have been developments in the past that severed the ability to do harm and underlying capacities, which were very much related. When we have nuclear weapons or certainly biological weapons or may be even cyber weapons, but I'm not sure about that, there really is a severing between underlining capabilities on the one hand and ability to do harm on the other.

There were about 400 diseases in the last seventy years that jumped from animals to humans. And diseases that we have now like HIV/AIDS or Ebola are hard to transmit, because they require contact with bodily fluids. Imagine at one point these diseases are easier transmitted through the air. That would be unintentional. Intentionally with new technologies now people can put together a smallpox genome relatively easily, which is something that wouldn't have been impossible twenty years ago. I think that societal conflicts are really the most problematic and I do think they're problematic, because you have this disconnect between capabilities on the one hand and ability to do harm on the other. In 1890 you could have killed twenty, thirty or forty people by throwing sticker of dynamite in a theater. Now you can kill hundreds

of thousands or millions of people with biological weapon. It's hard to acquire nuclear weapons. But Steve Coll, who is the writer for the New Yorker, in his last book about Pakistan and Afghanistan he talks about this one incident when some Pakistani naval officers actually intended to steal nuclear weapons and bring them onboard ships. They weren't successful. But you know that's unlikely, but they could've been successful.

M.K. And probably my last question – I always ask this question, when I take interviews. Recent influential book you've read that you would suggest for my students.

S.K. There's an interesting book by Robert Kagan called "Jungle Grows Back". He talks about the cost of the current administration in the way that it dismantled the existing international order. I mean these rules are highly imperfect, but they have worked pretty well and now we throw them out the window for no good reason.

M.K. Thank you very much.

S.K. Thank you.

About the author:

Stephen D. Krasner – Graham H. Stuart Professor of International Relations, Stanford University. 616 Serra Mall, Encina Hall West, Stanford, CA 94305-6044, USA. E-mail: skrasner@stanford.edu.

НАИБОЛЕЕ ВАЖНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ В НАУКЕ О МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ СЕГОДНЯ – ЭТО ТРАДИЦИОННЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЙ ПОЛИТОЛОГИИ

Стивен Д. Краснер
DOI 10.24833/2071-8160-2018-6-63-7-12

Стэнфордский университет

Стивен Краснер принял участие в VIII Всероссийском конгрессе политологов «Политика развития, государство и мировой порядок», который проходил в Москве (8-9 декабря 2018 г.). На полях Конгресса он любезно дал интервью шеф-редактору нашего журнала Максиму Харкевичу.

Об авторе:

Стивен Д. Краснер – профессор в области международных отношений, Стэнфордский университет. 616 Serra Mall, Encina Hall West, Stanford, CA 94305-6044, USA.
E-mail: skrasner@stanford.edu.