Preface

When Hans Morgenthau reformulated realism for modern scholars, he began with the concept of power. Politics was about pursuing interests and in international politics interests were defined in terms of power. Just as wealth was the goal and domain of economists, so power was the goal and domain of international politics. By defining politics as the pursuit of power and by conflating power with interests, Morgenthau set the stage for decades of debate about these two terms and the proper relationship between them.

Both power and interest turned out to be elusive concepts, and figuring out how to use them as effective guides to analysis or policy proved difficult. In the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of international relations scholars tried to make sense of a failed US policy in Southeast Asia; few could find a material basis for US interest in Vietnam or, equally problematic, explain US military failure against an apparently far weaker opponent. Simultaneously, the fundamental building blocks of foreign policy analysis, states, were themselves being challenged by an array of new organizations, both public and private—multinational corporations, international organizations, domestic insurgencies. The world was increasingly messy and it was hard to imagine that power and interests were, as Morgenthau had claimed, one and the same. By the late 1980s, understanding varied state interests—interests beyond simple power maximization—had become the central concern of international relations scholars whose focus now was on the strategic interaction of rational actors in pursuit of diverse goals. This new focus on divergent interests and bargaining tended to downplay power and the power asymmetries between states that had been the backbone of earlier realist scholars.

No scholar better exemplifies the intellectual challenges foisted on Morgenthau’s

---

1 “The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.” Politics Among Nations (1960): 5.
2 With over 50,000 dead, it was hard to defend the later argument of failure as a result of a lack of commitment.
disciples than Stephen Krasner. Throughout his career he has wrestled with realism’s promises and limitations. He used concepts of relative power as the basis of his analysis of foreign policy and international institutions in the 1970s and 1980s, but came to question the fundamentals of state sovereignty in the 1990s. By the turn of the century, he was abandoning his neorealist colleagues and, pointing out that there was a contradiction between realist ontology based on fully sovereign autonomous states and realism’s assumption of anarchy in which states can further their interests in any way they choose. In an anarchical world, altering the domestic authority structures of other states and violating their autonomy, could be more attractive strategies than war or diplomacy, the conventional tools of realist statecraft among sovereigns.

In honor of Krasner’s scholarship, the authors in this volume were asked to reflect on, the role power plays in contemporary politics and how a power politics approach is still relevant. Contributors largely agree on the centrality of power but diverge substantially on the ways power is manifest and should be measured and understood. Many of our authors confronted the same intellectual dilemmas as Krasner in struggling to define power and its relationship to interests, yet their responses are different. Together, these essays explore new ways of thinking about power’s role in contemporary politics and demonstrate the concepts continued relevance for both policy and theory.

Stephen Krasner: Power and Realism in a Changing World

Inspired by the ideas of Hirschman, Morgenthau and Carr, Krasner has always been a prominent defender of realism and the importance of power understood in material terms, whether military or economic. Power was central to international politics for Krasner, and he took realist premises very seriously. Yet realist frameworks rarely provided a complete explanation for outcomes, in Krasner’s analyses, and much of his work involved understanding power’s role in situations not well explained by realism. If states seek power, why do we see cooperation? If hegemony promotes cooperation why does cooperation continue in the face of America’s decline? Do states actually pursue their national interests or do domestic structures and values derail the rational pursuit of material objectives? Krasner’s explanations were as diverse as were the problems. They
pushed, to use his phrase, “the limits of realism.” For some problems, Krasner hewed the realist line: he argued that relevant actors were usually, but not always, states and that outcomes were determined by the way states defined their interests and the distribution of power they faced in pursuing their goals. But during his long career, he never settled for a simple explanation of the national interest. Instead, he argued that a state’s behavior had both material and ideational elements and in the more contemporary period, that non-state actors and failed states had altered the basic structure of the international system which had, for several hundred years, been defined by the distribution of capabilities among major powers. Krasner believed that markets were a constant and powerful constraint on state action, but ultimately it was state power that was the necessary requisite for markets to function smoothly. And though he paid much attention to the material basis of state power, he understood the independent importance of ideas or cognitive beliefs and the challenge this admission posed to a straight power-politics approach. Overall, his explanations were lucid and broad based, setting down a gauntlet for others to challenge.

To differing degrees, the arguments made by the authors in this volume speak to one of three themes that run through Krasner’s work: state power and hegemony; the relationship between states and markets; conceptions of the nation state in international politics. These themes appeared regularly in Krasner’s scholarship as he wrestled, over his career, with fundamental questions of inter-state politics. As the papers in the volume will suggest, they remain important launching points for current discussions of international politics.

*State Power, Hegemony and Cooperation Theory*

Initially, like Morgenthau, Krasner gave pride of place to sovereign states as his unit of analysis; unlike Morgenthau he constantly re-examined that assumption. He recognized, especially in his work on sovereignty, that realist assumptions about state autonomy were empirically and theoretically problematic. It was impossible to understand how power mattered without considering the interests of rulers, political

---

3 Regimes book.
4 DNI, Structural Conflict
5 Cite 2004 International Security article; 2005 Foreign Affairs article with Carlos Pascual
leaders, rather than states as unified actors. Early work focused on a core realist concern—the effects of state power. In 1976, Krasner attempted to reinvigorate realism, which had been challenged by arguments about transnationalism and interdependence via the study of the international trading regime. (WP:1976) Noting that the world had alternated between periods of openness and closure, Krasner argued that the nature of the trade regime was a product of the distribution of power among states. Contrary to the prevailing wisdom, open trade or a liberal trading regime was not a natural outcome of domestic interests or economic ideas; rather, it was an outcome of hegemony. When the distribution of state power was skewed and a hegemonic state was rising, that state had an interest in providing the leadership necessary to open world markets. Given its technological advantage, open trade served the rising hegemon’s economic interest. The argument relied on Hirschman, who showed that trade dependence could be used as a source of power, and Kindleberger, who argued that a hegemonic nation should be willing to provide the collective good of an open trade regime.

As the field increasingly looked to economics as a model for theory building, what earlier scholars had thought of as “leadership” by great powers was subsumed into a larger conversation about “providing public goods.” Market failure rather than conflict and war came to be viewed as the exemplary problem in international relations. Trying to understand when and why nations provide international collective goods became a critical research agenda in the 1980s. Scholars wondered whether hegemony was really necessary to create and maintain open trade and monetary stability or whether other groupings of states would be willing to expend resources for a collective good. The result was a lively research debate on the more general issue of explaining cooperation. The cooperation focus, though, papered over the role that power asymmetries played even in the provision of collective goods. Cooperation almost always produced uneven benefits and strong states had no interest, theoretically or practically, in being shortchanged. Fifteen years later, Krasner would re-visit the puzzle of international cooperation and regime creation to explore this distribution of benefits in an article that

---

6 Keohane and Nye Power and Interdependence, Transnational Relations IO
7 Insert notes to Hirschman, Kindleberger, and relevant SDK work.
8 E.g. Duncan Snidal, IO.
9 E.g. Keohane, After Hegemony
appeared in *World Politics* in 1991. Here, he took up the examination of the regime for international communications. Yes, he argued, the regime was of broad benefit, but Krasner argued that its particular form reflected the power and desires of its strong state creators, not abstract functional needs. Reacting to the liberal institutional rationale for the creation of international institutions, Krasner argued that the organization of regimes was less about how to solve some common problem faced by the signatories to the agreement and more about how the explicit rules favored particular members. While agreeing that regimes did make members better off, he returned to his realist roots, and argued that that there were multiple places on the ‘pareto frontier’ that cooperation could occur. It was power, he suggested, and not other institutional variables that determined the particular choice of regime rules and the degree to which the regime re-enforced the interests of particular members.

Further, recognizing that the international system looked little like politics within states always made Krasner skeptical of the concept of international authority. Authority, or rightful rule only made sense when thinking about domestic politics. In international affairs there has been no such legitimacy and thus no such authority.

Krasner, however, had not confronted fully the issue of authority in his path breaking work on international regimes. In 1982, he assembled a group of authors, four of whom join us in this volume, to explain the roots of international cooperation. Fueling much of the later work on international institutions, Krasner defined regimes as principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge. The definition was one agreed on through group consensus. The main inspiration came from John Ruggie. In a later essay reflecting on this experience Krasner argued that if he were to re-do the regimes volume he would have offered three different definitions of regimes reflecting different theoretical perspectives. For realists international regimes could be defined as principles, norms, rules, and decisions making procedures reflecting the preferences of the powerful; for liberals, principles, norms, rules, an decision-making procedures designed to solve market failure problems, and for

---

10 Others, notably Gruber, argued that regimes were not just about the division of benefits favoring the powerful but that some regime members were made worse off.
constructivist some variant of the definition originally proposed in 1981. While eschewing order of the type found within states, the volume established the existence of cooperative arrangements; states did not live in a world that was “nasty, brutish and short” but rather, there were multiple levels of international institutions that, along with states, exerted influence.

**States and Markets: Explaining Foreign Economic Policy**

The politics of economic policy making was another theme Krasner explored throughout his career. His earliest work looked at the politics of the international coffee cartel, foreshadowing his later work on international regimes. Much of his effort in the 1970s went into understanding American economic policy. In the special issue of *International Organization* in 1977, ‘Between Power and Plenty,’ he offered the first of what he would label a “statist” view to explain US commercial and monetary policy in the post-WWII era. In monetary policy, he argued, the state was ‘strong,’ that is, able to develop a coherent view of its interests and to isolate policy-making from particular interest group pressures; in commercial policy, however, policy was politicized and thus constrained. The state in commercial policy making was ‘weak’ because domestic groups had a voice and moved policy away from what would have been optimal for the country as a whole. Thus, he concluded that in some domains foreign economic policymaking was akin to security politics: policy makers’ conception of the national interest explained policy outcomes, and both interests and power were consistent with a realist view. Not so for other areas of economic policymaking, like trade, where Krasner found that power and interest did not necessarily co-vary. Policy was a result of the self-interested actions of domestic groups and the resulting vector could deviate from national interest as deduced from the international power structure.

These ideas were developed more fully in *Defending the National Interest*, where he again looks at the American “state.” Looking more closely at US policy on raw material acquisition, he found that at times, policy resulted from a careful consideration of interests; as often, however, the pattern of policy intervention made little sense in the

---

11 Krasner, Intro Power, States, and Sovereignty
absence of cognitive ideas held by central decision makers.\textsuperscript{12} To explain this inconsistency, he turned to the work of Franz Schurmann.\textsuperscript{13} Schurmann was not constrained by a realist vision of interests as a set of material goals; rather he suggested that state interests could be a combination of both material and ideational factors.\textsuperscript{14} Krasner concluded that the US, in its hegemonic position, could be oriented toward both material and ideology goals—the two co-existed and shaped US policy. Ideological goals were likely to be most important when a state’s material interests were secure. In these cases, a hegemon could be tempted to follow policies based on ideological objectives, without careful weighing of material costs and benefits. Thus, there was no reason to search for a materialist goal in the minds of central decision makers who embarked on the Vietnam War. It was a war of ideology, oriented against communism. Not everything was ideologically oriented; other policies that assured the US access to needed raw materials were materialist based. But being powerful meant that a nation could attempt to maximize both material and ideological goals.

\textit{The status of nation states}

Finding that ideological variables explained some aspects of US foreign policy led Krasner to later explore more fully the role of cognitive beliefs so as to better understand the ontological basis of the nation state. In a series of articles beginning in the mid-1980s,\textsuperscript{15} Krasner argued that states were embedded in a larger set of global notions about sovereignty, in which international law and practice empowered nations with rights that had little to do with their intrinsic character. Drawing on work in sociology by Nils Brunsson, Krasner concluded that the system of sovereign states, was a form of “organized hypocrisy.”\textsuperscript{16} Nations were not all equally sovereign and many were without the core attribute of being able to defend the autonomy of their domestic authority structures. The hypocrisy ran deep. Nations that gave lip service to the norm of state

\textsuperscript{12} See: DNI; US commercial and monetary policy (1977); State Power and the Structure of international trade (1976); coffee article, structural conflict.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Logic of World Power}, 1974.
\textsuperscript{14} Krasner would conclude that interests are determined by the material aims of a country’s social and physical existence while ideological concerns related to more fundamental questions of beliefs about order, security and justice. (DNI:334)
\textsuperscript{15} Ideas and foreign policy; IS; 50th issue of IO
\textsuperscript{16} Nils Brunsson, \textit{Organized Hypocrisy}. 
sovereignty could be quick to ignore its precepts. For Krasner, decoupling the idea of sovereignty from the actual practices of statehood in the international system was necessary to explain the behavior of political leaders and outcomes in the international system. Sovereignty was not an organic package: a state could have some elements of sovereignty such as recognition in international law and not others, such as the ability to effectively govern its own territory.

The study of the historical construction of the nation state system led Krasner to consider more closely whether or not and when social ideas constructed states as actors as well as other aspects of the international system. Whereas early in his career, Krasner saw state action as dominated by material concerns and rational action; now he considered whether other mechanisms were at work. Norms, values and identities could not be ignored although they were weaker in the international environment than in domestic. At least for domestic politics path dependence could be critical; choices made at critical historical moments could set future trajectories for state development.  

While taking norms seriously, he would ultimately conclude that they did not dominate behavior as suggested by constructivist approaches. Krasner agreed that norms constrained behavior but in a more strategic than ‘taken for granted’ sense. Norms were ‘hooks’ in that a leader could mobilize a domestic population around some set of social ideas. The international system, comparatively however, had fewer norms that states adhered to. Domestic society is ‘thickly normed’ and the international environment ‘thinly normed.’ Material power is more important in the latter than the former.

Krasner served in the Bush administration in 2001 and 2002 and then again from 2005 until the middle of 2007. During this period, state-building was a major concern of the American government. State building explicitly involved violating the Westphalian/Vattelian sovereignty of states that were weak both domestically and internationally. Realism hardly served as much of a guide under conditions in which underlying material capabilities in states and their ability to do harm had become decoupled. North Korea could kill hundreds of thousands of people in neighboring countries whose GDP’s dwarf its own. What mattered was not the international distribution of power but rather the domestic capacity and ideological predispositions of

17 Comparative Political Studies and Comparative Politics (1984, 88)
weak or failed states. Krasner’s work both before, during and after his time in government attempted to come to grips with the challenge of creating effective and benign (from an American perspective) domestic authority structures in target states; a challenge that involved both power and norms.18

In part, his return to his realist roots was a result of his time in government. Confronted with an increasing number of ‘failed’ states, US policy was concerned with how the US could use its influence to build more efficient institutions in these nations. State building obviously creates a realist world, but with a twist. The state system under construction was not populated by equally sovereign states. Stranger still, the interests of the powerful were now to create state structures in the weak. Realism was now being turned on its head! The interests of the powerful were not only in the well being of people in its territory but as well in the well being of less powerful states. Power was everywhere and it was unconstrained. Power was not ‘soft’ but at heart, it was as blatant and self-interested as Morgenthau had predicted. What had changed, however, was the legitimate conception of the goal of that power.

Re-conceptualizing Power

The theme that runs throughout Krasner’s work is the importance of power. Morgenthau saw power and interests as associated terms—a nation’s interests derived from its relative power in the international system. Power, he argued was the defining element of international politics. But for Krasner, power existed in multiple arenas and as our author’s re-enforce, mandating that researchers ask both about who has power and what is being sort. These are the building blocs of contemporary analysis.

Although begun as a tribute to Krasner’s scholarship, the editors of the volume realized that the steady theme in his scholarship, power, was under-studied in the more contemporary period. Changes in methodology and an emphasis on game theoretic arguments during the 1980s and 1990s have tended to sideline power. The analytic action in those frameworks lies in the specification of divergent interests, the existence, or lack thereof, of “win sets,” and strategic environment in which actors interact. Fundamental

18 Organized Hypocrisy; “Shared Sovereignty: Intl Security 2004; Responsible Sovereignty, Policy Perspectives 2010
power asymmetries fade into the background. Similarly, the field’s preoccupation with regime type, and the policy community’s enthusiasm for democratization, have obscured power’s role. Our hope is to use this opportunity to once again cast light on what we suggest is the fundamental attribute of politics, that is, the role of power in international life.

To focus on power is necessarily to focus analysis on inequality. In most, if not all, forms, power exists as “asymmetry”; it exists because actors are unequal in endowments or situation. Our authors, to some extent, consider a world of inherently unequal actors, whether states or not, and consider in what ways this inequality explains political outcomes. In this sense, we return to the fundamental questions addressed by Morgenthau a generation ago. Today, however, our authors suggest that we consider multiple pathways through which power may be exerted. To illustrate, we organize the volume around three hypothetical pathways. In one, power is exerted through the international system, in a second, through domestic politics and in a third, through the ability of the international system to shape domestic structures.