

# State "Sovereignty" and International Cooperation for Enclosed Coastal Seas Protection

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Empirical evidence suggests that the most powerful states command control of more physical resources than any previous type of social organization. What then, restricts state action? The purpose of this inquiry is twofold. First, I will examine and identify some normative limitations on state autonomy to act. Second, I argue that these factors which constrain and shape state autonomy, together with the international relations discourse in which they are imbedded, suggest a number of problems for multinational environmental cooperation to protect enclosed seas.

Through a brief history of the construction of the concept of sovereignty, and an examination of the evolution of its theoretical and behavioral norms, I demonstrate that sovereignty is a historically and socially constructed norm - not an essential (or "natural") characteristic of how the world is or must be. Sovereignty is one of many socially constructed norms in, and about, international relations. I argue, in line with sociological work on institutions, that sovereignty competes with these other norms and is altered over time by this competition.

The point here would be to demonstrate how viewing sovereignty as an evolving norm alters traditional discourse about state capacities and autonomy. For example, as a norm sovereignty is not a thing or commodity to be "preserved" or "given up," but a conceptual construct to be "reconceptualized," "reconstructed" or "deconstructed." I suggest some ways in which this conception of state sovereignty is compatible with changing environmental norms.

Secondly, empirical evidence in the work of scholars like Robert Jackson and Joel Migdal is utilized to demonstrate that "state sovereignty" is very different in both theory and practice for different states or types of states. I argue that our failure to take this into account when designing "regimes" for the protection of things like enclosed coastal seas presents a serious challenge to their success.