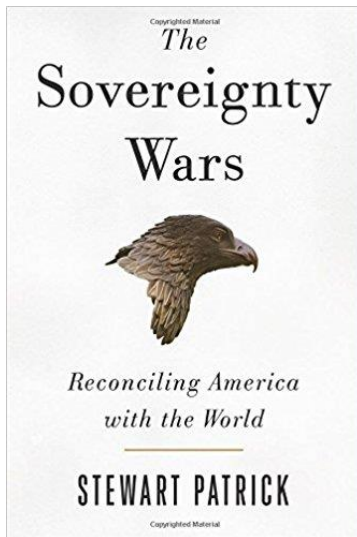


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Teaching Notes

The Sovereignty Wars: Reconciling America with the World

By **Stewart M. Patrick**

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While the United States has been the world's greatest champion of international cooperation, it has often resisted rules it wishes to see binding for other countries. In *The Sovereignty Wars*, Stewart Patrick defines what is at stake in the U.S. sovereignty debate. To protect U.S. sovereignty while advancing American interests, he asserts that the nation must occasionally make “sovereignty bargains” by trading its freedom of independent action in exchange for greater influence through expanded international cooperation.

Summary

Few ideas are as sacred in American politics as sovereignty. From the founding of the republic, through the rejection of the League of Nations, to the present day, Americans have grappled with how to reconcile their natural desire for independence with the need for effective international cooperation. Unfortunately, contemporary debates on how to defend and exercise sovereignty are confused and overheated. We often hear that U.S. sovereignty is under siege and that global bodies are unaccountable and are dominating the will of the American people. Contrary to such common assertions, the United States is not in danger of subordinating its Constitution and system of self-government to international law and organizations. Globalization *does* require Americans to think more clearly about sovereignty's different dimensions and to consider “sovereignty bargains,” whereby the nation voluntarily trades off a measure of its freedom of action to cooperate with other

like-minded countries. This logic applies to multiple global challenges, from nuclear proliferation to financial instability, climate change, and pandemic disease.

Combining colorful anecdotes and rigorous analysis, *The Sovereignty Wars* shows how America's split personality has influenced contemporary U.S. attitudes toward international law, global security, multilateral trade, border security, and international organizations. The book explains how the election of President Donald J. Trump accelerated these trends, bringing to office an avowed nationalist committed to placing "America First," reasserting U.S. national sovereignty concerns in the administration's attitudes toward multilateral trade agreements, traditional alliances, the United Nations, border control, and the Paris climate change agreement.

The book aims to provide policymakers, scholars, and the interested public with a less alarmist, and more sober, appreciation of what is actually at stake in the sovereignty debate. It makes clear that multilateral cooperation is typically the only means for the United States to control its sovereign destiny in an age of global threats and opportunities.

Read an excerpt from [*The Sovereignty Wars*](#).

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate courses:

- International Relations
- U.S. Foreign Policy
- The History of American Foreign Relations
- Global Governance

Discussion and Essay Questions

Courses on International Relations

1. What is the concept of sovereignty and what is its significance in world politics?
2. How has the concept of sovereignty changed over time, and what have been the implications of these shifts for state behavior and world politics?
3. Some describe the principle of sovereignty as resilient and fundamental to world order. Others consider it obsolete and on the ropes. Which of these perspectives comes closer to the mark?
4. What is the doctrine of "contingent sovereignty"? Under what circumstances, if any, might it apply?
5. Is the principle of state sovereignty compatible with the global promotion and defense of human rights?
6. Is the principle of sovereignty an obstacle to addressing pressing global problems like climate change?

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy

1. How have U.S. history and political culture informed American conceptions of sovereignty?
2. How unique is the U.S. attitude toward sovereignty compared to attitudes of other nations?

3. How does the structure of government created under the U.S. Constitution enable or constrain the U.S. approach to international cooperation?
4. What is the relationship between U.S. law and international law under the Constitution?
5. Do emerging global threats require adjustments to traditional U.S. conceptions of sovereignty?
6. What challenges does globalization pose to the substance and exercise of U.S. sovereignty?
7. Are international organizations like the United Nations compatible with U.S. sovereignty? Why or why not?

Courses on the History of American Foreign Relations

1. How did the founders of the American republic conceive of popular sovereignty?
2. How did the U.S. Constitution apportion the people's sovereignty?
3. What role did the topic of sovereignty play in the U.S. debate over the League of Nations—and the Senate's eventual rejection of U.S. membership?
4. How did the Roosevelt and Truman administrations seek to reconcile U.S. sovereignty with membership in the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions, as well as subsequent membership in the North American Treaty Organization (NATO)?
5. How did the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama conceive of the trade-offs between sovereignty and international cooperation?

Courses on Global Governance

1. Is global governance compatible with an international system based on the sovereign territorial state, or are the two fundamentally in tension?
2. What challenges do contemporary trends in global governance pose for sovereign states?
3. What can sovereign states do to make international bodies more accountable to their citizens?
4. Should structures of global governance emphasize representation, based on the principle of sovereign equality of states, or instead effectiveness, based on the interests of the most capable actors?
5. Should non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations and private corporations, have equal standing with sovereign states in structures of global governance?
6. What would be the benefits and costs, as well as risks and opportunities, of moving from a sovereign state-based global system toward something resembling a world state?

Further Projects

Op-Ed

Write an 800-word opinion piece arguing that one of the following poses a threat (or, alternatively, poses no threat), to American sovereignty: the World Trade Organization; United Nations; or UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Analytical Essay

Write a 1,500 word essay on one of the following subjects:

1. What are the most important influences on the U.S. conception of sovereignty—and how distinctive is that approach compared to other big powers?
2. From a sovereignty perspective, what attitude should the United States take toward contemporary trends in international law?
3. Does the evolving global threat environment require adjustments in traditional U.S. conceptions and practices of sovereignty?
4. Is it possible for the United States to remain sovereign while integrating itself into the global economy?
5. How does the concept of sovereignty inform current debates over—and potential solutions to—U.S. immigration policy and efforts to preserve border security?
6. What steps can the United States take to ensure that international organizations do not infringe upon U.S. sovereignty?

Speechwriting

In his first speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2017, President Trump invoked the word “sovereignty” on twenty-one occasions. Your job is to respond to his particular vision of sovereignty, as if you were the leader of another nation speaking from the UN podium shortly after the president has spoken. Your speech may be critical, supportive, or mixed in its assessment of the president’s speech. But it should relate your understanding of sovereignty to the global situation as seen from your “own” country, as well as your perceptions of the ideas the U.S. president has advanced.

Supplementary Materials

John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011).

Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: Evolution of an Idea* (Malden, MA: Polity: 2007).

Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Julian Ku and John Yoo, *Taming Globalization: International Law, the U.S. Constitution, and the New World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Karen T. Lifton, “Sovereignty in World Ecopolitics,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 2, (November 1997): 167–194.

Edward C. Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organization 1919-1999* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

Walter A. MacDougal, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

Jeremy A. Rabkin, *Law without Nations? Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Adriana Sinclair and Michael Byers, "When U.S. Scholars Speak of 'Sovereignty,' What Do They Mean?," *Political Studies* 55, no. 2 (2007): 318–340.