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International Law and Sovereignty: Between Legal Obligation and Political Will

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the enduring tension between legal obligation and political will within the framework of international law and state sovereignty. Tracing the historical evolution of sovereignty from the Westphalian model to its modern-day reinterpretation in an era of globalization, human rights, and supranational governance, the study examines how international legal norms often clash with the strategic interests of sovereign states. Theoretical perspectives including natural law, legal positivism, realism, liberalism, and Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) are employed to critically assess how states interpret and navigate their international obligations. By analyzing key legal sources such as treaties, customs, and jus cogens norms alongside institutional mechanisms like the United Nations, International Criminal Court (ICC), and World Trade Organization (WTO), the paper evaluates the enforceability of international law in light of selective compliance and political manipulation by powerful states. Case studies including the U.S. and the ICC, China's rejection of the South China Sea ruling, and humanitarian interventions in Kosovo and Syria highlight the asymmetries in enforcement and the instrumental use of law. The article advocates for norm internalization, civil society engagement, and institutional reforms to bridge the gap between international legal commitments and state behavior. It concludes by proposing a reimagined sovereignty one that balances national autonomy with global legal accountability to meet contemporary transnational challenges.

***Keywords**: International Law, Sovereignty, Legal Obligation, Political Will, ICC, UN, Realism, TWAIL, Global Governance, State Compliance.*

Introduction

International law and sovereignty are the most fundamental concepts of global political order, but the two concepts always seem to be in conflict. The international law can be defined as a set of norms, principles, and rules that regulate relationships of the states and other actors on the planet. It includes treaties, customary practices, general principles of law that are accepted by

civilized countries, and the deductive reasoning of law, found in decisions of the courts and law scholars (Shaw, 2017). Sovereignty, however, refers to the responsibility that each of the states has the absolute control of its territory and its internal activities without being influenced by any other (Krasner, 1999). Conflict between these notions comes when international commitments are put to test which in effect undermines the autonomy of a state in its decision making. Whereas the purpose of international law is to establish order, cooperation and accountability responsibility, sovereignty justifies prerogative of national independence. This dialectic is indicative of a core paradox in international governance, namely how do we balance the legal binding commitment and the political will of a state to adhere to it? The necessity to align these two frameworks grows as the world becomes more and more globalized, and the number of issues that transcend national borders increases (climate change, migration, warfare, etc.) (Dunne & Reus-Smit, 2021).

Concerning the development of sovereignty in comparison with international law, one can go back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 when the principle of non-intervention and territorial integrity was set down. This classical westphalian model was all about the sovereignty of the state with the minimum external legal or moral obligations. But the 20 th century was to see a slow shift as the world got more connected and mutually dependent. The League of Nations and the United Nations brought about a normative change of a collective responsibility, protection of human rights and peaceful settlement of disputes (Simma, 1994). The meaning of sovereignty was starting to be revised as not only a state of control, but also a state of responsibility- an idea reflected by the cropping up of the new idea of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which restricts state sovereignty in the case of mass atrocities (Bellamy, 2009). Moreover, there is also the tendency to have more international courts and tribunals such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and this could mean that the sovereignty of states is not absolute and that there is development of legal universalism. Such shift emphasizes that sovereignty is no longer an impregnable entity but a relative and fluid entity developed in the light of international norms and legal frameworks (Besson, 2008).

Although there were normative developments, there is still a big gap between the international legal obligation and state behavior. Such paradox may be observed through legal instruments that are ratified, yet not enforced, or through the impunity of the powerful states that break international norms. An example of selective compliance with international law and commitment to a national interest over legal obligation is the withdrawal of the U.S. by President Trump (and subsequently reinstated by Biden) to the Paris Climate Accord, or the U.S. non-participation to the creation of the ICC by the Rome Statute (Slaughter, 2017). Likewise, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a clear disregard of the UN Charter and customary norms on the prohibition of use of force, but geopolitical calculations and vetoer protection exempt it of any responsibility in the Security Council (Klabbers, 2022). These examples demonstrate that the application of political will may influence the adherence to legal norms and hurt the premise of legal equality of the states. The international law has no centralized enforcing authority and the power of the law depends on the force of voluntary compliance and normative legitimacy and not on coercion. This asymmetry raises concerns regarding the practical value of international law in forcing the state action particularly in a period of increasing populism and nationalism (Chesterman, 2022).

In modern days, the conflict of international law and sovereignty is strongest in cases that have international interests. The cases in which the ICC has been investigating war crimes in Sudan,

Palestine, and Ukraine present the possibilities and inabilities of international legal accountability. Although the ICC has already issued arrest warrants on leaders in states like Vladimir Putin, the arrest cannot be made, as the powerful states do not cooperate (Sadat, 2023). Similarly, climate change agreements including the Paris Agreement are largely based on voluntary national contributions, which are much diversified in their ambitions and performances. The interests of sovereign states on short-term economic or political reasons may supercede their long-term global commitments and may weaken collective climate interests (Falkner, 2016). Furthermore, the COVID-19 infection demonstrated how vulnerable international cooperation was as states were competing over resources, avoiding or neglecting WHO recommendations, and removed the borders with references to national sovereignty. These crises make the topic of interest even more topical: the global challenges need strong legal collaboration, but the trend of sovereignty inexplicably often restrains the concerted efforts. This becomes a key issue that needs to be addressed in theoretical debates and discourse of policy on how international law can develop in a manner which is binding and at the same time respected despite the absence of political will.

Theoretical Framework

The conflict between political will and legal obligation in international law is strongly informed by early jurisprudential discussions especially between natural law and legal positivism. The theory of natural law argues that international law is based on an international version of right and wrong and it is above national sovereignty and man-made law. Advocates of the theory believe that states have a moral obligation to abide by certain norms like human rights, justice and peace even where they are not generally written as treaties (Finnis, 2011). Conversely, legal positivism states that international law only has legal validity to the extent that states sanction it; only rules adopted or followed by states have legal effects (Klabbers, 2022). This positivist assumption ranks state sovereignty and holds that there is no obligation unless it has been accepted by a state on a voluntary basis. This argument between these two schools shows that there is a critical conflict in the application of international norms, although the natural law school provides an ethical rationale of universal accountability, positivism is the actual legal situation and without participation the application of international norms is highly limited by the law. The modern legal world tries to square the circle between these paradigms, giving the example of the International Criminal Court (ICC) that integrates the moral universality and the treaty-based legitimacy (Besson & Tasioulas, 2010). This dualism informs the frailty of the rule of law in a system that is controlled by sovereign states.

Besides the jurisprudential theory, the theory of international relations (IR) are also helpful in the sense that they provide useful lenses to see how and why states act according to international law as they do. The aspects of realism presume the existence of states as rational self-interested units within an anarchic international system in which power and survival override international law (Mearsheimer, 2001). In a realist sense, international law is simply a convening device, one which is observed only when it is in the national interest, or only when it plays to politics of power. Therefore, strong states are likely to break or disregard international commitments without any fear of reprisals like in the case of Russia failing to respect the UN Charter in entering Ukraine. Instead, liberalism stresses on institutions, interdependence, and contributions of the domestic and transnational actors toward compliance with international law (Keohane, 2005). The liberals say that the legal duties may influence the state preferences with time especially where it is entrenched in the cooperative regimes or international organizations. In a case example, the legal

framework of the European Union has largely affected the policy of member states due to supranational enforcement (Alter, 2014). Such opposing IR theories help explain why international law is unevenly observed: on the one hand, realists emphasize the sovereign condition of states, whereas liberals emphasize the possibility of international law to bind and change states via norms.

Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) provide a more critical point of view. These schools say that international law lacks neutrality since it is a creation of historical and structural disproportions. CLS theorists accuse the indeterminacy and elitism of legal reasoning by arguing that law usually justifies power instead of containing it (Koskenniemi, 2005). TWAIL refines this criticism, focusing on multiple ways in which international legal regimes are themselves colonial in origin and neo-imperial in nature, a fact that they contend is used systematically to oppress the countries of the Global South (Anghie, 2007). To the TWAIL perspective, sovereignty can be seen as either a shield or a straitjacket on weak states: it guards weak states against direct domination, but it also cuts off access to the benefits of pooled enforcement and justice. An example is that the ICC has been accused of selective prosecution as an application of geopolitical interests camouflaged in terms of justice (Ssenyonjo, 2017). These theories begin to challenge the validity and fairness of international legal commitments and assert that postcolonial states and their political will are usually bound under the system that serves only the interests of powerful nations. Therefore, to TWAIL thinkers, the clash of legal duty and the sovereignty is not a question of desire, but of structural injustice.

Collectively, these paradigms of theory give opposing views on the sovereignty-law relationship. Natural law and liberal institutionalism are apt to indicate that the concepts of state sovereignty may and should be softened by international legal requirements to serve global justice and cooperation. Positivism and realism however caution that sovereignty is the basis of international relations and the legal norms are subordinate to national interest. Critical legal theory and TWAIL, on their turn, attack the roots of the system, claiming that not only is sovereignty but also legal obligation informed by power hierarchies. Interpretation of international crisis like lack of action on climate change, non-adherence to ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or South China Sea conflict differs drastically depending on the applied theoretical perspectives. The multiplicity of views is more than just scholarly, it has a direct impact on how international law is formulated, applied and legitimate too. This is imperative in comprehending what perhaps needs to be done in the contemporary international system as the quest to seek legal responsibility intersects with divergent ideologies, strategic considerations, and historical grievances.

Sovereignty: Historical Evolution and Modern Contestations

The contemporary understanding of the state sovereignty is traced back to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War and introduced the concept of territorial integrity and non-interference as constitutive of the international system. This system which was known as Westphalian sovereignty entrenched the principle that every state has the ultimate power in its territories and cannot be governed or judged by another state (Krasner, 1999). This doctrine of international relations was used to describe the legal order in international relations in centuries with the primary focus on the autonomy of states rather than the general rules. Sovereignty was construed to be indivisible, absolute and self-contained. But in the same classical era, the exercise of sovereignty was not always smooth; the empire, colonies and protectorates distorted the straight borders of equal states (Anghie, 2007). However, Westphalian principles have contributed

to the contemporary in-state centric legal framework, in which the agreement of sovereign states replaced the backbone of the international law. This historical framing has proven to be an influential one but it has been more and more compromised by the changing legal and political realities.

Multilateralism, norms of human rights and global governance institutions have slowly and significantly transformed sovereignty in the 20 th century. This trend in the law changed when the United Nations was formed in 1945 with the UN Charter creating collective security duties and restrictions on unilateral use of force (UN Charter, arts. 2(4), 51). The sovereignty was not unconditional anymore; it was part of a larger life of international law in which states had responsibilities towards the international community. The emergence of the human rights law weakened even further the concept of internal immunity. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine which was adopted in 2005 was a moral and legal norm that expressed that the international community was under an obligation to act when mass atrocities, like genocides or ethnic cleansing had occurred, which would supersede the concept of state sovereignty to advance humanitarian principles (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002). Meanwhile globalization, environmental crisis as well as pandemic has emphasized the interdependence of states, necessitating cooperation across countries which frequently impacts the prerogatives of sovereign states (Held & McGrew, 2002). Such developments represent a going-over of paradigm: sovereignty is no longer seen as an entitlement to impunity but as a duty which is performed under a common rule of law and morality.

Even with such normative developments, the practice of sovereignty is highly contested, a case that is exemplified by modern case studies. A special case was the independence declaration by Kosovo in 2008 after a NATO intervention and several years of UN occupation, which has been discussed to a very high extent in terms of legality. The declaration of Kosovo became legal according to the international law; however, the important powers have failed to recognize it on the basis of sovereignty and integrity of the territory of Serbia (ICJ, 2010). Conversely, the Syrian civil war showed the boundary of R2P; even though mass atrocities and the use of chemical weapons have been happening within the country, the international community was split, and the Assad regime did not lose its sovereignty because allies supported him, such as Russia and Iran (Bellamy, 2015). Sudan is a bit of a mixed bag: it was the influence of the international community that made South Sudan secede in 2011, but constant conflict in Darfur and the continued refusal of the ICC to prosecute former President Omar al-Bashir demonstrate that the conflict between justice and state sovereignty has persisted (Ssenyonjo, 2017). These illustrations highlight the two-faceted character of sovereignty in the existing international order: as the legality debate shifts towards conditionality and accountability, political will, power imbalances and strategic priorities have helped to maintain a variegated and frequently unpredictable enforcement of international standards.

Legal Obligation in International Law

International law recognizes legal obligations that are laid down on some well-established sources as stipulated in Article 38(1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). These comprise of international treaties, customary international law, general principles of law that are understood by civilized nations, and secondarily judicial decisions and writings. The most precise form of commitment to law is the treaty, or international convention, and this form of commitment becomes binding on the signatories when ratified in the principle pacta sunt servada

(agreements must be kept) (Shaw, 2021). Traditional international law, however, is grounded on regular patterns of actions by states performed due to the feeling of legal responsibility (opinio juris) (Cassese, 2005). Domestically derived general principles are also used as a normative glue in the places where treaties and custom fail to speak. The combination of these sources makes up a thorough legal regime which is supposed to regulate the actions of states in the fields as varied as the law of the sea, diplomatic immunity, use of force and human rights. The magnitude of enforceability of these obligations especially without the coercive power, though, remains a major bone of contention to the international law.

Although there is a normative system, enforceability of international law is in question because it is decentralized and there is no world sovereign to ensure adherence to the law. Critics believe that international law is more of a system of voluntary rules based on reciprocity and mutual interest as opposed to a binding rule similar to that of the domestic law (Goldsmith & Posner, 2005). However, other legal scholars believe that international law has some kind of normative pressure that influence the behavior of a state particularly when supported by issues of reputations, economic incentives or institutional implications (Abbott & Snidal, 2000). The mechanisms of enforcement are different: some treaties provide compliance committees or dispute resolution systems (such as WTO panels), others provide diplomatic interaction or third party arbitration. Where there have been massive breaches, as in the case of genocide or aggression in war, the enforcements can be through sanction, international criminal prosecution or even rare forms of military intervention, which is sanctioned by the UN Security Council. Nonetheless, the universality and legitimacy of these legal requirements are undermined by selective enforcement and enforcement's asymmetry of power. The trend of inconsistent application of rulings especially against the strong states contributes to the idea of international law as a tool of convenience as opposed to justice.

International institutions like the ICJ and UN Security Council are pinnacle in adjudication and enforcement of legal obligation but their success is not so well. The ICJ, the major judicial body of the United Nations makes legally binding decisions in disputed cases among states and its advisory opinions tend to make disputed norms clear. As an example, in the Nicaragua v. In the United States case (1986) the ICJ held that the United States had breached international law by aiding Contra rebellion in Nicaragua, but the United States has not respected the judgment, which shows the boundaries of enforcement when there is no consent, or political will (ICJ, 1986). Chapter VII of the UN Charter provides that resolutions of the Security council may be binding and may contain sanctions or authorizations to use force. However, the action of the Council is frequently impeded by the veto power of the five permanent member states (P5), as it happened in the case of the Syrian conflict, most votes were blocked despite extreme cases of humanitarian violations (De Wet, 2019). The factor of legal duty to international determinations interacts with other political considerations, calculative political alliances and normative validity in defining the state of state obedience to international judgments. The unequal implementation of law also makes it hard to describe the international law as a rule-based neutral order.

Conflict between peremptory norms (jus cogens) and political discretion is one of the deepest dilemmas in international law. The Jus cogens norms which include the prohibition of genocide, torture and slavery are regarded to be universally binding and non-derogable even by treaty. They represent basic principles of the international community and they are mentioned in Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of the Treaties (UN, 1969). These norms are however, in many

cases, in conflict with real politics. To give an example, geopolitical motives have hindered effective foreign actions against crimes against humanity in Myanmar and Xinjiang despite substantial evidence of such crimes (UNHRC, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2021). The seeming failure of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, which was driven by R2P, to meet its mandate and instead contribute towards destabilizing the entire region shows how humanitarian imperatives can be translated into political motivations (Bellamy & Williams, 2011). These inconsistencies indicate a structural flaw to international law: legal norms are strong in principle, but their enforcement is usually subjected to the lens of state interest. The challenge of bringing the gap between jus cogens and practical implementation continues to be a significant deterrent to an internationally equitable legal system.

Political Will: The Gap between Norm and Practice

Political will is a feature that significantly determines the level of application and effectiveness of international law despite the claims of universalism to the international law. The phenomenon of selective compliance as one of the most evident aspects of it is the thing that states follow the norms of international community when they correlate with the national interest and disregard them when it is necessary. Although obligations may be imposed through treaties and the customary law, the compliance rates depend a great deal on a voluntary compliance or peer pressure where there is no centralized authority. This can be traced on the unwillingness of the United States to ratify Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) due to the fear of loss of sovereignty and the possibility that its citizens, especially armed forces will be prosecuted (Kaye, 2011). Despite the fact that the U.S. advocates war crimes accountability across the world, it has made legislative moves, including the American Service-Members Protection Act (2002) to ensure that ICC cannot exercise jurisdiction over its citizens. This contradiction explains that political will can prevail normative commitments to display the difference between a legal principle and strategic calculations.

Inconsistency between law and practice is further highlighted by serious instances of non-compliance by world powers. One of the prominent cases was rejection of the 2016 decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Philippines v. China, the entity that nullified the broad claims of the South China Sea by China the so-called Nine-Dash Line (PCA, 2016). Though China is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) it has rejected the ruling of the tribunal as being null and void and has gone ahead to militarize artificial islands in contested waters (Beckman, 2017). On the same note, annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 contravened several international law norms such as the UN Charter and the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (Allison, 2014). Nevertheless, the geopolitical considerations, the right of veto in the UN Security Council and the absence of an enforcement ability made international condemnation mostly a symbolic act. The cases also show an unpleasant truth: strong countries can effectively defy international decisions with impunity, without seriously jeopardizing the authority of international law.

Major Powers are also the ambivalent architects and saboteurs of international law, as they advocate the rule of law in certain matters and deny international accountability measures. To give an example, U.S. has been practicing consistent promotion of human rights and international criminal justice in other nations, but has kept itself and its friends free of inspection (Mazower, 2012). This could be seen in how it approved the establishment of international tribunals to Rwanda and former Yugoslavia but opposed the establishment of such tribunals to crimes

committed by Israeli or American forces. On the same note, China preaches the ideology of non-interference yet it employs trade and investment to drive the position of smaller states at international forums (Mills, 2020). Such contradictions do not exist only in the Global North. Other regional powers of the Global South, including India and Brazil, have sometimes resisted the establishment of binding environmental or trade-related rules that could restrain national developmental agenda. This is symptomatic of a bigger problem: that political will when set against legal stipulation tends to land on the side of national sovereignty even to the detriment of international order.

In the view of most states of the Global South, international law appears to be an institution dominated by the Western values and interests whose primary aim is to act as a mechanism of geopolitical control. Third world scholars adhering to the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) School state that international law has always been implicated in colonialism and economic exploitation despite its pretentious normative claims (Anghie, 2005). As an example, structural adjustment packages that were foisted on third world countries by the international financial institutions during the 1980s and 1990s were not only damaging to socio-economic rights but also with the trappings of international legality. The selectivity of international criminal justice in the cases of African leaders being unfairly targeted by the ICC has increased criticisms of bias and selectivity (Murithi, 2013). This fact destroys the legitimacy of international law and underscores the necessity of the reformation of global legal institutions to see the different voices and experiences. In the absence of such reform, the obligation of law will remain situated through the prism of power and interest, enlarging the discrepancy between the norm and practice further.

The Role of International Institutions

The international institutions have been at the center of formulating, enforcement and administration of international legal norms but they are usually limited by the political will of sovereign nations. The most famous multilateral institution is the United Nations (UN) whose organs including the Security Council (UNSC), the General Assembly (UNGA), and the International Court of justice (ICJ) offer a legal-political arena of global governance. The international court of justice (ICJ) settles inter-state disputes and offers advisory opinions in legal issues whereas the International Criminal Court (ICC) tries individuals who commit acts like genocide and war crimes. World Trade Organization (WTO) is critical in the settlement of trade disputes and enforcement of norms in all economic sectors. Local organizations such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also play significant roles to promote legal systems on the regional level and impose duties on member states (Alter, 2014). The efficiency of these institutions are however often crippled by structural and political limitations, such as state non-compliance, vetoes, funding disparities and jurisdictional constraints.

The underlying issue is that the enforcement ability of these institutions is weak and in many cases, they rely on the cooperation of the member states. ICC, as an example, lacks police force and depends on national officials to apprehend indicted persons. This dependency could be seen through the example of a former President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir, who was on the wanted list of ICC and spent more than 10 years in the country, avoiding arrest before his downfall (Bosco, 2014). In its turn, the decisions of the ICJ are binding yet not enforceable unless they are supported by the UNSC which, however, is frequently stalled by veto politics, especially, when it comes down to the P5 (the five permanent members). This was portrayed in the Nicaragua v. In United States,

where the U.S. disregarded the Court decision and left the case (Schwebel, 1987). Over the past few years, the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO has become effectively paralyzed as the United States blocks the appointment of judges on the Appellate Body (Shaffer, 2020). Such instances highlight the tensive nature of the power of international law and the sovereign prerogatives and hence the adherence was rather a political exercise than subordination.

To overcome these predicaments, scholars and policymakers have presented a series of institutional reforms, which are expected to increase effectiveness and legitimacy of international institutions. Among the key suggestions also include reforming the UN Security Council in order to make it more representative and representative through representation of the Global South countries and reducing the application of the veto (Weiss, 2016). In the case of the ICC, some of the reforms entail an improvement in complementarity, system strengthening of domestic laws, and an improvement in evidentiary standards as a way of avoiding the politicization of processes. Equally, in the case of the WTO, the reform proposals have been limited to the restoration of the Appellate Body, making the system more transparent, and balancing the role of developing countries in trade talks (Evenett, 2019). Regional institutions such as the AU have also taken a stride to reform the institutions such as the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights and the African Peer Review Mechanism which are geared towards establishing a feeling of accountability on the continent. Slow as it is, these debates are one continuous attempt to rebalance international institutions, so that they would be able to better negotiate between legal normativity and political reality, especially in the context of a multipolar world order.

Towards a Reconciliation: Bridging Legal Obligation and Political Will

An attempt to overcome the disparity between the international legal obligation and the political will is increasingly founded on the notion of norm internalization and the tactical appeals to the soft law mechanisms. Non-binding texts such as declarations, guidelines, and voluntary codes of conduct that constitute soft law comprise one of the most influential tools to influence the behavior of the state as they create expectations and set best practices that are not as strict as formal treaties (Abbott & Snidal, 2000). Such instruments are mostly a precedent to the binding norms, which help establish norms gradually through the mechanisms of socialization, acculturation and persuasion through law. As such, a good example is provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which did not bind any state but had an immeasurable impact on the creation of binding human rights treaties as well as constitutions of states all around the world. Likewise, peer pressure, naming-and-shaming, and public accountability have triggered state action in response to environmental soft law instruments like the Rio Declaration or the Paris Agreement, although the latter has a non-punitive enforcement (Bodansky, 2016). These strategies aid such states to align sovereignty and the need to cooperate internationally by making such compliance affordable and maintaining flexibility hence increasing the legitimacy and acceptability of international norms.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and transnational advocacy networks (TANs) also help in the compromise of legal norms and political interests as they can be considered to be norm entrepreneurs, watchdog, and accountability rights. These networks, which include, NGOs, international institutions, legal scholars, and grassroots actors are critical towards the diffusion of norms and development of public discourse with regard to compliance by the states. As argued by Keck and Sikkink (1998), TANs use the force of information politics and framing symbols in the form of a boomerang effect to stress on the non-compliant states by use of international platforms

and external actors. As an example, it was not only the state actors that made the campaign to see the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to succeed but also the years of lobbying of the civil society coalitions like the Coalition for the ICC. In the same way, progressive movements on global climate justice and protection of human rights have enhanced examination of the actions of government and the pressurizing, on the part of citizens, of conforming to international standards (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 2013). The existence of these actors is crucial to the establishment of normative environments which make international obligations politically beneficial even on the part of reluctant states. Their role is even more when they are in democracies and the leaders are answerable to the global commitments by the domestic audience and media.

So as to keep this normative change, the classical conception of sovereignty needs to be re-conceptualized to fit in the facts of a globalized world. The concept of sovereignty, as the privilege of dominance at the point of the territory border, has been on the way to be changed to the one of responsibility-based sovereignty, which can be illustrated by the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle (Evans, 2008). Such a development indicates that sovereignty has the responsibility to respect human rights, avoid atrocities, and bow to international law. To harmonize sovereignty with legal compliance policy suggestions might be the institutional reforms with a view of making international institutions more inclusive and transparent, capacity-building of domestic legal framework to adopt international norms, or the extension of the so-called hybrid accountability arrangements such as regional courts and truth commissions. Also, internalization of norms through the internalization of international law by domestic national legal systems through making such law a part of national constitutional law and state courts can take place (Benvenisti, 2012). These multi-level strategies also make sure that legal obligation is not perceived as something external but organic part of responsible governance. After all, it is not just the law but shared determination to a strong multilateral ethical commitment that will reconcile law and will in a world of complex international challenges.

Conclusion

The connection between sovereignty to international law remains to be one of the longest lived and intricate individual issues in universal politics. On the one hand the international law aspires to offer a coherent set of norms, standards, and obligations, which are to regulate the state behavior, facilitate peace, cooperation, and justice among the nations. Conversely, sovereignty has been the fundamental principle in international relationships where states have absolute right in decision making in their territories. This tensions of both, theory and practice, continue to prevail in the form of the demands of the global law order and the prerogatives of the national self-determination. All these notwithstanding, the reality remains that, the expression of legal norms in the real world still rely heavily on political will, and this has been proven with selective application and power-oriented interpretations.

The historical evolution of sovereignty as it appeared and evolved in its classical Westphalian version and afterward in its modern reinterpretation proves the fluctuating nature of state autonomy in a globalized world. The governance model of absolute sovereignty proves ineffective in light of contemporary global issues that concern not only armed conflict and forced migration but also such phenomena as pandemics and climate change. Meanwhile, the enforcement instruments of international law have found it difficult to keep up, owing to institutional weaknesses, political disparities, and conflicting national interests. This has resulted in a disjointed

legal environment in which there are rules, which are not universally enforced, but that influential states could frequently ignore as a matter of convenience with impunity. The credibility gap arising reduces the moral standing of international law, and it erodes confidence in international institutions.

Nevertheless, with these structural and political obstacles in mind, the possibility of reconciliation between the legal duty and political will is not completely out of the picture. It is evidenced through normative evolution, which has seen the development of the doctrines of Responsibility to Protect, emergence of jus cogens norms and expansion of the hybrid legal regimes, all of which show that sovereignty is no longer absolute but always subject to global moral concerns. Also, the ideas of the soft law and transnational networks, civil society, and advocacy networks have a crucial role in encouraging compliance and making states accountable despite the lack of formal enforcement. These figures add to a context whereupon observance of foreign law is no longer just a prerequisite of the stature of law but also to global legitimacy and image.

The balance between sovereignty and legal obligation has to be readjusted so as to take steps to a more just and functional international legal order. These include acknowledging the state interests as legitimate but asserting the need of global norms that go beyond national boundaries. Tremendous reforms of institutions, increased representation of marginalized voices, and domestication of international law are important milestones in this regard. Finally, the harmonization of sovereignty with the rules and principles of international law, requires more than a structural transformation, but a change in political culture, a change that appreciates ethical multilateralism, honors legal obligations and accepts cooperation as a strategic necessity. With the current state of interdependence, the international law will be more successful in succeeding when it entails interface of the legal norms with the political reality but maintains the values upholding justice, equity and accountability to all..

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