

REVIEWS

Dijkstra: International Organizations and Military Affairs

by Sten Rynning, University of Southern Denmark

International Organizations and Military Affairs, by Hylke Dijkstra, London: Routledge, 2016.

Hylke Dijkstra has written a highly interesting book that deserves to be widely read. The book examines the dilemma faced by states that enjoy the support that international organizations (IOs) offer but also struggle to control them, and it concludes that states tend to be too restrictive in their control measures. The book is well written and the conclusion is refreshing, if contestable.

The essential argument of the book draws on principal-agent theory. Fearful of “agency loss,” the argument goes, states use various “control mechanisms” that do enhance control to an extent but entail costs that can ultimately undermine policy (p. 13). Dijkstra first develops this framework of analysis and then tests it on three cases: the UN, the EU, and NATO. Moreover, each case—the secretariat of each international organization—is examined in two contexts: a generic one of institutional development and a concrete one of mandate-shaping for a military operation.

Principal-agent theory is well known, but this analysis of military cooperation at the international level is nonetheless novel. In setting up the secretariat of an IO, states seek to overcome costs of cooperation but simultaneously create an agent likely to develop distinct institutional and policy interests, which they must then control. Dijkstra steps into uncharted territory by applying this logic to the heart of military cooperation, bringing his theory into dialogue with the literature on national interests and alliances. The overall conclusion of the book offers a corrective to the mainstream emphasis of the latter literature: states tend to be too restrictive in their approach to international secretariats on account of national interests, and states could gain in terms of policy effectiveness by delegating more power to these secretariats.

There are two main empirical sections in the book, both of which compare UN, NATO, and EU developments in light of three theoretically anchored mechanisms for curtailing secretariat agency: non-delegation, generic rules, and shadow bureaucracies.

The first section looks at institutional development. The UN Secretariat turns out to have been particularly constrained by non-delegation and generic rules—resulting in the quite well known history of hampered UN capacities in matters of peacekeeping. NATO’s Secretariat (International Staff) is by and large controlled via generic rules, while that of the EU (the military component of the European External Action Service [EEAS]) is more broadly constrained. The UN and EU cases thus run on parallel tracks of widespread constraint, perhaps, the conclusion offers, because they are in a phase of creation and “because creation brings about more uncertainty” (p. 209).

The second section compares secretariat influence and control in cases of mandate negotiations. The UN Secretariat experienced its marginalization in the design of the UN mandate behind the force to support South Sudan’s independence in 2011. The culprit in this case was the U.S., which used its elaborate “shadow bureaucracy” to table a draft resolution that

“differed considerably” from that suggested by the secretariat (p. 148). NATO’s International Staff was constrained in the case of the 2011 Libya intervention, first by NATO’s late entry into the game and then by the elaborate generic planning rules that skewed institutional power in favor of NATO’s military authorities. Finally, the EU’s anti-piracy mission ATALANTA demonstrates a case of secretariat marginalization by way of non-delegation, an approach developed by the UK through 2008 as it found itself marginalized in its opposition to an EU mission. Therefore, it came up with the idea to offer to run such a mission through a national UK operational headquarters rather than a proper collective EU mechanism.

The overall conclusion is, as mentioned, that states tend to impose unnecessary costs on themselves by way of their choices of restrictive control. Costs are inevitable in principal-agent relations, but based on these case studies, Dijkstra concludes that secretariats actually do not unduly grow in size, can offer smart ideas for policies, and can professionalize the coordination and management of interstate relations (pp. 213–14). There are exceptions, of course, and EU enthusiasts will be alarmed to note that they mainly concern the EU. Still, the point is clear: states could benefit from enhanced IO secretariat agencies.

Dijkstra finds that interstate rivalry is containable, even as national rivalries run deep. In the case studies, we repeatedly encounter French investments in the EU; UK reservations on the EU; U.S., German, and other interests in maintaining the status quo within NATO; the struggle by new NATO members to gain an institutional foothold; mistrust from the global south toward the perceived dominance by the north of the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations; and so on. Nonetheless, Dijkstra’s starting point with the rationale for cooperation (principal-agent theory) leads him to plead for the rationale of further cooperation.

Analysts, such as myself, who predominantly work with the international and institutional consequences of political diversity—what Stanley Hoffmann once termed “the logic of diversity”—will find this conclusion thought provoking. It is probably possible to engender common approaches by way of secretarial buildup, but the potential of secretarial buildup is probably also strictly limited. Focusing on secretarial capacity is in a sense putting the cart before the horse: secretarial capacity flows from the underlying alignment of national political priorities—from the sense of international order that particular states support.

Underlying political alignment would explain why NATO’s International Staff works fairly well in this comparative perspective and also why the EU and the UN are struggling. But even NATO is like the EU and UN: vulnerable to outsized membership, having expanded now to twenty-nine member states. The trusted fallback option of appealing to U.S. leadership is wearing a bit thin, though it may still last. The rise of China, populist politics, and other factors certainly create a situation where NATO visibly experiences the same disintegrative pull as these other organizations.

Hylke Dijkstra should be commended for inviting this dialogue between rationalist theory and theories of power politics. The latter will question his policy conclusions and the reach of his empirical observations, but this is part of the dialogue. The bottom line is that every analyst of international cooperation will benefit from Dijkstra’s careful assessment of institutional trends in the UN, NATO, and the EU. The book is well written, with admirably clear case studies, and the invitation to dialogue deserves to be taken seriously.

Hug: Institutionally blind?: International organisations and human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union

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Institutionally blind?: International organisations and human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union, by Adam Hug, ed. London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2016.

Adam Hug’s book examines the enormous challenges facing international institutions in promoting human rights and good governance in the former Soviet Union (FSU). Each chapter outlines the role of a different organization or institution, highlights major challenges that it faces, and asks how it can better perform given significant political, economic, and strategic constraints. The editor then summarizes the key recommendations for the organizations, which include the EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, economic institutions, national parliaments, and NGOs.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a host of international organizations rushed into the region to facilitate the “transition” toward a market economy and Western liberal democracy. At the time, many academics worked in the field of “transitology” and tested theories of “democratization” on the newly independent states. Twenty-five years later, the reality is that there has been little or no such political “transition” in twelve of these countries (i.e., all the former Soviet countries minus the Baltic states). In fact, in several cases, we have witnessed the consolidation of authoritarian regimes and the partial withdrawal of international institutions. In parallel to this evolution, scholars now write about the diffusion of non-liberal norms, methods, and institutions across the region—and beyond.¹

The authors in this collection lament what may be more accurately termed the qualified failure of these organizations rather than the institutional “blindness” referred to in the book’s title. They take the normative stance that security across the region would be enhanced by improved human rights and governance, a view that is not shared by the regimes they are examining. The collection does not engage with the theoretical scholarship on the topic but instead succeeds in giving detailed, critical and up-to-date assessments of these organizations’ human rights promotion capabilities. This is important and timely as global governance today seems to be increasingly dominated by geopolitics, realpolitik, and hard security interests.

The authors show that overall, despite some positive contributions (they highlight, for example, the Council of Europe’s [CoE] Venice Commission, which gives independent legal advice to states), Western organizations’ mandates and policies have become more limited, pragmatic and less focused on human rights. The EU, for example, now prioritizes stability and economic ties in its European Neighbourhood Policy and in its approach toward Central Asia. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has seen the erosion of its “human security” agenda and the ousting or degradation of its field missions throughout the former Soviet region and is currently facing myriad challenges in trying to deliver impartial and independent election monitoring. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

1. Nicole J. Jackson “Trans-Regional Security Organizations and ‘Statist Multilateralism’ in Eurasia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, January 2014; “The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-Liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: An Analysis of Russia’s Support of Authoritarian Regimes in Central Asia,” *Contemporary Politics*, 16:1, 2010.