Are international institutions necessary for global peace and security?

https://www.e-ir.info/2011/06/01/are-international-institutions-necessary-for-global-peace-and-security/

DUMITRACHE ANDREI, JUN 1 2011

In the last eight decades the number of actors actively involved in global governance has dramatically increased, convincing large sections of the population that international institutions are now the driving engine of economic, political, and social policy all over the world. With international organizations such as the UN, NATO, and the IMF claiming to tackle efficiently the poverty, underdevelopment, peacekeeping, and security issues of the planet, it would seem that Harry Truman was right to believe in the following lines:

'*For I dip into the future, Far as human eye could see, Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonders that would be…*' (Tennyson in Zweifel, 2006:56).

Unfortunately, this is not the case for today`s international system and the empirical evidence confirms predominantly the 'realist approach rather than the institutionalist' (Mearsheimer, 1994:7) one. Many of the international institutions being praised for their relevance in promoting and establishing peace and security in the global system actually lead to opposite results. NATO is the institutional apparatus of a military alliance, which naturally raises questions of security and conflict possibilities among the states that are not part of it (Keohane, 1988). The same can be said about the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which so far, through its borrowing conditions has only managed to create huge economic problems in many developing countries in South America, and therefore creates the basis for future security matters in the affected regions. Starting from the assumptions of the 'decentralized cooperation theory' (Snidal in Gilligan, 2007:1) this paper will seek to prove not only that international institutions are not necessary for global peace and security, but can many times act as catalysts for conflicts around the world. In order to achieve the proposed conclusion, this essay will concomitantly identify and introduce the main failures of some international institutions and will provide examples of how some of them promote conflict and war rather than tackle it.

The current international system is one of 'self-help' (Waltz in Mearsheimer, 1994:11) and also one of a permanent 'prisoners dilemma' (Kappen in Krause and Williams, 1997:257), a system in which states find themselves constantly challenged by the perpetual 'security competition' (Waltz in Mearsheimer, 1994:11) existent at both political and economic levels. It is therefore only a matter of deduction the idea that the focus remains on the self-interested state as the main unit in understanding international relations. Further, it is appropriate to mention that the realist perspective correctly suggests that it is mainly powerful states that choose to create, control, and lead international institutions with the purpose of using them to their best advantage, and to a certain extent to reduce the uncertainty prevalent in the international arena (Mearsheimer, 1994). Having said this, it is now time to analyze some of the main international institutions and prove both their inefficiency in achieving world peace and security, as well as their lack of authority over their member states.

One of the largest institutions involved in global governance is the United Nations. It is a veritable global bureaucracy composed of numerous 'nested arrangements' (Archibugi in Held, 2002:60) which in theory regulate and represent the social, economic, and security interests of all the human race. Its main body, the Security Council with its five permanent members, the USA, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France, is the living proof of 'Realpolitik' hidden purposely behind the institutional structure of the UN, a type of politics functioning according to the pragmatic

Are international institutions necessary for global peace and security?
Written by Dumitrache Andrei

terminology of 'nuclear, chemical, biological weapons and ballistic missiles' (Schmidt in d'Orville, 1993:18). Having set as its main goal the achievement of world peace, the United Nations so far has repeatedly proved itself unable to handle the securitization and pacification of many geographical areas. A good example is the 1994 Rwandan genocide when Hutu government officials launched a nationwide extermination campaign of all Tootsie tribe inhabitants, an outrageous event which the United Nations has not managed to prevent or stop, although a considerable amount of its armed forces were deployed in the region at the time (crimesofwar.org). Another example is the crisis in Sudan which so far has remained unsolved, although suffering has affected millions of people (crimesofwar.org). A more recent case of the United Nation's inability to manage a security crisis is the 1990 massacre of Srebenica of 8000 Muslims by the Serbian army, then under the command of Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (crimesofwar.org). The above examples prove that so far the United Nations has failed to deliver on its promise for world peace and security, mainly because of the encroachments the P5 members have so far practiced in delivering appropriate policy outputs on matters of extreme delicacy. The inflammatory situation in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas has exposed the policy driving power the US, as a world hegemon, possesses when protecting Israel from the sometimes unfriendly resolutions passing through the Security Council (Klausner, 2007). Another interesting case is the war in Iraq launched by the US and its allies against the will of the UN, a case which proves all institutionalists wrong (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004). Therefore, it is now clear that when talking about international institutions one is correct to define them as 'arenas for acting out power relationships' (Mearsheimer, 1994:13), arenas which are dominated by the main economic and implicitly military powers.

It is also the case with the International Monetary Fund, which being a creation of the Breton Woods agreement, which can be thought of as actually serving the interests of the US, as it is deductable from the higher voting quota the USA holds within this financial institution and the background of the elites governing it. With the rise of China as both an economic and military power there is already availability from US bureaucrats to accommodate China within the IMF, WTO, and WB and therefore prevent the creation, under the influence of the government in Beijing, of other international financial institutions which might not serve the West's economic interests to the extent the Breton Woods ones do. Another interesting fact about the IMF is that although it is allegedly designed to bring about global development, countries like those in Latin-America have suffered great economic setbacks as a result of the implementation of neoliberal policies and loan policy conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Back in 2001, due to a historic debt towards the IMF, Argentina had become an unstable country, creating security and economic concerns throughout the whole of South America. The examples do not end with Argentina, as Brazil, Chile, and Mexico have also suffered from the financial regime the IMF has embarked them upon. These are all very good examples of how an international institution not only does not make peace more likely, but it actually deems it impossible. Another good example of how the IMF's policies are conflict conducive is the general divide it has created between 'core economies and peripheral ones' (Wallerstein in Baylis, 2008:147), a divide which polarizes the international arena and creates the premises for a significant number of economically driven political conflicts. The power structure persistent within the IMF and the WTO proves right the assertion that international institutions only 'mirror the distribution of power in the system' (Mearsheimer, 1994:13-14) as their existence is owed to the explicit strategic will of powerful states in the international system to 'maintain their share of world power and increase it' (ibid).

With the rise of the political, economic, and predominantly ideological divides between West and East, specific to the Cold War era, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created as a response to the Warsaw Pact. The very creation of this alliance proves the centrality of the concept of 'balance of power' (Baylis, 2008:163) when trying to understand international relations. Initially purely a military alliance aimed at securing Western Europe and North America from the military and ideological dangers raised by the imperialist USSR, but also by a hypothetical 'resurgent Germany' (Williams, 2009:300), it has to this day survived and mutated into an international institution concerned with the security of its members, but also with the defense of the democratic political system. This metamorphosis of NATO confirms the hypotheses launched by Walt according to which some alliances 'may contain or acquire institutional capabilities that can be used for tasks beyond those for which were originally designed' (Williams, 2009:298). Despite this radical transformation, NATO remains a military alliance which by its nature enhances the security dilemma of other states. This view is shared by International Relations theorists such as Wright, Holsti, and Kaplan who have suggested that 'alliances tend to generate counteralliances, which generate further mistrust and tensions, leading to arms races and the further polarization of the alliance structure and

Are international institutions necessary for global peace and security?
Written by Dumitrache Andrei

ultimately to war' (Levy, 1981:582).

This is the case for the rocket defense shield the United States plans on installing in Eastern Europe to protect its NATO allies from possible attacks coming from Iran. Russia has regarded the project with huge suspicion especially as the general view is that the shield is not a NATO initiative but a US foreign policy masked as such. In this specific case we are entitled to say that this international institution is again rather damaging to world peace and security. This is confirmed by theorists like Kimball who suggest that 'alliance formation decisions are endogenous to conflict initiation decisions' (2006:371), although 'game-theoretic alliance formation models' (Reed in Kimball, 2006:373) might suggest the very opposite. Reid (Kimball, 2006) bases his observation on the assumption that at the core of alliance formation lies the sharing of information which theoretically would act as a diffuser of tension between system actors. This idea is viable but only as a theoretical concept, and this is because in reality alliances are formed and developed with an in-built system of information sharing that prevents states in other alliances from gaining access. Good examples are again NATO, and the Warsaw Pact. It is of a very small probability that the Western Allies would have shared genuine and vital military information with their Eastern counterparts. Further on, another reason why alliances are most likely going to increase global insecurity is the very behavioral nature of their actors. As Walt has successfully identified 'when entering an alliance, states may either balance (ally in opposition to the principal source of danger) or bandwagon (ally with the state that poses the major threat)' (1985:4).

On the other side, it is arguably correct to say that alliances creating a bipolar status quo in world politics might lead to great achievements in the area of security and peace. This assumption is confirmed by Kenneth Waltz who gives as an example of the stability of the 'bipolar world' (Walt, 1985:24) the neutrality Cambodia or Egypt were able to invoke during the Cold War (Walt, 1985). To add an extra dimension to the inherited conflict proneness NATO suffers from, it is appropriate to introduce a concept according to which permanent alliances are more likely to generate war than 'ad-hoc' (Levy, 1981:583) ones. This idea is supported by Morgenthau who believes that permanent alliances are more probably going to lead to war because long standing 'alliance commitments reduce the number of possible coalitions which could conceivably form against any aggressor, and therefore that is why they are conducive to war' (Levy, 1981:583). From an opposing perspective we could trustfully support the idea that NATO is conducive to peace, as resulting from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty:

'The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area' (North Atlantic Treaty, 1945).

This milestone article suggests that NATO is rather a 'defense pact' (Singer and Small in Levy, 1981:587) which Singer and Small have defined as consisting of more parties which 'intervene militarily on the side of any treaty partner that is attacked militarily' (ibid.). Considering this in the current political context in which NATO and Russia, at the recent 2010 Lisbon Joint Council, have agreed 'to embark on a new stage of cooperation towards a true strategic partnership' (NATO.int), it would be correct to remark the possibility that NATO is an organization that by increasing the transparency of its affairs is more peace prone than any other military alliance has ever been. Still, it is advisable to remain prudent and wait for history to confirm this aspect, as it is in the nature of every military alliance to follow the motto 'if you want peace prepare for war' (Ceadel, 1987:72), which draws on the conceptions of war and peace that defencist theorists promote. With all the above arguments in mind this paper will now proceed with the concluding arguments in support of the initial thesis that international institutions are not necessary for the attainment of global peace and security.

It is now clear how international institutions are generally the results of leading states. Therefore, it is rather more correct to say that it is world powers that could eventually, under conditions of extreme political will, promote global peace and security and not the international institutions they have created in order to build their spheres of influence and increase their power in the international system. Still, avoiding a radical conclusion on the matter, it is fair to mention that the current framework of international institutions holds some promise of thorough cooperation in

Are international institutions necessary for global peace and security?

Written by Dumitrache Andrei

different fields such as healthcare (World Health Organization) or global warming (COP 16 or the EU's courageous environmental policy) consequently reducing 'some forms of uncertainty' (Keohane, 1988:386) and as a direct result promoting world security and peace. The United Nations has also had its share of success in missions such as the one in Sierra Leone (UNAMISIL), a mission which has been a real success due to a common consensus reached among the P5 (Olonisakin, 2008). With the public speech focusing increasingly on human rights, with states such as Sweden or Canada actively engaging in humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in Africa or Afghanistan (Brysk, 2009), one might be tempted to suggest that the world is changing, and together with it, the assumptions governing state behavior in the international arena. Although not entirely true, this highly optimistic view betrays some traces of truth. Both Canada and Sweden are liberal democracies, and along with them many other states especially in the Northern Hemisphere, and as the 'democratic peace theory or Pax Democratica' (Huntley in Dobson, 1998:917) has suggested, liberal democracies, by nature do not fight each other and are extremely prudent in engaging in armed conflict. In addition, it is correct to say that international institutions are not necessary and relevant for the achievement of global peace and security as 'it is perfectly possible to imagine anarchic state systems that are nonetheless peaceful' (Fukuyama in Waltz, 2000:8). On the other hand to a certain extent international organizations can improve the chances of human kind ever achieving those goals by reducing to a limited extent the amount of suspicion existent at the bilateral or multilateral level. I will end this paper by agreeing with the validity and relevance of the 'decentralized cooperation theory' supported by Snidal and Abott, a theory that holds as its core assumption the fact that at a macro political level 'international institutions are not necessary to facilitate international cooperation' (Gilligan, 2007:1).

Bibliography:

Baylis, J. Smith, S. Owens, P. 2008, *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 147-149, pp. 314-345.

Brysk, A. 2009, Global *Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp.220-235.

Ceadel, M. 1987, *Thinking about Peace and War*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp.72-100.

Dobson, P.A 1998, *Review of Pax Democratica: a strategy for the 21*st *century*, International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 74, No. 4, p. 917.

Gilligan, J.M. 2007, *The Transactions Costs Approach to International Institutions*, New York University, pp. 1-26.

Held, D. McGrew, G. 2002, *Governing Globalization: power, authority and global governance*, Polity Press and Blackwell Publishers, USA, pp.46-70.

Iliopoulos, K. 2009, *Karadžić Genocide Trial Begins*, viewed 29th of November 2010, <http://www.crimesofwar.org/onnews/news-karadzic3.html>

Iliopoulos, K. 2010, *Two Sides to Every Story: Congo and the Rwandan Genocide, viewed 29*[th] *of November 2010*, < http://www.crimesofwar.org/onnews/news-congo6.html>

Keohane, R.O 1988, *International Institutions: Two Approcahes*, International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp. 379-396.

Kimball, L.A 2006, *Alliance Formation and Conflict Initiation: The Missing Link, Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Special Issue on Alliance, pp. 371-389.

Klausner, L. K. Bickerton, J.I. 2007, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Fifth Edition, Pearson, USA, pp. 178-193.

Krause, K. Williams, M.C. 1997, Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases, Routledge, UK, pp. 255-273.

Are international institutions necessary for global peace and security?
Written by Dumitrache Andrei

Levy, S.J. 1981, *Alliance Formation and War Behaviour: An analysis of the Great Powers* , The Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 581-613.

Mearsheimer, J.J. 1994/1995, *The False Promise of International Institutions*, International Security, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 5-49.

NATO 1949, *North Atlantic Treaty*, viewed 29th of November 2010, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm?selectedLocale=en>

Olonisakin, F. 2008, *Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone: The Story of UNAMSIL* , Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, pp. 111-130.

d'Orville, H. 1993, The Search for Global Order: The Problems of Survival, Interaction Council, New York, pp.13-30.

Shapiro, J. Gordon, H.P. 2004, *Alliances at War: America, Europe and the Crisis over Iraq* , Professional Publishing, New York, pp. 185-221.

Walt, M.S 1985, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power* , International Security, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring, 1985), pp. 3-43.

Waltz, K.N. 2000, *Structural Realism after the Cold War*, International Security, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 5-41

Williams, P. D. 2009, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge, London, pp.291-342.

Zweifel, D. T 2006, *International Organizations and Democracy: Accountability, Politics, and Power* , Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, pp. 31-111.

—