

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR SOVEREIGNTY

REFLECTION PAPER III

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR

DEMOCRATIZATION, GLOBALIZATION & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SCHOOL OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND POLICY SCIENCES

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND PUBLIC POLICY

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FEBRUARY 2007

Last Updated: February 7th 2007

Introduction

The last century has seen an increase in the number and responsibilities of independent international organizations (henceforth IO's). Usually seen as avenues to increase cooperation between states in the anarchic world¹, the IO's have enjoyed significant growth not only in their responsibilities, but in their autonomy as well. For example, Abbott and Snidal (1998) cite the example of the US operations in the first gulf war, where the US courted the UN into supporting its campaign against Iraq, asking for a more unified, global stance against the aggressor (Iraq). This is an especially interesting case, since the US (along with the allied nations from WWII) created the United Nations organization (henceforth UN), and being the premier superpower, had no inherent need for approval from the UN Security Council. Furthermore, as Abbott and Snidal state, the majority of the forces operating in Kuwait were the US forces. So, their conclusion is that the US wanted to "convert the measures taken into genuine community action"² and thus this would display the superpower's interest in establishing a cooperative and united front with the rest of the world against Iraq. The question then, is why would the US deem this a necessary action in the light of its standing in the power hierarchy of the world? Surely it does not need permission from the UN in order to take action against Iraq. While the US still can boast some influence over the UN (which is probably why the UN agreed to a joint coalition to protect the Kuwaiti's), the sovereignty of the US itself does come under threat here, in that it is setting a precedent for granting the UN a perception of greater sovereignty. Therefore, what I argue for below is why greater autonomy for IO's is in the interests of its member states, and consequently, how greater sovereignty for the IO (specifically the UN) will lead to the creation of a supranational governing body after a certain period of time³.

¹ By neoliberals

² See Abbott and Snidal: 28

³ The idea for this piece was motivated by Dr. Clint Peinhardt's discussion of Alexander Wendt's current work in progress.

Why an IO is Created

Chayes and Chayes (1993) outline three major factors for the reason as to why states comply with treaty obligations, namely *Efficiency*, *Interests* and *Norms*. First, they refer to efficiency as the states' preference in keeping "policy continuity"⁴ meaning where decisions are costly the cheapest alternative to re-evaluating policy is to continue the same policy over extended periods of time. Secondly, complying with treaties is also in the interest of the member state, since the treaty itself was agreed to because the state had something to gain by entering into it. Thus the interests of the state are reflected in the treaty, and hence it is in the interest of the state to comply by it. Finally, the idea of norms⁵ is that once a treaty goes into effect, the state is obligated to abide by it, thus noncompliance would go against the norm of the member state⁶.

The same arguments can apply to the creation and compliance with an IO as well, in that the IO would be set up to protect the efficiency, interests and norms of the member states. Hence, IO's would then establish continuity in their policies (as dictated by their respective charters), protect the interests of the member states (presumably the reason why it was set up in the first place) and also establish and maintain the norms of the member states. Abbott and Snidal (1998) display the above arguments as well as additional ones that would encompass what they call the "Centralization" function of the IO generated by the creation of the IO⁷. They argue that having an IO for multiple states allows ease in negotiations among states, allows the "pooling" of resources, managing common administrative tasks and allows for "norm elaboration and coordination." Thus, the efficiencies gained by setting up an IO to manage these tasks outweighs the costs of "going it alone" leading to the creation of supranational bodies such as the UN, the World Bank, the EU and NATO,

⁴ See Chayes and Chayes: 178

⁵ See Chayes and Chayes: 185

⁶ Here, Chayes and Chayes specifically refer to the norms in the US in terms of a state making the rules of a treaty part of its domestic legal system. While it may be argued that many countries may not have the same norms as the US, and thus this hypothesis cannot be readily generalized to the entire world, I would counter that a significant majority of states would indeed strive to comply under threat of retaliation.

⁷ See Abbott and Snidal (1998): 10-16

among others. One final efficiency gain of note is that of IO's in monitoring and enforcement of international agreements. For example, the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) was set up to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and now monitors and enforces the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Koremenos (2005) provides empirical evidence to test the impacts of renegotiation costs, uncertainty and risk aversion on the length of an agreement between states⁸. Using the "Continent of International Law" (COIL) dataset, coding proxies for the independent variables, she finds statistical support for the hypothesis that risk-averse states with low renegotiation costs, under conditions of uncertainty, strive for short term agreements. Assuming that short term agreements are the least desirable outcome of an agreement⁹, and since countries are striving for stability in their foreign policy, the creation and maintenance of an IO that could possibly reduce the risk and uncertainty associated with a treaty would be ideal. Furthermore, as stated above, the IO would also help to reduce renegotiation costs as well, allowing flexibility into the agreement. This provides support for the necessity of creating an IO which would oversee international negotiations.

Why IO Autonomy is Necessary

Abbott and Snidal (1998) provide taxonomy of the functions of an IO. They identify the roles of an IO as information provider, trustee, allocator and arbiter¹⁰. They argue that for an IO to function adequately in these roles, it must remain neutral amongst all states. Only then can it gain universal trust amongst the varied states. Furthermore, if an IO were to be perceived as truly neutral¹¹, the uncertainty and risk between state to state agreements would be reduced thus ensuring the longevity

⁸ See Koremenos (2005): 553

⁹ This is a fair assumption since an agreement under these conditions would be considered rather weak. For example, an agreement between the US and the UK would be less risky on the part of both countries, and with less uncertainty as compared to an agreement between the US and Cuba (given their respective historical contexts). We would naturally expect an agreement between the former to last longer and be stronger than the latter.

¹⁰ See Abbott and Snidal (1998): 19-23

¹¹ Note that the perception of states about the IO as a neutral party is extremely important. This is derived from the "Constructivist" school; an IO simply being neutral is not enough to satisfy everyone under conditions of anarchy. It must necessarily be perceived to be so.

of international cooperation. Abbott and Snidal provide examples of the UN, NATO and the IAEA in these roles, where success is only established once all states believe in the neutrality of the IO itself. Furthermore, states look to neutral IO's for treaty monitoring and enforcement (discussed by Keohane¹²) such as the IAEA case discussed earlier. This is another example of the IO's function as an information provider and arbiter. It may be argued that monitoring and enforcement of treaties may not be inherently neutral as states could pressurize the IO to conduct greater scrutiny on other riskier states, however an agreement on the treaty with a monitoring and enforcement clause would not be possible if one of the states perceived the IO to be biased.

Fearon (1998) further clarifies the importance of international regimes to the interstate bargaining process. He suggests three mechanisms as to why this is so. First, they bring efficiency to repeated bargains since "focal points and bargaining precedents are undoubtedly created by the experience of repeatedly negotiating certain sets of issues within the context of a regime."¹³ Secondly, regimes structure the bargaining process to ensure a high probability of the parties reaching an agreement. Thirdly, regimes can also impact the probability of reaching an agreement by raising the "political costs" of the failure to reach an agreement. What this means is that they can pressurize states to come to an agreement even though they may not realize equal gains.

In order for an IO to carry out these functions and promote harmony and peace between conflicting states, they must be autonomous to a certain extent. This might seem paradoxical since, in order to be autonomous and have the power to coerce and enforce, they must rely on the states themselves to grant them the right to exercise their autonomy. We know from the realist school, however, that self interested states would not allow themselves to be "governed" by an institution, especially in the case where the "governing" entity has no military might whatsoever. This does not hold in the case of IO's since theoretically the IO commands the military of all the other member

¹² As cited by Fearon (1998): 298

¹³ See Fearon (1998): 298

states (in case of a dispute). Furthermore, it is in the interest of each member state to grant the IO autonomy in order to facilitate the utility that each state would derive from the organization.

Conclusion

As outlined above, in order for states to gain efficiencies in dealing with other states, the necessity for an IO (such as the UN) to exist is evident. As globalization increases, the need for states to cooperate has become greater and greater. It follows then, that it is in the interests of states to protect not only their interests and norms, but to incorporate their issues in the global context as well. Issues such as global warming and nuclear proliferation threaten every single state in the world, and thus the need to come together and combat these issues has gained precedence in the past few decades.

Lipson (1991) provides a good counterexample wherein, he argues, that states may form informal agreements between each other when the normal channels cannot provide the tools necessary to resolve the conflict under conditions of time pressure. Furthermore, he states that informal agreements help to circumvent the usual bureaucracies, domestic politics or secretive issues¹⁴. Barring the secretive argument, IO's can be used to facilitate exactly those issues that he lists as the causes for informal agreements.

Downs et al (1996) present a critique of the managerial school, wherein enforcement of treaties is deemed unnecessary and better management is called for. The main thrust of their argument is that states would not agree to large departures from their existing policies without the threat of enforcement. Again, a significantly large member autonomous IO could potentially alleviate this problem simply by putting global pressure on the rogue states, so that they may comply with the rest of the world.

Finally, since a supranational body¹⁵ is necessary, and in order to perform its functions, it must be granted autonomy, it would follow that eventually the sovereignty of this global-governing

¹⁴ See Lipson (1991): 537-538

¹⁵ Such as the UN, though I will avoid labeling the hypothetical IO in this section.

body will supersede the nation-states that created it in the following way. In period 1, the world creates the organization to facilitate agreements and provide administrative support. The major powers (A, B, C, D) in this period grant the IO enough independence so that it is able to maintain its perception as an independent body. In period 2, a single superpower remains (A). This superpower in period 2 still exercises considerable influence over the IO due to its military might. We know, however, that the balance of power shifts between nations over time. In period 3, there is a rising superpower (E) that begins to question the independence of the IO. We would expect the IO, then, to act in ways defying (A) in order to maintain its perception of independence. This would be acceptable to (A) as well since it is in its interests that the IO preserves its image of independence. In period 4, where there is a balance of power between (A) and (E) will the IO become totally independent and begin to be granted further power and sovereignty in order to keep the balance between the two superpowers. Thus, with further iterations, we would expect to see the power of the IO grow, under cases of continued frictions between the two superpowers¹⁶.

¹⁶ This hypothesis of the supranational superpower is theoretical at best. It follows the model of the United States, wherein power was first concentrated within the states, but eventually was transferred to the federal government. It would seem that this is a natural evolutionary process, especially catalyzed by the need to establish standards of commerce and trade within a particular community.

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