

***The New Dynamics of Multilateralism:
Diplomacy, International Organizations, and Global Governance***
**Edited by James P. Muldoon, Jr, JoAnn Fagot Aviel,
Richard Reilano and Earl Sullivan**

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Two perspectives define the debate concerning the significance of international organizations to global politics. Proponents of the liberal perspective maintain that international organizations enhance the potential for global stability as these institutions provide a means of communication and collaboration across state boundaries.¹ By contrast, partisans of the realist perspective prove more skeptical of the value of international organizations. Realists characterize international organizations as largely ineffective and suggest that direction of global politics is instead determined by the interests of the world's most powerful states.²

The New Dynamics of Multilateralism is consistent with the liberal perspective. Focusing on international organizations as the structures through which multilateral diplomacy frequently takes place, the book highlights the different means through which these institutions have played an important role in addressing many of the challenges confronting international politics. An orienting concept for the volume is global governance in which multilateral institutions serve to "constrain and guide their member states' behavior and organize their relationships in accordance with general principles of conduct ..." (49).

The book is an edited volume intended for use in an upper division undergraduate course; it is an updated version of previous editions focused on multilateralism published in 1998 and 2005. The essays included in the volume are drawn from both scholars and practitioners as a means of demonstrating how multilateralism is relevant to both the academic study of global politics as well as more immediate, real world concerns.

The study begins with a series of introductory essays describing the concept of multilateralism and its significance to recent global politics. This is followed by a systematic consideration of different actors that participate in multilateral diplomacy. Separate sections are devoted to the role of states, non-state actors, and the international secretariats of multilateral organizations. A concluding section reflects on the common themes and findings apparent among the different chapters.

There are a number of important strengths associated with this volume. First, the study documents the growing significance of multilateral diplomacy to global politics. The statistics cited within the study reflect the explosive growth in the number of international

1 Robert Keohane's work is representative of the liberal perspective. See Robert Keohane (1989) and Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin (1995).

2 For examples of studies in the realist tradition, see the work of Hans Morgenthau (1948), Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (1994/1995).

organizations and associated non-governmental organizations engaged in multilateralism. For international organizations, the number of institutions is estimated to have grown from 27 in 1909 to 244 in 2006 (11). In terms of non-governmental organizations, such as those engaged in humanitarian aid operations, the United Nations had granted only 90 groups consultative status in 1949; by 2009, the number of groups with this status stood at over 3,290 (297). These numbers provide a striking indication of the growing infrastructure available for carrying out multilateral diplomacy.

Second, many of the chapters are effective at demonstrating that our understanding of international organizations should expand beyond perceiving these structures as only forums where states have an opportunity to consult with one another. Instead, the diplomats within the secretariats of international organizations often have their own values and preferences which they seek to have realized in the decisions made by their institutions. As a result, these actors frequently engage in selling the agenda for their organizations and advocating for their favored policy outcomes.

To cite one example of this often-overlooked role played by international secretariats, a chapter contributed to this volume describes the different strategies employed by the United Nations' World Food Program in response to the rapid rise in global food prices that became apparent during 2006. The World Food Program proved effective at highlighting the danger to the world's poor that resulted from this rise in food prices. As a result of their public diplomacy efforts, the World Food Program received donations of \$5 billion in 2008; this proved to be a significant increase in comparison to the donations of \$2.7 billion in 2007 (278).

A third strength of this volume is its efforts to provide a balanced perspective concerning the effectiveness of both international organizations and affiliated non-governmental organizations to address global challenges. The book's editors are partisans of the liberal perspective and its affect ion for multilateral diplomacy. As a result, most chapters highlight what may be considered the successes of multilateral diplomacy such as efforts at preventing the widespread proliferation of nuclear weapons or responding to humanitarian disasters through the provision of aid to the victims of natural and manmade disasters.

At the same time, the editors have taken care to acknowledge that there are instances where international organizations have proven weak and ineffective, and thus provide some support for realist skepticism about the value of these institutions. In the realm of peacekeeping, contributors note that the United Nations has often proven incapable of generating a rapid response to an unfolding crisis as a result of debates among member states concerning the actual need for intervention as well as a widespread reluctance among government leaders to contribute troops to these missions (110-113).

In a similar vein, contributors note that multilateral diplomacy has been demonstrably ineffective in responding to the threat of climate change resulting from the burning of fossil fuels. The most recent multilateral effort to address this issue was a 2009 international conference held in Copenhagen; the meeting's results are characterized as a: "...loose commitment to hold global warming within 2°C above preindustrial levels, but in terms of a mechanism to effect this, little was achieved"(125). Efforts to establish a more meaningful agreement foundered on concerns among states that broad commitments to limit pollution

would serve to constrain these countries' economic development.

Despite the important insights presented in this volume, there are some relatively minor but notable limitations as well. The essays within the book provided by diplomats and their leaders or non-governmental organizations often seem to describe the operations of their institutions in excruciating detail, with a particular enthusiasm for listing and repeating the acronyms of the organizations with which they have contact.³ Rather than providing this level of detail, these contributions might have more impact on readers if they were grounded in the broader theoretical debate between liberals and realists regarding the significance and influence of international organizations and non-governmental organizations to global politics.

Another problematic aspect of the contributions of practitioners is that these chapters often fall into the trap of serving as cheerleaders for their organizations and thus tend to focus only on the positive aspects of their contributions to multilateralism. This is most apparent in the chapter intended to consider the role of private sector businesses in the processes of global governance. With authors affiliated with the US Chamber of Commerce, the chapter highlights the opportunities that exist for partnerships between the private sector and non-profit organizations. The authors do not explore the potential difficulties that might emerge given the apparent incompatibility of interests between private companies that prioritize profits and nonprofit organizations focused on such issues as environmental protection, promoting worker's rights, and enhancing democracy.

A final concern is the absence of any meaningful discussion within the volume or the criticisms leveled at international organizations related to their failure to represent meaningfully the interests of developing states. Missing from the discussion of the United Nations is the longstanding debate about expanding the number of permanent members of the Security Council to include populous, developing countries such as India, Egypt, Nigeria, or Brazil.⁴ Similarly, in its consideration of global economic institutions, the book fails to mention the conspicuous absence of leaders for these organizations from developing countries; the custom is for the president of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to be an American and the managing director of the International Monetary Fund to be European. In the absence of strong representation, the leadership of developing states often perceives international organizations to be unsympathetic to their needs and interests.

Despite these limitations, this book serves as an excellent introduction to the study of international organizations and global governance. It will provide students and other interested readers with a firm understanding of the different ways that these institutions have the potential to influence the processes of international relations.

3 One illustration of this enthusiasm for acronyms among contributors is the following passage:

“As noted above, the primary approach taken toward influencing COP9 was one of insider politics. Based on an analysis of the exiting political context, TNC and GISP chose to work with governments, the CBD secretariat, and other partners to provide technical inputs into the deliberations...” (193).

4 On the issue of expanding the permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, see Bruce Russett, Barry O'Neill and James Sutterlin (1996).

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