

Book Review: International Organizations and Military Affairs by Hylke Dijkstra

In International Organizations and Military Affairs, Hylke Dijkstra captures the breadth and depth of the interconnections between member states and international secretariats. The book is not only an important scholarly contribution, but also fills a crucial gap for anyone who seeks to gain a better understanding of the politics within international organisations and international military collaborations, writes Kai Chen.

***International Organizations and Military Affairs.* Hylke Dijkstra. Routledge. 2016.**

Find this book:



Based on official documents, secondary literature and background papers, as well as 45 in-depth interviews conducted with relevant policymakers in the United Nations, European Union and NATO, *International Organizations and Military Affairs*, authored by Hylke Dijkstra, explores why and how member states seek to control the expansion of secretariats within these three major international organisations engaging in multinational military operations. It's noteworthy that Dijkstra adopts the principal-agent theory as the analytic framework of the book.

International Organizations and Military Affairs is divided into four parts. The first section (Introduction and Chapter One) explains why some member states would like to control the secretariats and constrain their expansion. In the following part (Chapters Two to Four), Dijkstra offers an overview of the institutional dynamics of the UN, the EU and NATO, which have swayed precariously between 'delegating' and 'controlling' their secretariats: namely, the UN Secretariat (e.g. the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support), the EU's European External Action Service and the NATO International Staff.

In the early twenty-first century, international organisations have played essential roles in planning and conducting multinational military operations. In order to reduce the costs of these (e.g. burden sharing and legitimacy), member states of international organisations have delegated some military functions to secretariats. As a result, secretariats have their own budgetary and personnel resources, and even informational advantages over member states. While interests vary across the member states, there has been a clear division between attitudes toward international secretariats. While some member states do not see clear benefits in the expansion of the secretariats, 'like-minded member states want secretariats to succeed in exerting influence' (208).





Image Credit: (HimmelrichPR CC BY SA 2.0)

From a cost–benefit perspective, Part Three of the book (Chapters Five to Seven) analyses why and how member states have used three mechanisms to control the expansion of the secretariats within these major international organisations, which ‘each employ 450-650 policy-grade civil servants working on security and military affairs’ (45). For the member states against the secretariats’ expansion, they consider that ‘if states anticipate too high agency costs, they should not delegate at all’ (214). Not surprisingly, these member states have therefore been using three control mechanisms: non-delegation (or incomplete delegation), generic rules and shadow bureaucracies. In the words of Dijkstra, these mechanisms are ‘directly linked to the unilateral interests of member states or groups of member states’ (129). Although the three mechanisms have proved effective, they have considerable administrative and policy costs; Dijkstra therefore identifies the pros and cons of the three mechanisms.

First, some member states have preferred the non-delegation of critical functions. Non-delegation addresses agency costs but has ‘resulted in considerable policy costs’, such as delays in multinational military operations (64). However, there is a notable exception: Operation Atalanta, one of the EU anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, in which the non-delegation of UK command functions did not lead to high policy costs. This was because the national headquarters of the British armed forces are in Northwood, the same location as the EU and NATO’s operations headquarters. This co-location therefore ‘has allowed for contacts and inter-institutional coordination’ (194).

Second, some member states have adopted generic rules (e.g. operating procedures and doctrines), which ‘restricts the flexibility of secretariats’ (43). In the case of the NATO International Staff, Dijkstra identifies several generic rules including, but not limited to, zero budgetary growth and ‘the division of high-level positions among the key member states’ (204). Regarding the UN Secretariat, UN member states also follow a generic rule that ‘the large majority of personnel is appointed on yearly contracts’ (82). In the long run, these would probably lead to negative outcomes: for instance, private military/security contractors being employed by the UN under yearly contracts is still controversial from the point of view of international law.

Third, in order to address informational asymmetries, some member states have used shadow bureaucracies to gather, process and verify information at the cost of significant in-house administrative capability. In fact, some shadow bureaucracies are barely satisfying. In the case of UNMISS (the United Nations Mission in South Sudan), sometimes its function was reportedly limited to ‘protect[ing] the civilians who made their way to the UN bases’ (152).

The final part, Chapter Eight, outlines the issues that need further research in the coming future. Dijkstra shows less concern about the secretariats' countermeasures to the control mechanisms. For instance, as he confesses, the NATO International Staff used to 'team up with the United States and other like-minded allies' (173). At the very least, there is an urgent need to answer the following two questions: how have the international secretariats colluded with like-minded member states? And how have the international secretariats responded to the control mechanisms adopted by some member states? The answers to the aforementioned questions would be helpful for considering the future payoffs of delegation. In addition, this reviewer is highly interested in the extent to which Dijkstra's findings would be applicable to non-European regional organisations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

International Organizations and Military Affairs captures the breadth and depth of the interconnections between member states and international secretariats. Moreover, it offers not only an important scholarly contribution, but also fills a crucial gap for anyone who seeks to gain a better understanding of the politics within international organisations and international military collaborations. This reviewer highly recommends this book to any individuals interested in international security as well as future scholars and analysts.

Kai Chen, PhD, is an assistant professor at the School of International Relations, Xiamen University, China. His principal research focuses on the nexus between international security and human insecurity, such as child labour, and maritime piracy. He has held visiting appointments at the National University of Singapore, Kyoto University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Thammasat University in Thailand, and Chengchi University in Taiwan. He is the author of *On Geo-cultural Relations between China and Indo-China Peninsula Countries* (Xiamen University Press, 2016), and *Comparative Study of Child Soldiering on Myanmar-China Border: Evolutions, Challenges and Countermeasures* (Springer, 2014).

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

July 13th, 2017 | [Europe and Neighbourhoods](#), [Featured](#), [International Relations book reviews](#), [Kai](#)

[Chen, Routledge](#) | [0 Comments](#)



This work by [LSE Review of Books](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England & Wales](#).

↵