

The Effects of International Security Institutions: A Critical Analysis

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I. Introduction

What difference do international institutions make in the security domain? Just as international security is one of the central subfields of international politics, international security institutions (ISIs) constitute an important subset of international institutions and political institutions more generally. Both despite and because of that fact, however, any attempt to write about the effects of ISIs must contend with two significant hurdles. First, scholars have written very little about ISIs per se. A thriving academic literature exists on the more general topic whether and how international institutions matter. But with only a few exceptions (e.g., Jervis 1983; Müller 1993; Duffield 1994; Wallander 1999; Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallander 1999), theoretical writings on the subject either draw their examples primarily from other realms, such as the international political economy (e.g., Keohane 1984) and international environmental cooperation (e.g., Young 1999), or make no effort to distinguish among international institutions in different issue areas.

One reason for this relative neglect may be that, as discussed more fully below, security affairs is the arena in which international institutions have been expected, on theoretical grounds, to be least consequential. Of course, this expectation, however well grounded, is at variance with the large numbers of ISIs that have in fact existed. Indeed, the ubiquity and diversity of ISIs is the source of the second obstacle. Scholars have produced numerous works on specific types of ISIs, such as laws of war, alliances, arms control agreements, and collective security systems, and countless analyses of particular institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and others. Arguably, the relevant literatures are too vast to summarize in a single paper.

Thus the dual challenge is to say something distinct about the effects of ISIs as a whole that nevertheless does justice to them in all their variety. With that goal in mind, this paper will address two issues. The first concerns the characteristics of ISIs. What features, if any, distinguish ISIs from international institutions in other issue areas? I argue that ISIs may be usefully differentiated on the basis of two fundamental analytical distinctions that are especially relevant, if not unique, to security affairs.

The second issue, and primary focus of the paper, is the significance of ISIs. What do we know (or think we know) about the effects of ISIs? What do we not know? And how might we best find out more about them? The paper examines the principal theoretical arguments and hypotheses that have been put forward regarding how and when ISIs should be consequential. It explores in particular four leading theoretical perspectives that offer varying, and often conflicting, assessments of the degree to – and ways in – which international institutions matter. Along the way, the paper also reviews some -- although by no means all -- of the empirical evidence that has been offered in support of these arguments.

II. Definitions: What Are ISIs?

Like many other topics in international politics, the terms “international security” and “international institutions” have multiple meanings. Security has long been a contested concept. Not only the nature of the sources of insecurity (e.g., military, economic, social, environmental, etc.) but also the appropriate units of concern (e.g., individuals, national groups, states, global society, etc.) have been the subjects of considerable debate (e.g., Wolfers 1962; Buzan 1983; Ullman 1983). And with the end of the cold war and the existential threat of mutual assured destruction, the question of what should be the proper ambit of “security studies” assumed even greater prominence (e.g., Haftendorn 1991; Walt 1991; Kolodziej 1992).

In hopes of placing some reasonable limits on the discussion, however, this chapter will employ a relatively narrow and traditional definition of security. For our purposes, international security concerns intentional, politically-motivated acts of physical violence directed by one political actor against another, typically – but not exclusively – states, that cross international boundaries. Thus ISIs are those that seek to address or regulate

- 1) the threat and use for political purposes of instruments (weapons) designed to cause injury or death to humans and damage or destruction to physical objects, and responses to such threats and uses by other actors;
- 2) the production, possession, exchange, and transfer of weapons of various types; and
- 3) the peacetime deployment and activities of military forces armed with such weapons.

It should nevertheless be noted that many ISIs also address concerns that extend beyond these issues.

Unfortunately, the task of defining international institutions is no less problematic. Over the years, scholars have employed multiple conceptions and definitions. One important distinction is that between institutions that are consciously constructed by states and other actors, such as specific treaties and agreements, and those that evolve in a more spontaneous and less intentional fashion, such as sovereignty and many laws of war (Young 1989). A closely related distinction is that between institutions made up of formal rules and procedures and those that consist largely of intersubjective norms. Again, in order to bound the problem, this chapter will focus on relatively formal and consciously constructed “sets of rules meant to govern international behavior” (Simmons and Martin 2002, 194), especially those that are negotiated and endorsed by states.

This conception raises in turn the question of the relationship between international institutions and international organizations. Prominent international relations scholars have offered opposing views on the issue. Robert Keohane includes formal organizations in his influential definition of international institutions (1989, 3-4), while Oran Young explicitly distinguishes between institutions and organizations, which he defines as “material entities possessing physical locations (or seats), offices, personnel, equipment, and budgets” (1989, 32). Certainly, it is important to recognize the material and agentic qualities of international organizations, which can become important international actors in their own right (e.g., Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Nevertheless, most international organizations have a strong basis in rules that define their roles, functions, authority, and capabilities. For example, the UN Security Council and its procedures are established in the UN Charter. Whether it is more fruitful to regard an international organization as an institution or as an actor will depend upon the precise question that one seeks to answer. But as practical matter, it may be difficult to distinguish between their agentic and institutional characteristics.

III. Forms of ISIs

Now that ISIs have been defined, we may begin to differentiate among basic types.

As suggested above, ISIs can assume a perhaps bewildering array of forms: international laws, treaties, agreements, organizations, regimes, and perhaps others. How can we make sense out of – and impose meaningful order on – this diversity?

As a first cut, we might seek to categorize them according to their spatial or functional scope. For example, Oran Young distinguishes between “international orders,” or broad framework arrangements governing the activities of all or almost all members of international society, and “international regimes,” which are more specialized arrangements that pertain to well-defined activities, resources, or geographical areas and often involve only some subset of the members of international society (Young 1989, 13). Similarly, the English school literature differentiates between primary institutions, which define the basic character and purpose of international society, and secondary institutions, which are more akin to regimes (Buzan 2004, xviii, 167). Alternatively, Robert Keohane distinguishes between three basic forms of international institutions: formal intergovernmental or cross-national nongovernmental organizations; international regimes, which “are institutions with explicit rules, agreed upon by governments, that pertain to particular sets of issues in international relations”; and conventions, which are “informal institutions with implicit rules and understandings that shape the expectations of actors” (1989, 3-4). Despite the usefulness of these and other conceptualizations, however, they offer no unique insights with regard to ISIs.

A. Inclusive vs Exclusive ISIs

Nevertheless, ISIs can be differentiated on the basis of two other fundamental analytical distinctions that are particularly relevant, and perhaps even unique, to security affairs. The first and more familiar distinction is that between inclusive and exclusive ISIs, which reflect fundamentally different goal orientations (e.g., Duffield 1994; Wallander and Keohane 1999). Inclusive or internally-oriented ISIs are primarily intended to enhance the security of their participants with respect to one another by reducing the likelihood of military conflict among them. They include collective security systems, prohibitions on the use of force, arms control agreements, and other possible arrangements between actual or potential

adversaries. In contrast, exclusive or externally-oriented ISIs serve principally to provide security to their participants with respect to non-members that are regarded as posing actual or potential physical threats. Their ultimate objective is to influence the behavior, intentions, and/or capabilities of such non-members, although the achievement of this goal often requires influencing the behavior, intentions, and/or capabilities of participants as well. Into this category fall alliances and arrangements for restricting the export of armaments or goods and technologies with military applications to third parties.

B. Operative vs. Contingent Rules

A second and much less noted distinction applies to the types of substantive rules that lie at the core of an ISI. These may be grouped into two basic categories: operative rules and contingent rules. Operative rules concern the ongoing activities of states. In principle, a state can be said to be in compliance or not with an operative rule at any given time. Most ISIs based on operative rules can be subsumed in three categories: arms control agreements, prohibitions on the use of force, and export control arrangements. The first two are inclusive while the latter are exclusive.

Arms control agreements are perhaps the most common form of operative rule-based ISIs. Some actively restrict the numbers, types, or deployment of the military forces that adherents may acquire and maintain, as have the ABM, SALT, INF, and CFE treaties. Others place limits on peacetime military activities, such as training, military exercises, and other measures intended to prepare forces for combat and to enhance their readiness, as have the Stockholm and Vienna agreements on confidence-building measures (CBMs) and the U.S.-Soviet Incidents at Sea Agreement.

Other familiar ISIs based on operative rules are those that proscribe the use of force. The UN Charter, for example, prohibits the initiation of all military hostilities. Others ban the use of certain types of weapons, such as chemical weapons, or restrict the purposes for which weapons can be employed, such as attacks upon civilians, in conflict.

Finally, export control arrangements place constraints on their participants' assistance to or cooperation with third parties that are regarded as actual or potential military threats.

Prominent examples are COCOM, the Australia Group, and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which have restricted the transfer of armaments and technologies with military applications to certain non-members. Their purpose is to limit the military capabilities of potential adversaries, thereby minimizing or even preventing the emergence of external threats and thus enhancing the security of their participants.

Contingent rules, in contrast, concern the activities of states in hypothetical circumstances that may never obtain. They are generally prescriptive, indicating what actions participants should take if the triggering conditions were to materialize. In fact, the purpose of contingent rules is typically to prevent the indicated circumstances from arising in the first place. Put differently, the principal issue involved is not whether states will comply with the rules when called upon to do so but whether the behavior of other states will be sufficiently altered by the prospect of compliance with the rules so as to obviate the need to invoke them.

ISIs based on contingent rules come in two basic varieties: inclusive collective security systems (CSS) and exclusive alliances (Claude 1962, 144-49; Wolfers 1962). The institutional character of alliances has often been overlooked in studies of the subject as well as by neorealist analyses of international institutions.¹ Yet it can be quite pronounced. At the core of an alliance is the positive injunction to provide assistance to a member if it is attacked by a non-member. This rule is often formalized in a treaty of alliance, although it need not be. It is the existence of such a rule, however, that distinguishes alliances from uninstitutionalized alignments between states based on common or complementary interests (Snyder 1997).² Nevertheless, alliances may also contain numerous operative rules

¹The focus here is on defensive alliances. Alliances for the purpose of aggression and conquest are excluded. The latter are generally ad hoc and thus much less likely to be institutionalized. Technically, moreover, they are based on operative rules of cooperation. For further discussion of aggressive alliances, see Schweller 1994.

²This definition is consistent with much of the alliance literature, e.g., Wolfers (1968, 268) and Reiter (1996, 58), although it is narrower than that employed by some alliance theorists, e.g., Walt (1987, 12).

concerning the peacetime military activities and preparations of their members, but such rules are derivative and supportive of the contingent rules regarding wartime assistance on which an alliance is based.

The characterization of CSSs as contingent-rule based ISIs may be disputed. CSSs contain core rules prescribing the actions that participants should take in the event that aggression occurs.³ At the same time, they are typically predicated on the existence of more or less explicit operative rules proscribing the use of force or other harmful actions by participants against one another. Thus it may be tempting to view CSSs simply as auxiliary sanctions regimes. Nevertheless, the operative rules prohibiting aggressive acts and the contingent rules prescribing responses to them need not be formally related and may in practice develop independently. For example, a regional CSS could be based on universal principles of international law.

The distinctions between inclusive and exclusive ISIs, on the one hand, and operative and contingent rules, on the other, suggest a four-fold typology of ISIs, which can be represented by a two-by-two matrix (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Typology of ISIs

	<u>Inclusive ISIs</u>	<u>Exclusive ISIs</u>
<u>Operative rules</u>	Arms control agreements (e.g., ABM, SALT, NPT, CBMs) Use of force prohibitions (e.g., UN Charter)	Export controls arrangements (e.g., COCOM, Nuclear Suppliers Group)
<u>Contingent rules</u>	Collective security systems (e.g., League of Nations, UN)	Alliances (e.g., NATO, WEU)

³Useful discussions of collective security systems include Claude (1962), Claude (1971) and Kupchan and Kupchan (1991). A broader definition of collective security is proposed in Downs and Iida (1994, 18).

It should be stressed that each of these categories is an ideal type. Actual ISIs may fall into two or more of them. For example, nominal alliances may simultaneously be CSSs if they also require their members to defend one another against attacks by other members. Alternately, alliances and CSSs may be accompanied by export control arrangements or arms control agreements.

IV. The Significance of ISIs

The most important question to be asked of ISIs is whether they make any difference in international politics. After all, if an affirmative answer cannot be offered, there would seem to be little point in discussing the nature and determinants of ISIs, let alone the mechanisms through which they may work their effects.

To be sure, the large numbers of ISIs that have existed as well as the demonstrated willingness of states to invest considerable time, energy, and resources in them constitute *prima facie* evidence of the importance of ISIs. Yet the presence of these phenomena is usually not regarded as sufficient even by those who believe that ISIs are consequential. Instead, we must look at the theoretical arguments – pro and con – that have been advanced regarding the influence of ISIs and the empirical evidence that has been offered in support of those arguments.

Unfortunately, there is as yet no distinct body of theory regarding the effects of ISIs. Rather, we must turn to the more general theoretical literature on the significance of international institutions, identifying where possible the distinct ways in which ISIs might (or might not) make a difference. That said, international security may provide an especially valuable arena for adjudicating among the competing claims of different theories insofar as it is the area where theorists of all stripes have expected international institutions to be least consequential (e.g., Lipson 1984; Keohane 1984, 6-7; Grieco 1988, 504; Grieco 1990, 11-14; Mearsheimer 1994/95). This chapter will review and evaluate four of the most influential theoretical approaches, laying out their principal arguments and providing empirical illustrations from the universe of ISIs.

Of course, institutions can have effects only where they exist. Yet potentially influential ISIs have not always been created in situations where they could in theory have mattered. In this regard, there may be a close connection between the causes and consequences of international institutions. Given space constraints, however, this chapter will not be able to address the important issues of whether and when ISIs are actually created and the forms they may take.

A. The Neorealist Baseline

The principal theoretical source of the null hypothesis that ISIs do not matter is neorealism. This approach emphasizes the potential for conflict inherent in the ability of states to use force against one another, the anarchic nature of the international system, and the presence of substantial degree uncertainty about other states' intentions, capabilities, and actions. Neorealist scholars hold a highly skeptical view about the significance of international institutions in general and ISIs in particular.

Neorealists argue that international institutions exert minimal influence over state behavior and international outcomes on several grounds (e.g., Grieco 1988; Mearsheimer 1994/95). First, they maintain that states will be reluctant both to create institutions in the first place and to observe the rules of any institutions that they do establish. One reason is the fear that other states will cheat on their obligations, leaving any states that do comply at a disadvantage. Given uncertainty about others' intentions, states can never be sure that their partners will abide by agreements and not seek to exploit them.

A more fundamental concern is that even when fears of cheating are absent and all states enjoy absolute benefits, some states may gain more than others and thus be able to increase their relative capabilities. Concerns about the distribution of gains are likely to be especially acute in security affairs, since states may be able to use any advantage they obtain in military power to coerce or conquer their adversaries (Grieco 1988; Wallander 1999, 15). As evidence of the salience of relative gains concerns, scholars have offered examples of unwillingness even among allies to strike deals on economic issues that would make all better off (Grieco 1990; Mastanduno 1991). In the security realm, one might also point to the hard

bargaining that typically proceeds – and sometimes prevents – the achievement of mutually beneficial arms control accords.

Another leading neorealist argument is that international institutions are epiphenomena. Even if states do choose to create international institutions, the latter merely reflect the calculations of self-interest of the most powerful states (Krasner 1983b; Strange 1983; Krasner 1991; Mearsheimer 1994/95). Thus powerful states are free to disregard institutional obligations whenever compliance is no longer viewed as convenient, and institutions are subject to restructuring or abandonment with each shift in the distribution of state power and interests. As examples of this dynamic, one might cite NATO's continuing dependence on U.S. sufferance, the unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty by the United States, and the latter's highly controversial decision to invade Iraq without the explicit authorization of the UN Security Council.

A related rational-choice argument is that international institutions typically require states to make at most marginal changes of behavior. Deeper cooperation involving greater departures from the status quo is avoided because the utility of cheating rises faster than the utility of compliance and participating states are unwilling or unable to pay the higher costs of enforcement. Thus U.S.-Soviet arms control treaties rarely required either side to alter its planned military programs substantially, and perhaps the most ambitious arms control agreement ever formulated, the 1923 Washington Naval Treaty, was marked by a high degree of non-compliance (Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom 1996).

B. Creating Theoretical Space for Institutional Effects

Other scholars, however, have cast doubt on each of these claims, thereby creating theoretical space within which ISIs might exert independent effects. Most easily dispensed with is the argument about fears of cheating. Uncertainty about the behavior of other states as well as their capabilities and intentions is a variable, not a constant (Wallander 1999, 24). Thus rather than simply assume the worst, states have an incentive to reduce uncertainty by obtaining more information. To this end, they may take unilateral measures, such as spy satellites, but they can also make use of international institutions.

Likewise, neorealists have exaggerated both the prevalence and the magnitude of relative gains concerns. Such worries are not always present in security affairs, and when they are present, they may not be sufficient to inhibit cooperation. Consequently, the potential of ISIs to shape state behavior and international outcomes is much greater than neorealists have acknowledged. First, as the distinction between inclusive and exclusive ISIs suggests, concerns about relative gains are likely to be less prominent in relations among allies than in relations between adversaries. Notwithstanding the truism that today's ally may be tomorrow's enemy, alignments may be highly stable under some configurations of power and interest. In those cases, states will not fear that their partners might soon turn on them. And even where relative gains concerns are not insignificant, they may be overridden by the imperative to work together in the face of a hostile common enemy.

In relations among adversaries, moreover, concerns about relative gains may not exist because institutions have no distributional consequences. Some ISIs may increase the security of all participants without affecting their relative power. For example, confidence-building measures that place constraints on peacetime military activities can lower the risk of an unintended conflict due to mistrust or misperception without affecting military capabilities.

And even where institutions do have distributional consequences, a state may have little or no opportunity to exploit relative gains. Thus in relations among nuclear-armed states, an agreement that enables one party to gain or maintain a numerical advantage in nuclear weapons will do little to diminish the security of other parties if they already possess invulnerable second-strike capabilities (Weber 1991). Likewise, in a world of conventionally-armed states, the distribution of gains will have little impact if defense is easy and offense is difficult (Glaser 1994/95, 79).

As for the argument that institutions are epiphenomena of power and interests, even the most powerful states may have incentives to comply with the rules of established institutions when doing so is inconvenient, and sometimes these incentives will outweigh those favoring non-compliance. Certainly, it is rational for no less a country than the United States to weigh the benefits to be gained from circumventing the UN Security Council against the possible

costs before choosing a course of action. In addition, even if institutions exhibit little autonomy and robustness, they may still be “essential mediators” between the distribution of state power and interests, on the one hand, and the precise forms that behavior may take, on the other (Hasenclever, Maier, and Rittberger 1997, 108). The importance of this fact is reinforced by the indeterminacy of structural factors. A range of particular institutional forms may be compatible with a given constellation of power and interests.

Going further, international institutions may in fact exhibit considerable resilience in the face of structural changes (Krasner 1983a; Keohane 1984, 100-103; Duffield 1992; Wallander 2000). One reason is uncertainty about whether the institution will be required -- or at least of use -- in the future, especially if states are risk averse. Another is the fact that institutions embody sunk costs and are thus usually easier to maintain than to construct anew. A third may be that an existing institution’s “assets” can be adapted for new purposes (Wallander 2000). Indeed, the existence of fungible institutional capabilities may lead states to discover new applications to which they might be put (March and Olson 1998, 966-68), as illustrated by the development of UN peacekeeping and NATO’s post-cold war interventions in the Balkans. A fourth reason is what March and Olson term the “competency trap”: actors will tend to buy into a particular institution by virtue of developing familiarity with the rules and capabilities for using them (1998). Whatever the reasons, as March and Olson observe, “institutions are relatively robust against environmental change or deliberate reform... the character of current institutions depends not only on current conditions but also on the historical path of institutional development” (1998, 959). Certainly, one can point to a number of examples of ISIs -- the UN Security Council, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and NATO, to name but a few -- that have outlived their original circumstances and endured in the face of major structural changes.

C. Neoinstitutionalism

In sum, strong theoretical grounds exist for concluding that ISIs may have important independent consequences. Through what mechanisms, then, can they work their influence?

The most well-developed school of thought on the impact of international institutions

is neoinstitutionalism. This approach, which has grown out of regime theory, has also been termed neoliberal institutionalism or simply institutionalism. It shares many assumptions with neorealism: that states are the primary actors in international politics, that they are rational egoists concerned only about their own interests, and that they interact in an anarchic setting with no higher authority to protect them from each other and enforce agreements. Despite these commonalities, neoinstitutionalists nevertheless employ a functionalist logic to argue that states will create sets of more or less formal rules where they expect such rules to serve their interests. These institutions can do so by increasing the options available to states and by altering the incentives to select one course of action or another, thereby producing different behaviors and outcomes than would have obtained in their absence.

Neoinstitutionalists have identified at least four specific mechanisms through which institutional rule sets can make a difference (Keohane 1984; Martin 1992b). First, and most simply, they can provide or serve as focal points that help states solve coordination problems. In many situations, more than one potentially beneficial and stable cooperative outcome (equilibrium) exists. Although different states may prefer different outcomes, once a particular solution is chosen, they all have an interest in complying with it. Any departure, such as choosing to drive on the left-hand side of the road (in North America, anyway), is likely to make the violator worse off, at least in the short term. Examples from security affairs include cold war spheres of influence (Duffield 1994), the U.S.-Soviet Incidents at Sea Agreement (Lynn-Jones 1984), and common NATO standards for military forces and doctrines.

In other situations, such as those represented by the Prisoner's Dilemma, states may benefit from mutual adjustments in their behavior but still have incentives to return to the status quo. Adversaries may attempt to gain a temporary military advantage in peacetime or war, and allies may seek to free ride on the efforts of their partners. In these so-called collaboration problems with unstable equilibria, institutional rules may serve as well-defined standards of behavior that reinforce the incentives to cooperate. Not only does one state's non-compliance risk the loss of the benefits generated by other states' cooperation and perhaps even the immediate imposition of additional sanctions, but it may also have

significant reputational costs. Other states may be less inclined to cooperate with a recognized rule violator on other potentially beneficial issues (Hasenclever, Maier, and Rittberger 1997, 35).

Such standards of behavior lie at the heart of many ISIs based on operative rules. These include arms control agreements that place limits on the numbers and types of weapons states may field, NATO conventional force goals during the cold war (Duffield 1992), and laws of war that prohibit certain military practices. ISIs based on contingent rules of behavior may perform a similar function. By entering into an alliance or a collective security system, a state can signal or clarify its intentions to both potential adversaries and allies that it will resist aggression against and provide assistance to those attacked. Although subsequent non-compliance may be subject to fewer immediate costs and cannot be ruled out, it may still have important reputational consequences. Thus by signing the North Atlantic Treaty, the United States engaged its reputation and raised the stakes associated with possible future choices.

A third important way in which institutions can have an impact is by reducing uncertainty (Keohane 1984; Martin 1992b). Where states have agreed to clear standards of behavior, they may be unsure that others are observing their commitments and thus experience additional incentives not to comply themselves. And even in situations where no party can improve its situation by defecting, so-called assurance problems, states may nevertheless be uncertain of others' intentions and thus fear that others may seek to exploit them. In both cases, institutions can promote cooperation by helping fearful states obtain greater certainty about others' behavior, capabilities, and interests and, conversely, by allowing states to reassure others that they are in compliance or have only benign intentions. To achieve these goals, international institutions may include rules requiring states to provide each other with certain forms of information or allowing others to carry out various types of inspections.

Such transparency provisions sometimes form the central elements of ISIs, as in the case of confidence building measures. At other times, such as the increasingly elaborate monitoring provisions of arms control agreements like the INF Treaty, they supplement more

fundamental behavioral standards. A third example is NATO's force planning process, which involves the sharing of detailed information about each member's military capabilities and plans and has played a central role in allaying concerns about free riding as well as of potential intra-alliance threats (Tuschhoff 1999)

Finally, international institutions can provide negotiating opportunities for their participants (Keohane 1984; Hasenclever, Maier, and Rittberger 1997, 34). By reducing transaction costs, standing decision making procedures make it easier for states to resolve disputes over existing rules and distributional conflicts, to devise new rules as needed, and to react in an effective manner to whatever instances of non-compliance that may occur. This is a central function of the UN Security Council, which interprets and organizes responses to violations of rules contained in the UN Charter. It has also been prominently on display over the years in NATO, whose members have made repeated decisions about peacetime military preparations and activities and, more recently, foreign deployments and military interventions.

D. Institutions as Organizations

As the examples suggest, decision making procedures are typically associated with international organizations, although they need not be (Young 1989). Thus a third theoretical approach emphasizes the organizational characteristics of many international institutions. From this perspective, international institutions become tools with a physical or material dimension that states can use to pursue their individual or collective interests. It is useful nevertheless to distinguish here between two general organizational forms: as collective actors and as autonomous actors.

Many international organizations take the form of rule-bound structures in which the representatives of member states interact and make collective choices. In the security realm, these include the UN Security Council, the North Atlantic Council, the U.S.-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and others. As such, international organizations can perform several functions – beyond simply reducing transaction costs – more effectively than ad hoc

groupings of states.

First, they allow the members to speak, should they choose to do so, with a single voice. In particular, they are able to dispense politically significant approval and disapproval of the claims, policies, and actions of states (Claude 1966). This collective legitimation function in turn facilitates the mobilization of international support on behalf of or in opposition to particular behaviors. Traditionally, it has been the prerogative Security Council, as exemplified by its response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. But when the Council has been deadlocked, other organizations have occasionally been employed, such as the General Assembly under the 1950 Uniting for Peace Resolution and NATO during the 1999 Kosovo crisis.

A second important function of international organizations as collective actors is the centralization of members' activities and resources (Abbott and Snidal 1998). At a minimum, such pooling may result in greater efficiencies, as when it allows – or requires – participants to specialize in particular activities. It may provide less capable members with resources that they could not obtain on their own. And it may even result in the generation of capabilities on a scale that no single member alone could produce.

Perhaps the best example in the security realm has been NATO's force planning process and integrated military planning and command structure. These organizational structures have discouraged the unnecessary duplication of military capabilities. They have provided the smaller members with access to intelligence about potential external threats and other assets that they would otherwise have lacked. And as a side benefit, they have placed constraints on the ability of many members to use their forces for purely national purposes (Duffield 1994; Tuschhoff 1999).

Third, international organizations of this type facilitate the use of issue linkage, especially where their mandates comprehend multiple issue areas. States can attempt to link issues outside of formal organizational frameworks. But the influence that organizational decision rules confer upon members can be a powerful source of leverage. Thus Britain was able to use its position in the European Community to obtain continued support for economic sanctions on Argentina by its reluctant partners during the 1982 Falklands Islands conflict

(Martin 1992a).

Whether international institutions take the form of sets of rules or collective organizational actors, even some leading neoinstitutionalists have questioned just how significant their independent effects actually are (Keohane and Martin 2003). If states form institutions in response to the structural conditions they face, is it not those conditions that best explain the outcomes associated with the institutions? One further response to this “endogeneity” problem is to recognize that international organizations can also assume the form of autonomous actors. States often create bodies to perform various executive functions, such as the UN Secretariat, the NATO International Staff, and others (Abbott and Snidal 1997). These supranational bodies are typically endowed with responsibilities, resources, such as technical expertise and information, and a certain degree of discretion that enable them to act independently to an important extent, or what has been termed “agency slack” (Keohane and Martin 2003, 102-103; Barnett and Finnemore 2004).

Although such organizations are not typically able to act in ways that directly contravene the interests of the states that create them, especially the more powerful ones, their autonomy allows them to perform certain functions more effectively than individual or even groups of states. As relatively neutral actors, international organizations may be able to serve as monitors or arbiters in politically charged situations where others may be refused access. Even if they are working on behalf of member states, their seemingly non-partisan nature will often make their activities more acceptable (Abbott and Snidal 1998).

In the security realm, the secretaries general of both the UN and NATO or their representatives have often been called upon to serve as mediators. Within NATO, the perceived impartiality of its high-level military commanders has enabled them to resolve conflicts and gain national concessions on disputed issues (Tuschhoff 1999). IAEA inspectors are more likely to gain access to the nuclear facilities of the organization’s members than would representatives of some individual countries. Perhaps the most prominent example is the practice of UN peacekeeping, which has allowed powerful states to support conflict resolution without becoming directly involved (Abbott and Snidal 1998, 19).

E. Social Constructivism

A second escape from the endogeneity trap lies in the recognition that international institutions can sometimes alter the basic structural variables that give rise to them in the first place through a variety of feedback mechanisms (Krasner 1983a). Such a process is implicit in the problem of relative gains, whereby states' compliance with international institutions can result in shifts in the distribution of power. Of particular interest here, however, are situations in which a state's participation in international institutions can alter its effective policy preferences.

Preference change can come about in several general ways. One approach focuses on the internal distributional consequences of international institutions, which can promote the formation and strengthening of domestic and transnational actors with an interest in compliance and weaken those that are opposed (Milner 1988; Haas 1990). Another approach emphasizes the internalization of institutional rules, which can be translated into domestic legislation, organizational routines, and standard operating procedures (Mueller 1993; Young 1999).

Perhaps the most developed and influential approach is social constructivism, which starts from the premise that (international) actors and social structures are mutually constituted. In contrast to rationalist approaches, social constructivism holds that the nature of actors is malleable and subject to modification through processes of interaction (e.g., Adler 1997; Ruggie 1998; Wendt 1999). In particular, for the purposes of this discussion, a state's involvement with or participation in an ISI can bring about changes in its interests and even its very identity, which in turn can have long-term behavior implications. From this perspective, then, international institutions are effectively schools in which actors learn or are taught new understandings and meanings.

Beyond these broad shared parameters, social constructivist work varies on a number of dimensions. One is the unit of analysis. Social constructivists have focused on individuals, elites, central decisionmakers, governmental organizations, social groups, and society as a whole. With few exceptions, however, they agree that meaningful analysis requires abandoning the state centric ontology of neorealism and neoinstitutionalism and

considering various domestic actors. Another source of variation is the particular ideational change that is of interest. Although social constructivism is usually framed in terms of interests/goals and identities/loyalties, it can also comprehend world views or definitions of the situation, including images of other actors; beliefs about how most effectively to achieve one's goals; and values.

In addition, social constructivists have identified and explored several mechanisms through which ideational change might occur in international institutional contexts. One is learning. Here, exposure via direct experience, such as personal contacts and interaction, or more goal-directed study may lead to emulation or imitation (Nye 1987; Checkel 1997). A second mechanism is teaching, whereby an organizational actor actively seeks to instruct state members via conferences, training programs, on-site consulting, and other means (Finnemore 1993). Teaching models typically presuppose some asymmetry in authority or technical expertise. Finally, actors may seek to persuade one another, using international institutions and especially organizations as discourse arenas that facilitate argumentative processes (Risse 2000; Checkel 2001; Johnston 2001).

Whether and how much ideational change will occur within ISIs as a result of such processes may depend on a number of institutional characteristics, not to mention other factors. One is the extent of exposure or density of interactions, which would seem to favor ISIs with well-developed organizational components. A second is the informality of intra-institutional interactions, which may facilitate argumentative processes. A third another is the degree of hierarchy inherent the institutional setting, which can both facilitate or hinder the transfer of ideas depending on other characteristics of the actors involved.

Thus far, related empirical work has not focused particularly on the effects of ISIs. Nevertheless, a number of relevant examples of social constructivist dynamics at work in the security realm can be found. Perhaps the first to be noted concerned U.S.-Soviet security relations, where interactions in a variety of institutional fora were seen as contributing to changing Soviet elite views about nuclear weapons and of the United States (Nye 1987; Mueller 1993). Within NATO, scholars have also found evidence of institutionally-driven ideational change. Individuals working within the organization have developed more

complex loyalties (Tuschhoff 1999), and the alliance allegedly played a role in reshaping post-unification German attitudes about the legitimacy of outside military interventions (Harnisch and Maull 2001). More recently, Chinese participation in the dialogue process of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has changed the beliefs of Chinese officials in charge of ARF policy about their country's interests with regard to regional security institutions and issues (Johnston 1999, 291).

VI. Conclusion

What can we conclude about the significance of ISIs? The empirical record indicates that they have had noteworthy effects of different types through a variety of causal mechanisms. These effects range from modifications of state behavior induced by the presence of institutional rules to the autonomous activities of international organizations to changes in the internal characteristics of states through their involvement in ISIs.

That said, this paper has not offered a systematic review of the available empirical evidence. A much more extensive survey would be required to answer with any confidence the question of what we already know about when and how often particular effects will occur and how significant particular effects are with regard to the overall nature, behavior, and security of affected states. My hunch, however, is that existing studies, individually and collectively, do not yet go much beyond establishing the presence of particular effects in particular circumstances. There is a need for much more carefully-designed, theory-guided, comparative empirical research on the subject.

Even that work, should it be forthcoming, is likely to leave unanswered at least two other interesting questions regarding the effects of ISIs: (1) how may the different types of effects and the mechanisms through which they occur vary across the basic types of ISIs, and (2) how may they differ (or not) between ISIs and international institutions in other issue areas? These questions underscore the lack of theorizing about the effects of ISIs per se and suggest the value of further investigation of the subject. What, if any, unique expectations can be derived about the likely effects of different types of ISIs? The principal theories and hypotheses discussed in this paper concern the impact of international institutions in general,

without particular regard to ISIs. Yet, as I have also argued, ISIs can be differentiated on the basis of two fundamental analytical distinctions that are especially relevant, if not unique, to security affairs. With one principal exception, however, the implications of these distinctions -- between inclusive and exclusive ISIs, on the one hand, and between those based on operative rules and those based on contingent rules, on the other -- for the effects of different types of ISIs have not been explored. The exception concerns the expected differences in effectiveness between externally-oriented alliances and internally-oriented collective security systems, with the former generally being regarded as more likely to enhance the security of their participants. Yet even here there are grounds for doubting the conventional wisdom, or at least the attribution of any difference in outcomes to the difference in basic orientation. After all, a number of inclusive ISIs, in the form of arms control agreements, have arguably enjoyed noteworthy success. Thus additional theoretical, as well as empirical, investigation of the subject would seem to be worth pursuing.

Even as scholars continue to develop new theories and to examine the historical record, it is also important for them to draw on the insights so far obtained in order to shed light on current problems and to inform policy choices. Indeed, the present era would seem to pose a particularly useful test for theories bearing on the significance of ISIs. On the one hand, the international system is characterized by the presence of a number of well-developed ISIs. On the other hand, with the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the structural conditions that gave rise to many of these ISIs have been profoundly altered. In particular, the United States has emerged as an unrivaled and unprecedented superpower (Ikenberry 2003). And in more recent years, the international security agenda has come to be dominated, at least for some important states, by a concern – international terrorism – that was not foreseen when most of the existing ISIs were founded. Consequently, it is well worth asking just how useful these ISIs can and will prove to be and how much influence they may be expected to exert. Scholars associated with the various approaches discussed above are unlikely to be of one mind on the issue, but it is nevertheless instructive to explore the implications of their theoretical arguments.

Current conditions would seem to be especially propitious for the realization of

neorealist expectations. A hegemonic power should be uniquely free to disregard its pre-existing institutional obligations and even to reshape them to suit its interests. This dynamic should be particularly pronounced in the novel circumstances attending the war on terrorism. ISIs should significantly affect the behavior of only relatively weak states, which the hegemon may alternatively force or induce to comply.

Recent years have offered a wealth of evidence that can be interpreted as supporting this perspective. Even before the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the United States had rejected several recently negotiated security arrangements that enjoyed broad international support, including the International Criminal Court, and it was moving to withdraw from the long-standing ABM Treaty. The immediate U.S. response to the attacks in Afghanistan took place largely outside existing institutional frameworks such as the UN and NATO, and it subsequently invaded Iraq without the endorsement of the Security Council. More generally, the United States under the Bush administration has attempted to loosen traditional international restrictions regarding the use of force.

At the same time, however, other perspectives suggest reasons not to expect the postwar institutional security architecture to be abandoned and, beyond that, for existing ISIs to continue to enjoy significant influence, even with the United States. One is the enduring relevance of more traditional security concerns, such as inter-state conflict and nuclear non-proliferation, for which the institutions were devised.

Another reason is the practical limits on the ability of the United States to address by itself the full range of threats, both new and traditional, that it faces. As the war in Iraq has shown, the United States may be able single-handedly to overthrow an unfriendly regime, but not to provide security and stability in the aftermath. Likewise, without the cooperation of other states, the United States is less likely to be able to prevent the further proliferation of technologies and materials useful for the construction of nuclear weapons. More generally, even hegemonic powers have incentives to build and maintain rule-based international orders that place some constraints on their behavior as a means of preserving their power and securing the acquiescence of others (Ikenberry 2003).

Third, only institutions can provide one resource that even powerful states find

helpful – and sometimes essential – for achieving their goals: international legitimacy. With institutionally-conferred legitimacy comes the possibility of greater cooperation and less opposition by other states (Ikenberry 2003). Just how important this is has been evidenced by the difficulties experienced by the United States in obtaining international support for post-conflict operations in Iraq. It is also suggested by the lengths to which the Bush administration went to work through the UN Security Council before ultimately deciding to invade without authorization.

Finally, some existing ISIs are characterized by a considerable degree of adaptability, which renders them potentially useful under a wide range of circumstances. One important example is the development and continued broadening of UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations. Another is the post-cold war use of NATO to intervene militarily and mount post-conflict peace operations in the Balkans and even distant Afghanistan. Just how adaptable any particular ISI might be will depend on the fungibility of its assets (Wallander 2000), but it would seem to be far too early to write off many as irrelevant to today's security challenges.

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