

Global institutions increase security

# Conserving monuments

By **Ko Colijn**

As instruments of peacemaking, global institutions like the United Nations are not really popular. In the stiff ‘new-speak’ of the modern policy sciences we should evaluate these institutions in terms of their accountability, policy targets accomplished, customer orientation, governance-to-cost ratio and policy efficiency. This is unjustified.

One current in the study of international relations is called neorealism. It is, basically, a still widely embraced theory explaining world politics as a process driven primarily by the actions of nation states that are engaged in a continuing power struggle for their survival. Neorealists see only a marginal role for international institutions: they are merely the tools of the only actors who matter in the jungle of global politics – the governments of the most powerful nations. To be sure, these states sometimes do cooperate in the big survival game and use institutions to their own benefit. In certain ‘win-win’ situations states may decide to enter into cooperative arrangements, although too large ‘relative gain’ differentials – i.e. state A would gain much more from the envisaged cooperation than state B – may be prohibitive to such partnerships.

However, even for adepts of this realist logic of scepticism and mistrust, it is still feasible to think of institutions performing a positive role. International institutions may open doors to sustainable patterns of cooperation, for example, as neutral referees to reach win-win situations in which governments get involved over a longer period. The very existence of institutions that administer give-and-take games in the longer run may tip the balance in favour of *negotiated* rather than imposed, let alone military solutions, or no solutions at all.

## Peaceful equilibrium

In another variant of extreme realist thinking, which parallels economic market theory, competition among states may even serve as a road to ‘peaceful equilibrium’. Flexible alliance formation, engaging in an arms race and even outright conflicts may not be looked upon as ‘diseases’ of the competitive international state system, but rather as the correctional mechanism of that very system which may also lead to dynamic anarchic peace. Rather absurd as it may sound, Edward Luttwak argued along these lines, with the bomb-to-Dayton campaign against Serbia, and operation Allied Freedom (NATO’s military intervention in Kosovo) in mind. In a provocative but yet serious contribution to *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 1999, Luttwak held that conflict resolution might be attained in the best and least harmful way according to the adage ‘give war a chance’.

At the opposite extreme, the 2005 *Human Security Report* (HSR) clearly rejects the ‘we-can-do-without-institutions’ paradigm. It concludes that the world has become a relatively



Photo: HH/Magnum Photos

safer place since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The number of armed conflicts has decreased markedly (down some 40%) and in parallel there has been a spectacular increase in ‘outbursts’ of peace or ends to conflicts. The *HSR* concludes that we owe a great deal of this optimistic change to increased international activism, in particular of NGOs and public institutions. The numbers of peace operations that have defused conflicts or have stabilized post-conflict situations, of war tribunals and sanctions mechanisms that have punished (or possibly deterred) rogue leaders, and of quiet but effective missions led by diplomats and UN emissaries such as Max van der Stoep, Jan Egeland or Lakdar Brahimi, have increased substantially since 1992. The follow-up of the *HSR*, the *Human Security Brief* of December 2006, shows an even stronger positive trend since 2002.

Since the 1960s the number of global multilateral security treaties in force has risen from some 150 to 400, in parallel to the downward trend in armed conflicts. While it may be premature to speak of a causal relationship, there is a correlation between institutional consolidation and growth on the one hand, and a less hostile world on the other. May I add to this correlation, observed by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between the occurrence of regional security institutions and the relative absence of regional armed conflicts? In concrete terms, there are significantly more conflicts in institutionally poor regions like the Middle East and parts of Asia. My conclusion would be then: let us be careful, conserving monuments in the area of global security would certainly not be a waste of effort. ■

A longer version of this interview can be found at [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu)

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## Developments

### Debating politics and poverty

Poverty and politics are inextricably linked. The new Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders, sees it as one of his main challenges to 'bring back politics' into international development cooperation. At a meeting with ministry staff in June 2007, Koenders stated that 'If we want to make a real difference on the ground in terms of poverty alleviation, and if we want to explore new ways of making aid more effective, we must not shy away from complex issues that concern the messy world of politics'.

In the coming months, *The Broker* will host an online debate about the thorny questions that surround the issue of politicization. The starting point for the discussion is an article by Kees Koonings (University of Utrecht), entitled *Bringing Politics into Poverty: The Political Dimensions of Poverty Alleviation*, which can be downloaded from the website [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu).

Koonings argues that the current notions and strategies for poverty reduction largely ignore the political factors that influence both the existence of poverty and the possibilities for alleviation. Poverty is a matter of social and political exclusion, not simply of scarcity. The domestic political interests in developing countries determine whether pro-poor growth is a real priority. But the political negotiations going on at the international level cannot be underestimated either. According to Koonings, 'Poverty alleviation may be the stated common ground for international cooperation (as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals), but it is certainly not the only priority within the international community at large – if it is a real priority at all'.

Koonings' article is the first chapter in an edited volume that was presented to Minister Koenders in June 2007, entitled *A Rich Menu for the Poor: Food for Thought on Effective Aid*

*Policies*. The 12 articles in this volume – produced by the Effectiveness and Quality Department (DEK) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – explicitly take politics into account by looking at issues such as donor legitimacy, the policy dialogue, the processes 'behind the façade', and the role of local elites.

*The Broker* wishes to contribute to evidence-based policy making by relating innovative research in the areas of development and globalization to ongoing policy discussions. To launch the debate, *The Broker* has invited renowned scholars, policy makers and practitioners from NGOs and the World Bank to participate. We have already received positive responses from many individuals in Scandinavia, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, the UK and the US.

Ellen Lammers

*Here is a brief selection of the contributions received so far:*

#### Brian Pratt, INTRAC, Oxford: *Losses and gains*

I agree that politics have been largely omitted from the international poverty agenda. But I suggest that Koonings could have been even more critical. For instance, on the impact of PRSP and on the inevitable resistance against pro-poor policies from certain societal groups. The problem is not only a lack of political awareness, but also the a-historical approach to poverty ... 🙋

#### Marco Zupi, CeSPI, Rome: *Complementing opposites*

I share much of Koonings' criticism on current concepts of poverty that fail to include 'the political'. However, I would like to highlight the



Photo: HH/Theo Audenaerd

ongoing interaction between different poverty approaches as well as the shortcomings of approaches that are limited to the notion of individual preferences ... 🙋

#### Nadia Molenaers, IDPM, Antwerp: *The schizophrenic challenge of the new aid approach*

I agree that politics are an intrinsic part of poverty issues, but I would like to take the analysis by Koonings a step further: what are the opportunities the new aid approach offers in terms of bringing politics back in, and what are the problems that it entails? ... 🙋

#### Solveig Buhl, OECD, Paris: *Poverty in practice*

Do we really need new concepts of poverty to include the political dimension? Or do we need more commitment on the part of major stakeholders and more practical tools (like PIA)? And last but not least: more honesty about what can and cannot be achieved given the existing political structures ... 🙋

🙋 To read the full texts of these and other contributions, to take part in this debate, and to download the article by Kees Koonings, go to [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu).

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## THE BROKER

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