# Non-State Actors in World Politics and International Relations research – an Introduction

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In this edition of *Political Perspectives*, the four articles examine a broad range of perspectives concerning the role of policy institutions, networks and researchers in world politics and foreign policy. The overarching theme of this edition is purposefully broad – as an endeavour to capture the diversity in topics, theoretical perspectives, ontological underpinnings as well as geographical variation, in ongoing research projects amongst International Relations (IR) academics of tomorrow. The IR discipline, however, has conventionally been preoccupied with the state-system as the focal level of analysis – predominantly through the realist ontological 'school of thought' where the 'state' performs as the key 'ontological tool' (see Waltz, 1979). Consequently, we deliberately chose the expansive phrase of 'world politics' as the term of 'international relations' implies a focus on nation-states (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2010:2). This edition of *Political Perspectives*, thus, accommodates for analysing world politics and foreign policy, rather, from the non-state level, where many a scholar is stressing the interplay between Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) and, indeed, states.

The investigatory scopes of the articles encompass the broader areas of the United Nations (UN) humanitarian interventions and the competitive market-place for non-state policy actors; non-state economic aspects of lobbying in the realm of trade; the role and influence of foreign policy think tanks; in addition to policy-making within the UN and civil society actors. Collectively, the articles draw upon empirical foundations from a number of countries

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and geographical areas. This genuine international aspect of *Political Perspectives* is also reflected amongst the five authors who are contributing to this edition – in terms of their nationalities and university affiliations (the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Italy – in addition to the UK and the US). This is an important contribution to the discipline in its own right – contemplating on an arguably American dominated IR discipline (see Holsti, 1985; Smith, 2000; Waever, 1998).

Additionally, the articles illustrate, and ought to serve as a humble reminder to IR scholars, that international relations (with lower-case letters) is conducted in as much as beyond the state-system and between non-state actors. As Dr Satu Limaye, Director of the prominent East-West Center in Washington, DC, eloquently promulgated in research interviews (with both Editors of this edition) – international relations between countries can at times be better grasped when the spot-light is placed on interactions between the countries' non-state players, for example business-groups, universities, and research institutes (*Interview_C03*).

In essence, the Guest Editors of this edition encourage IR scholars to increase their engagement with the empirical world beyond 'arm-chair' analysis – through a broader set of levels and units of analyses (see Griffiths, 2012). This call was impressively answered by scholars judging by the more than 15 submissions which found their way to the editors' desk. Even though there is a heightened interest in non-state actors beyond the nation-states within academia, the role of policy-institutions, researchers, and networks in their various forms – as well as their engagement with other non-state players in the international system – continues to warrant more research. This edition has prompted more research in this field and to showcase some of the broad variety of non-state actors, as well as to signify their intricate links with and the roles they play in world politics and international relations,

The first contributor in this edition, John Karlsrud, a Doctoral Research at the University of Warwick and a Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) focuses on the UN in the area of humanitarian interventions. However, the author specifically examines how the UN can be perceived as a competitive arena of various policy institutions and researchers where issues, norms, concepts, and rules are being framed through informal policy alliances. States are not the only actors that frame these norms within the UN: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, think tanks, and various sections within the UN actively cooperate to shape the development of norms guiding International

Organisations (IOs). One way to analyse the interconnectedness of various actors is to highlight the role of various professional environments, or ecologies, and how they are linked up because professions include both organisational and performative aspects. As Karlsrud argues, these professions are 'communities of practice, gathering best practices and lessons learned which together with established rules, norms and values that form the direct repository of guidance and constitute jurisprudence for future problem-solving actions' (Karlsrud, 2012). In order to demonstrate this theoretical argument, the author discusses the recent advancement of the norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) regarding UN peacekeeping as a case in point as opposed to the non-interventionist norms.

The second contribution by Matia Vannoni, a Doctoral Researcher at the London School of Economics, also looks at policy lobbying but the focus is on trade. There is a tendency to concentrate on political aspects from a non-state level rather than an economic perspective, although there is the occasional nod to Multinational Companies (MNCs) in the literature (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2010:2). Vannoni's analysis provides an in-depth account relating to how firms, producing monopolistic competition and intra-industry trade (ITT), act in the policy arena. The author hypothesises that these types of trade which the firm engages in affects the firms' lobbying strategies. As a case study, the author examines the Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD) in order to test whether firms active in IIT between the US and EU employ direct lobbying strategies in trade policies. The TABD is one of the major forums for business cooperation between the EU and the main trade partners and it is composed by individual firms which are heavily engaged in ITT. The article confirms that the modes of production and trade such as ITT and monopolistic competition fragment interests within industries. The trade policy coalitions are therefore neither along industry nor along factor lines, but individual firms' lines.

The third contribution focuses on one particular sort of policy institutions and researchers at the non-state level: British foreign policy think tanks. Not a lot of research has been done in this field: there is still a considerable gap in researching and comprehending the role of think tanks in world politics. Iván Medina Iborra, a Doctoral Researcher at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (at the time of producing this article – currently a Post-doc Fellow, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain) therefore moves into this field with his co-author David S.A. Guttormsen, a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Warwick and Senior Editor of this edition on non-

state actors. One of the main discussions within the think tank literature is the question whether it is possible to assess (and quantitatively gauge) think tanks' impacts on the policy process (Stone, 2004:10). Using three of the most prominent British foreign policy think tanks, namely Chatham House, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) as an example, the two authors find that the notion of 'influence' should be reconceptualised beyond quantitative measures. The authors therefore explore the notions of 'visibility' and 'activity' of think tanks. In discussing 'visibility' they refer to the presence of think tanks on the Internet and the media whilst with the notion of 'activity', they are assessing publications and networking activities of staff.

The final contribution comes back full circle as it explores the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the role of various civil society actors on the policy-making process within the UN. Hannah Woodburn, a MA student at Georgetown University, suggests that this convention shows how NGOs, Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs), and disabled persons organisations (DPOs) came together in the drafting process of the UN Convention. As Woodburn argues, 'the UNCRPD was the most expediently negotiated UN convention due to the participation of nongovernmental organizations and the involvement of persons with disabilities' (Woodburn, 2012). Without the involvement of these actors, the outcome would have been qualitatively different. This became apparent in the three outcomes of the Convention: they initiated a human rights agenda for disabled persons, they created a definition of persons with a disability, and they included gendered language in establishing human rights for women with disabilities.

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