

## **Book Review**

Bjørn Møller, *European Security: the Roles of Regional Organisations*, Ashgate, 2012, 516 pages, ISBN 978-1-4094-4408-4, price 75 GBP / 130 USD.

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Today's literature on 'European security' mostly deals with the European Union's policies in security and defence or justice and home affairs. Rarely does one see a comprehensive analysis of European security that includes not just the usual two protagonist organisations, the European Union and NATO, but the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe as well. Bjørn Møller's *European Security: the Roles of Regional Organisations* explores the contributions of all these international organisations to security in the wider European region. It is a comprehensive and eclectic work that, rather than a student textbook or scholarly publication, is best seen as a 'tour de table' suited for practitioners and the generally interested reader.

The main thrust of the book consists of a descriptive account of the institutional development, issues and security themes for each organisation from a historical perspective, interwoven with theoretical reflection drawn from a wide body of literature. The first three chapters give an overview of theoretical perspectives on the concept of security, regimes and international organisation(s), and regions and regionalism. The subsequent five chapters deal with the UN in global and regional security, Europe as a region, NATO, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and the EU respectively. The conclusion reviews the 'comparative score-cards' of these organisations.

The book's two strong points are the broad view taken on security and European security organisations, as well as the large body of literature – theoretical and descriptive – that has been consulted. However, it is hard to discern the book's main audience or its central question, which makes it difficult to judge if it is appropriate for the reader or whether it is successful in providing answers for its investigations. Since this is what a book review should address, this review will explore several possible audiences in order to come to a conclusion on Møller's work. This review therefore assumes four possible audiences: students, scholars, practitioners and 'the generally interested'. The publisher-supplied recommendation on the back cover of the book suggests it is "a 'must read' for students and scholars", so let us start with these.


If the book is considered as a handbook for students the broad approach taken to reviewing relevant theories and issues can be beneficial. For example, chapter 2 on international organisations discusses various definitions and issues such as 'peace as a public good' and the 'security dilemma' and takes into account a broad range of authors from David Ricardo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Axelrod to Hedley Bull and Peter M. Haas. By concentrating the arguments of authors into a few sentences the reader quickly moves through a sizeable field of literature, but this brevity does come at the cost of completeness and clarity. Sometimes the reader almost has to be already familiar with the works in order to comprehend the concise descriptions. Reading up on the original sources, or another source providing a fuller account, should be explicitly suggested to uninitiated students. Furthermore, the choices for discussing certain theoretical perspectives, whilst leaving others unmentioned, are not made explicit. Chapter 3 on international organisation, for example, is almost mute on constructivist thought. On other occasions, assumptions seem cherry-picked to support an argument without proper reference to theory. For example, the argument on page 105-106 that complete disarmament is a hypothetical impossibility because of 'cheating' actors rests on Realist assumptions. The author neglects to mention this assumption, nor does he refer to Liberalist or Constructivist viewpoints that suggest possibilities to the contrary. To function as a handbook for students, such issues would need to be addressed. Furthermore, the cost of the book at £ 75 or US\$ 130 will likely be prohibitive to using it as required reading, especially with many other handbooks available at competing prices.

As a scholarly work, the book can fill a gap in the literature as a comprehensive comparison of the contribution of international security organisations to European security. Møller seems to be working towards such a comparison by differentiating concepts of security: state security, societal security, human security and environmental security. The chapter on the UN proceeds to evaluate to what extent it has contributed to each version of security, but since each concept lacks a method for operationalization the analytical element of the chapter is lost. No tally is made of the UN's contribution to global security; and confusingly, European security is not discussed in the chapter. The chapter on NATO is extensive but predominantly descriptive and historical, only referencing theoretical concepts from earlier chapters on occasion and not as part of a framework for analysis. The chapters on the OSCE and the EU are a mixed bag of historical and thematic descriptions and references to theoretical concepts. The EU chapter differentiates security by 'being', 'talking' and 'doing' which provides few handles for analysis, a problem that is also reflected in the chapter's summary. The conclusion of the book is problematic as well in terms of presenting research findings. The conclusion is entitled 'comparative score-cards', but unfortunately a structured comparison – which would have been a good reason to recommend the book – is not made. The lack thereof makes its contribution to scholarly knowledge rather limited, or at least difficult to discern.

A specific mention of the use of references is also in order. The book sports a staggeringly large bibliography of 168 pages containing an estimated 3300 + works. On the one hand, this makes the book more of an asset. A two-page section on the environment and security in the UN context, for example, provides more than thirty references which the reader could decide to explore. On the other hand, the amount of references makes it difficult to gauge the author's opinion on the referred work or the exact argument he is building on. The UN's collaboration with NGOs, for example, is posted in a sentence on page 135 with a note containing 15 works; assuming that few have the time to read all of these, the reader is given no clue as to which work provides an essence of the argument. This devalues the references from both student and scholar perspectives.

For the audiences of practitioners and generally interested readers many critical notes from the student and scholar perspectives do not apply. The broad but also fast-paced writing, jumping from theories to issues and historical notes and back again can keep the interest of a reader who is not looking to have a particular question answered, but just wants to 'tour the landscape'. For such readers, the book seems best suited. A practitioner may see theoretical twists to topics encountered in the day-to-day work and be inspired by them. A general reader can enjoy a different approach from historical accounts of European security without becoming bogged down in theoretical jargon and particularism. Although one might view some the excessive uses of references as a distraction from the narrative.

Bjørn Møller's *European Security: the Roles of Regional Organisations* is not an unequivocal 'must read' for scholars and students, but it can appeal to those who are looking for a broad tour of the subject.



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Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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