

Section 8 – Relazioni internazionali

Panel 11. The Role of Non-state Actors in Foreign Policy

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In a time of diffused and accelerated power, non-state actors, including civil society organizations, think tanks, interest groups, media, (multi-national) enterprises but also nefarious actors such as terrorist groups and organized crime, exercise an ever-increasing political role, both domestically and internationally. Whereas public policy analysis has by now developed sophisticated models of multi-actor networked governance in domestic politics, foreign policy analysis remains predominantly focused on intergovernmental interaction. International relations literature, on the other hand, is rich in studies of non-state actors operating in international fora but has not contributed so much to exploring the linkages between non-state actors and foreign policies of individual states.

This panel aims at exploring the changing role of different non-state actors in foreign policy as well as furthering our knowledge of their impact. Despite its rather “sovereignist” nature compared to other policy fields, foreign policy making is increasingly more networked and more pluralistic. More and more often it is performed via multi-stakeholder initiatives, hybrid coalitions and partnerships. Although non-traditional diplomacy, including tracks two and three, political alliances, and foreign policy by proxy are not new, these channels have also been transformed substantially over the past few decades. There is a number of ways in which non-state actors are engaged in foreign policy of individual states. Actors such as NGOs, think tanks or expert networks engage in policy problem definition, information gathering, provision of expertise and formulation of policy options, or coordination through transnational networks. They can be involved in policy implementation in some sub-fields, such as democracy promotion, development aid or peacekeeping missions. In some policy areas, such as environment, states may even partially delegate their decision-making to international organisations or multi-lateral fora.

In this panel, we would like to explore what kinds of roles are performed by different non-state actors under different conditions, interrogating the degree of their autonomy and sources of their authority. Are they “partners”, “rivals”, “transmission belts” or “Trojan horses”? We would also like to conceptualise their impact in different settings. While the field has been dominated by the studies of Western democracies where pluralist co-governance is increasingly the dominant model, much less is known about foreign policy making in non-democratic or authoritarian regimes. We particularly invite case studies looking at non-democratic countries and their coalitions. We are also interested in the role of non-institutionalized actors, such as social movements, activist networks or even individual actors.