Ideas, Interests and Foreign Aid

Why do countries give foreign aid? Although many countries have official development assistance programmes, this book argues that no two of them see the purpose of these programmes in the same way. Moreover, the way countries frame that purpose has shaped aid policy choices past and present. The author examines how Belgium long gave aid out of a sense of obligation to its former colonies, the Netherlands was more interested in pursuing international influence, Italy has focused on the reputational payoffs of aid flows, and Norwegian aid has had strong humanitarian motivations since the beginning. But at no time has a single frame shaped any one country's aid policy exclusively. Instead, analysing half a century of legislative debates on aid in these four countries, this book presents a unique picture both of cross-national and over-time patterns in the salience of different aid frames and of varying aid programmes that resulted.

A. MAURITS VAN DER VEEN received his Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University, and is currently an Assistant Professor at the College of William & Mary. He has also taught at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Georgia. His research focuses on the impact of ideas on the making of foreign policy; in addition to foreign aid, he has written on European integration and human rights policy.

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Preface

I have been interested in foreign aid for almost as long as I can remember. Growing up in the Netherlands, I read the free monthly magazine *Sam Sam* (Working Together), published by the Dutch government to educate children about development assistance and distributed to every student in the upper grades of elementary school. When I began to pay attention to national politics some years later, I took for granted that although specific features of the development aid programme were frequently debated in the legislature and in the media, the need to have a large and generous aid programme was rarely questioned. Indeed, it was not until I moved to the United States for college that I encountered arguments against foreign aid per se.

If Americans had a different view of the practice of development assistance policy, they also appeared to have a different view of the theory that might explain it. Rational choice theory, rather more popular in the United States than in Europe, seemed to suggest that government policies must always pursue material interests, which made aid policy – with its ostensibly altruistic goals – hard to explain. I began to wonder how aid policy could be perceived so differently in the Netherlands and the United States, even though the policy instruments were essentially the same; I also wondered whether these differing perceptions might explain how widely aid programmes varied across donor states; and I wondered how the logic of rationality might account for a policy that seemed to have so many different possible motivations.

It quickly became clear that the best way to turn these puzzles into a manageable research project was to look in more detail at the aid policies of countries that were broadly similar on most key dimensions, but whose aid programmes differed considerably. Accordingly, I decided to focus on small- and medium-sized European countries (even though my argument generalizes to all aid

donors, as I explain in the conclusion). As I researched aid policy and elaborated my ideas over the ensuing years, I found that different perceptions of the purpose of aid policy – i.e. aid 'frames' – have a tremendous impact on the shape of a country's aid programme. On the other hand, it proved unnecessary to look for non-rational motivations: while policy-makers often pursue non-material goals – such as meeting an obligation or establishing a reputation – they do so quite rationally. In fact, the key to understanding aid policy lies not in explaining away aid frames that highlight non-material goals, but rather in obtaining reliable measures of the strength of different frames. Here I found legislative debates to be invaluable, and I spent many months combing through the parliamentary records of Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway to learn how legislators had framed aid from the inception of national aid programmes to the present.

Over the life of this project I have been fortunate to receive support from more people and organizations than I can ever properly thank. A Mellon Foundation Dissertation Research Grant through the Department of Government at Harvard University supported my initial investigations into the topic. Krupp Foundation Grants through Harvard's Center for European Studies made possible extensive field research in 1995 and 1996 in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Norway, as well as the initial phase of dissertation writing during the 1996–1997 academic year. Further field research during the summer of 1997 was supported by a Jens Aubrey Westengard Summer Research Grant, and the processing of that research was facilitated by a Mellon Foundation writing grant through Harvard's Government Department. Without the generous support of these different foundations, it is unlikely that I would have been able to tackle a project of this scope or bring it to successful completion.

My field research would not have been possible without the assistance and accessibility of a number of libraries and research institutes, many of which I have visited repeatedly over the years. In all four countries studied, the libraries and the librarians of the national aid administrations – DGIS in The Hague, ABOS in Brussels, DGCS in Rome and NORAD in Oslo – were extremely helpful. In addition, several research institutes graciously let me use their libraries and offered me space to work. In particular, in Italy, the Istituto Affari Internazionali

(IAI) offered me the use of their library as an ersatz office for a number of weeks. Similarly, in Oslo, the Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt (NUPI) generously provided office space during the summer of 1996, and its library and librarians were invaluable during my research there. In addition, stimulating lunch conversations at NUPI greatly added to my understanding of Norwegian politics. A subsequent stay at the ARENA research institute in Oslo some years later proved equally worthwhile and productive.

At Harvard University, I enjoyed affiliations with the Center for International Affairs and the Center for European Studies. After receiving my PhD, I was able to develop the dissertation's argument further during a post-doctoral fellowship at the Christopher H. Browne Center for International Politics at the University of Pennsylvania. I updated the study with data throughout the year 2000 during my first years at the University of Georgia, while the final revisions were undertaken at my current institutional home, the College of William & Mary. I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to all these institutions for the supportive and stimulating intellectual environments they offered.

My greatest debts, of course, are to the people whose support, insights and feedback have made this book much better than it otherwise would have been. In particular, I would like to thank (in no particular order) Brad Mann, Pepper Culpepper, Erik Bleich, Mark Duckenfield, David Leal, Javier Astudillo, Marga Gomez-Reino, Wendy Franz, Andrew Moravcsik, Lucy Goodhart, Milada Vachudová, Robert Putnam, Marc Busch, Jeffrey Checkel, Ian Lustick, Tom Callaghy, Avery Goldstein, Dan Miodownik, Markus Crepaz, Chris Allen, Jaroslav Tir and Mike Tierney, and many more whose omission is due only to my faulty memory, not to any lack of appreciation. Special thanks are owed to the members of my dissertation committee, Lisa Martin, Robert Keohane, Stanley Hoffmann and Peter Hall.

On a more personal note, I cannot thank enough the friends who hosted me in different countries: Roel Mulder in The Hague, Gesa and Bernd Haarpaintner in Brussels, and Cille Skaarberg and Olav Storli Ulvund in Oslo. In addition, I owe some of my most memorable experiences in each country (and, quite possibly, my sanity) to the many running friends I made along the way, including Patrick Aris, Mark van Maaren, Frank Staal, Massimiliano Monteforte, Roberto

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