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Fair Burden-Sharing and the Robustness of International Regimes: The Case of Food Aid

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1. Introduction [\(footnote 1\)](#)

Most students of international regimes accept the proposition that international regimes (as well as other types of international institutions) matter in world politics. This proposition can be unpacked by stating that, at an abstract level, there are two closely linked ways in which international regimes make a difference to the behavior of states. First, in their routine performance many regimes prove to be quite *effective*; and, second, many regimes, when exposed to exogenous challenges, turn out to be remarkably *robust*. A regime is effective to the extent that states actually abide by the principles, norms and rules that define the regime; [\(footnote 2\)](#) an international regime has proven *robust* if its members continue to adhere to it and to comply with its injunctions, even after the regime has come under serious stress owing to some outside event that gives some or all of its members a strong incentive to violate, or to use their power to change, central norms and rules of the regime.

Both effectiveness and robustness are measures of the causal significance of an international regime; robustness, however, is the more important one. Only a compelling demonstration that international regimes are indeed often robust makes it impossible for scholars sympathetic to orthodox realism's skepticism against international institutions to dismiss regimes as mere "fine weather" phenomena: a regime that has proven robust *has* demonstrated its ability to cope with heavy weather. Students of international regimes have gathered evidence showing that this is actually the case: there are numerous instances of international regimes surviving serious challenges not as dead letters, but as effective institutions (see, e.g., Rittberger 1990; Young 1992; Ruggie 1993).

In this paper we do not intend to add further examples of international regimes successfully meeting threats to their existence or effectiveness. Rather, we regard it as an established fact that international regimes are often, though by far not always, robust. Our focus is on the factors that account for this phenomenon and particularly its variance. Why are some regimes more robust than others? Numerous *institutional attributes* may help to explain such differences. For example, the extent to which the regime so far has proven successful as a tool to solve the problems that prompted its creation in the first place is likely to be an important determinant of its robustness. Further potential determinants are easily added. Thus, cooperation theory suggests that regimes with a large membership are more difficult to maintain under unfavorable external conditions than regimes with only a few members (Olson 1965). Moreover, not only the size of its membership, but its composition as well can be expected to affect a regime's capacity to absorb exogenous shocks. Thus, there is growing evidence that a homogeneous membership consisting of democratic states enhances the robustness of an international regime (Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1997a: 23-34). In this paper we focus on a particular variable, which is often claimed to influence the robustness of international regimes, but whose impact has rarely been studied empirically: the *distributional consequences of the regime*, i.e. the way benefits and burdens of regime-based cooperation are distributed among the participants.

Most students of international regimes would probably agree that regimes are created by states to further their interests (however broadly defined) and that, accordingly, regime-based cooperation, more often than not, generates net benefits to each and all of the states involved. This, however, leaves open the question of how the gains from cooperation are distributed among the membership. With regard to any given case, we can ask: Is the distribution of benefits and burdens symmetrical or skewed? And if skewed, in whose favor? The answers to these questions describe what we refer to as the "distributional consequences" of a regime. One can then go on to pose, as we do in this paper, the general question of whether the varying distributional consequences of international regimes make a difference with regard to their robustness.

The paper does not claim to provide a conclusive answer to this question. Our goal is a more modest one. In a first step (sec. 2) we seek to bring out the theoretical significance of the issue under discussion arguing that the two competing schools of thought in the study of international regimes, rationalist and reflective institutionalism, respectively, suggest different hypotheses regarding the relationship between the distributional consequences and the robustness of international regimes. Hence, studying this relationship empirically promises a theoretical surplus reaching out beyond the immediate problem under scrutiny. Subsequently (sec. 3), we present a preliminary test of these hypotheses by confronting them with an empirical case: the international food aid regime. The paper concludes (sec. 4) with a discussion of the implications of the results of this case study for the two hypotheses as well as for the larger theoretical edifices within which they are located.

2. Regime Robustness and Distributional Consequences: Rationalist and Reflective Perspectives

Two broadly conceived schools of thought can be distinguished in the study of international regimes. Each offers a different hypothesis regarding the relationship between the distributional consequences and the robustness of international regimes. *Rationalist institutionalism* expects international regimes producing a roughly symmetrical (or equal) distribution of benefits and burdens for their members to be (*ceteris paribus*) more robust. *Reflective institutionalism* suggests that a fair distribution of benefits and burdens (which only occasionally will coincide with an equal distribution) endows regimes with a greater ability to withstand exogenous challenges. We refer to these hypotheses as the (rationalist) *symmetry hypothesis* and the (reflective) *equity hypothesis*, respectively.

2.1. Deriving the Rationalist Symmetry Hypothesis

Rationalism in international relations theory attempts to explain international politics on the basis of the assumption that states behave as utility-maximizers. Foreign policy decisions and international institutions are reconstructed as the results of individualistic calculations of advantage made by governments. Rationalists usually assume that the utility functions that states maximize do not attach any (positive) value to the welfare of others: in other words, altruism is never a motivating force for states. Rationalists postulate that the behavior of states reflects strategic rationality (taking into account the rationality of their opponents), but not moral considerations. As Keohane and others (Stein 1983; Axelrod and Keohane 1986) have shown, this postulate does *not* imply that international rules can have no bearing on foreign policy decisions. It is assumed, however, that states do not respect rules because they feel morally obliged to do so. Rather, they comply with international norms and rules when, e.g., the short-term gains of failing to do so would be outweighed by losses in the long run.

Both realist and neoliberal approaches to the study of international regimes accept, and build upon, these assumptions (Keohane 1989a). Whether or not this common meta-theoretical basis justifies their merging into one school of thought is surely debatable. Indeed, elsewhere we have argued that three rather than two schools of thought co-exist in the study of international regimes: neoliberalism, realism, and cognitivism (reflectivism) (Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1996a, 1997b). We have also pointed out, however, that the dividing line between neoliberal and realist perspectives on international regimes is being increasingly blurred and that - despite the recent controversies (Baldwin 1993) - the potential for a synthesis between them is rather significant. Hence, our reference to rationalist institutionalism as a single school of thought in the study of international regimes may be somewhat premature, but, we believe, it is nevertheless well-founded. Moreover, to the extent that realist and neoliberal authors have addressed the relationship between the distributional consequences and the robustness of international regimes their conclusions are highly convergent. In the following, we briefly summarize the realist case for the symmetry hypothesis, which has been most effectively put forward by Joseph Grieco. Subsequently, we look at an argument presented by neoliberal Robert Keohane, which, although different from Grieco's, has very similar implications for the issue under consideration.

The *realist* argument for the symmetry hypothesis runs as follows: The behavior of states in the international arena is crucially shaped by the anarchical structure of the international system. Anarchy first and foremost means that no central institution guarantees the survival and/or independence of the units. This is why the international system is one of self-help (Waltz 1979). Ultimately, each state depends for its security and its survival on its own (especially, but not exclusively, military) capabilities. These capabilities, however, will not serve their purpose independently of the capabilities of other states: it is *relative*, not absolute power that counts in the international system. As a result, each state must take an interest in the development of its own capabilities and, *in addition*, must keep an eye on the changes in the capabilities of its neighbors and other potential adversaries.

These basic facts of international life have important consequences for the ability of states to cooperate. States engage in regime-based cooperation in order to achieve mutual gains. Such gains, however, have repercussions on the (relatively valued) capabilities of the cooperating parties (as well as on those of outsiders). As a result, states deciding whether or not to (continue to) cooperate with others in a given issue-area are concerned not only with absolute gains, but with relative gains as well. More specifically, according to Grieco (1988; 1990), they are sensitive to relative losses, i.e. gaps in gains in favor of their partners. Although this sensitivity is not a constant, but is contingent on certain situational attributes, concerns about relative losses never completely disappear and may prevent states from embarking on, or pursuing, cooperation with others even when this means forgoing substantial (absolute) gains. By the same token, an ongoing cooperation that yields relative gains to some and relative losses to others is likely to leave the latter group of actors dissatisfied reducing their allegiance to the regime. Consequently, the symmetry hypothesis applies: Since no relative losses accrue in regimes which allocate benefits and costs evenly among their members, such regimes are *ceteris paribus* more robust.

The implications of the *neoliberal* perspective for the issue at stake are less clear. It could be (and has been) argued that neoliberalism with its emphasis on constellations of preferences rather than on configurations of power represents a purer case of rationalism than does realism and, as a result, is largely insensitive to distributional issues. According to this account, cooperation among states resembles an exchange of goods on a market: provided that transaction costs are not prohibitive, the exchange can come off if only it is beneficial to both the "seller" and the "buyer." Similarly, neoliberal theory only predicts that regime-based cooperation does not get started, or is very short-lived, unless all participants are left better off as its result (or, at least, none is left worse off). Neoliberal theory does not specify how the accumulated gains have to be distributed among the members in order for the regime to be robust. Not surprisingly, realists have taken neoliberals to task for missing the importance of distributional conflict in the formation and maintenance of international regimes, and consequently, the importance of power for its resolution (Krasner 1991). These critics are right - but only up to a point. Neoliberalism is mainly interested in how states attempt to reach the Pareto frontier and does not show much awareness of the problems states face in collectively deciding where to settle on that frontier. Nevertheless, neoliberalism is not absolutely silent on distributional issues. What is more, as far as the relationship between distributional consequences and institutional robustness is concerned, its conclusions (unlike its arguments) do not differ from realism's (Milner 1992: 470-2).

Neoliberals argue that cooperation among self-seeking and morally indifferent states crucially depends on the application of reciprocal strategies such as tit-for-tat (Axelrod 1984; Axelrod and Keohane 1986). According to Keohane (1989c: 135), reciprocity has two essential attributes: contingency and equivalence of the (not necessarily material) "goods" exchanged. At the most abstract level, the goods that are exchanged in an international regime are the (net) benefits that states make available to one another by means of their rule-governed cooperation. Neoliberals stress that regimes are not supposed to supplant the reciprocal strategies necessary for maintaining cooperation. Rather, one of their central functions is to help remove obstacles to the successful operation of such strategies at the international level (Oye 1986: 16f., 20). We see now why the symmetry hypothesis follows: in view of the functional logic that informs neoliberal thinking on international regimes (Keohane 1984: 80f.; 1989a: 167) it must be concluded that regimes which do no longer allow for reciprocity (which implies, as we have seen, roughly equivalent gains for the participants) should be valued less by the states that have maintained them so far and, consequently, should be less robust.

2.2. Deriving the Reflective Equity Hypothesis

The notion that an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens can be expected to foster schemes of international cooperation has repeatedly appeared in the regimes literature, although little effort has been made to establish its empirical validity or to define its theoretical status so far. Donald Puchala and Raymond Hopkins (1983: 66) have explicitly hypothesized that "[f]airer regimes are likely to last longer" not without adding, though, that "theoretical generalizations must be carefully qualified." Oran Young (1994: 133f.) has argued that "it is virtually impossible to achieve high levels of implementation and compliance over time through coercion" and that, therefore, "even great powers have a stake in the development of international institutions that meet reasonable standards of equity" (see also Young 1989: 368f.). Finally, Andrew Hurrell (1993: 68f.) has stressed the need for notions of justice "to be seen as intrinsic to the process by which order is produced." Although, in the quoted phrase, Hurrell is concerned with regime formation rather than maintenance, his argument would seem to apply to regime robustness as well: assuming he is right about the creation of order, it should be expected that an order failing to respond to notions of justice cannot be but brittle.

As we have noted, the theoretical status of this idea, which we refer to as the "equity hypothesis," so far has been left unexplained. ([footnote 3](#)) Such an explanation can readily be supplied, though. We contend that reflective, but not rationalist, institutionalism can accommodate the equity hypothesis. While the present state of reflective theory-building does not allow for deriving the hypothesis *in sensu stricto* from a coherent and well-defined set of assumptions and definitions, the hypothesis can be shown to be consistent with basic ideas of this school of thought. Conversely, a consistent robustness-enhancing effect of distributional fairness (which only now and then coincides with equality) would constitute an anomaly to rationalists of both the realist and the neoliberal variety. ([footnote 4](#))

Reflective institutionalism parts company with rationalism in terms of both ontology and epistemology. As far as *ontology* is concerned, reflective institutionalists replace the rationalist atomism with a more communitarian perspective (Wendt and Duvall 1989). Atomism (at the international level) means that states' preferences over outcomes are prior to, and unaffected by, their interaction. International institutions can be important in that they affect the relative costs of the strategies available to states, but they do not affect the fundamental goals which states pursue. Communitarians concede that states create common rules in order to realize common interests, but they reject an account of international institutions in which institutions are all product and not at all productive. States as social actors are as much the creatures as they are the creators of international rules. This is because there are rules which *define* the international game and which therefore can be ignored only at the risk of losing one's competence as an actor on the international scene. Some of these rules are constitutive in nature such as those formal and informal ones that render diplomacy and, more generally, inter-state communication possible in the first place; others are regulative but equally fundamental such as the rules associated with the concept of sovereignty or the rule that *pacta sunt servanda*. Together they form a normative groundwork that cannot be meaningfully interpreted as an instrument at the hands of states and therefore escapes the rationalist explanation of international institutions. Communitarians maintain that there is an international society, not just an international system (Bull 1977), and that this society, as any society, could not exist were it not for the habitual and reliable observance of certain fundamental rules by its members. States perceive themselves to have an obligation to honor these rules because this is "the price of membership in international society and having relations with other nations." (Henkin 1968: 32)

By contrast, rationalists seek to get along without the concept of (a sense of) obligation. As noted earlier, this does not mean that norms have no impact on state behavior, but that this impact must be explained in terms of the repercussions that (non-)compliance is likely to have on the (independently defined) utilities of states. Neoliberals and at least some realists believe that these repercussions can be quite substantial. (Otherwise their work could not properly come under the heading of "institutionalism.") They insist, however, that neither the effectiveness nor the robustness of international regimes is inconsistent with a behavioral model which portrays states as amoral, calculating actors who observe a given rule only as long as compliance seems to be - on balance - most advantageous to themselves. Reflective institutionalists are skeptical of this account. In particular, they doubt that reputational concerns - the mechanism specified by rationalists (Keohane 1984: 99-107) - are sufficient to explain why states often honor inconvenient obligations (Kratochwil 1989: 109). Indeed, from the reflectivist point of view, states are not properly described as utility-maximizers in the first place. Reflectivists regard this behavioral model as misleading because it attributes ontological primacy to actors and preferences rather than to society and social rules. The more appropriate model is that of a role-player (Young 1986). Role-playing means that states do not follow a "logic of consequentiality," i.e. the decision making process is not one of first examining one's individual goals and then calculating which course of action would have the best consequences in the light of these goals. Rather, they follow a "logic of appropriateness," where action becomes "a matching of a situation to the demands of a [role] position." (March and Olsen 1989: 23)

Although reflective institutionalists place special emphasis on the deeply embedded, both informal and implicit, international rules of the game which Keohane (1989b: 4) refers to as "conventions," they have something to say about those explicit "surface rules" that constitute international regimes as well. The study of the conventions of international society is relevant to the concerns of regime theory because these fundamental rules have consequences for the making and the interpretation of issue-specific norms and rules (i.e. regimes). In particular, only those regimes whose provisions are not at odds with the underlying normative structure of international society are likely to be robust. Provisions that do not meet this condition lack international "legitimacy" and the "compliance pull" that comes with it (Franck 1990). Conversely, the closer the fit of a set of issue-specific rules with the fundamental conventions of international society, the greater their legitimacy and hence the robustness of the regime in question. This idea is especially important because it points to a possibility of making reflectivist sense of the conjecture that international regimes with a fair distribution of benefits and burdens are more robust than others: should it turn out to be the case that the equity hypothesis holds up empirically, reflectivists could put this result down to the *operation of an international convention that calls upon actors to respect the just claims of others*.

Up to this point, we have failed to provide a definition of *fairness*. It is therefore time to ask: when is a distribution of the benefits and burdens resulting from inter-state cooperation fair? The way we approach this question is shaped by our decision to interpret and to test the equity hypothesis as a reflective proposition. Many reflectivist scholars are not content with criticizing the ontology of rationalism. They go on to object

to the rationalist *epistemology* as being similarly inadequate. As Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie (1986) have pointed out, rationalist institutionalism's commitment to the standards of positivist philosophy of science prevents them from doing justice to the intersubjective nature of international norms. Positivists require all scientific claims to be based on observable ("brute") facts; the existence of a social norm, however, cannot be established with exclusive reference to facts of this sort (Searle 1969). Similarly, for methodological reasons, rationalists usually make rather heroic assumptions about the knowledge position of actors (regarding what options they have, what the implications of certain choices would be, etc.): this move helps them to focus on the strategic aspects of the situation, but at the same time it is often grossly unrealistic (Young 1989). Socially and historically contingent normative and causal beliefs intervene between the most fundamental interests of states and their perception and evaluation of the options available to them. This suggests that the "outside" way of accounting for social behavior characteristic of positivism is insufficient and should be supplemented, or even supplanted, by the sort of "inside story" telling that hermeneutic approaches demand. (*footnote 5*)

This epistemological stance has implications for the issue under discussion. Most important among these, interpreting the equity hypothesis as a reflective proposition makes it necessary to seek to establish the "subjective" conception of distributive justice that is shared by the participants themselves. If states' decisions are influenced by considerations of justice, *their* conceptions of justice are causally significant, however primitive or sophisticated they may be. Therefore, the task is not one of identifying the most plausible philosophical account of justice and using its result (say, Rawls's [1971] famous "difference principle") as a criterion for distinguishing (comparatively) just regimes from (comparatively) unjust regimes. Rather, testing this hypothesis requires an accurate understanding of the appropriate *community standards* of equity. Nevertheless, moral philosophy is not irrelevant for our purpose. Philosophical insights are useful in two inter-related respects: (1) They provide the formal features of the concept of justice. This knowledge is a precondition for identifying those statements and arguments about a regime's distributional aspects that are moral in content. (2) They suggest a set of widely-acknowledged precepts which may serve as heuristics or working hypotheses in establishing the conception(s) of justice held valid and pertinent by the actors themselves.

(1) Two formal features of the concept of distributive justice are particularly important. First, distributive justice is a social norm whose function is to settle, and mediate between, competing claims to scarce goods. Consequently, the practical discourse on justice is not detached from individual interests, it *depends* on their existence. In the absence of conflicts of interest there would be neither justice nor injustice. Second, the concept of justice is not identical with the concept of equality, but it implies equality in the sense that like cases are treated alike. To put it differently, in a cooperative venture the allocation of gains and costs must not be arbitrary. It must accord with a *rule* of distribution (or a consistent system of such rules). These considerations allow for the following specification of the equity hypothesis: A regime is *ceteris paribus* more robust if its distributional consequences satisfy a rule of distribution which is acknowledged as valid by the participating states and regarded as pertinent to the type of situation that is exemplified by the situation at hand.

(2) Obviously, this specification is still on the formal side. In the light of the above considerations, this should not be regarded as a flaw of our formulation, though. At any rate, complete specification is not desirable, as this would amount to applying an *external* standard of justice, which, as we have seen, is inconsistent with the basic epistemological choice of reflective institutionalism. Nevertheless, it is possible and reasonable to add more substance to this formulation. This is where moral philosophy's second contribution comes in. We have just observed that, in a sense, justice implies equality. The prescription that like cases are to be treated alike is virtually empty, however, as long as we are kept in the dark about the *respects* in which persons (or groups of persons) have to be alike to deserve equal treatment. For, obviously, there are countless respects in which any given set of persons are "equal" or similar to one another (and just as many in which they are not). Hence, what we need to identify are those properties of individuals (or collectivities) that are morally relevant (Hart 1961: 153-63). In common morality the idea of justice is closely linked to certain precepts which specify such properties. Different (and in part even contradictory) in content these precepts are very similar in form: Each requires institutions (or decisionmaking units) to distribute benefits (or, in other cases, burdens) in proportion to some variable such as merit or need in the subjects of justice (Perelman 1990: 31-46). The reflective (or subjectivist) approach that we decided to take in order to study the impact of the ethical quality of distributional consequences on the robustness of regimes, suggests that we use these common morality notions ("From each according to his capacity," etc.) as point of departure in our attempt to decipher the conceptions of justice that are shared by a group of states in a given issue-area.

3. Burden Sharing and the Robustness of the International Food Aid Regime

The international food aid regime is an integral part of the international community's efforts to enhance global food security. In essence, it prescribes that a guaranteed minimum of cereals is to be provided on concessional terms to developing countries annually; it comprises norms and rules for burden-sharing among donor states; and it sets up criteria for the distribution of food aid determining which country is eligible for aid and how the flow of aid should be organized. Since the 1970s, the USA and the EC/EU (*footnote 6*) have been the most important donors among the regime's participants, accounting on average for 75 per cent of its food volume and for 80 per cent of its costs. The remainder is provided by a variety of industrially developed states including Australia, Canada, Japan, and Switzerland. The latest issue of the *Food Outlook* (April 1998) counts as much as 24 donor states supplying food aid. In the following, we will concentrate on the two major actors in the issue-area. In the history of the international food aid regime we can broadly distinguish two periods. Since 1954 a hegemonic regime evolved in the issue-area (becoming to some extent formalized in 1967). This regime comprised the so-called "Principles of Surplus Disposal." These principles aimed at harmonizing food aid with international trade. The Food Aid Convention (FAC) of 1967 organized burden-sharing among a multitude of donor states. In addition, a tacit regime norm derived from the practice of the United States as the hegemon of the Western World. This implicit issue-area specific norm prescribed that the United States stabilize cereal prices on the world market and provide the major part of food aid in

emergency situations. The second period of the food aid regime began with the World Food Conference in 1974. In the wake of the conference the hegemonic regime was revised. Its principles, norms and rules were geared more towards development and less towards the market. The guaranteed minimum of annually available food aid was increased. This second period lasted until the first half of the 1990s. In 1994, the USA did not honor its commitments under the FAC, and, in the following year, it cut its pledges. In 1996 the second World Food Conference in Rome adopted a "neoliberal" (*footnote 7*) approach to international food security emphasizing the responsibility of low-income and food deficit countries (LIFDCs) for their agricultural production. The corresponding turn in the donor states' attitudes was nicely captured by a Reuters headline: "Rich tell poor to do more for the hungry" (quoted in Nord-Süd aktuell (1996) 10:4, 645). Still, in rhetoric, "the rich" confirmed their intention to eradicate hunger globally while they made sure that the Plan of Action endorsed by the conference hardly mentions the term "food aid."

3.1. The Evolution of the International Food Aid Regime

The U.S. "One-Man Show"

The origins of the international food aid regime lie in U.S. domestic politics (Hopkins 1992; Ruttan 1996). In 1954, Congress passed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, commonly referred to as Public Law (PL) 480. The new law authorized the Executive branch to sell wheat and other surplus cereals from government-owned reserves on concessional terms to developing countries which needed to import agricultural products as cheaply as possible. Although a number of LIFDCs benefitted from the American initiative, PL 480 was adopted primarily for domestic reasons. With the end of the Korean War and the recovery of Japanese and European agriculture the international market for grain had tightened. At the same time, agricultural productivity in the United States peaked. Both trends led to growing government-owned stocks which threatened to depress agricultural prices and to considerably lower producers' income.

In order to relieve the national budget of skyrocketing storage costs and to avoid the bankruptcy of countless farmers, the administration was looking for ways to dispose of the surpluses without destabilizing the national market. A solution was found in the use of subsidized food transfers for humanitarian purposes. Countries which were not able to produce enough cereals for national consumption and which lacked the purchasing power to compensate their deficits through commercial imports were to be supplied with American surplus grain on concessional terms. This idea was translated into an assistance program that gave the government considerable leeway to use food for foreign policy purposes. Subsequently, a strong domestic alliance formed that encompassed the farmers' lobby, foreign policy makers, shipowners, and humanitarian activists and supported huge U.S. food aid shipments to developing countries (Ruttan 1996: 191-6).

While welcome at home, the American initiative was observed with suspicion abroad. Grain exporting nations such as Canada and Australia were highly concerned that the United States would dump their vast agricultural surpluses under a humanitarian pretext. They considered food aid a form of export subsidy that threatened their market shares. In response to these concerns major trading countries convened at the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Rome and negotiated a code of conduct designed to prevent commercial exports from being replaced by food aid. Central to this code of conduct - the so-called "FAO- Principles of Surplus Disposal" - was the principle of additionality (Cathie 1982: 54-65). It stipulated that food aid were to be additional to those commercial sales which could be reasonably assumed to have taken place in the absence of concessional transactions.

In order to increase transparency and to avoid cheating, the grain exporting states established a Consultative Subcommittee on Surplus Disposal within the FAO. Its purpose was to register commercial food imports by commodity and country over the preceding five years. This (annually renewed) index is known as "Usual Marketing Requirement." It describes the normal level of commercial imports needed to identify violations of the principle of additionality. As Singer, Wood, and Jennings (1987: 58) explain:

If food aid in the form of surplus disposal was given after that level had been reached then it could be shown that the surplus disposal was not having an adverse effect on the commercial market interests.

By virtue of their PL 480 the United States became the principal provider of food aid (Hopkins 1992: 229). From 1955 to 1965, millions of tons of cereals were transferred to developing countries. As Ruttan (1996: 156) and Singer, Wood, and Jennings (1987: 22) observed, in this period concessional sales constituted on average more than one third of the volume of U.S. overall grain exports. They peaked in 1965 reaching 17 million tons. It soon became obvious, however, that food aid was not only an ineffective but also a costly policy instrument to solve the domestic surplus problem. Even vast volumes of government-sponsored concessional sales did not absorb the growing productivity of American farmers. Instead, surpluses proved to be highly resistant to such measures. In 1961, after six years of food aid programmes, the grain stocks attained an all-time maximum of 68 million tons. This was equivalent to the national grain production of four years (Cathie 1982: 8).

The U.S. government, therefore, looked for alternative instruments to manage the surplus problem. Finally, the Johnson and Nixon administrations decided to curb the productivity of American farmers. They made their subsidies dependent on participation in acreage reduction programs. According to Cathie (1982: 123), this policy was highly successful. "In 1972, 60 million acres, almost one-sixth of the U.S. crop land, was taken out of production by the government controls." Further accelerated by the growing demand for American cereals from China, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, stocks began to decline dramatically since 1962. In 1972, the government held only 14 million tons compared to 68 million tons in 1961 (Shapouri and Missiean 1990: 17). Consequently, the costs of food aid rose sharply. As a result of expanding international grain markets, the administration had to choose between selling its cereals for hard cash to paying customers or giving it on concessional terms to developing countries. Food aid, in other words, entered into competition with commercial exports. As Ruttan (1996: 165) noted, "concern over global food shortages was beginning to replace concerns about the burden of food surplus."

In this situation, the U.S. sought the participation of other prosperous nations in international food aid programs. The belief that surpluses and stocks would decrease while the need for assistance would increase had led to the negotiation of the FAC in 1967. For the first time in history, eleven states and the EC/EU accepted a binding commitment to provide an amount of 4.5 million tons of grain annually. Although the 4.5 million

tons were less than half the original U.S. proposal, the convention has been appropriately referred to as "a milestone in international food aid." (Singer, Wood, and Jennings 1987: 73) It assured a minimum of cereals which would be provided independently of the current agricultural situation in the donor countries. Thereby, "the risks of instability in supply of food aid were reduced." (Singer, Wood, and Jennings 1987: 24) Additionally, the FAC was a first step toward a wider burden-sharing among a multitude of donors (Ruttan 1996: 164). Before 1967, almost all food aid had been provided by the United States with some minor contributions from Canada. Beginning with the FAC, other rich nations launched their own programs. The EC/EU, for instance, agreed under the FAC to provide a minimum of 1 million tons of grain per annum. The United States, though, was still by far the largest donor. Between 1967 and 1971, its share of total food aid shipments was about 80 per cent. On average, the U.S. government provided 11 million tons of cereals for concessional transfers annually, although its legal commitment under the FAC was only about 1.9 million tons. There was, in other words, a stable pattern of overcompliance by the U.S. in the issue-area of food aid.

As Puchala and Hopkins (1983: 79f.) have pointed out, the Principles of Surplus Disposal and the FAC describe only part of the mutual expectations of the food aid regime's participants. Additionally, there was a tacit norm which originated in the United States' position as a hegemon in world politics in general and in the issue area of global food security in particular. As outlined earlier, in the 1960s the USA accounted for nearly all international food aid shipments, it possessed huge national grain reserves, and its share of the international grain trade came close to 40 per cent. The other Western states expected the USA to use its considerable food power to promote its interests as the leader of the Western alliance. This implied that the U.S. were supposed to stabilize the international grain prices by managing its stocks accordingly and to provide food aid in emergency situations as it had always done. This established practice of the U.S., serving at the same time the common good of the international community and intelligible national interests, had given rise to the justified expectation of its continuation.

These national interests derived from the often mentioned argument in U.S. politics that the provision of food was an effective instrument to counter Soviet influence in the world. As stated for instance by Senator Hubert Humphrey (quoted in: Hopkins 1992: 230) in the late 1950s, "communism has no greater ally than hunger; and democracy and freedom no greater ally than an abundance of food." Similarly, John F. Kennedy (quoted in: Rothschild 1977: 88f.) argued during the 1960 election campaign, that "food is strength and food is peace and food is freedom and food is a helping hand." According to Ruttan (1996: 166), the Johnson and Nixon administrations intensified the strategic use of food aid in the context of the so-called "Food for Peace Program." It served as an instrument to induce Third World governments to adhere to U.S. political objectives and to shield their societies from Soviet influence. Food security thus was conceived as part of the Western strategy of containment directed against communism. (*footnote 8*)

To sum up, the generally shared expectation that the United States would bear the major burden of food aid and stabilize international prices by managing national grain reserves established together with the FAO Principles on Surplus Disposal and the FAC of 1967 the first international food aid regime, which, essentially, was an hegemonic regime.

World Food Crisis and World Food Conference

In the early 1970s, the world faced a sudden food shortage (Weiss and Jordan 1976; Cathie 1982: 122-6; Uvin 1994: 100). Poor harvests in the Soviet Union und drought-induced decline in agricultural production in Southern Asia led to an increased demand for grain on the world market. Between 1971 and 1973, the prices for wheat and other cereals nearly tripled. Under these conditions, the United States decided to sell as much cereals as possible to paying customers. Commercial grain exports rose from 36 million tons in 1971 to over 82 million tons in 1973. The sudden demand-led *hausse* exhausted U.S. reserves. As noticed by Shapouri and Missiean (1990: 18), government grain stocks "plummeted from about 10 million tons in 1973 to 170,000 tons in 1974." At the same time, the Nixon administration sharply reduced its food aid shipments. The volume of aid declined from over 9 million tons in 1970 to 3 million tons in 1973. Nearly half of the 3 million tons were directed towards Vietnam and Cambodia for purely political reasons. The rising prices together with the decreasing volume of food aid led to a precarious supply situation in many developing countries. Wide-spread famine and starvation occurred in Bangladesh and other Third World countries. The international community confronted its first global food crisis after World War II.

In November 1974, a World Food Conference was held in Rome to coordinate global action on food security in developing countries (Weiss and Jordan 1976; Puchala and Hopkins 1983: 82-5; Singer, Wood, and Jennings 1987: 34f.). The conference was initiated by Henry Kissinger, then U.S. Secretary of State, and was largely the result of public outrage about the fiasco of food aid (Rothschild 1977: 92). In a "Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition" the assembled states confirmed that "the elimination of hunger and malnutrition [...] and the elimination of the causes that determine this situation are the common objectives of all nations." All governments should therefore "accept the goal that within a decade no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day's bread, and that no human being's future and capacity will be stunted by malnutrition." To attain this goal, the conference urged immediate action on two interrelated problems of the contemporary food supply situation. On the one hand, agricultural production and food distribution in developing countries should be enhanced. On the other hand, the global food security system should be improved.

In view of the first problem, the conference urged the international community to accord high priority to agricultural development. As stated in Resolution XVIII, "the ultimate solution to the problem of food shortages in developing countries lies in increased production in these countries." They should, therefore, remove obstacles to adequate production and distribution of food and provide sufficient incentives to farmers to improve the local and regional supply situation. The rich nations were assigned the duty to assist them in their efforts. This implied that the doctrine of import-substituting industrialization - so far dominant among developing countries - had to be modified in favor of an approach giving due attention to rural development. As noted in Resolution II, "the maximum possible degree of self-sufficiency in basic food is [...] fundamental to the solution of the food problem in developing countries." In order to stimulate investments in agriculture, the states agreed on the creation of an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The fund was established in 1977 as a specialized agency of the United Nations and is considered a major achievement of the conference (Singer, Wood, and Jennings 1987: 35). For the first three-year period, its budget was in the order of \$ 1 billion composed of pledges by the OECD and OPEC countries. The IFAD is designed to finance agricultural development projects primarily for food production in the Third World.

In view of the second problem, the conference recommended a reform of the world food security system. Action, it was suggested, should be taken along three dimensions. First, the existing global information and early warning system was to be improved. States were expected to cooperate closely, sharing data about the current and prospective crop and food situation in order to enhance their capacities to take prompt and appropriate measures in emergency cases. To achieve this end, the conference charged the FAO and the International Wheat Council with formulating the necessary institutional arrangements. Today, global agriculture is closely monitored by the World Food Program (WFP) ([footnote 9](#)) and the FAO. But, as many critics notice, reaction to the occurrence of famines is still too slow and transport facilities still need to be improved (Clay 1991: 223-30; Ruttan 1996: 179).

Second, during the world food crisis it became obvious that the minimum volume of food aid agreed upon by the signatories to the FAC was insufficient. Consequently, the conference asked the international community to "make all efforts to provide commodities and/or financial assistance that will ensure in physical terms at least 10 million tons of grain as food aid a year" (Resolution XVIII). The *objective* of at least 10 million tons of food aid a year was reaffirmed in Article 1 of the renegotiated Food Aid Convention in 1980. In concrete numbers, however, the accumulated individual commitments of the donors amounted to no more than 7.6 million tons as documented in Article III of the same convention. The United States' share was 4.5 million tons, the EC/EU pledged 1.7 million tons, and the remaining 1.4 million tons were to be supplied by a group of nine other donor countries including Australia, Canada and Japan. However, in the 1980s donors regularly overcomplied with the 10-million rule, i.e. donor countries gave more aid than they were obliged to under Article III of the FAC. In the mid-1980s, and in response to emergency situations in Africa, international food aid shipments reached 14 million tons in 1984 and peaked at 15 million tons in 1987 ([Graph 1](#)).

Third, the conference called for a re-orientation and re-organization of international food aid flows. Until 1974, the allocation of food aid was dominated by donor countries' political and economic interests and often neglected recipients' needs. This situation was to be changed. Donor countries were to make sure that concessional transfers did not interfere with the development objectives of recipient countries. Generally, it was to be ensured that food aid neither operated as a disincentive to local production nor caused adverse repercussions on the domestic market. By contrast, aid was to be designed to stimulate rural employment through development projects such as "food-for-work programs," for instance. In order to maximize the effectiveness of food aid and to minimize the risk of political instrumentalization, the conference recommended that donors channel a significant proportion of their food aid through multilateral institutions such as the WFP.

Held seven years after the negotiation of the first FAC, the World Food Conference in 1974 is considered a second crucial step toward the establishment of a development-oriented food aid regime (Hopkins 1992: 231; Uvin 1994: 140). According to Clay and Singer (quoted in Uvin 1994: 140), it was a "watershed in the history of food aid." Donors committed themselves to combat global hunger and malnutrition and to implement food aid policies that are designed to improve the long-term food security of developing countries: They established new international institutions such as the IFAD, improved the information systems and early warning networks, enhanced the volume of food aid transfers, and formulated general guidelines for the allocation of food aid giving priority to LIFDCs. They also increased the share of global food aid distributed by multilateral institutions, and last but not least, they implemented most of the provisions of the World Food Conference in their respective national food aid legislations.

In 1975, the U.S. Congress decided that at least 75 per cent of American food aid should be targeted toward least-developed countries with large numbers of undernourished people. In 1979, Congress adopted the Bellman amendment to PL 480 which required the Secretary of Agriculture to check all American food aid shipments for their possible negative effects on recipient countries. It was to be excluded that food aid may operate as a disincentive to local production or disrupt national markets (Hopkins 1992: 243). Similarly, the EC/EU legislated that its food aid should be used primarily to support the poorest countries. In 1981, it adopted a policy that was deliberately designed to enhance self-sufficiency in recipient countries (Uvin 1994: 141).

It should be noted, however, that even the reformed food aid regime had serious shortcomings. As observed by Clay (1991: 204), Hopkins (1992: 247), and Uvin (1994: 149), the volume of food aid was not adequate when compared with the international supply situation, and political and economic considerations still played an important role in the distribution of food aid. Concessional transfers did not always reach those who needed them most. Nevertheless, in retrospect, the 1980s appear as the golden age of international food aid. The regime was constantly revised and improved. Both the weight of recipients' needs in food aid allocation and the observance of widely shared rules and norms for the appropriate use of food aid increased. New practices which are less dependent on surpluses such as "triangular transactions" and "local purchases" were developed and implemented.

Ironically, the permanent reform of the regime in the 1980s was facilitated by the declining importance of concessional transfers when compared with the commercial sales and the total development assistance. As stated by Hopkins (1992: 231; see also Singer, Wood, and Jennings 1987: 24):

While food aid accounted for 15 to 25 per cent of grain trade and represented close to 20 per cent of the total ODA in the 1950s, it accounted for only 5 per cent of grain trade and 10 per cent of ODA in the 1980s. (...) Indeed, as food aid proved less important to producer groups, this made it easier for the regime to abandon surplus disposal as a principal element in rhetoric about food aid and focus instead on food security goals aimed at economic development and the long-term alleviation of hunger.

Another consequence of the declining share of concessional food transfers in world trade was the suspension of the "Usual Marketing Requirement" for food aid shipments to least-developed countries. As noted by Singer, Wood, and Jennings (1987: 58), the Committee on Surplus Disposal started to ignore the principle of additionality because of its adverse effects on development in situations of food shortages. It forces poor countries to use their scare resources in order to provide their population with food instead of investing them into rural development. As a result, the principle of additionality was replaced by a "principle of substitutability." (Hopkins 1992: 241f.)

The operation of a development-oriented regime was further supported by the re-emergence of huge surpluses in donor countries in the 1980s ([Graph 2](#)). In 1986 global grain stocks peaked at 450 million tons equaling 27 per cent of the annual world cereal consumption. The very

dimension of reserves made food aid a *quantit, n, gligeable* since its volume was too small to be used for stocks reduction purposes. In response to the increasing costs of surplus production, however, the U.S. and the EC/EU started to revise their agricultural policies as they weighed heavily on their national budgets. The efforts to cut national food reserves were reinforced by an increase in international trade in cereals from a low of 205 million tons in 1986 to 252 million tons in 1992. As a result of both the agricultural reforms and the growth in food trade, grain stocks declined more or less steadily and prices for cereals rose again. This trend was amplified by the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round at the end of 1993.

Regime Collapse in the 1990s

Consequently, in the middle of the 1990s, food aid was once more reconsidered. Responding to domestic pressures to reduce foreign assistance, the Clinton administration cut the nation's annual pledges of food aid nearly by half. At a revision meeting of the FAC in 1995, the U.S. government reduced the country's share from 4.5 million to 2.5 million tons of cereals a year. ([footnote 10](#)) By this move, national commitments under the FAC declined for the first time since the World Food Conference, falling from 7.6 million tons to 5.4 million tons. As a result, the gap between individual promises and the collective goal (10 million tons) increased considerably. ([footnote 11](#)) This reduction of food aid is all the more noteworthy, given the results of a recent study of the United States Department of Agriculture (1995: IV), which concludes that

food aid need will nearly double over the next decade, even with reasonably optimistic assumptions about recipient countries to produce their own food or to have the financial capacity to import food commercially. Total food aid needs to maintain consumption and meet emergency needs for refugees are projected at 15 million tons in 1996, increasing to 27 million tons by 2005.

The cuts in pledges to the FAC paralleled the real-world trend in the availability of food on concessional terms ([Graph 1](#)). In response to crises in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, international food aid peaked in 1992 at 15 million tons. Since then it declined to 7.5 million tons in 1995. This is the lowest volume of food aid since the world food crisis in 1974. Contrary to the regime's intentions, low-income and food-deficit countries (LIFDCs) are particularly badly affected by the cuts. As noted in the FAO's *Food Outlook* (October 1996):

Nearly all of the contraction was accounted for by reduced shipments to the LIFDCs, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Aggregate cereal shipments as food aid to the LIFDCs are estimated to have fallen to 5.7 million tons in 1995/96, 1.4 million tons less than in the previous year and the lowest level on record.

The results of the second World Food Conference in Rome in 1996 confirm the change that has taken place in the attitudes of donor countries towards food aid. Even if (on principle) the rich nations still affirmed their duty to assist developing countries, they resisted strongly to commit themselves to any concrete measures to alleviate hunger and malnutrition in the world. Conversely, in line with "neoliberal" economic concepts, they stressed the importance of national initiatives and international trade to improve food security in developing countries. Existing aid programs were frozen, and donor countries' willingness to offer help for self-help is on the decline (Peters and Trueblood 1997: 19-20).

3.2. The Robustness of the International Food Aid Regime

Effectiveness, Exogenous Shocks, and Robustness

In this section, we look at the robustness of the international food aid regime at different points in time. As we have indicated in the introduction, the concept of regime robustness is logically linked to two other concepts central to this study: to the concept of regime effectiveness and to the concept of exogenous challenges (to a regime). A regime can be called *effective* if it receives verbal and, most of all, practical support from its members. In general, it is assumed, that this support will be expressed by the extent to which (1) the participants abide by the norms and rules of the regime and (2) their behavior corresponds with the commonly held expectations in the respective issue-area. An *exogenous shock* or challenge is an event in the regime's environment which tends to reduce the willingness of states to cooperate within the regime. To put it differently: a shock is (or creates) a situation in which the members of a regime have a strong incentive to violate, or use their power to change, central norms and rules in the issue-area. An exogenous challenge, therefore, jeopardizes the regime's effectiveness. By *robustness* we understand the capacity of a regime to withstand exogenous challenges without its effectiveness decreasing. This is the case if the member states continue to abide by the principles, norms and rules that define the regime, even though some or all members have incentives to violate them. Therefore, a regime's robustness shows only (or fails to show) in face of an exogenous shock. Studying the robustness of regimes empirically, thus, requires defining and identifying shocks in the relevant issue-areas. Moreover, since it is pointless to examine the robustness of a regime whose rules have never been implemented, it is necessary to make sure that the regime in question was sufficiently effective in the first place ([footnote 12](#)) before looking at its members' reactions towards exogenous shocks.

Analyzing the robustness of the international food aid regime, we proceed in two steps. First, we provide evidence for the effectiveness of the *hegemonic regime*, whose long formation process culminated in the FAC of 1967. The world food crisis of 1973-74 constituted a major exogenous challenge to this regime. Stocks declined, the prices of cereals rose sharply, and food aid entered into competition with commercial sales ([Graph 2](#)). In this situation, which resembles a prisoner's dilemma, states were tempted to reduce their levels of food aid and sell their cereals to paying customers. The availability of substantial short-term profits from trade jeopardized the long-term goal of establishing global food security. The occurrence of this shock makes it possible to determine the regime's robustness by asking whether or not the member states continued to live up to the commonly held expectations in the issue-area. Second, we analyze the effectiveness of the *reformed food aid regime* as devised by the World Food Conference in 1974. With regard to this regime, we discuss two distinct shocks. One took place in the second half of the 1980s, the other one in the 1990s: in both cases stocks declined and prices rose rather substantially. Both shocks raise the question as to whether the regime proved robust under changed, i.e. more regime-adverse, circumstances.

The Effectiveness and Robustness of the Hegemonic Food Aid Regime

The rules of the FAC as established in 1967 were observed by the member states. As generally expected, the transfers were even considerably

higher than the agreed upon 4.5 million tons. On average, 13 million tons of cereals were shipped each year until 1971. In this period, the United States was by far the most important donor. It accounted for over 80 per cent of the global food aid shipments, and it reacted promptly to emergency situations. For instance, when parts of Asia suffered a serious drought in 1968, the Johnson administration scaled up American food aid shipments to 14.5 million tons, and up to 1971, it kept food aid levels at about 10 million tons a year. In the FAC of 1967, the EC/EU and other potential donors, accepted only a small role in international food aid, anticipating that the overwhelming part of the food aid burden would be shouldered for strategic reasons by the United States.

In the 1970s, challenges to the hegemonic food aid regime arose from various corners. As a consequence of the Vietnam war, a stagnating national economy, and growing trade imbalances, the burden of leadership had begun to weigh more heavily on the United States. Since its inauguration, the Nixon administration therefore pursued inter alia an extensive acreage reduction program to curb the costs of storekeeping. Furthermore, it used the period of superpower détente to improve commercial ties with the Soviet Union and China, which led to major purchases of U.S. grain by communist countries (Dittmer 1977). Both, declining agricultural production and rising commercial exports, led to rapidly shrinking stocks. During the world food crisis, prices tripled and government-owned stocks dwindled further as a result of offensive sales on the international market. As noticed by Ruttan (1996), the Nixon administration took every opportunity to improve the country's balance-of-payments situation. It sold a fifth of the 1973 harvest to the Soviet Union. This was a somewhat ironical development given the political convictions of the 1960s. According to these beliefs, these sales must have bolstered the internal rule of the enemy, and since the delivered food was missing in other parts of the globe, they additionally increased the risks of communist inspired revolutions. But détente made things look different for the U.S. government. Food aid was no longer needed for strategic purposes because starving people were no longer considered a threat to the Western World.

Due to declining U.S. stocks and rising export prices for agricultural products, the food aid regime of the 1960s came under pressure and finally collapsed. Between 1971 and 1973, total food aid shipments fell from 13.5 million tons of cereals to a historic low of 6.5 million tons. Even though the formal rules of the FAC were not violated, the deep cuts in food aid by the Nixon administration surprised the international community. As noted by Puchala and Hopkins (1983: 79f), "there was still the almost universal expectation that the North Americans could and would hold reserves for the world and would manipulate them in the interest of market stability." It was precisely this expectation that was not met by the United States in the early 1970s. Additionally, as a consequence of empty storehouses the U.S. was no longer willing to provide as much food aid as it did in the 1960s. In response to the collapse of the hegemonic food aid regime during the world food crisis, the international community convened in Rome to discuss a reform of the failed regime.

The Effectiveness and Robustness of the Reformed Food Aid Regime

Since 1980 (when the FAC was renegotiated) the rules of the reformed food aid regime as designed by the World Food Conference were by and large observed. Indeed, donor states regularly overcomplied. Between 1983 and 1993 the volume of food aid varied between 11 million tons and 15 million tons. On average, 13 million tons of cereals were shipped annually. A large part of the international food aid was channeled through the World Food Program. In total, multilateral transfers increased from 13 per cent of global deliveries in 1972 to 27 per cent in 1993. Another indicator for the effectiveness of the regime was the fact that agricultural export lobbies considered food aid shipments an inefficient way of disposing national surpluses. As observed by Hopkins (1984: 139) and Uvin (1994: 148f.), the development-oriented allocation norms and rules of the reformed regime made food aid a relatively costly instrument when compared with other surplus disposal mechanisms such as direct export credits. This presupposes, however, that the regime was honored by the member states.

A third indication of the regime's effectiveness was the failure of the EC/EU Commission in 1995 to introduce new internal rules for the allocation of food aid. These rules would have strengthened the surplus disposal function of European food aid at the expense of other, more strongly development-oriented instruments such as triangular sales, local purchases or the monetarization of food aid. A coalition of humanitarian NGOs succeeded in preventing the regime from being recaptured by agricultural interest groups.

A first exogenous challenge to the reformed food aid regime emerged in the second half of the 1980s. In response to the recovery of the grain trade and as a consequence of the devaluation of the U.S. currency, the huge stocks of 1987 decreased by 33 per cent within three years, falling from a record level of 455 million tons to 306 million tons in 1990 ([Graph 2](#)). In particular, the U.S. reserves shrunk dramatically ([Graph 3](#)). In 1987, they stood at 204 million tons and, in 1990, they finished with 61 million tons. In the same period, the prices for wheat increased from \$ 109 per ton in 1987 to \$ 161 at the end of the decade. At this time, food aid became significantly more expensive and the donor states faced strong incentives to reduce their pledges.

A similar pattern was again observable between 1993 and 1996. In this period, world stocks declined to levels as low as not since 1981 ([Graph 2](#)). Descending from a temporary maximum of 383 million tons in 1993, they reached a low of 258 million tons in 1996. This volume corresponds to only 14 per cent of the annual world cereal consumption, which is a level that is far below the 17 to 18 per cent range that the FAO considers the minimum necessary to safeguard world food security. The U.S. reserves diminished from 79 million tons in 1993 to 25 million tons in 1996, and in the European Union stocks fell from 47 million tons to 19 million tons ([Graph 3](#)). The prices for wheat rose correspondingly from \$ 143 to \$ 216 per ton reaching a new all-time peak in the history of the international wheat trade. As in the end of the 1980s, the food aid regime was put under great stress.

While the reformed food aid regime proved to be robust in the late 1980s, it collapsed in 1995. To be sure, there was a minor setback in 1988 when the volume of food aid declined to 12 million tons from the previous year's maximum of 15 million tons ([Graph 1](#)). But even then, the volume was still above the annual average of 11 million tons reached in the first half of the 1980s. Beginning with 1989 food aid levels rose again and peaked in 1992 at 15 million tons. Therefore, it can be argued that the shock was absorbed by the regime. The level of aid was not seriously affected by rising prices and declining stocks. This pattern, however, did not recur in the mid-1990s.

As already mentioned, the Clinton administration declared in 1995 that it would reduce its pledge to the FAC from 4.5 million tons to 2.5 million

tons. The U.S. announcement surprised and irritated the other member states (see International Herald Tribune, 3 April 1995: 3). It was only in December 1994 that American officials had indicated at an aid group meeting in Washington, D.C. that the United States would maintain its pledge of 4.5 million tons annually. The move of the Clinton administration, therefore, signaled a break with the established practice in the issue-area. Since the World Food Conference in 1974, the guaranteed minimum of food aid had not been reduced, and from 1981 to 1992 the international community never fell short of providing 10 million tons of cereals a year. Beginning with 1993, however, food aid shipments dropped continuously, and in 1995 they ended at 7.5 million tons which is the lowest level since the mid- 1970s. In line with the global down-scaling of aid flows, the United States cut the volume of its food aid shipments by 66 per cent. It shrunk from 8.5 million tons in 1992 to 2.9 million tons in 1995. In 1994, the U.S. government, for the first time in the history of food aid, failed to live up to its commitments under the FAC (if only by a small margin). Instead of delivering the agreed-upon 4.48 million tons, the cereal shipments amounted to only 4.31 million tons. The following year, then, saw the official reduction of the United States' pledge to no more than 2.5 million tons a year. In other words: the food aid regime proved not to be robust in the mid-1990s.

3.3. Distributional Consequences and Regime Robustness in the Case of Food Aid

The theoretically critical question we need to turn to now is whether the variance in the robustness of the food aid regime over time can be accounted for by one of the two hypotheses linking regime robustness to specific distributional patterns, i.e. the *rationalist symmetry hypothesis* that expects international regimes producing a roughly symmetrical (or equal) distribution of benefits and burdens among their members to be (*ceteris paribus*) more robust, and the *reflective equity hypothesis* which suggests that a fair distribution of gains and costs endows a regime with a greater ability to withstand exogenous challenges. Both hypotheses are evaluated in light of states' responses to the shocks that occurred in the issue-area. The food aid regime had to cope with three exogenous challenges, each of which consisted in rapidly shrinking grain stocks and sharply rising prices. In each case, the central actors were the same; and in each case the situation structure (constellation of interests) was similar to a prisoner's dilemma. We can therefore assume that the three cases are sufficiently comparable to warrant a longitudinal comparison.

Assessing the Rationalist Symmetry Hypothesis

In the issue-area of food aid, the burden-sharing among donors varied significantly. Before 1967 the United States accounted for over 95 per cent of all concessional grain transfers to developing countries. Even after the conclusion of the FAC, it supplied about 80 per cent of the global food aid. In the wake of the World Food Conference in 1974, the situation began to change, however ([Graph 4](#)). In 1976, the EC/EU already contributed 12 per cent of the global food aid, and its share tripled to 37 per cent until 1994. In the same period the United States' share dropped from 62 to 46 per cent. This trend towards greater equality in burden-sharing between the U.S. and the EC/EU becomes even more evident if we do not only consider the volume of food aid but also its costs ([Graph 5](#)). In 1976, the EC/EU accounted for 16 per cent of the global food aid disbursements, whereas the expenses of the United States amounted to 68 per cent. By contrast, in 1994 the shares of both actors were almost balanced with the EC/EU at a slight disadvantage. The United States then financed 41 per cent of all food aid flows and the EC/EU paid for 42 per cent. ([footnote 13](#))

If we compare the shock situation that existed during the world food crisis of the early 1970s with the one in the mid-1990s, we find that, although burden-sharing became significantly more balanced, this did not enhance the robustness of the regime. It collapsed in both cases. At least as far as the food aid case is concerned, equality of the distribution of benefits and costs does not seem to make a difference for regime robustness. This finding is strengthened when we turn to the third shock situation at the end of the 1980s. Between 1985 and 1989, the USA provided 52 per cent of the food aid volume while the EC/EU accounted for 18 per cent. In regard to the costs of food aid, the USA met 54 per cent while the EC/EU's share was about 28 per cent. Thus, the burden-sharing at this time was considerably *less* balanced than in the mid-1990s. Yet, at that time the regime did what it failed to do half a decade later under supposedly more favorable conditions - it survived the shock.

Assessing the Reflective Equity Hypothesis

Before we can evaluate the reflective equity hypothesis, we need a criterion of distribution that is acknowledged as valid by the members of the regime and reflects their subjective conception of a just distribution of benefits and burdens in cooperative ventures of this sort. One criterion that is often applied in international politics and which is also appropriate in our case stipulates that in a joint undertaking everyone should contribute according to one's capabilities. This "capability criterion" is used, for instance, to determine the national contributions to the United Nations' budget which are calculated on the basis of the national income of the member states (Koschorreck 1991). Thus, rich nations are required to contribute more than poor ones.

In the case of food aid, donor states decided to use a similar allocation rule (Cathie 1982: 136). The implicit assumption is that major exporting nations have more cereals at their disposal than minor ones. Consequently, their contributions under the food aid regime should be greater than those of states that export less. More specifically, the individual volumes of food aid should mirror donor states' shares in the global grain trade: the greater this share, the more food aid the country should provide. Ideally, a country with a world market share of 20% should also provide one fifth of the global amount of food aid deemed necessary by the community of states. If this rule of distribution is followed scrupulously, each member of the regime supplies the same (percentage) share of its national cereals *exports* as food aid. The extent to which these shares converge in reality can therefore be used as a measure of justice in the distribution of burdens. ([footnote 14](#))

Another standard that could be used in addition to, or in lieu of, the world market share is the national cereals *production* (Uvin 1994: 133). For the distribution of burdens to be fair, it could be required that those donor states that produce more than others also give more, that is, that each give according to its overall production. Using the same reasoning as above, we find that, according to this second criterion, burden-sharing among donor states is fair to the extent that all divert the same percentage share of their production for food aid purposes. ([footnote 15](#))

In the following, we apply both criteria. ([footnote 16](#)) Our discussion focuses on the U.S. and the EC/EU, which traditionally account for 70 to 85

per cent of the global food aid, and addresses the following questions: Does the distribution of burdens between these two actors vary over time when analyzed in the light of the two fairness criteria? And if so, can this variation account for the observed fluctuations in the robustness of the food aid regime? Was it the case (as suggested by the equity hypothesis) that exogenous challenges caused the regime to collapse if and only if burden-sharing was unfair?

As regards the period before the world food crisis in the early 1970s, the United States' share in concessional sales was about 80 per cent, while its share in the global grain trade was only about 40 per cent. In the first two years of the 1970s, the United States contributed 24 per cent of its grain exports to food aid supplies, while the EC/EU and its member states allocated only 13 per cent for this purpose ([Graph 6](#)). The burden-sharing is even more unfair when the production criterion is applied. Here the U.S. food aid accounted for 4 per cent of the national grain production while the EC/EU and its member states delivered only 1 per cent of their production. The complaints by President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz in 1972 that the United States were considered the "world's father provider" (quoted in: Rothschild 1976: 290) were justified. There is a broad scholarly consensus that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the allocation of burdens in the issue-area of international food aid was indeed unfair to the United States (Cathie 1982: 25; Ruttan 1996: 164; Uvin 1994: 142). Therefore, the sharp reduction of U.S. food aid between 1973 and 1974 was not illegitimate from the standpoint of inter-donor fairness. ([footnote 17](#)) The question remains, however, whether the United States would have maintained their food aid levels if the burden-sharing had been fair.

In the wake of the World Food Conference in 1974, burden-sharing became not only more symmetrical but also more equitable. In the 1990s, the United States and the EC/EU allocated approximately the same share of their cereals exports to food aid supplies ([Graph 6](#)). Similarly, both donors shouldered about equal burdens in terms of the production criterion ([Graph 7](#)). Between 1990 and 1995, the American food aid supplies equaled 2.5 per cent of the national grain production while the European food aid shipments amounted to 2.4 per cent. In other words, each of the two major donors provided about the same share of its grain exports and its grain production for food aid purposes. Hence, according to both criteria of distributive justice, the burden sharing was fair at this time. Nevertheless, the regime did collapse in 1995. Contrary to the reflectivist expectation, distributive justice in the allocation of costs did not increase the robustness of the food aid regime to any notable degree. The fate of the fair regime in the 1990s was disconcertingly similar to that of the unfair regime in the 1960s and early 1970s. This suggests that distributive justice and regime robustness are uncorrelated.

This impression is confirmed, when the third shock situation is included. From 1985 to 1989, the share of food aid in national cereals exports was about 8 per cent for both donors. In terms of the relationship between grain production and food aid, the United States gave slightly more than the EC/EU. The U.S. share was about 2.4 per cent while the EC/EU share was 1.4 per cent. If anything the situation at the end of 1980s was marginally *less* fair when compared with the burden-sharing in the 1990s. Nevertheless, in the late 1980s the regime was robust whereas in the 1990s it collapsed.

The following table summarizes the findings:

Shock Period	Symmetrical Distribution	Equitable Distribution	Regime proves robust
early 1970s	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
late 1980s	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
mid-1990s	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>

4. Conclusion: Theoretical Implications of the Findings

Neither of the two hypotheses - the rationalist symmetry hypothesis and the reflective equity hypothesis - correctly predicted the variance in the robustness of the international food aid regime. In this concluding section, we consider what this result means for the hypotheses and the theoretical perspectives they are rooted in. At one level, the answer is almost trivial: the poor performance of either hypothesis does not mean much at all given that neither rationalist nor reflective institutionalism subscribes to a determinist conception of the social world. Hence, it is always possible that the hypothesis is unsuccessful in the case at hand, even if it is perfectly true, viz. as a probabilistic proposition. This argument is a powerful one reminding us that the jury is still out on the two hypotheses and providing compelling reasons for studying more cases before judging the merits of either of them (let alone the theories they are embedded in). ([footnote 18](#)) Meanwhile, it is not necessary to stop at this point and to postpone reflection on the findings of this study until it has been supplemented by a series of others. Consideration of the "test value" of our case, although it cannot replace additional testing, may give us an idea of how likely it is that these results will be overturned in subsequent research.

First of all, it should be noted that our "case study" actually looked at three cases (or "observations"), ([footnote 19](#)) corresponding to the three exogenous shocks that the food aid regime faced so far. Hence, our empirical base (albeit still small) is broader than it might appear at first sight. Moreover, as we have pointed out, this longitudinal study met the requirements of comparability to a large extent, suggesting that it is better seen as a "controlled comparison" than a single case study. ([footnote 20](#)) Consequently, there is every reason not to brush aside its results too lightly.

Even more important from a theoretical point of view are a couple of questions that directly address the relationship between the case selected and the hypotheses and theories under scrutiny. Is there any possibility to explain the failure of one or both of the hypotheses on the basis of

theoretically relevant features of the case? How serious is this failure anyway, given the explanatory claims of the two theories? In other words: should the food aid regime be seen as a "hard case" or as an "easy case" for the theories under examination?

Consider the equity hypothesis first. As the table at the end of section 3.3. shows, this hypothesis did not fail the test across the board: it is only the states' (especially the U.S.) responses to the most recent shock that disconfirmed its predictive power. It is therefore worth asking whether there is some argument explaining (or making sense of) this apparent anomaly *from a reflectivist point of view*. If there is, we may conclude that our case (contrary to appearance) did not and could not weaken this theory of international institutions. (All that may be needed is adding some *theoretically-grounded* qualifications to the equity hypothesis.) Provided that a similar strategy is not available to the rationalists (having to cope with two anomalies rather than one), such a possibility of explaining "away" the apparent failure of reflective institutionalism would indicate that, at least for the time being, this school's claim to superiority has been strengthened.

At first sight, however, it seems unlikely that such an argument can be made. On the contrary, it could be argued that reflectivists, who consider morality as a motivating force in international politics, should have expected the food aid regime to be robust in the mid-1990s, *even leaving aside* the fair burden-sharing that characterized the regime at this time. As Ruttan (1996: 149) und Uvin (1994: 148) have pointed out feeding the hungry appeals to the most basic instincts of mankind. Furthermore, the moral imperative to avoid starvation appears to be one of the rare examples of an interculturally shared norm. Unsurprisingly, the moral conviction underlying this imperative has found its way into numerous international documents. For instance, Article 11 of the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights states that everyone has a "fundamental right to be free from hunger" and that the members of the international community should adopt appropriate measures to improve the global food security. The entitlement of all human beings to food and the corresponding duty to make food available to the hungry was reaffirmed at the second World Food Conference in Rome in 1996. In the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, the participants recognized

the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.

Even though the view is widely shared in the international community that primary responsibility for food security rests with the home governments, the industrialized nations in general recognize their moral obligation to help those who cannot help themselves, provided they can do so at reasonable costs. Therefore, in the same document, they subscribed to the global effort to achieve "food security for all" and to eradicate hunger in the world, "with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015." Hence, a globally shared norm which requires actors to assist others in emergency situations should indeed have bolstered the international food aid regime.

Still, there is at least one argument that reflectivists could reasonably put forward in order to account for this difficulty. They might argue that aid is not morally required when it is not helpful to those it is supposed to serve and that governments have finally realized that this is the case with food aid. According to this interpretation, the breakdown of the regime in the mid-1990s, ultimately, was not caused by an exogenous challenge it could not meet, but by an instance of cognitive change: causal beliefs (regarding the longer term effects of food aid) changed, although normative ones (aid that really helps is morally good) did not. ([footnote 21](#)) Following this line of argument, governments have realized that there are more efficient ways to increase global food security than food aid and that, indeed, food aid is harmful by creating "disincentives" for developing countries to increase their local production. Unfortunately, however, there is little evidence to support this interpretation. Not only does the disincentive debate date back to the 1950s, experts have shown that this problem is not inherent to food aid. Rather, it is possible to organize and channel food aid in such a way as to not discourage the expansion of local crops in the long run and, at the same time, feed the hungry now (Binswanger and Mills 1995; Clay 1987, 1991; Ruttan 1996). Moreover, there are no indications that the cuts in food aid have been re-directed to other, presumably more efficient, development projects.

On the contrary, the aggregate levels of ODA have fallen in real terms in the 1990s. As observed by the Development Assistance Committee, they declined from \$ 62.1 billion in 1992 to \$ 47.6 billion in 1997 (OECD Press Release: Aid and Private Flows Fell in 1997, 18 June 1998; OECD 1997). Especially the aid budget of the United States has suffered dramatic cuts. While the Bush administration in 1992 still spent \$ 11.3 billion for development assistance, the Clinton administration reduced foreign aid programs to \$ 6.2 billion in 1997. Thereby, the United States dropped to the third place among all donor states, behind Japan (\$ 9.4 billion) and France (\$ 6.3 billion) and only slightly in front of Germany (\$ 5.9 billion). Therefore, it looks as though the disincentives argument was largely a pretext to cloak the OECD countries' decision to save money in times of increasingly tight budgets. Even more important in the context of this study, the reference to an alleged cognitive change cannot salvage the equity hypothesis as far as the food aid case is concerned.

The difficulties reflectivists have establishing a strong role for moral considerations in the deliberations of states in the issue-area of food aid should lend support to the rationalist case. ([footnote 22](#)) As we have seen, this is not true. At least as far as the rationalist interpretation of the distributional requirements of institutional robustness are concerned, the experience of the food aid regime does not confirm this school of thought in regime theory either. It is therefore worth asking what this failure means to this body of ideas. Any given failure of a theoretically-derived hypothesis will weigh comparatively heavily or comparatively lightly, will mean a serious blow to the theory or will be shrugged off by its proponents without much further consideration, depending on whether the object under study constitutes an "easy case" or a "hard case" to the theory. ([footnote 23](#)) Classifying food aid in these terms is difficult because rationalist institutionalism has two branches, realism and neoliberalism, which differ in their core theoretical concerns (defining different "easy" and "hard cases" for them). Thus, realism traditionally focuses on security relationships, whereas neoliberalism is more often applied to problems of international political economy (though not humanitarian issues). Since, as we have seen in section 2, realism entails the symmetry hypothesis more clearly, we confine our discussion to this branch. It is reasonable to argue that food aid should be seen as a *hard case* for realism. It comes under the category of "low politics," and it is an issue-area where states' relative gains concerns should be low (Grieco 1990: 45). As a result, states should be more willing to tolerate relative losses and be less prepared to insist on (at least) a balanced distribution of gains (or burdens). Consequently, deviations from this hypothesis should be more frequent according to the theory.

This said, such considerations provide "excuses" at best; they must not be mistaken for any kind of positive evidence in favor of the theory. As we have seen, the symmetry hypothesis has performed rather poorly in this test, and as long as no further cases have been examined, the hypothesis remains unsubstantiated. More research along these lines is therefore needed in order to establish whether these findings are in fact little more than outliers or indeed reflect the truth of the null hypothesis that neither fairness nor equality is correlated with regime robustness.

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Footnotes

1

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2

The term "regime effectiveness" is sometimes used in a more narrow sense, referring to the extent to which the stated *purpose* of the regime is achieved through rule-based cooperation.

3

Meanwhile, Hurrell (1993), in the subtitle of his article, refers to his approach as a "reflective" one.

4

In this paper we use the terms "just," "fair," and "equitable" (and their derivatives) interchangeably. Similarly, we do not distinguish semantically between "equal," "balanced," and "symmetrical."

5

For the distinction between inside (*Verstehen*) and outside (*Erkl., ren*) accounts of behavior see Hollis and Smith 1990.

6

In this paper, the food aid of the EC/EU comprises the efforts of both the Community (or now Union) and its individual members.

7

We use inverted commas to distinguish the economic doctrine of "neoliberalism" from the theoretical perspective in international relations theory that goes by the same name. For the relationship between "neoliberalism" (the economic doctrine) and neoliberalism (the IR theory) see Keohane 1989b: 10.

8

Recent studies suggest that the idea that a considerable amount of political leverage could be obtained from food aid was ill-founded (Ruttan 1996: 197f.; Uvin 1994: 138).

9

Founded in 1961, the WFP is a multilateral international organization that organizes emergency and project aid. Today, nearly one third of the global food aid is distributed through the WFP.

10

In 1995, the United States produced 277 million tons of cereals and exported 104 million tons. Stocks were at 60 million tons.

11

In addition to the U.S., Australia reduced its commitment from 400,000 tons to 300,000 tons of cereals, Canada from 600,000 tons to 400,000 tons, and Norway from 30,000 tons to 25,000 tons.

12

For further discussion of the concepts of regime effectiveness, exogenous shocks and regime robustness, see Hasenclever, Mayer, and Rittberger 1996b: 4-9.

13

The discrepancy between the food aid volume and the food aid costs can be explained by the EC/EU's practice to provide food aid generally in the form of grants (whereas the U.S. also provides food aid on concessional credit terms). Additionally, the EC/EU is more heavily involved in new forms of food aid deliveries such as local purchases or triangular transactions, where the food that is to be provided as aid is bought in other developing countries. In 1995, 1.4 million tons, representing about 16 per cent of global aid deliveries, were procured in developing countries. The EC/EU purchased 770,000 tons of cereals in developing countries whereas the United States bought only 4,400 tons abroad.

14

Suppose that the variables a^E , a^F , b^E , and b^F denote the annual grain exports and the annual food aid of two countries A and B , respectively. If each country's material contribution to world food security reflects its share of the world grain market faithfully, then $a^E : b^E = a^F : b^F$. This equation, however, can be reformulated as follows: $100 (a^F : a^E) = 100 (b^F : b^E)$, which is another way of saying that A and B contribute the same percentage share of their grain exports as food aid.

15

This measure of justice is somewhat rough, since it does not take into account the size of the population (or the surplus per capita). The problem does not arise with the U.S. and the EC/EU, though, whose total population is about the same.

16

In contrast to the export criterion, the production criterion is not explicitly mentioned in international documents such as the International Grains Agreement. We nevertheless use it as an alternative measure of distributional justice in order to give higher reliability to our assessment of the fairness (to donors) of the food aid regime.

17

Considering the moral rights of the recipient countries, this does not imply, however, that the reduction was justifiable overall. It is disputable, to say the least, as to whether the move of the Nixon administration could be justified from a moral point of view, as long as it did not know whether or not other states would respond by increasing their food aid.

18

It should be noted, therefore, that this study of the food aid regime is only the first in a sequence of case studies forming the empirical backbone of a larger research project devoted to exploring the relationship between the distributional consequences and the robustness of regimes. Other studies in progress deal with commodity trade regimes, the NPT regime, the regime regulating conventional forces in Europe, and the whaling and fur seals regimes. The project is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

19

For the distinction between cases and (independent) observations see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994: 52.

20

For the standards defining a controlled comparison see Lijphart 1975.

21

For the distinction between causal beliefs and normative (or principled) beliefs see Goldstein and Keohane 1993.

22

This is not to say that the practice of food aid could be explained without any reference to moral concerns whatsoever.

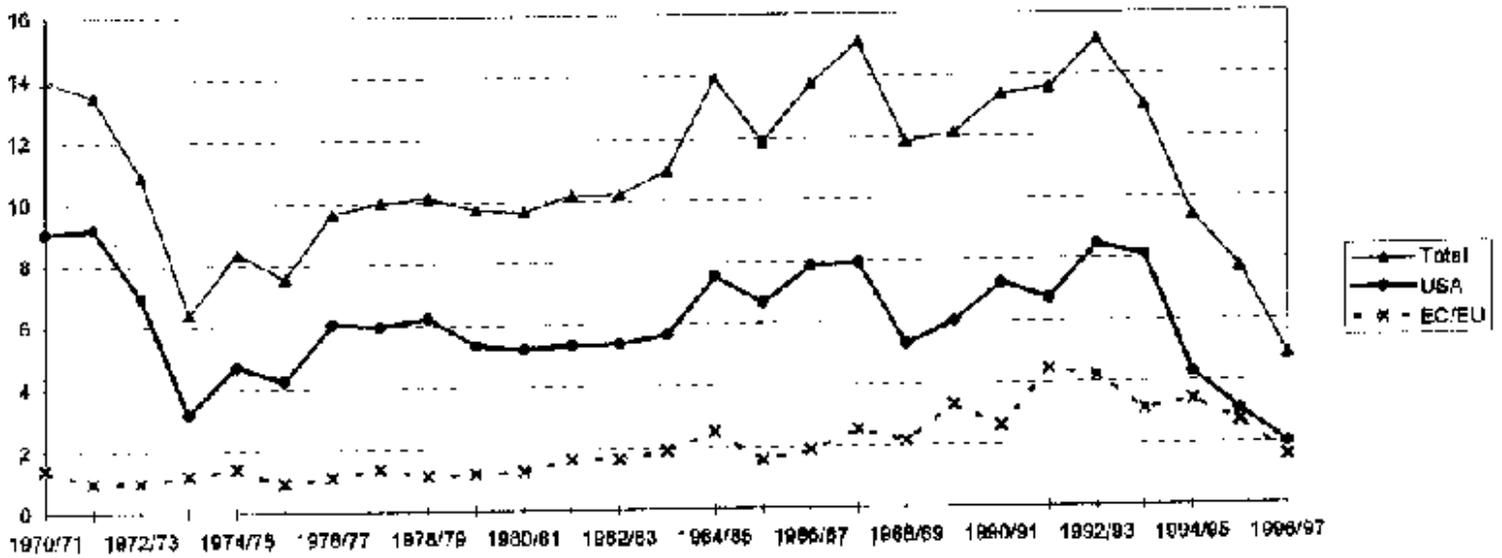
23

Eckstein (1975) uses the language of "most-likely cases" and "least-likely cases" to express the same idea.

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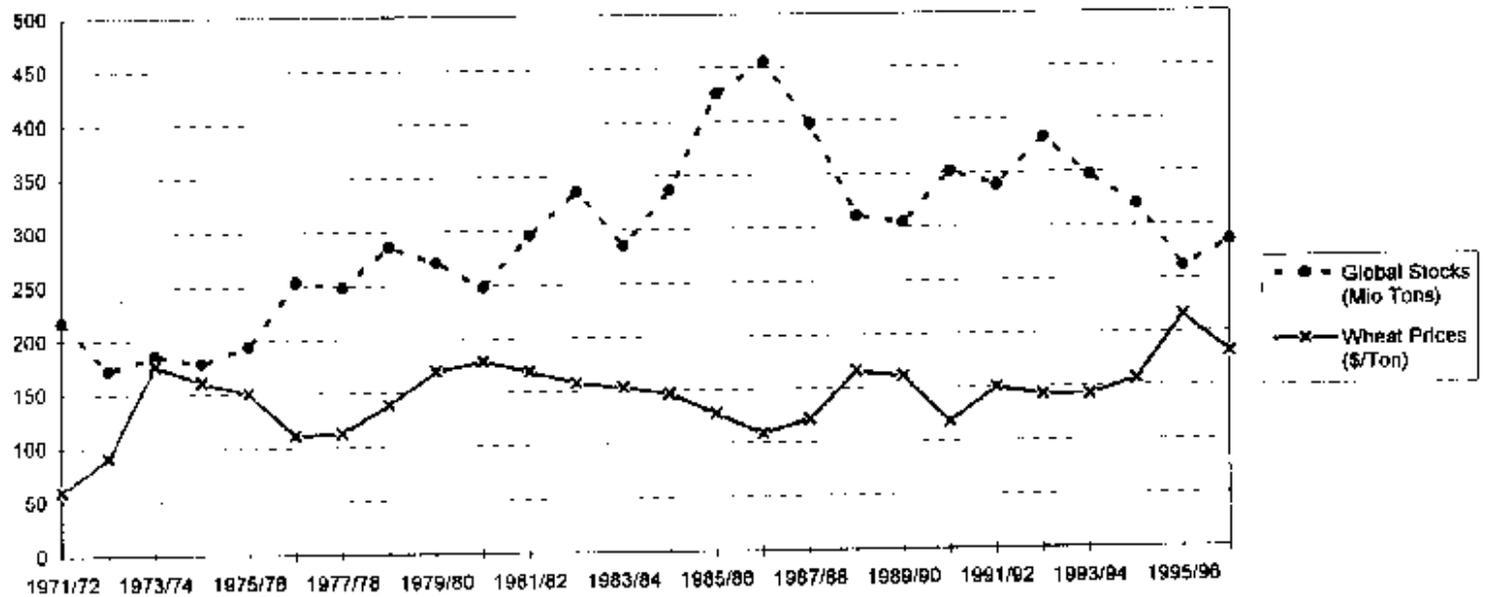
Graphs

Graph 1: International Food Aid Deliveries In Cereals (Million Tons)



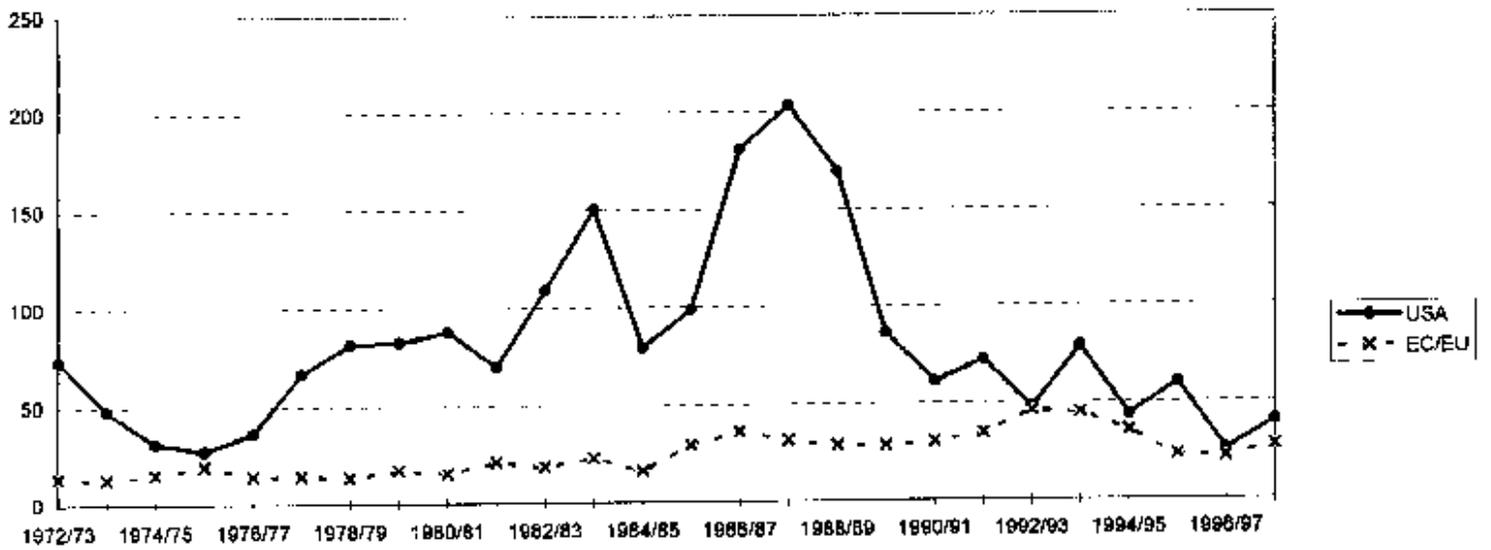
Sources: FAO Food Outlook and FAOSTAT

Graph 2: Shocks - Evolution of Global Stocks and Wheat Prices



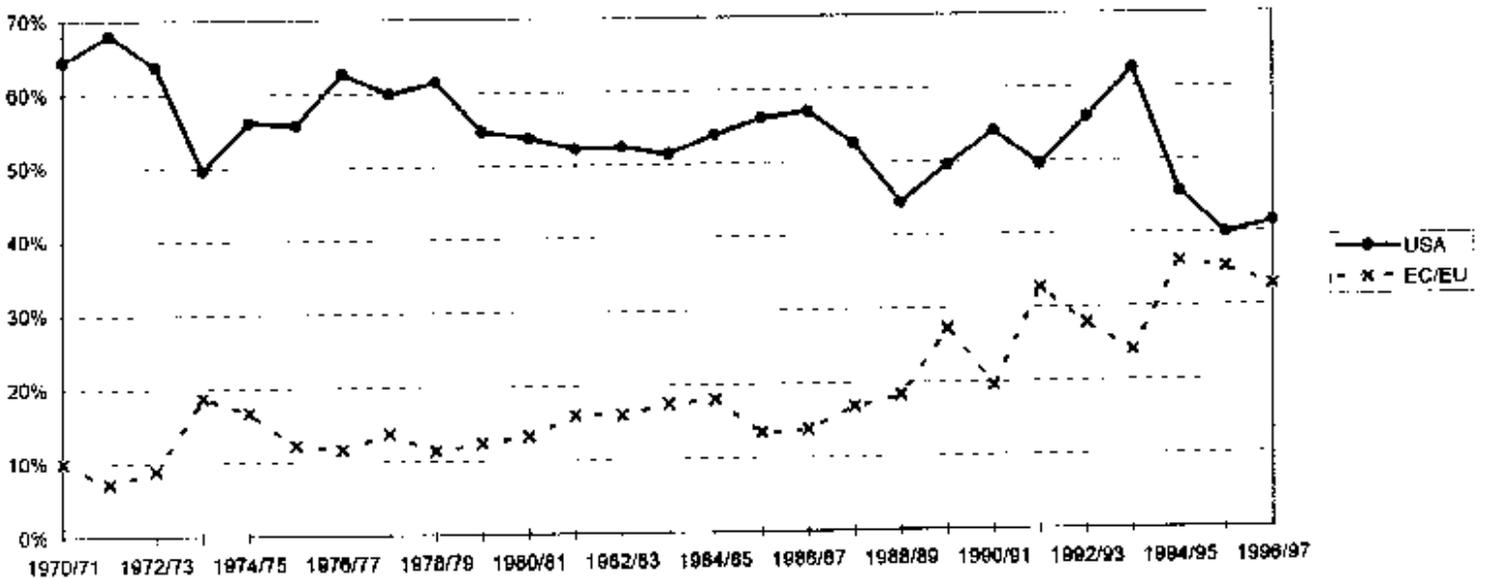
Source: FAO Food Outlook

Graph 3: Stocks in Cereals (Million Tons)



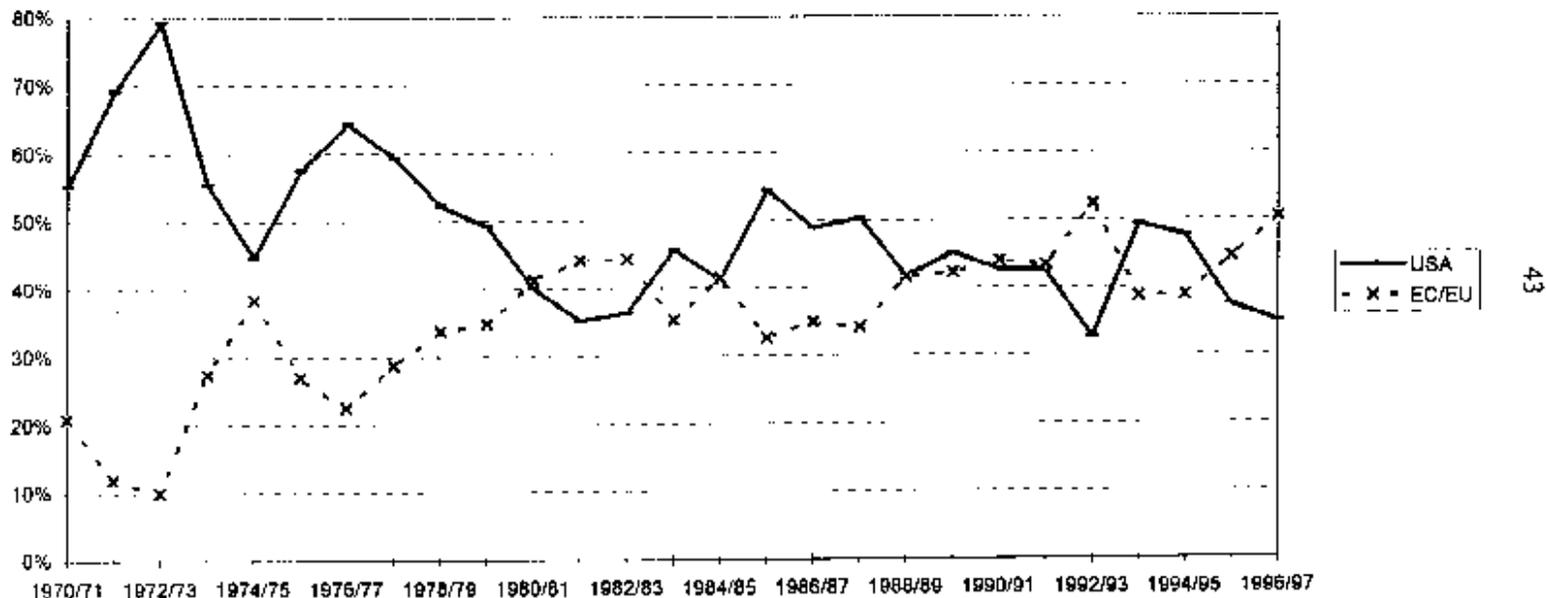
Source: FAO Food Outlook

Graph 4: Shares in the Global Food Aid Volume (Million Tons of Cereals)



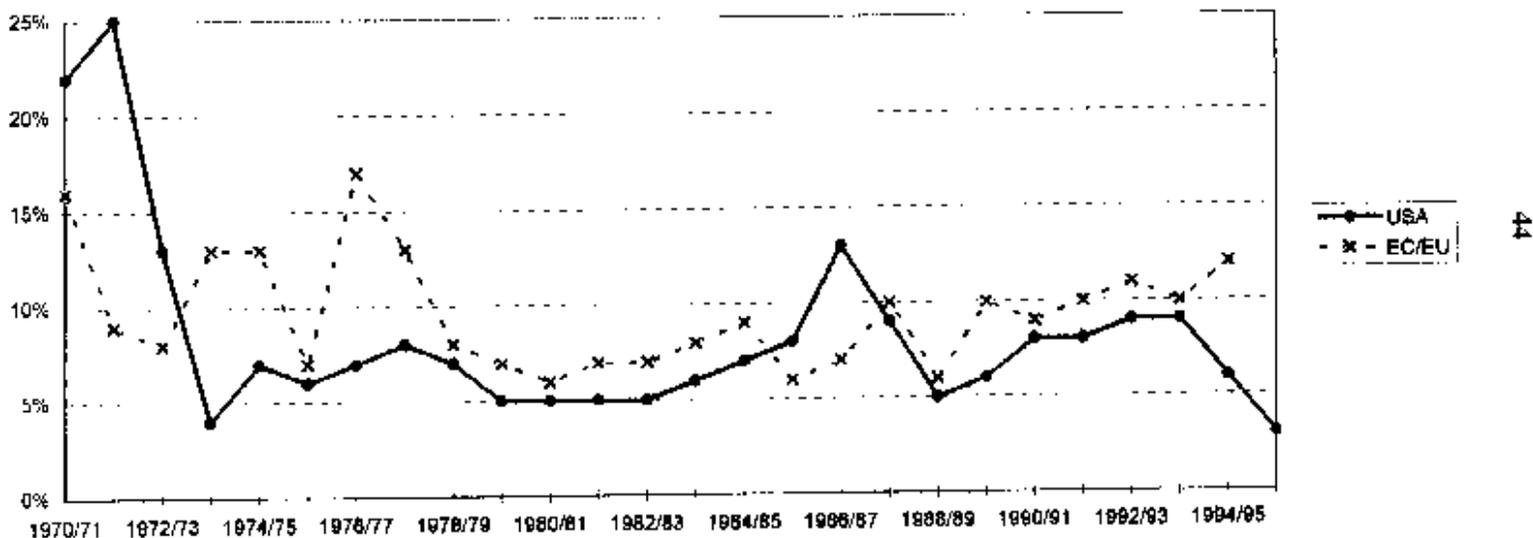
Sources: FAO Food Outlook and FAOSTAT

Graph 5: Shares in the Global Food Aid Disbursements



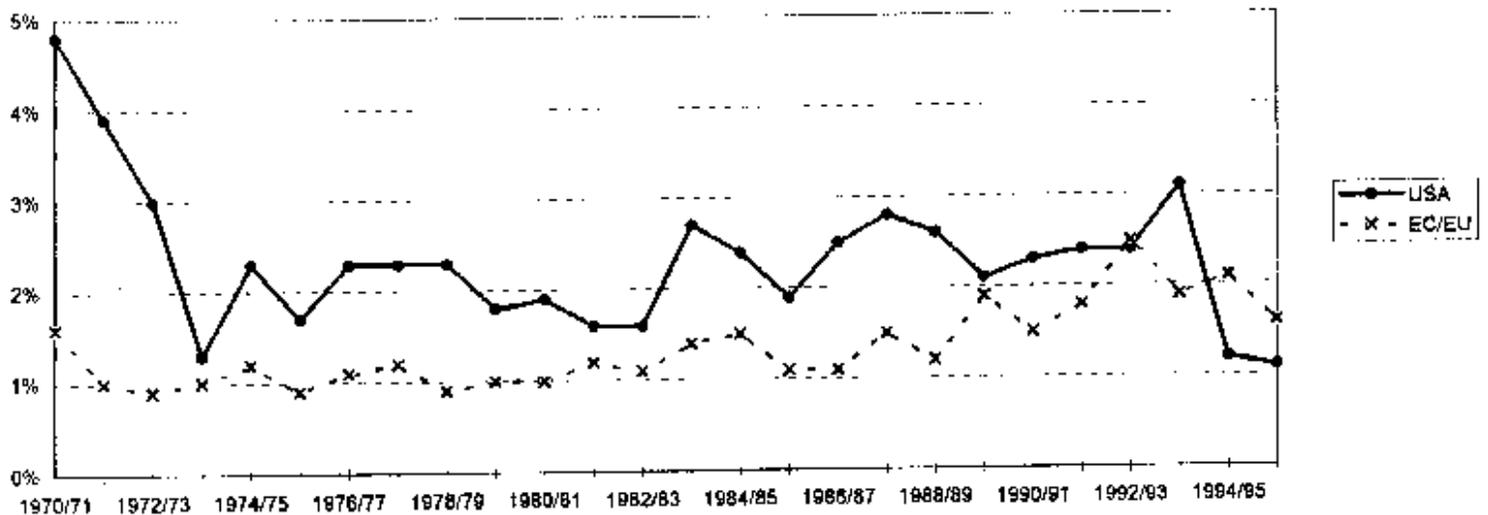
Source: DAC-Reports

Graph 6: Food Aid Shares in National Cereals Exports



Sources: EUROSTAT, FAO Food Outlook and FAOSTAT

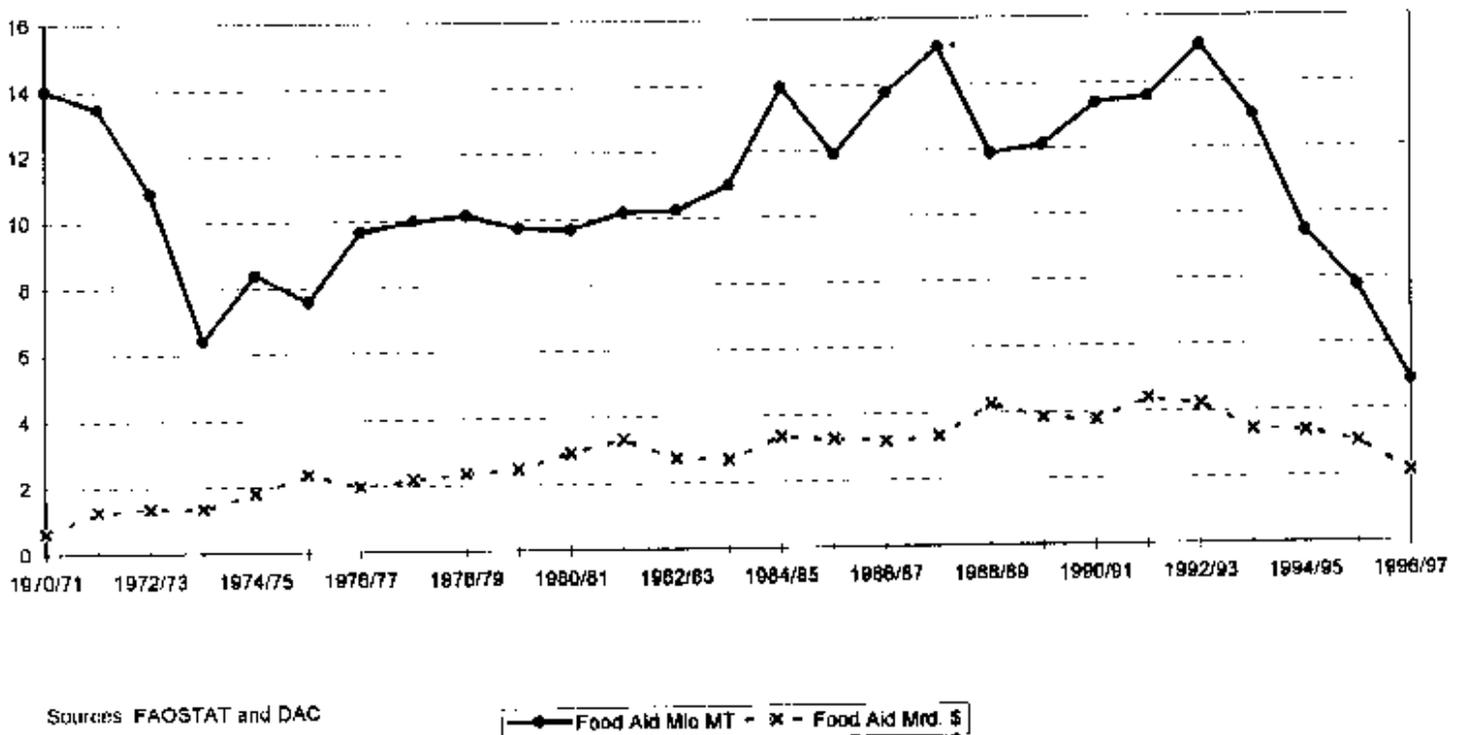
Graph 7: Food Aid Shares in the National Production of Cereals



45

Sources: FAO Food Outlook and FAOSTAT

Graph 8: Total Food Aid In MT and \$



46

Sources: FAOSTAT and DAC

—●— Food Aid Mio MT —x— Food Aid Mrd. \$

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