EDITORIAL

Understanding How International Organizations Function: Theory, Empirical Analysis, and History

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The four articles in this issue of the *Journal of International Organizations Studies (JIOS)* cover diverse subjects, but their main contribution is in applying different approaches in their analysis. Two apply approaches from international organization theory to understand how regional intergovernmental organizations grow and function—or not; a third uses empirical analysis to determine how national bureaucratic factors influence intergovernmental decision making; and a fourth uses historical analysis to document how the status of women issue transitioned from one international organization to its successor. Each makes a contribution to the literature but also raises questions about the theories employed, the analytical techniques used, and the extent to which history is correctly documented.

Malte Brosig's "Interregionalism at a Crossroads: African–European Crisis Management in Libya—a Case of Organized Inaction?" is an analysis of the role of two intergovernmental organizations, the African Union and the EU, in the international response to political developments connected with Libya's Arab Spring in 2012. These two organizations, in the author's words, were "disenfranchised from this conflict despite Libya touching upon vital security interests of their member states." The article documents how these organizations have developed a joint strategy, as part of interregional cooperation that includes peace and security as one of its pillars. In this sense, interactions between regional intergovernmental bodies are a new approach to achieving joint objectives. Brosig suggests that they, on the basis of the agreed strategy, should have cooperated more effectively in the Libyan situation. He looks at theoretical formulations to explain the inaction and settles on emerging institutionalist theories.

One problem with the analysis, which suggests an area for further work—both theoretical and practical—is that the EU and the African Union are qualitatively different organizations. The EU, in many issue areas, has ceded sovereign authority by its member states as a result of agreements dating from the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, and in these it functions as though it were a government. In other areas, like foreign and security policy, it functions like an international organization, dependent on the agreement of its sovereign members to determine responses to crises. In security, the EU in practice defers to other agreements, like NATO, for policy and action. The African Union, in contrast, has adopted a policy of providing peacekeeping troops to enforce agreements reached. But this requires an agreement among the union's member states for action to be taken. Brosig shows there was no basis of consensus in the African Union for action in Libya and, for the EU, response was determined at the national and NATO level rather than the EU. This would be consistent with the basis on which both the African Union and the EU, in the area of foreign and security policy, were established.

A second Europe–Africa comparison is found in Stefan Plenk's "The Uniting of East Africa and the Uniting of Europe?" The article tests the use of the functionalist theory found in Ernst Haas's 1958 study the *Uniting of Europe* in an analysis of the East African

Community (EAC). In the late 1960s, functionalism was a major theory applied to the creation of international organizations but went out of fashion. Unlike realist theory, which explained why states engaged in conflict in international relations, functionalism explained why states cooperated. Drawn initially from anthropology, it was given a major boost when the UN was formed by the work of David Mitrany.[1] Plenk shows that Haas's theory, developed to explain the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), may be applied to explaining the EAC's creation. He also shows there are differences, primarily in the context, between the two institutions.

On a personal note, I first came across Haas's theory when I taught a graduate seminar on international economic communities at the University of Washington in 1970 and followed it subsequently. As I noted in a paper in 2007, "While scholars like Ernst Haas (1964) pursued functionalism intellectually, this line of analysis seemed to fail when the expected functional relationships did not appear. The problem, as Ruggie, et al. (2005) put it was that states did not seem to behave as functionalist theories would suggest."[2] Ironically, what functionalist theory in the *Uniting of Europe* would have predicted eventually came true in the form of the EU, something that was so much larger than the ECSC that Haas himself would not have predicted it at the time. A problem with the theory was that it did not build in enough realist considerations to explain the context in which the organization developed. Regime theory was a valuable synthesis that could also be used to analyze the current and future growth of the EAC.

A different approach to analysis is found in Diana Panke's "Getting Ready to Negotiate in International Organizations? On the Importance of the Domestic Construction of National Positions." Panke's focus is on the relationship between national bureaucratic structures and the outcome of intergovernmental negotiations. Based on interviews with delegates to the UN General Assembly, the analysis looks at how states, required to be involved in an increasing number of multilateral negotiations, cope. More specifically, Panke looks at whether national positions in the negotiations are determined from capitals or are determined in local permanent missions to international organizations. It notes that while some countries, like the U.S., Germany, France, the UK, Japan, Canada, China, South Africa, India, and Brazil seek to have coherent, integrated positions in all negotiations, others do not have the luxury of a large staff at both mission and capital levels. An empirical analysis of voting in the General Assembly argued that absenteeism from voting was related to small delegations.

The issue of consistency across negotiations is an obvious concern of many states. However, Peter Hansen, a former senior UN official who had also been a delegate, once argued that one reason progress was possible in negotiations was because many countries did not have consistent positions and, as a result, new breakthroughs were possible.[3] The president of the General Assembly in 2013, John Ashe, from Antigua and Barbuda, is an example of someone who could adjust his national position to improve the likelihood of an agreement. In this context, in the UN General Assembly only about 23 percent of resolutions are put to the vote, and these are considered to be failures since those who vote against are not bound by those resolutions.[4] The process of reaching consensus on the remaining 77 percent is typically complex and involves stages of agreement among groups. Even a small delegation may influence the basis for consensus (and, in fact, can refuse to join a consensus, thus forcing

1. Mitrany, David (1946) *A Working Peace System: An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organizations,* 4th Edition*,* London: National Peace Council.

2. Mathiason, John (2007) "Reviving Functionalism and Regime Theory to Explain the Role of International Secretariats," paper prepared for the panel on the *Agency and Influence of International Organizations* at the 2007 Convention of the International Studies Association. The references are to Haas, Ernst B. (1964) *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization,* Stanford: Stanford University Press and to Ruggie, John Gerard, Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane and Philippe C. Schmitter (2005) "Transformation in World Politics: The Intellectual Contributions of Ernst B. Haas," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 8, pp. 271–96.

3. Hansen, Peter and John Mathiason (1987) "Coordination in the United Nations System," in M.S. Rajan, V.S. Mani, and C.S.R. Murthy (eds.) *The Nonaligned and the United Nations*, Oceana Publications.

4 Mathiason, John (2012) "Commentary by John R. Mathiason: The General Assembly—The Future We Want," in Joachim Müller and Karl P. Sauvant (eds.), *Annual Review of United Nations Affairs 2011–2012*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

a vote) and does not need to be present for voting. Using analyses of votes, therefore, is not a good means for determining the role of delegations in reaching agreements.

Finally, Jaci Eisenberg's "The Status of Women: A Bridge from the League of Nations to the United Nations" uses historical analysis to show how an issue can transition from one institution to its successor. Most scholars find the League of Nations was a flawed organization, but many of the present rules, regulations, and contexts were first found in the league. Mitrany's study, already cited, as well as other analyses show how lessons from the league could be brought forward to the UN.[5] Less has been presented about how the issue of the status of women transitioned from the League of Nations to the UN and, in fact, that the league even dealt with the issue is not well known. Eisenberg shows that at the very last period of the league, partly pushed by progress in regional organizations like the Organization of American States, it started an effort to define how it could deal with the issue. It created what would now be called an expert panel, composed of individuals, to study the issue and make recommendations. One of the members was an American lawyer, which was of some interest in that the U.S. was not a member of the league. Showing how this was connected to how the UN took up the issues is an important contribution, because the history of UN work on the advancement of women is not well known. Most of Eisenberg's analysis is based on writings by and about Dorothy Kenyon, the American who served on the league body and, in fact, was the first U.S. representative on the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

One problem with studies of international organizations is that their histories tend to be drawn from individual's papers or personal experience. The UN Intellectual History Project's study on women was written by Devaki Jain, a nongovernmental organization activist, whose analysis was largely based on her own experience.[6] There has not been as much interest in the history of how and why the UN took up this important issue with considerable success and the literature is not particularly rich. I made an effort to fill the gap with what was eventually a self-published study of the history of how women's issues evolved from 1945 to 1993, mostly using official documents.[7] One historical fact of particular relevance was the conversion of the body to deal with the status of women from a sub-commission of the Commission on Human Rights to the status of a full commission was opposed by the first chair of the Commission on Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States. The push for full status was in fact made by Bodil Begtrup, the Danish chair of the sub-commission.

The articles in this issue show progress in the analysis of international organizations in terms of connecting theories with observed events and processes and in filling gaps in history. They also show the need for more reflection to find the best means of analyzing the origins, evolution, current practices, and future probabilities for these increasingly important organizations.

5. Mathiason, John (2007) *Invisible Governance: International Secretariats in Global Politics*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.

6. Jain, Devaki (2005) *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

7. Mathiason, John (2001) *The Long March to Beijing: The United Nations and the Women's Revolution*, Vol. 1, *The Vienna Years*, Mt. Tremper, NY: Associates for International Management Services.