

EDITORIAL

Looking Inward: The Politics of Administering the International Public Sector

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The current issue is the last we will edit, as we transition to a new editorial team headed by Kendall W. Stiles at Brigham Young University. We have enjoyed this start-up phase for the journal, have learned from the exercise, and we are sure the new team will continue making this journal an essential part of research and discussion on international organizations.

This issue is an important one, since it focuses on the inner workings of the international public sector. It is the second time JIOS has had a special issue dealing with management of the international public sector. The recent special issue on *Sociological Perspectives on International Organizations and the Construction of Global Order* looked at international organizations from a perspective pioneered some twenty years ago by Gayl Ness and Steven Brechin. The current issue looks at the organizations from a public administration perspective.

We find this approach promising, because international organizations are public administrations in that their secretariats and other international civil servants work to implement what nations agree on. Whether they are public administrations in the same sense that national and local governments are is one of the questions being explored. This issue, edited by Julian Junk and Frederik Trettin, seeks to find commonalities. Noting that public administration theory frequently suggests the actions of civil servants can undercut or change outcomes in a way that works against the objectives for which programs were established, they examine a number of cases in international organizations where this seems to be the case. The title of this issue, “Micropolitics Meets Geopolitics: Internal Dynamics and Dysfunctions of International Organizations,” expresses the thesis well. The introductory article sets the stage, noting that research on international organizations often neglects the internal functioning of secretariats.

There are many reasons for this, including the general opacity of international secretariats, but another reason is that scholars in the United States do not show much interest in the inner workings of international organizations. This is confirmed by the authors in this issue, who primarily work or study in Europe, especially Germany, where the role played by international organizations as active entities dealing with global problems is much more visible. In contrast, the focus in the United States has been on interstate aspects of international relations. A recent example of this is an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* entitled “Unruly World: The Case for Good Enough Global Governance” (Patrick, 2014), which focuses almost exclusively on states and assumes governance is only possible when states agree on principles, norms, rules, and procedures. This process is slow and flawed. It mentions the international public sector only in passing by stating:

The dysfunction of the UN extends well beyond the Security Council, of course. Despite modest management reforms, the UN Secretariat and many UN agencies remain opaque, and their budgeting and operations are hamstrung by outdated personnel policies that encourage cronyism (p. 61).

And yet, if the international public sector cannot function effectively, even “good enough governance” will not happen.

The authors in this issue clearly demonstrate why it is important to look at the inner workings of international organizations, beyond formal management reform, to see how public administration concepts, such as “bureaucratic spoiling,” can help elucidate why international operations may not achieve their expected results.

The empirical focus of most of the analysis presented is on peace operations, clearly one of the largest aspects of international public management. It is also among the most public of international actions and, as the authors note, one where standard job security that is usually found in international organizations is less likely to be assured. The analysis by Schöndorf of the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor shows how important this was in completing the mission. One reason peace operations are complex is that the military contingents involved are not international officials but rather national contingents provided to the United Nations. Dijkzeul and Wakenge’s analysis of religious proselytizing by Bangladesh and Zambian contingents in two peacekeeping operations demonstrates some of the difficulties involved. Interestingly, this type of problem goes back historically to the first complex peace operation in the Congo, where some national contingents refused to accept orders from the civilian peacekeeping officials, because their governments (in one case, Ghana) instructed them not to. This is also analyzed in Winkler’s study of the disconnection between headquarters and mission perspectives in Liberia.

A connection with the state system is shown in Karlsrud’s analysis of how an integrated approach to peace operations was developed at least in part through an initiative of the Norwegian government. There are many more, including the “Four Nations Initiative in Towards a Compact: Proposals for Improved Governance and Management of the United Nations Secretariat” (International Peace Institute, 2007) that helped expand results-based management in the United Nations. One factor that could help further develop this line of analysis is the connection between secretariats and governmental initiatives, such as those described by Karlsrud. It is another way in which secretariats seek to change the context in which they are expected to work.

Historical analysis may be helpful in understanding internal bureaucratic functioning. Schindler’s analysis of “bureaucratic spoiling” in a dispute between FAO and the World Food Programme, during the administration at FAO of Eduard Saoma, shows the importance of how a chief executive’s style and approach can affect results. One of us, Mathiason, can testify to this personally. In the late 1980s, I was a short-listed applicant for a division directorship at FAO and was interviewed by Saoma. He asked me two questions to determine my suitability for the position. First, he asked, “What is your astrological sign?” I knew that and replied. Then he asked, “What is your Chinese astrological sign?” I did not know and told him so. I did not get the position.

Time moves on, and the scholars in this issue and in future issues will undoubtedly help develop international organizations through their analysis. We wish our successors at JIOS success as the discipline evolves.

REFERENCES

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