Mark Zacher and the Study of International Organization

by Louis W. Pauly

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“Introduction: Mark Zacher and the Study of International Organization,” by Louis W. Pauly


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Mark Zacher passed away on 25 October 2014. Born in Boston, educated at Yale and Columbia, for four decades he was an active member of the Political Science Department at the University of British Columbia. For twenty of those years, he served as director of UBC’s Institute of International Relations. A prominent contributor to International Organization, he also served as its associate editor in the mid-1990s and as a member of the editorial board for fifteen years. Mark loved the scholarly community behind the journal, and he did a great deal to help them build its reputation. He was mentored by IO’s founders who had offered him the essay prize that launched his career. He was part of the generation that revived the journal and put it at the forefront of the new field of international political economy.¹

The words Mark left in the pages of the journal provide an important insight into the evolution of the scholarly study of international organization during the late twentieth century. They suggest a certain temperament that helped shape a particular approach to that study. Mark’s own Yankee combination of pragmatism, empiricism, skepticism, and fundamental optimism was shared by many of his colleagues on the IO board, but in his case a classic Canadian sense of irony was added to the mix. He always wanted to stay connected with the mainly American scholars who typically led the journal during the six decades that followed its founding in 1946. Like his British friend, Susan Strange, however, he never stopped pushing them to temper intellectual ambition with a healthy dose of humility and to open the IO community to perspectives from the world outside the United States. He understood the vital role of power and interests in world politics, but his research was driven by a profound belief in the possibility of human progress. Included in this special issue are IO articles by Mark and others with whom he was in explicit or implicit dialogue. They remind us of his personal gifts, and they demonstrate how liberal international relations theory developed during a fascinating era.

Continuity and Change in the History of IO

Why is the top journal in the fields of international relations and international political economy called International Organization? Does that title not imply a rather narrow and specialized area of study? Its founders did indeed intend to establish a dedicated vehicle for the “comparative study of international organizations.”² With the specter of depression, war, and genocide at the forefront of their minds, the trustees of the World Peace Foundation thought it well worthwhile to understand the failure of the League of Nations and to explore the strengths and weaknesses of a renewed effort to build the organizational foundations for a better, more prosperous, and peaceful world.

As the United Nations and myriad technical organizations evolved in the early post–war years, the journal flourished. Even into the 1960s, despite the Cold War’s warping effects, it still

¹ I thank Jon Pevehouse as well as Ron Deibert, who completed his doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia under Mark Zacher’s supervision, for reading and commenting on a draft of this introduction.
seemed plausible to many that intergovernmental agencies could promote the peaceful settlement of disputes and underpin the kind of intensifying economic interdependence that would render great-power conflict unthinkable. The stalemate after war in Korea, the death of a charismatic UN Secretary General in 1961, the subsequent decline of certain peacekeeping operations, US intervention in Vietnam and the onset of cross-border inflation, turmoil in foreign exchange markets, a massive spike in the price of oil, and an apparent move, not least in Europe, toward regional economic blocs—all of these developments shifted scholarly attention away from the increasingly technical work of international organizations. And yet the world did not fall apart, as it had it 1914 and again during the 1930s.

What made the world “hang together?” By the time John Ruggie asked that very question in a famous IO article, the journal seemed to have moved far away from its original mandate. But appearances can be deceiving. An innovative generation of IR scholars shared the aspirations of IO’s founders and decided to approach the problem of world order with the same respect for empirical evidence but also with a new commitment to more rigorous theoretical development. The traditional answers to Ruggie’s question were straightforward: coercive power, in the language of realists, and/or the rational calculation of interests, especially economic interests, as liberals understood them. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, IO provided the premier forum for debate on the interaction of states and markets. To be sure, it favored debate informed by dominant North American academic values. In an academy increasingly characterized by disciplinary specialization, however, that debate extended beyond scholarly boundaries. Scholars of international relations and comparative politics began walking down the same path, while relevant insights from psychology, sociology, philosophy, and especially economics informed the journey. That path led to a new field, now called international political economy, and IO became a leading promoter.

What Ruggie highlighted was a tentative answer to the broader question that had actually shaped IO from its inception. Ideas could hold the world together, especially ideas underpinning norms, norms defining standards of behavior, and standards sometimes molded into binding rules. The identities and interests of actors capable of destroying or preserving our neighbors, our species, and our habitat were malleable, even mutually constitutive, and ideas could change them. The insight was attractive to the next generation of scholars interested in IO, whether they labelled themselves constructivist or not. Embedded in organizations, less-institutionalized regimes, or the constitutive fabric of communities capable of developing at least a modicum of solidarity, the insight proved transcendent. True, not everyone agreed that good ideas would trump bad ones, or that accidents, unintended consequences, errors of judgment, or the dark side of human nature could be decisively countered. Certainly not everyone, moreover, agreed that North American academic practices exemplified on the pages of IO deserved to be hegemonic.

What we can see in retrospect, nevertheless, is that the journal became extraordinarily influential in its rapidly globalizing fields. The core insight about the role of ideas, a commitment to theoretical rigor, and a deep respect for empirical evidence had something to do with it. The effort to understand and perhaps to help change the underlying organization of global politics came widely to be seen as a high calling, not least because the twentieth century had demonstrated the high price of global disorganization. The journal’s founders were explicit

3 Ruggie 1998.
about their normative commitments. That their successors were more circumspect reflected the changing practice of social science, not a fundamental break in aspirations. Over a long period of time, Mark Zacher’s work exemplified both the change and the underlying element of continuity.

From Intergovernmental Institutions to Norm-Governed Behavior

Mark published his first article in *IO* in 1966 and his last in 2001. The body of research and writing that he left behind helped significantly to break the path along which the authors and readers of *IO* travelled during a turbulent era. More than that, his evolving interests and methods tell us much about the fields of study that today place world order at their center. To reread his work is to catch a glimpse of key turning points in their history.

“The Secretary General and the United Nations’ Function of Peaceful Settlement” was published in 1966 as an *IO* prize essay. Mark drew it from the dissertation he defended at Columbia that same year. The article carefully examined all of the international disputes that the UN Security Council and General Assembly delegated to the Secretariat between 1946 and 1965. On this basis, it underscored the changing “practices” of the Secretary General and his emerging role as “mediator-in-chief.” The testimony of contemporaries and institutional innovations during his time in office suggested that Dag Hammarskjöld was the seminal figure. Despite his untimely death in 1961 while on a mediation mission, his personality and prestige had established a degree of “independent authority and influence.” Although he warned against exaggerating that influence, especially since experience under the next Secretary General was less encouraging, Mark asserted that the existence of new and increasingly “autonomous” organizational structures designed to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes marked “the incipient growth of an international executive.” Those structures mainly took the form of delegated peacekeeping forces, supervisory instruments for arms control agreements, and mechanisms for the delivery of economic aid. He agreed with the conclusion Ernst Haas had drawn in 1964 from the experience of UN peacekeeping forces: they constituted “merely another nibble at the structure of the self-confident national state … [and an element in] the continued drift toward supranationality.” They suggested a progressive move toward the identification of common interests and the integration of fundamental functions of established polities.

During the next few years, *IO* published much work on this theme, some of which came to different conclusions. Yashpal Tandon, for example, contributed the article reproduced in this special issue. Reflecting on the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the preceding withdrawal of UN forces, Tandon emphasized the crucial distinction between peacekeeping, where the UN had achieved some success, and peace-making, where the organization seemed ill-suited. At a time when the American phase of the long war in Vietnam was just beginning to rage, and during a decade when Cold War rivalries threatened the financial capacities of the United Nations, the limits of intergovernmentalism became visible. In 1970 when Mark published his first book, which expanded on the findings of the *IO* article, confirmed “realists” (not to say, unreconstructed Cold Warriors) reviewed it respectfully but criticized its “idealistic

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4 All his life, he kept the monetary value of the prize listed on his CV. $300 was serious money for a young scholar in those days. Adjusted for inflation, the current value would be about $2,200.
5 Zacher 1966, 736.
6 Ibid., 737. See also Mark’s review essay on the same theme that *IO* published in 1969.
7 Ibid., 736, note 32.
aspirations.”\textsuperscript{8} As any student of international relations could see, the ancient debate was still alive, albeit on fresh empirical grounds.

That debate was definitely joined during the crisis years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the post–war system of intergovernmental organizations aimed at fostering cross-national collaboration fell into disarray. Despite the disappointments associated with violent conflict in southeast Asia, oil price shocks, the end of the Bretton Woods exchange rate system, and the continuing absence of a global treaty designed to promote freer trade, however, the post–war order itself did not collapse. In fact, the world economy grew, economic development occurred, and the Cold War remained cold. Even in the absence of strong international organizations, political collaboration was an observable phenomenon. It also provided a key intellectual puzzle.

In 1972, Keohane and Nye identified the sinews of deepening coordination at the transnational level. Combining insights from power politics and economic functionalism, they later developed upon this foundation the idea of complex interdependence. Katzenstein’s 1978 edited volume accepted that idea and focused on the variable effects of idiosyncratic domestic structures as systemic forces gathered strength. Such seminal works were in the background when in 1980 a leading group of scholars, mostly based in the United States but including Susan Strange from the London School of Economics and Mark from the University of British Columbia (where he had been employed since 1965) began work on a collective project, the ultimate fruit of which was arguably \textit{IO}’s most influential special issue. The \textit{International Regimes} volume appeared in 1982, and in 1983 it was republished as a book by Cornell University Press.\textsuperscript{9} The American approach to international political economy, a field placing liberal and realist perspectives into dynamic contention, developed quickly thereafter.

More than any other policy arena, trade policy defined the largest terrain of subsequent empirical investigation. Mark and his colleague Jock Finlayson contributed the article on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to \textit{IO}’s \textit{Regimes} volume. In contrast to the treaty-based United Nations he had studied earlier, and the International Trade Organization that had died on Capitol Hill in the early post–war era, the executive agreement enshrined in the GATT established a “quasiglobal trade barriers regime.”\textsuperscript{10} With their eyes on a regulatory framework that fit with the volume’s orienting definition, the authors set out the terms that would later be used in many studies of regime dynamics: “interdependence norms” of non-discrimination, liberalization, and reciprocity, and “sovereignty norms” circumscribing permissible exceptions for safeguards and development. In the end, they set out a theme that resonates throughout the subsequent regimes literature—the key role of norms-shaping standards of behavior that reduced uncertainty and thereby enhanced the probability of long-term, mutually self-interested bargains between and among economic partners.

Liberal and realist treatments of the evolving, not collapsing, trading order were placed into dialogue with the Zacher-Finlayson article in the \textit{Regimes} volume itself. Charles Lipson and Stephen Krasner highlighted the complexity of the underlying questions of interest to scholars of international relations. What are the effects of the trade regime (and other integrative regulatory frameworks) on the capabilities and interests of sovereign actors? Related work in IPE continues

\textsuperscript{8} Zacher 1970; Barros 1971.
\textsuperscript{9} Krasner 1982.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 274.
to this day. Picking up a thread from Ernst Haas’s opening article in the volume, but without abandoning his own realist priors, Krasner suggested that regimes just might provide a durable mechanism for social learning.

By 1987, partly through detailed empirical studies that took him from the systemic trade regime identified with the GATT to the variegated arrangements that aspired to regulate trade in specific and important commodities, Mark’s view of world order had moved a long way. The idealist of 1966 had developed some sympathy for what his colleagues in the Regimes volume called “structural realism.” Effective regimes, he believed, rested on the foundation provided by a system-shaping hegemonic state but also on the distinctive interests of an adequate coalition of supporting states. If they existed, however, they had to have some kind of decision-making apparatus—an institution, if not necessarily a formal, treaty-based organization. What might such an institution actually do? It would create opportunities for deliberation, transparency, oversight, mediation, and the monitoring of compliance. Dag Hammarskjöld might not have liked their informal legal character and consequent limits on their autonomy, but he would have recognized the functions they served.

For Mark and others, some twenty years of theoretical debate on international collaboration after the heady post–war days culminated in a respect for hegemonic power and for convergent state interests in given, mainly economic, issue areas. This functional (but not functionalist) combination seemed to explain the endurance even of loosely organized regimes. However, it had difficulty explaining the rise of new frameworks aimed at regulating the behavior of state and non-state actors. Its acceptance of the underlying realist assumption of systemic anarchy and its focus on the rational and unproblematic calculation of state interests left it facing many puzzles in the core arena of security policy. As early as 1957, Karl Deutsch had identified the phenomenon of security communities, where the settlement of disputes by violent means was now ruled out. How did they arise, and why were they apparently expanding in the 1970s and 1980s? Similarly, how and why were apparently sustainable regimes established to limit the proliferation and use of certain kinds of horrific weapons? The kind of functional logic Mark and others had employed in the new field of IPE gave rise to new questions.

The 1987 article by Roger K. Smith reproduced in this special issue presents a clear summary of the regimes debate to that point in time. It also takes a step forward into the security realm, even as it looks back to earlier understandings of complex interdependence in its search for the roots of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. In dialogue with Mark and his colleagues in the Regimes volume, Smith helped open the door for new approaches to the puzzle of international collaboration. Adler and Barnett’s revival of interest in security communities came the next year, and a new wave of constructivist scholarship followed.11 Knowledge, social learning, and mutually constituted identities came to the fore.

In his last IO article, Mark took on the challenge of reconciling a more subtle and older realist orientation, that of the so-called English School with Hedley Bull’s notion of a “society of states” at its center, with the phenomenon of incipient security communities.12 In the background was a growing body of scholarship premised on Ruggie’s contention that territoriality—a key

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11 Adler and Barnett 1998.
feature of the states-system—was becoming “unbundled.” In contrast, Mark emphasized the importance of a key norm that governed behavior even in the absence of an autonomous enforcement mechanism, and he deployed it to account for the development of interstate relationships that could eventually constitute security communities. Global capitalism, the mobility of factors of production, and the evolution of new forms of civic identity, he argued, did not limit the cross-border resort to force during the late twentieth century. Instead, the historically hard-earned and broadening acceptance of “the territorial integrity norm,” with its proscription against the violent redrawing of state boundaries, accounted for a new and more peaceful global order. Mediators might assist in the peaceful settlement of disputes, but deeper normative transformations within and among states provided the necessary conditions for success.

The 2004 *IO* article by Tanisha Fazal republished here added empirical support to Mark’s analysis. Focused particularly on the precarious existence of buffer states between great powers or contending alliances, Fazal finds a marked change in the post-1945 period. In short, buffer states stop “dying” in the contemporary system. Borders rarely change and state apparatuses are almost never dissolved and absorbed by neighbours. The territorial integrity norm is one but not the only plausible explanation, Fazal concludes.

Ten years later, in the wake of surprising events in the Middle East, in the borderland of Russia, and in the South China Sea, the norm is hardly unchallenged. That it has collapsed, however, remains highly disputable. As Fazal suggests, sources of support for the norm, and limits on its being overridden, remain. They could readily be summarized in realist terms: fear of catastrophic retaliation, the high costs of occupation, and the persistence of support for the norm by a strong enough coalition. None of these sources, however, necessarily contradicts the idea that learning has taken place and, despite setbacks and repeated lessons, the idea is likely to continue to develop and deepen.

In this sense, the governing frameworks Mark uncovered and explicated during his long scholarly career were quite consistent with the expectations he drew from Haas and other pioneers in the early days of *IO*. From peacekeeping, to the regulation of trade barriers, to the stabilization of commodity markets, to the preservation of territorial boundaries, “the politics of collaboration and the evolution of consciousness itself” went hand in hand. Mark had developed an acute sense of the analytical power of realism in the day-to-day and year-to-year conflicts and struggles in a wide array of issue areas, but he also retained his essentially liberal aspirations for the future of humanity. Demands for autonomy and desires for integration were in tension, and he believed that tension could be productive. As he looked at a broad range of common challenges, he let go of the notion that hegemonic power was required to harness that tension. “Cobwebs of agreement have grown, and states have become more aware of the importance of both order and openness for national prosperity … There are broad areas of cooperative and law-governed behavior based on mutual gains among states and commercial

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actors.”15 In his last books, he insisted that compatible interests, common knowledge, and deeper understanding could and would stimulate constructive innovations in global governance.16

Mark’s early work, the research of his middle years, and the detailed studies he continued as long as he could deepened his personal sense of humanity’s destiny. It was a destiny evoked by the phrase from Haas’s 1964 book that he had quoted at the conclusion of his first IO article. Despite setbacks, a “supranational drift” was observable in global affairs. That idea remains at the center of rigorous empirical investigation and vibrant theoretical debate on the pages of IO.

References


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