
International Organization in the 1970s: Three Key Papers

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In 1974 I was an associate professor at Stanford University and a member of the editorial board of *International Organization*. After beginning life in 1946 as an integral part of the World Peace Foundation in Boston, *IO* had largely devoted itself to descriptive studies of formal international organizations. The late Harold K. Jacobson at the University of Michigan and Joseph S. Nye, then as now at Harvard, along with the late Alexander Dallin at Columbia and myself, joined the board in 1968 and were effectively in control of its direction. In the winter of 1974–75 Nye was the chair of the board. It became evident to us during the fall that something was wrong. It turned out that the journal's editor was in the process of resigning from his university and was no longer performing his editorial duties. I volunteered to investigate and then to serve what was originally a two-year term as editor, which later was extended to six years (1975–80 inclusive).

In 1974 the United States was suffering from “stagflation”—a combination of inflation and recession that was attributed to large oil price increases in the wake of the Arab embargo efforts after the 1973 Arab–Israel war. I wrote a special inaugural essay for my first issue of *IO* (in the spring of 1975), which I entitled “*International Organization and the Crisis of Interdependence*.” Its initial paragraph has a contemporary ring to it, although the “formerly latent” issues now are terrorism, immigration, and nationalist populism:

It will cause little controversy to observe in the spring of 1975 that the world is in a profound political and economic crisis or that interdependence is a palpable and often unpalatable fact. Conflict over formerly latent issues is increasingly evident as governments try desperately to cope with the effects of other governments' policies, as in the case of oil, or with resource shortages, as in the case of food. Many of the problems from which such issues arise ... have immediate impacts on people's daily lives ... Domestic and foreign policies are closely intertwined, and important domestic interests are threatened by events abroad. It is becoming clear that ties between economies can transmit economic evils as well as economic goods.¹

Two themes were prominent in my essay. One of them, “the road not taken,” called for a more explicitly normative approach to the study of international institutions. I raised some questions with normative content about the creation or adaptation of international organizations to meet the “crisis of interdependence”; new strategies involving informal institutional arrangements; and long-term strategies to promote “a better-integrated, as well as more just, world order.” It could hardly be said, from a perspective of more than forty years later, that my normative call was very successful.

¹ Keohane 1975, 357.

The academic study of international relations and political science has on the whole veered even farther away from normative questions as the demands of scientific method have intensified. And it is doubtful that the world order of today is better integrated than it was in 1974. In some ways—attention to human rights, for instance, and the improvement of the condition of billions of people in poor countries—the world may now be more just; but injustice remains endemic, both within and across states.

My other theme—“the road taken”—was to point out the limitations of viewing the study of international organization as the study of formal institutions and to propose an approach focused on elite networks. I wrote that “much policy coordination at the international level is carried on less through formal organizations with clear mandates than through informal working groups or elite networks more or less closely linked to established institutions.” I cited the paper that Nye and I had recently published in *World Politics* on transgovernmental networks and wrote that “for a number of problems, supranational solutions, however desirable in the abstract, may not be necessary for progress to be made ... Between the poles of unilateral national behavior and an unrealizable supranationalism, quite a few moderately effective organizational possibilities may exist.”² Over the last forty years and increasingly so during the last decade, this emphasis on a variety of international and transnational networks—now referred to in terms such as “regime complexes,” “orchestration,” “private authority,” “public-private partnerships,” and “private transnational regulatory organizations”—has become a major theme of the literature on world politics.

My essay indicates the mindset with which I took on the editorship. But no editor determines the shape of the best work that appears in his or her journal. The most one can do is to nudge potential contributors in a certain direction; solicit good papers for review when you see them; appear open to innovation as well as high-quality scholarship that is more conventional; use good judgment in selecting referees and making decisions; and offer constructive advice during the process of revision. It is the authors who generate original work.

I was asked by the current editor of *IO* to suggest the most important three to five articles published in *IO* during my editorship. Since these articles are to be included in this virtual issue of *IO*, I decided that the principal criterion for inclusion is whether the article is so brilliant and penetrating that it is still worth reading—and not merely of historical interest as a way station contributing in some way to current scholarship. Indeed, the paper should be a reasonable candidate for inclusion on a reading list for a graduate seminar in world politics or international institutions. I went through the tables of contents for the 1975–80 volumes of *IO*, rereading a number of papers, both among the most-cited papers from the period and those that had received less attention.

I began with the notion of listing nine or ten papers, but sometimes memory is too rosy. Papers that had impressed me at the time, or that raised cogent points, often also included a good deal of material that seemed relevant only to particular controversies of the day, or made forecasts that now seem ludicrously wrong. For a social scientist it is chastening to see how little of what we do holds up over a period of several decades. After my review, I was left with just three articles, which are therefore included in this virtual special issue. In my view, all three of these papers are brilliant and path breaking.

² Keohane 1975, 361, 363.

It turns out that all of these papers focus on the relationship between domestic and world politics. Discussions of international interdependence in the late 1960s and early 1970s led scholars who were deeply knowledgeable about both history and comparative politics to point out that such interdependence could not be understood apart from comparative politics. All three of the scholars represented in this virtual special issue had participated, as doctoral students or young faculty members, in vigorous discussions of these subjects at a lunch table in the Harvard Center for International Affairs and at a regular seminar on “the state and capitalism” in the Center for European Studies during in the early 1970s. They knew each other well and had interacted intensively, not only in print but in person.

In 1976 Peter J. Katzenstein published an article on domestic structures and foreign policy that presaged the special issue on domestic politics and foreign economic policy that he edited the following year. Katzenstein argued that the institutional and political economic structures of the OECD countries varied fundamentally, in particular with respect to the “strength of the state.” He systematically compared France with the United States in the domains of commercial, financial, and energy policy, characterizing France as having a “state-centered policy network” and the United States as having a “society-centered network.” His conclusion was that “foreign economic policy can be understood only if domestic factors are systematically included in the analysis.” As he wrote in his conclusion: “On questions of the international economy international politics can no longer be adequately analyzed from the heights of the international system alone. The political causes and consequences of many current international problems of the international economy should instead be interpreted as well from the perspective of domestic politics.”³

Particularly after the publication of the 1977 special issue, which became a book that Katzenstein edited on the foreign economic politics of advanced industrialized democracies, no one could question this conclusion, which is fundamental to much of the major work in world politics over the last forty years as international relations and comparative politics—formerly and still formally distinct—have become inseparable fields of political science. Peter J. Katzenstein has had as much influence on this salutary development as anyone in the field.

In his 1978 article, “The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics,” Peter Gourevitch turned Katzenstein on his head, so to speak, by making the international system an explanatory variable.⁴ Drawing on such authors as Otto Hintze and Perry Anderson, Gourevitch argued that “two aspects of the international system have powerful effects upon the character of domestic regimes: war and trade.” In his conclusion, he summarized his second-image reversed argument as follows:

The international system is not only a consequence of domestic politics but a cause of them. Economic relations and military pressures constrain an entire range of domestic behaviors, from policy decisions to political forms. International relations and domestic politics are therefore so interrelated that they should be analyzed simultaneously, as wholes.⁵

³ Katzenstein 1976, 45.

⁴ Gourevitch 1978.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 911.

Gourevitch's insight has generated a huge literature in the study of world politics. He followed up this article with other articles and a book, *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises*, but the impact of his work was much more far reaching.⁶ The literature on human rights politics provides an example of how deeply Gourevitch's second-image-reversed perspective has permeated the study of world politics. One of the first questions that analysts of human rights politics ask is whether international human rights institutions, in a given situation, provide a "hook" for domestic mobilization. More generally, when political scientists begin now to think about how to explain a pattern of political institutions and policy behavior in a set of countries, one of the obvious candidates is the international system. This was not obvious before publication of "The Second Image Reversed." It is no wonder that it is by far the most-cited article from the 1975–1980 volumes of *International Organization*. I am particularly pleased that *IO* published this paper under my editorship, since my biggest blunder as editor was to decline to publish an earlier essay on a related theme by Professor Gourevitch, which then appeared in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*.⁷ It was fortunate for me that Professor Gourevitch was willing to submit his "second image reversed" paper to *IO* despite that bad previous decision.

My third and final choice is a less well-known paper, although it is one of the ten most cited from *IO* during the 1975–80 period. In "The Political Consequences of the Product Cycle," published in the winter issue of 1979, James Kurth framed his analysis as a response to the economic stagnation of the 1970s by focusing not on domestic political institutions but on the preferences of different industrial sectors. Kurth first outlined four familiar responses to stagnation: Keynesian demand stimulus, favored by the consumer-durable industries, especially automobiles; military Keynesianism, favored by arms and aircraft manufacturers; free trade plus deflation to reduce costs, preferred by large international banks; and protectionism, advocated by declining industries such as textiles and steel. He explored in some detail how these responses had been advocated by particular industries over the previous two centuries.

In the most brilliant part of his analysis, Kurth turned for a fifth response to the work of Joseph Schumpeter on industrial dynamics and Raymond Vernon on product cycles. New industries could arise whose innovations would "lift up the entire economy behind them" as the automobile industry had done in America in the 1920s and in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. Such innovative industries favor free trade to expand the markets for their products. Kurth concluded his essay as follows:

What might be one such new industry in the United States? Two of our earlier leading sectors, railroads and automobiles, plus another major industry, aerospace, were successive improvements in transportation. But as the history of the *Concorde* suggests, improvements in transportation may have reached the limits possible within the framework of the old industries. The next logical leap is to move not bodies but minds, i.e., to improve not transportation but communications...

⁶ Gourevitch 1986.

⁷ Gourevitch 1977.

Will the 1980s see a great telecommunications boom fueling a great economic boom like the great railroad, automobile, and aerospace booms of the past? ... A great telecommunications sector would have implications for military power and international relations as well as for international trade ... Out of a massive telecommunications industry would issue the inventions and innovations for a new kind of weapons system and military defense, of which existing “precision-guided munitions,” “smart bombs,” and “automated battlefields” are only premonitions. And these would be weapons systems in which the technologically advanced liberal democracies of NATO would have both an absolute and a comparative advantage. And once again, innovation of new industrial sectors, “gales of creative destruction,” would prove to be the basis, and perhaps the necessary conditions, for conservation of old and worthy political institutions.⁸

The Katzenstein and Gourevitch papers are foundational to the study of international politics and political economy during the last forty years. Kurth’s paper shows that deep historical knowledge and theoretical imagination can lead to prescience about the future. If anyone else in 1979 forecast so well, on the basis of a theoretical argument, both the industrial future of America for the next quarter century and the shift in military power that led to the demise of the Soviet Union, I am not aware of it.

It is a pleasure to recall the years of intellectual ferment that produced these classic works of political analysis, and a source of modest pride to recall my role as the editor of the journal that published them.

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⁸ Kurth 1979, 34.