What does it mean to bridge the gap between academia and policy in international affairs? This has been the Journal’s goal since its inception, but this issue we decided to tackle the question head on with our first-ever IR Scholars Forum. We asked the five international affairs scholars on our front cover—Francis J. Gavin of the University of Texas at Austin, Robert Jervis of Columbia University, John M. Owen IV of the University of Virginia, Marc Trachtenberg of UCLA, and Stephen M. Walt of Harvard University—to reflect on the relationship between the academic and policy worlds, and discuss how their own thinking about policy-making has evolved over the course of their academic careers. The resulting collection of essays in the IR Scholars Forum offers a unique look at their personal experiences as scholars and the opinions about policy those experiences have help shaped.

In keeping with this theme, we also spoke with Alexander Evans, a scholar-diplomat with the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office, to glean insight on the academia-policy divide from someone who has worked on both sides of the fence. From his perch in Washington, US Treasury Department’s Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, David S. Cohen, talked with us about dismantling terrorist financing networks.

Like the academia-policy divide itself, the articles featured in this issue consider the often-competing aims that influence a range of international affairs challenges: Paul Carroll of the Ploughshares Fund looks at US and Chinese objectives vis-à-vis North Korea; John Teton of the International Food Security Treaty Campaign calls for the global right for freedom from hunger as enforceable national and international law; George Mason University’s Patrick Mendis explores the strategic importance of Sri Lanka for Chinese and US policy in the Indian Ocean; and political consultant Michael Morrison considers the emerging role of think tanks in China as a potential means of predicting Chinese foreign policy.

International affairs scholars and policy makers may never move in exactly the same orbits, but they would certainly work to each other’s benefit if they moved closer. In order for that to happen, though, both sets of actors need to be able to see each other without the blinders and biases of their respective professions. It is our hope with this issue that we crack that door open a little more widely.

Audrey Latura
Editor-in-Chief
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