The authors of the two volumes under review here, *Earth Negotiations: Analyzing Thirty Years of Environmental Diplomacy*, by Pamela Chasek, and *Environmental Regime Effectiveness: Confronting Theory with Evidence*, by Miles, Underdal, Andresen, Wetterstad, Skjaerseth, Skodvin and Carlin, attempt, in their different ways, to answer the question that forms the title of this essay. These scholars join a host of others determined to advance understanding of the formulation, dynamics, and effectiveness of inter-state institutional arrangements. Regime analysis remains a growth industry as investigators seek to unearth the “secrets” of successful cooperative endeavors. Aware of the enormous methodological and epistemological difficulties confronting them, researchers have, over the years, honed their investigative skills through the application of increasingly well-specified models and/or hypotheses meant to identify and capture relevant variables. Advances, whether theoretical, empirical or both, promise not just intellectual progress, but the possibility of practical effects as well. To the extent that scholars remain committed to shaping, even in a minor way, the “real world” of policy, identification of crucial factors, events, processes, and actors should prove worthwhile. Thus, the focus of this review is on the question of whether the authors have advanced the field of international environmental...
politics and policy. Do we, after a reading of these works, come away with a better understanding of the “environment” of environmental agreements?

Pamela Chasek, with her focus on the negotiation process itself, sets out to achieve three different objectives through identification of phases of the negotiation process: “to manage the complexities inherent in multilateral negotiations and identify relationships between variations in process and outcome . . .,” and “to determine how international environmental agreements are arrived at . . .” (p. 51). The authors of *Environmental Regime Effectiveness*, headed by Edward Miles and Arild Underdal, hope to be better able to evaluate the effectiveness of regimes through the development and testing of a causal model. Effectiveness in this model is measured in terms of outputs (rules and regulations of the regime itself), outcomes (change in human behavior), and impacts (change in the biophysical environment). The standards against which regime effectiveness is to be measured are a condition of noncooperation, or no regime, and an ideal, or collectively optimal solution. Chasek selects eleven cases “to determine the relationship among different phases in the [negotiation] process and the outcome through “phased process analysis,” while Miles and Underdal present fourteen case studies. There is, as might be expected, substantial overlap in the cases chosen. This means that both studies provide, yet again, descriptions of cases which have been analyzed many times in the past by other researchers. This places a special burden on the authors to give the knowledgeable reader a new or different “take” on these events informed by theoretical models and/or hypotheses which hopefully provide new insights. Both Chasek and Miles and Underdal attempt to do so, although not to equal effect.

Although there are a few points of contact between the two works, their differences outweigh their similarities. Therefore, each will be discussed in turn, concluding with a brief summing up.

*Earth Negotiations: Analyzing Thirty Years of Environmental Diplomacy*

Beyond the objectives noted above, Chasek appears to wish to develop a negotiating model that will provide greater understanding to both researchers and practitioners in order to improve the negotiating process which in turn may improve the outcome. The process itself is decomposed into different phases, hence the term “phases process analysis,” interspersed by “turning points.” After a review of various examples of phased process analysis devised by different scholars, Chasek chooses a version with six phases: precipitants, issue definition, statement of initial positions, drafting/formula-building, final bargaining/details, and ratification/implementation (p. 149). A turning point is defined as “a critical point in the negotiations where a decision is taken, a compromise is agreed upon, or a concession is made that allows the negotiations to proceed from one phase to the next” (p. 151). Any and every event, it appears, may function as a turning point. Also, these designated events are clearly presumed to be positive in effect (p. 155). One could speculate or imagine, though,
the occurrence of an event which could stall or derail the process. Instead, the
presence of a turning point, five are identified, is presumed, by definition, to
lead automatically to the next phase; one entails the other. This would seem to
make evaluation of the impact of these two presumed independent variables on
the designated dependent variable, the outcome, to be quite problematic.

Each phase is assigned different characteristics. For example, the precipi-
tant phase distinguishes between different types of events: incidents of human-
induced pollution, growing scientific evidence, concern about overexploitation
of biological resources, and economic concerns (p. 150). Of course, as Ron
Mitchell has noted, there are many other factors, such as “trends in economic,
cultural, and informational interdependence,” and the interests of powerful ac-
tors, that may lead to consideration of some issues while others “vanish without
a trace.” What is missing in this study is a careful exploration and explanation
of why certain events were chosen for inclusion while others were not.

As with phases, each turning point embodies different types. For example,
turning point 1, “from precipitants to issue definition,” may involve three ave-
nues through which the move from phase one to phase two may occur: “initia-
tive of a state or group of states,” “initiative of a non-governmental organiza-
tion,” or “decision of an intergovernmental body.”

Phases and turning points are identified and described for each of the
eleven cases. Chasek then assigns a numerical value to each of the elements of
the phases and turning points in order to compare the cases through the appli-
cation of statistical analysis. They are to be compared in terms of their relevant
impact on the outcome. The outcome is identified in terms of the strength of the
agreement. Chasek writes: “I used a combination of the nature of the agree-
ment, its efficiency, and its stability through the development of a ‘Strength In-
dex’” (p. 179). In fact, though, it is the text of the treaty, its provisions, that com-
prise the index, with the assignment of weighted values in the form of an
ordinal scale to different provisions. Greater weight is assigned to those sections
considered more important for environmental improvement. The only other
variable included is the presence or absence of protocols or amendments meant
to capture the “life” of the treaty (p. 234).

The limitations of this conceptualization of outcome are substantial. Al-
though the text of a treaty is important as it lays out the rules and regulations of
the regime, by itself it gives us little sense of the effectiveness or impact of the
agreement, either in terms of actor behavior, or resolution of the environmental
problem for which the negotiations were held. Three tasks, to quote Ron Mitch-
ell, are involved in efforts to evaluate policy effectiveness: “identifying an appro-
priate goal, an appropriate metric of movement, and an appropriate indicator of
the share of that movement to attribute to the policy.” None of these tasks are
captured by the identification of outcome through the “Strength Index.” This se-

riously weakens the value of any of the relationships that might have been uncovered through the analysis, for what are we to conclude with respect to the impact of the negotiation process on regime effectiveness?

An intriguing finding based upon the correlation analysis was the appearance of “two different paths or processes . . .”, one the “UN-centered negotiations,” the other “state-centered negotiations” (p. 188–190). What would be interesting to discover is the impact, if any, of these different paths on the “strength” of the outcome. Unfortunately, no conclusion can be reached as, writes Chasek, there was “no significant correlations between most of the phase and turning points and the Strength Index” (p. 190). Thus, in the end, the analysis “did not provide many insights about the relationship between process and outcome” (p. 218). What then are we left with? For Chasek it comes down to the fact that: “anyone can walk into a negotiating chamber and by listening to the delegates determine which phase they are in and what needs to happen to enable the negotiations to move forward” (p. 172).

This, however, leaves a lot to be explained for knowing where one is, although important, often tells one very little about what one needs to know to achieve a desired goal. Do the authors of Environmental Regime Effectiveness provide a better roadmap?

Environmental Regime Effectiveness: Confronting Theory with Evidence

In the first two chapters of this substantial and thoughtful study, Underdal lays out the causal model and the methodological approaches adopted. Like Chasek, the decision was made to approach the research question along two avenues: qualitative comparative analysis and statistical analysis. In his presentation of the model itself Underdal is careful to acknowledge the difficulties associated with such an endeavor, including what is feasible and what not in their effort to evaluate the impact of regimes. Unlike Chasek, they take on the three tasks identified by Mitchell, although attention is focused more on two of the three: “an appropriate metric of movement, and an appropriate indicator of the share of that movement to attribute to the policy.” Evidence for this lies in the three pronged definition of the dependent variable, regime effectiveness: output, outcome, and impact.

The two sets of independent variables, problem malignancy and problem-solving capacity, are assumed to operate upon level of collaboration, an intervening variable, which in turn is assumed to impact regime effectiveness. Six levels of collaboration are identified; although the specific links between each level and a particular configuration of the independent variables is not worked out, granted a very difficult task.

The nature of a problem, whether benign or malign, has long received consideration as an important factor affecting the likelihood and extent of cooperation. Adopting a collective action approach, Underdal conceives of the po-
political malignancy of a problem “as a function of the configuration of actor interests and preferences that it generates” (p. 15). What are these interests and preferences? The behavioral model adopted is that of the utility maximizer. “Individualistic motivations,” writes Underdal, are assumed to “dominate” (p. 18). Malignancy is considered a function of incongruity, caused by externalities and competition, asymmetry, in terms of incompatible values or interests, and cumulative cleavages, where parties find themselves, across issues, either consistent winners or losers.

Problem-solving capacity is a function of three factors: institutional setting, distribution of power among the parties involved, and the skill and energy available for the “political engineering of cooperative solutions” (p. 23). Hypotheses are developed for each separate element, while ordinal scales are used to measure levels of collaboration and effectiveness. The fourteen cases, with one “control” case on nuclear proliferation, are decomposed into components and phases to enable comparison over time and increase the number of cases available for statistical analysis. The cases are categorized and presented in terms of their relative effectiveness.

First conceiving of institutions as “arenas,” Underdal then seems to move to adoption of the regime itself as the institutional setting whose capacity is hypothesized to affect regime effectiveness. Thus we have, as one of the hypotheses, the statement that “the establishment of (negotiation) arenas as formal institutions that exist and are used... enhance the effectiveness of international regimes” (p. 26). Thus output seems to shift from an element of the object to be evaluated, the dependent variable, to an element of one of the independent variables.

Power has long played a central, although sometimes indeterminate, role in analyses of regime formation and effectiveness. In this model power is defined “as the control over important events” (p. 29). The assumption made is “the probability that a particular solution will be adopted and successfully implemented is a function of the extent to which it is perceived to serve the interests of powerful actors” (p. 30). Whether power is concentrated in the hands of “pushers,” “intermediaries,” or “laggards” is deemed relevant for what is termed the basic game, “the system of activities that is the subject of regulation.” In addition, decision game resources, votes and arguments, are to enter into the overall power assessment (p. 31).

On balance, development of this model is an impressive piece of work. Building on the work of other scholars, it clearly represents a theoretical advance. It should be repeated, however, that the model, as have most other efforts, rests on a specific “behavioral pathway;” that of the rational actor model in which regimes are viewed as solutions to designated collective action problems. This, of necessity, will shape the terms under which regimes are judged effective. As Oran Young and Marc Levy note in a recent volume on the same issue, there are multiple pathways, each of which may be “the generative source of
behavior on the part of the states and other actors . . . whose behavior contributes to outcomes in the issue areas under consideration.” In his concluding chapter Underdal seems to acknowledge this limitation (p. 438). Having said this, there is much to admire in this thought provoking, important theoretical work.

How successful is the confrontation of the theoretical model to the evidence? How carefully was the model applied to the cases under review? Here the outcome is mixed for although each chapter concludes with tables summarizing the major findings, all too often certain crucial factors, such as power, are not discussed. Similarly, discussion of what a no-regime world would look like, relevant as a standard against which to measure effectiveness, is absent in more than one case. Also, why a particular numerical value was assigned in terms of level of collaboration is frequently not made clear. Underdal reports that it was “agreed from the start that case-study authors should pursue causal paths wherever they might lead” (p. 48). Certainly, identification of factors that lie outside the model but appear to have played a role in the outcome should be acknowledged and discussed. But, failure to apply all the elements of the causal model under investigation may only serve to weaken the coherence of the project. Underdal, in the concluding chapter, writes: “our in-depth case studies by and large lend credibility to the key basic premises on which the model is based” (p. 458). This holds true only to the extent that the authors presented and discussed those premises in their respective analyses.

Perhaps the most striking part of this project is the concluding chapter, for what makes this particularly valuable, besides the presentation of the results of the statistical analysis, is the perceptive, critical thinking on what needs to be done for future research. For example, the finding that malignancy by itself does not have the impact on effectiveness expected leads to an important consideration. “To grasp the full impact of malignancy we would, however, have had to focus on problems—including those that did not generate institutionalized cooperation as well as those that did.” This leads Underdal to conclude with an important insight for the field of regime analysis. There may well be a bias in favor of positive findings given the focus on already established cooperative institutions (p. 447).

In his own summing up Underdal correctly notes that this study does support Oran Young’s contention that “regimes matter.” They do. One hopes that the findings and insights of this project will form the basis of future research, including a reworking of the basic model in order to further advance our understanding of the role of regimes. Where we are now, to return to the title of this essay, is farther down the road. Thanks to the efforts of the researchers of this volume, we do have a better grasp of the “environment” within which international regimes operate.

References
