

FOREWORD

## 50th Anniversary Commemorative Letter

STEPHEN M. SCHWEBEL\*

---

Americans tend to trumpet their inventiveness. This trumpeting may be tasteless, but evidence of American inventiveness in the last two hundred years is readily established. American inventiveness encompasses not only science, engineering, and material productivity. It embraces humanistic endeavors as well. A singular American invention that is worth celebrating is the law review.

Scholarly publication in the law has been an element of cultural progress for centuries. In the tradition of the great sources of law—the civil law and the common law—European scholarly publication has been concentrated in academic faculty and among a small band of doctoral candidates. But publication in the United States has had another tradition.

The first volume of the *Harvard Law Review* was published in 1887. It was inventive in that it was prepared and edited by students. Students wrote the articles and case notes. It was not a matter of the professors talking down to the students. It was a phenomenon of students talking up to their professors—and talking up to the world. Such publications were, as far as I know, found in the United States alone until relatively recent years, when they spread abroad.

Articles, notes, case reports, and book reviews in American law school journals only occasionally took up questions of international law. On the rare occasions when international law was discussed, it was examined in the *American Journal of International Law* from 1907 onwards. There were comparable publications in France, Germany, Great Britain—*The British Year Book of International Law* dates from the 1920s—and other, mostly European, countries.

---

\* Former President, International Court of Justice.

Fifty years ago, the *Virginia Journal of International Law* began publication. It marked the debut of a specialized student law journal, one devoted to international law. The debut was so successful that it was rapidly emulated. Today there are scores of student journals of international law. They are mainly in the United States, but they are found abroad as well. The *Virginia Journal of International Law* enjoys the distinction of being the oldest continuously-published, student-edited journal of international law in the world.

It may be the good fortune of these many journals that the reach of international law has expanded with the advent and growth of these journals. Contemporary international law embraces fields hardly known to international law before the Second World War. Take the modern preoccupation with the international law of human rights, one focus of the contents of the *Virginia Journal of International Law*. The first books in the field were written by then Whewell Professor of International Law at Cambridge University, H. Lauterpacht, as the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed. Even traditional areas of international law, such as the law of the sea, have seen great growth.

A glance at the tables of contents of issues of the *Virginia Journal of International Law* illustrates that the *Journal* is at the forefront of analysis of the issues of modern international law. It is an invention that is here to stay—but not to stand still. It is an invention that merits celebrating on its fiftieth birthday.