"What's the Problem? A Research Agenda for Diplomatic History."

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H istorians as a general rule end up working on particular topics not because they are told to work on them. They work on topics that happen to interest them. The historical profession is not organized like an army. No one comes up with a master strategy defining the big questions that need to be answered and laying out a strategy for answering them. That by and large is not the way we work, and few of us, in fact, would want to work that way. But this does not mean that there is no point for those of us in a particular field of history to think seriously about what the scholarly agenda of that field should be.   The point applies with special force to scholars in our own field—that is, to people interested in the history of international politics. Given the social importance of the subject we study, it makes particular sense for us to stand back from time to time and think about what we in this field are trying to do, about how we should go about doing it, and about important questions that we need to focus on. Doing that can help us see how the work we do can be part of some larger scholarly enterprise. It can thus help us see why some topics are of particular importance, and thus why those topics are particularly worth studying.

It thus makes sense to think about what the scholarly agenda of the field as a whole should be. But how can we get a handle on that issue?   The best approach, I think, is to start at the top and work our way down. We should begin with the big questions. What is it exactly that we would like to understand? What are the core issues that define the field we're working in? Only then will we be in a position to think about how we should go about answering them.

The most fundamental issue is the question of war and peace—that is, the issue of what makes for war or for a stable international system. A secondary, but still quite important issue, derives from that but lies just a little bit below the surface: given what we're able to learn about what makes for war, is there anything of a general nature, that can be said about how policy—both foreign policy and military policy—should be conducted?   We do not need, of course, to deal with those issues explicitly whenever

we produce historical work. But we should never lose sight of them entirely. If we are studying the past just out of idle curiosity or choose historical topics in an essentially haphazard way, the work we produce, to my mind at least, is bound to be of very limited value.

As historians, we get at those big issues by analyzing the conflicts of the past, and great power politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has traditionally been our most important area of concern. We try to understand a great conflict like the First World War, for instance, by studying the whole process that led to up to it, and we do that mainly by focusing on policy—that is, on the thinking of key decision-makers, on the particular decisions that were made, and on the reasons for those choices. As a springboard for that work, we look at what was believed at the time and at standard views still found in the scholarly literature; we ask whether those interpretations hold up in the light of new evidence that has become available in recent years.

Many of those traditional interpretations were based on claims about who was responsible—that is, who was to blame—for a particular conflict. With the passage of time, the perspective shifts. The tendency is to become less judgmental—to think more in political as opposed to moral terms. The assumption is that no one has full control over what happens and that everyone is reacting to everyone else. Indeed, a government might feel that it has little choice, given the situation in which it finds itself, but to react to events the way it does. We see a political process at work and our goal is to understand the logic that underlies that process. In that way we try to see why events took the course they did—why a great war broke out, for example, or why a more or less stable peace eventually took shape.

The whole trick in doing this work is to see how big issues turn on relatively narrow (and thus more studiable and more answerable) historical questions. By seeing those relatively narrow problems in that broader context, we're able to see why the findings we reach when we study them are important. If, for example, we're interested in understanding the origins of the Pacific War, we'd obviously need to understand U.S. policy in 1941. And that implies that we'd need to see how President Franklin Roosevelt and his top advisors understood Japanese policy. We'd want to see whether they really thought that Japan was determined to expand regardless of consequence or whether that country was seriously interested in reaching some sort of accommodation with America. And to do that, we could try to put ourselves in the president's shoes, read all the information that was coming in to him on this subject—through diplomatic channels, through the newspapers, and especially through intelligence sources—and see what kind of picture was taking shape. Just reading through the MAGIC intercepts—the decrypted messages that had become available because of America's success in deciphering the Japanese diplomatic code—might be quite revealing. There are many exercises of this sort that are worth doing when you are working on a major historical problem.

I used the word "logic" before, and that word is of primary importance in this context. It implies that our goal when we're doing historical work in this area is to bring out the

extent to which the political process—the process that could lead to war or, perhaps, to a stable system—is to be understood in rational terms. Policies were chosen and choices were made, and our goal is to make them intelligible. That does not mean presenting whatever happened as inevitable, but our goal is always to make sense of what happened. It is important to strike the right balance here: there is always a certain logic underlying the course of events, but that logic is never as tight as the logic of a mathematical theorem.

For some of us, the idea that the goal is to bring out the logic that lies at the heart of the historical process we're concerned with has a somewhat stronger connotation. It suggests that we are particularly interested in the degree to which policies make sense in power political terms—that is, the degree to which power considerations played a key role in shaping foreign policy behavior. Indeed, it suggests that we can get a sense for what that logic is by focusing on the power political side of the story.

Framing the problem in this way does not imply that our goal is to force the historical record into some pre-conceived logical framework. The goal is very different: we want a method that brings the problems into focus. We judge for ourselves what policy should have been if people were behaving rationally (in some sense of that term). We're then in a position to look at actual behavior and see whether it conforms to that picture—and if it does not, we can ask why that was the case. I might think, for example, that it did not make sense, in power political terms, for imperial Germany before 1914 to take on all three of the next most powerful countries in Europe all at the same time; that conclusion then provides me with a point of departure for thinking about why German behavior was irrational in that sense. Or I might suspect that the growing hostility between Germany and the western powers in the first decade of the twentieth century put Russia in the driver's seat, and indeed enabled Russia to pursue the policy it did in the Balkans from 1912 on. This is just a conjecture, but conjectures of this sort play a key role in historical analysis. In this case, it defines questions that only a study of the evidence—the evidence, that is, on Russian thinking in this period—can answer. But questions of this sort—conjectures of this sort—are essential if we're to draw meaning from the sources. We wouldn't get very far, in terms of insight into the issues we're fundamentally concerned with, if we approached the sources in an essentially mindless way, hoping that the 'facts would speak for themselves.'

The same basic point applies when we're dealing with more recent issues. Many problems relating to the Cold War turn on the issue of Soviet aggressiveness, so we need some way to get at the question of just how aggressive the Soviets were. And that question has to be studied in context: what impact, for example, did U.S. policy have on what the Soviets were doing? And that takes us to the question of what U.S. policy was. Did the U.S. government, during the Nixon-Kissinger period, really try to reach an accommodation with the Soviets? What were the Americans' real goals, and what role did U.S. policy play in the whole story of the later Cold War?

One could begin by studying the question at a fairly general level—by looking at what U.S. leaders were trying to accomplish and at how they proposed to achieve those basic

goals. But one would never want to just leave it at that. One could look at a whole series of specific issues with an eye to seeing what a close study of those questions tells us about what basic Soviet policy was and what basic American policy was.   This applies to fundamental problems, like the German question and what was called the European security question. It applies to the China question and to a whole series of regional issues—the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, Southeast Asia, and so on.

It applies also to military and arms control issues. One of the things we really need is a political history of strategic arms control in the 1970s, a history based on the great mass of archival material now available on this subject. Arms control is in fact more puzzling than it might seem at first glance. The main question we need to focus on has to do with what the point of those arms control efforts was. People think the goal was to reduce the risk of war, but it can by no means be taken for granted that any agreement that was reached would automatically have had that effect. Why, for example, would an agreement that simply codified what each side was going to do anyway make for a more stable world? Some people say that the goal was to make sure that the forces of both sides were structured in such a way that neither side had any incentive to go first in a crisis. But again it is by no means obvious that political leaders were really thinking in those terms. For one thing, if the assumption was that there was no realistic prospect that going first would make any meaningful difference in the event of war even in the absence of an agreement, why then was an agreement seen as so important? People said that it was essential to ban ballistic missile defense because anti-ballistic missile systems might create a first-strike advantage and were therefore 'destabilizing'; but it was also often said (sometimes by the same people) that such systems were essentially worthless in strategic terms, because there was no cost-effective way to prevent an enemy from causing 'unacceptable damage' no matter who struck first. In that case, what difference would a treaty banning missile defense actually make?   The stability theory, moreover, suggested that it was essential that both sides have the ability to retaliate after absorbing an enemy's first strike; it therefore frowned on strong counterforce capabilities and viewed survivable forces favorably. And yet a viable arms control treaty would have to be verifiable; that meant that the adversary's forces would have to be identifiable and thus (at least to a certain extent) locatable and targetable. Arms control in principle made it harder to build certain survivable systems (like hard-to-target mobile land-based missiles), and thus, in that sense, might have a certain "destabilizing" effect.

Were people aware of these problems, and if so how did they deal with them? Was the whole arms-control effort rooted in a coherent philosophy—that is, in a clear sense for what the point of that effort was? And was there a clear strategy for how to achieve that goal? Or was there something missing at the core? Were both governments interested not in reducing the risk of war and establishing a 'stable' strategic relationship, but rather in certain secondary political or tactical goals? Was the arms control policy, for example, essentially a bone thrown to the public—a way of convincing people that the government was sincerely interested in peace, thus reducing the pressure the government felt to achieve peace by reaching a real political

understanding? This, as I say, is an important issue that needs to be studied on the basis of the documents.

We also need to learn more about the non-proliferation treaty, and in particular about how the regime it established was supposed to work. How exactly was it thought that that treaty would keep "proliferation" in check? If a country did not intend to go nuclear, it would make no difference whether it signed the treaty or not. If it did decide to go nuclear, it had the right, even if it signed the treaty, to withdraw from the non-proliferation regime and to proceed with its nuclear program. It was also hard to see, in any event, how the control regime the treaty established would prevent cheating, given that the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] would, at least initially, be allowed to inspect only 'declared sites.' It would be very interesting to know how such issues were dealt with at the time.

A study of the IAEA itself might yield some interesting results, since the history of this agency is key part of the whole non-proliferation story. Robert Gallucci, who knows a great deal about all these matters, was struck by the way the IAEA was transformed following the discovery in 1991 that Iraq had had a secret nuclear weapons program prior to the Gulf War. Having played down that possibility before the war, and having been embarrassed by the fact that the wool had been pulled over its eyes, the IAEA pressed hard for special inspections in North Korea. "I think the Agency's response would make a wonderful Ph.D thesis in organizational learning, evolution and culture," Gallucci said in 2001. "I thought it was amazing."[1]

These arms control issues are important, but we need to learn a lot more about military issues in general. During the later Cold War both sides, for example, devoted vast resources to developing their strategic nuclear capabilities. This is somewhat puzzling if conventional views about the impossibility of developing any meaningful strategic edge are in fact correct. Again, the question of rationality plays a key role here. What was each side hoping to accomplish?   How are their military policies to be understood? How did they interact with each other? How did the strategic balance evolve, and what political meaning (if any) did it have? How did governments go about assessing it, and how did the political leadership understand the military balance—both what it was and how it was changing over time, and what political shadow it would cast? And what was going on in the non-nuclear sphere, especially in Europe? Given the vast nuclear arsenals each side had, why did the conventional balance matter? Or did it? How did people deal with the problem of escalation, and how did the two sides understand how their adversaries dealt with it? And how did each side try to manipulate its rivals', and third parties', perceptions? All these issues are of fundamental importance, and we

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[1] Robert Gallucci, , "Reflections on Establishing and Implementing the Post-Gulf War Inspections of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs," address at Institute for Science and International Security conference on "Understanding the Lessons of Nuclear Inspections and Monitoring in Iraq: A Ten-Year Review, June 14-15, 2001 (http://www.isis-online.org/publications/iraq/gallucci.html).

need to know a lot more about them than we currently do. What we need, in other words, is a serious political history of the U.S.-Soviet strategic balance.

We also need to learn more a lot more about intelligence, especially about what each side learned about the other side's intentions through eavesdropping and in other ways. Matthew Aid, in his book on the National Security Agency, refers to a "super-secret joint CIA-NSA listening post located on the tenth floor of the American embassy in Moscow that had been intercepting the telephone calls of key Politburo members since at least the early 1960s" and to a "separate intercept operation hidden inside the British embassy in Moscow." "Both sites," he writes, "monitored a wide range of radio and telephone communications inside the Russian capital, including KGB, GRU, Soviet government, and police radio messages, as well as the car conversations of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and his successors." The U.S. government was also able to listen in to what Soviet leaders were saying to each other at other points in time, most notably in 1979.[2] The Soviets, at times, were for their part able listen in, at least at certain times, on what U.S. and other western leaders were saying to each other.[3] Information deriving from sources of this sort might well have been quite important, and it would certainly be interesting to know more about what was learned in this way and what effect it had; this general point applies not just to the Cold War period, but to earlier periods as well. Because of the paucity of documentary evidence in this area, these issues are often very hard to study, but this does not mean that we should not keep them in mind. And, occasionally, when important bodies of evidence do become available, work in this area might be of great value.

All these issues are important, but one cannot help but feel that by focusing on policy questions we might be losing sight of the big picture. Power considerations, of course, loom large in international political life, but the way the international system works—and especially the way military power affects political outcomes—seems to have changed dramatically over the last couple of centuries, and especially since 1945. And there are issues here very much worth studying.

In 1875, at the height of the 'War-in-Sight' crisis, the German Kaiser William I argued that a preventive war was out of the question. Some people said that Germany should strike France before that country had completed its rearmament program and was ready for war, but the German Empire, he thought, could not pursue that kind of policy: the whole country, not to mention third parties, would not support a war which was viewed as unjustified.[4] In an age when the energies of whole nations had to be

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[2] Matthew Aid, *The Secret Sentry: The Untold History of the National Security Agency* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), pp. 143-44, 163-65, 170, and Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), esp. 318-19, 323.

[3] See, for example, Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 209.

[4] Marginal note on message from State Secretary von Bülow, May 16, 1875, in *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914*, ed. Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Friedrich

mobilized if a war was to be fought effectively, such considerations were clearly of fundamental importance, and one might have thought that this situation would have led to a relatively stable international order. If both sides were prevented from pursuing aggressive policies, how would a great armed conflict be possible?

Could it be that political leaders were aware of the problem, but were able to finesse it by framing their policies in such a way that, no matter what their real basis was, they would come across, at least to their own people, as defensive and thus worthy of support? Could it be, moreover, that the need to frame policies in that way tends to corrupt the political process—that is, that it tends to make it harder for states to understand each others' goals and arrive at arrangements that both sides can live with? In a sense, the effect of this perspective would be to turn the democratic peace thesis on its head: it suggests that democratization can actually be destabilizing. There are any number of conflicts that could be reexamined from this point of view, but the later Cold War, it seems to me, would be of particular interest in this context.

To get a handle on these issues, it makes sense to focus on relatively narrow questions, since the narrower an issue is, the more studiable it is. So one needs to identify specific puzzles that can be examined in the light of the empirical evidence. It is perfectly understandable that a government might want to frame its policy in a way that allows it to come across, at least in the eyes of its own people, as essentially defensive in nature. There is nothing puzzling here. The main puzzle in this area has to do with the adversary's behavior in such a situation. One would think that the adversary would want to do everything in its power to prevent the government from succeeding in that endeavor. One would think the adversary would not want to play into the government's hands by doing anything that would allow the government to plausibly claim to its own people that its policy was purely defensive.

Thus, for example, the German government in 1914 held off from being the first to order general mobilization in order to be able to blame Russia, as the first great power to take the plunge, for setting off the avalanche, and thus for giving Germany no choice but to react. But shouldn't the Russians have been able to see that that was Germany's strategy? Shouldn't the Russians, therefore, have held back from general mobilization for that very reason? This is certainly a studiable issue. One can, for example, look at the reports of the Russian military attachés in Berlin to see if they understood that Germany was making this kind of calculation.

The same general point applies to Germany's strategy vis-à-vis France in 1914. The French people fought to defend their own country; it is not likely that they would have fought the war the way they did just to defend Serbia (a country which, the French government knew, had very aggressive goals). Shouldn't the Germans have understood this and framed their policy accordingly—that is, stayed on the defensive in the West

Thimme (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922-1927), 40 vols. in 54, 1:282 ([link](#)).

and fought the war, if necessary, in the east?   Did they in fact understand the political situation in France, and if so what impact did it have on their policy? If the impact was minimal, why, exactly was that the case?

The same kind of point can be made about Japanese policy in 1941. Wouldn't the Americans have been less likely to go into the war, or at least to fight it to the bitter end, if the Japanese had limited their attack to the oil-producing areas in the Dutch East Indies? Shouldn't the Japanese therefore have calculated that the political advantages of a limited attack would vastly outweigh the military advantages of attacking Pearl Harbor and the Philippines? They obviously didn't make that calculation, but why didn't they?

This whole issue of the ability of one country to understand how the domestic political situation in a rival country affects the foreign policy of that country is obviously of fundamental importance. One important case here has to do with U.S. assessments of the Soviet system during the whole Cold War period, and especially of the kind of foreign policy that system gave rise to. It is amazing, when one goes back and reads what was published on the subject, how often it was taken for granted that a degree of aggressiveness was simply built into the Soviet system.—that Soviet policy, that is, was essentially to be understood in domestic political terms. That certainly was George Kennan's view in his famous X-article of 1947 and many other observers have argued along similar lines.[5] What is striking is that this was essentially an argument by assertion: it is hard to think of any work that actually sought to prove, by looking at the evidence in a relatively objective way, that Soviet policy was really to be viewed in such terms. Since we need to understand the Cold War better than we now do, this issue is still very much worth looking at, especially given all the new material from Soviet sources now at our disposal. And that sort of study could provide a basis for thinking about why the Americans analyzed 'the sources of Soviet conduct' the way they did.

The Soviet case, of course, is not the only case of this kind worth studying. Issues having to do with the relationship between foreign policy and the domestic political system are worth exploring no matter what country one is dealing with. But there is perhaps an even more basic issue, and this has to do with changing attitudes about war itself, especially since 1945. The change in this area has in fact been quite extraordinary. In World War II, about a million civilians were killed in the air attacks on Germany and Japan. It was assumed, before the war, that German aggressiveness especially had a good deal to do with the fact that earlier wars had not been fought on German territory. In 1940 and 1941, responsible U.S. officials had felt that "the potential enemy," as Robert Lovett put it in 1949 in the Congressional hearings about the B-36 bomber program, "had started five wars of aggression in the last 80 years, every one being fought in someone else's country, and every one of them free from

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[5] "X" [George Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947) (link).

devastation and destruction in their own homeland."[6] The implication was that this time things would be different—that this time, as President Roosevelt wrote Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson in 1944, "the German people as a whole must have it driven home to them that the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization."[7]

And to the extent that that was the goal, the bombing campaign was astonishingly successful—or so it would seem at first glance. Germany and Japan, the two countries whose civilian populations had suffered most from air bombardment, were transformed from being the two most militaristic powers in modern history to the two most pacifistic ones: it is hard to believe there is no connection here, although this issue is certainly worth studying more closely. But despite the success of the policy—if indeed it can be said to have succeeded in this sense—attitudes shifted quite dramatically in the postwar period. The policy of deliberately attacking civilian populations, or even a course of action which people understood would inevitably lead to large numbers of civilian deaths, is now widely as immoral and indeed as criminal.

It is important to try to understand why attitudes in this area shifted so dramatically after 1945. The natural assumption is that the nuclear revolution played a fundamental role in this regard. But it is important to remember that few would have predicted in the late 1940s that a change of the sort we have experienced was in the cards. The whole idea that there should be a curse on nuclear weapons—that nuclear forces should not be used for political purposes, except, perhaps for the purpose of deterring a nuclear attack on one's own homeland—was not the prevailing view among experts in the 1950s and early 1960s. The sort of system that did develop, in fact, ran against the grain of much of the theorizing that was done at the time. As Thomas Schelling, the most impressive of those theorists, wrote in 2009: "The ability of the United States and the Soviet Union to collaborate, sometimes tacitly, sometimes explicitly, to 'stabilize' mutual deterrence despite crises over Berlin and Cuba, for the entire postwar era prior to the dissolution of the USSR, would not have been countenanced by experts or strategists during the first two decades after 1945."[8]

Schelling himself, in his famous 1966 book *Arms and Influence*, laid out a theory about how international politics would work in the nuclear age. War was not about simply destroying the enemy's military forces as a kind of end in itself. It was about coercing the enemy—that is, affecting his will. And one could influence his political behavior by exploiting the "power to hurt": the threat to cause pain could be of fundamental

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[6] Eighty-First Congress, First Session, "Investigation of the B-36 Program," hearings before the House Committee on Armed Services, August 1949 (Washington: GPO, 1949), 24.

[7] Quoted in Conrad Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 32-33.

[8] Thomas C. Schelling, "A World without Nuclear Weapons?" *Daedalus* 138, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 129.

political importance, both during a war and before hostilities actually broke out. "The power to hurt is bargaining power," Schelling wrote. "To exploit it is diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy."[9]

All this, he argued, had been obscured by the fact in the great wars of the previous century "it was usually military victory, not the hurting of the people, that was decisive." The reason, however, was not "that civilized countries are so averse to hurting people that they prefer 'purely military' wars." The reason was that the enemy's military forces first had to be destroyed before the enemy's population was totally at one's mercy and would have no choice but to bend to one's will. "The Allies in World War I could not inflict coercive pain and suffering directly on the Germans in a decisive way until they could defeat the German army." Even in World War II, "military victory was still the price of admission."[10]

But in the nuclear age that was no longer the case. The enemy's military forces did not have to be neutralized before the enemy's cities could be destroyed. But what if the enemy could do the same thing to you? How could you make your coercive threats credible? The answer, Schelling thought, had a lot to do with the fact that there was a good deal of uncertainty in the process that could lead to war: that uncertainty was what made a policy of coercion possible in such circumstances. Knowing what the consequences were, no one might choose to "coolly and deliberately" launch a full-scale nuclear attack in response to some enemy transgression. But one could rationally take action that just might lead to war—perhaps even to a war which the other side would start. The increased risk of escalation—that is, of semi-inadvertent escalation—would put pressure on the other side to reach a settlement. But the adversary could play the same game with you, and that would fundamentally affect the way international politics worked in the nuclear age: "the resulting international relations often have the character of a competition in risk taking, characterized not so much by tests of force as by tests of nerve."[11]

Schelling was not simply analyzing the way international politics would work in the nuclear age. The argument also had a certain prescriptive dimension. The United States, he thought, would be well-advised to pursue such a policy—a policy of exploiting of what he famously called "the threat that leaves something to chance."[12] "Until we can manipulate the risk of general war and engage in competitive risk-taking with the Soviets," he wrote, "I don't think we are going to learn to take care of Berlin, much less

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[9] Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2.

[10] Ibid., 15-17, 21

[11] Ibid., pp. 92-105. (The quotation is on 94.)

[12] Thomas Schellling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) (link), chapter 8.

to take care of Indonesia and Finland when the time comes."[13]   That sort of strategy, he knew, was inherently terroristic, since it was "intended to coerce the enemy rather than to weaken him militarily."[14] He knew that "bargaining with violence"—that is, the approach he was recommending—"smacks of extortion, vicious politics, callous diplomacy, and everything indecent, illegal, or uncivilized." But "no one who hates war can eliminate its ugliness by shutting his eyes to the need for responsible direction; coercion is the business of war."[15]

Our sensibilities today are very different and indeed the transformation has been quite dramatic. Schelling himself now feels that nuclear weapons are "under a curse" and that that norm is "an asset to be treasured."[16] But that does not mean that the whole line of argument in *Arms and Influence* is no longer important. It in fact provides us with a framework for thinking about a number of issues of fundamental historical, and indeed political, importance.

How, first of all, is this transformation of norms to be understood?   The temptation is to say that people—and by that I mean ordinary people throughout the world—came to see where things seemed to be headed during the early nuclear age and were repulsed by what they saw.   Staring down into the fiery pit of a nuclear hell, the visceral reaction was to simply reject that kind of future: 'no, this is not the kind of world we want to live in!' Political leaders, military officers, and the civilian strategists as well—this conjecture would run—had little choice but to accept those new attitudes as a fact of life and build their policies on that basis. But things were probably not that simple, for norms of that sort could in principle have been exploited: the more ruthless party in a political rivalry—the one that felt least bound by the norm—would have a certain edge. But if that were the case, its rival could scarcely allow itself to be straitjacketed by those norms: both sides would have an incentive to defect, and the norm-based system would inevitably erode.

Things, of course, did not work out that way during the Cold War, but that may well have been because we were lucky—that is, because both sides moved in the same direction at much the same pace and at much the same time. This is just a conjecture, but if valid, that finding would have major implications. It would suggest, among other things, that the current system of constraints is much less solid than we might be tempted to think—that it might unravel more quickly than we think. But the issue can

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[13] Thomas Schelling, "Managing the Arms Race," in David Abshire and Richard Allen, eds., *National Security: Political, Military and Economic Strategies in the Decade Ahead* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 646.

[14] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 17.

[15] Ibid., 215-16.

[16] Thomas Schelling, "An Astonishing Sixty Years: The Legacy of Hiroshima," Nobel Prize lecture (December 2005) (http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/2005/schelling-lecture.pdf).

certainly be studied in the light of the historical evidence. One can get at it, for example, by studying some fairly narrow topics—for example, why it was that Schelling's own views changed the way they did.

The same sort of thinking might give us a certain basis for studying the whole phenomenon of political terrorism. It would suggest that terrorism is rooted in a sense on the part of the group practicing it that the downside risks are fairly limited—that the targets of terrorism will not respond by upping the ante and launching large-scale counter-civilian attacks of their own on the populations the terrorists claim to champion and which provide them with a certain degree of support. In general, the idea here is that the development of norms, which we tend to think of in purely positive terms, inevitably has an underside: that legal constraints, for example, by tying the hands of the law-abiding are inevitably a source of empowerment for the lawless. There are many issues, relating to the development of international law and institutions, that can be informed by that kind of perspective.

But the basic issue that the whole Schelling argument raises, for me at any rate, has to do with the very fundamental issue of how military power works—how it worked traditionally, how it worked during the Cold War, and how it works in the post-Cold War world. "Military strategy," Schelling wrote in 1966, "can no longer be thought of, as it could for some countries in some eras, as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence" "Whether we like it or not," he concluded, military strategy "has become the diplomacy of violence."[17] If we do not accept that view, and if we think that military strategy should not be based ultimately on the exploitation of the 'power to hurt,' we have to ask what, if anything, it should, or even can, be based on. If 'coercion is the business of war,' we have to ask how military power can have a coercive effect if civilians are no longer at risk: why should a defeated country, with no organized military force to speak of, bend to the will of a foreign conqueror if there is little that the conqueror can do to it? All these issues can be studied in particular historical contexts, and when they are, it will be very interesting to see what general conclusions emerge.

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[17] Schelling, *Arms and Influence,* 34.