

H-Diplo | ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis: Part II issforum.org

25 August 2022 | <https://issforum.org/to/JervisTribute-2>

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EDITORS' FOREWORD

BY RICHARD IMMERMANN, DIANE LABROSSE, AND MARC TRACHTENBERG

This is the second part of the H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis, who passed away last December. The first part, which we published in February,¹ included over forty contributions, plus some other material: Bob's essay in our "Learning the Scholar's Craft" series, references to other articles in which he discussed his career, and lists of his formal and his informal writings.

Most of the contributors to Part I addressed what Bob meant to them in both intellectual and human terms, often in a very moving way. But even the most personal essays touched on some of the scholarly issues Bob was concerned with. Re-reading those essays today, and going through those lists of his writings, one is struck by the wide-ranging nature of his scholarly interests, and by his massive contribution in all sorts of areas.

A number of our invited essayists wanted to explore certain issues related to Bob's work in depth. Some of them felt that they did not have enough time to produce the sort of essays they wanted to write for our February forum. Others, who very much wanted to take part because of their respect or affection for Bob, could not meet the original deadline for other reasons. We decided that it would make sense to divide the forum into two parts, scheduling the second one for publication this summer.

The result is the collection of essays which you are about to read. It begins with a wonderful piece by Bob's daughter Alexa that served as the eulogy she gave at the memorial service for her father in New York in February.² Twenty contributions from Bob's friends, former students, and academic colleagues follow—some short and personal, others longer and more scholarly.

We would like to end by saying how much it has meant to us to have been involved with this project. Bob was an important part of our lives, and we are profoundly gratified to see how important he was to so many other people as well, and in so many ways. Over sixty people contributed to the two forums. For those of us who knew Bob personally, the forums have provided a chance to share our feelings about him and to appreciate the fact that we are part of a community—that we have something in common that goes well beyond a set of shared intellectual interests. It is quite extraordinary that even though Bob is no longer with us, he is still bringing us together in this way.

¹ *H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis: Part I*, eds., Richard H. Immerman, Diane Labrosse, and Marc Trachtenberg, February 4, 2004; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>.

² The service is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeVwPFG_5Rk.

MEMORIES OF MY FATHER BY ALEXA JERVIS¹

Confession time: I have not read anything my father wrote. I hear it's good. But I am not qualified to talk about his professional accomplishments. So I won't.

I will say this: he was silly. He would sing "Bali-Ha'i" from *South Pacific*, and he would do the Twist. If you asked him very nicely. He loved Phineas and Ferb, and would wander in to join his grandchildren in front of the television – even after they had left the room, he would continue to watch, and then he would look guilty when he was discovered. He told very elaborate bedtime stories about two snails who set off on an epic journey around the block.

In 1987, he read a novel – *Bonfire of the Vanities*. He enjoyed it, but did not feel the need to read another. He attended the movies in NYC once (summers in Colorado were different – he saw one a year) – again, it was good (*Galaxy Quest* in 1999), and he was very taken with the comfortable seats in the Union Square theater – but he felt no need to repeat the experience.

I have three stories, with some digressions within – they are not in chronological order.

First, once, we were in the Metropolitan Museum sometime in the 1990s. We were looking at rugs, from (I think) the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire. He got up very close to the rug, took his glasses off and began to share his observations. He obviously sounded both confident and correct – I say obviously, because a number of people began to gather to listen to him. He, oblivious to their presence, finished speaking, and went to the next tapestry, leaving me to answer the group's questions about which Art History department he taught in, and where they could read his work.

Second, he knew the value of not necessarily everything, but a whole lot of things. He knew the cost of *literally* nothing. He made it his business to never enter a store. Digression: in the last year of his life, he went to his doctor's appointments at Mt. Sinai on his own because of COVID restrictions. He would often, surprising all of us, return with flowers for my mother. I told him that I could not believe he was breaking his "no stores" rule. He said, "Oh no, I bought them from the deli, so I didn't actually go inside. I just gave the guy the money and he gave me flowers." Fair enough.

Digression over. Now, because he never knew what anything cost, my sister and I quickly learned that he, and not our mother, was the one to ask if we ever wanted to buy anything. When we would tell him what it was, he would have the exact same reaction, no matter what end of the cost spectrum – "*What? How much??* That's absurd.... Well, OK fine. I have a Danish film crew in my office." You would think someone of his considerable intellect would have figured out that his approach would have shall we say...unintended consequences, but he did not. Anyway, thanks for the prom dress.

Final story, and please be aware that this sounds like a certain kind of story, but it is not really that story, or it is more than that story: When I was about 10, my father was planning to walk me to Haagen-Dazs after dinner to get ice cream, but we were waiting until he finished dictating the paragraph he was working on. He paced up and down the living room, talking into his little machine, while I waited, not especially patiently. We left, went for our walk, but by the time we got to the store, it had closed for the evening, and I was forced to get an ice-cream sandwich from the deli, which felt like a terrible disappointment. He said "I'm sorry, but this idea was right in my head and I had to finish."

Obviously, this sounds a little like the complaint of the neglected child of the great professor, and I would be lying if I said that there was nothing of that here. He worked a lot, in all kinds of ways, while maintaining a very rigid nap schedule. So it's true that he was not always completely available to us. But what I was aware of, even then, watching him pace, and became

¹ This essay is a lightly revised version Alexa Jervis's eulogy at the Robert Jervis Memorial on 26 February 2022 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture.

more aware of as I grew up, is that for him, ideas mattered – not just his ideas, but my mother’s, my sister’s, mine. I learned from him that if you had an idea, or if you just solved a problem that you had been chewing over all day, you had to stop right then and there and preserve it. Your idea was worth it, even if it meant inferior ice-cream. So I began by saying that I was talking about a different part of my father than so many of our other speakers – but really, so many of us in this room learned from my father that what we had to think, say, and write was meaningful. And that is a gift.

“WORKING WITH BOB JERVIS. MEMORIES OF A PRODUCTIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY RELATIONSHIP”

BY VOLKER BERGHAIN, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

When I was considering moving from Brown University to Columbia’s History Department, some friends and colleagues in Providence who knew me well wondered if I would be happy at a much larger institution in the middle of Manhattan where faculty members were not only very busy publishing books, articles, and op-ed pieces, but also involved in innumerable activities and commitments beyond the Morningside Campus. Although my move turned out to be a good one intellectually, these friends certainly had a point as far as Columbia’s hectic academic life was concerned. It was not easy to meet colleagues even over a coffee.

Bob Jervis was the exception in this environment. Knowing of my interest in international history, he reached out to me soon after my arrival, and contact between us became even closer after the Center for European Studies, which was located in the School of International Studies and Public Affairs (SIPA), was expanded into the Institute for the Study of Europe (ISE) and I became its director.

In the meantime, I had “inherited” quite a large number of doctoral students from my predecessor in the History Department, some of whom had been studying the role of modern Germany in the international system, especially in the context of the two world wars, and had taken seminars at Bob’s Institute of War and Peace Studies. This exchange and our mentoring roles intensified when a mutual friend appeared on the scene: Paul Kennedy, who was directing the Institute of International Studies at Yale University and who contributed his memories of Bob Jervis in the first volume that honored Bob’s work and influence.¹ It was also the time when the origins of World War I had again become a major field of historical research, and Bob’s earlier seminal contributions to the study of problems of perception and misperception in international history and the miscalculations of the Central European monarchies in July 1914 were being rediscovered.² Paul was fortunate to have some foundation funds in his kitty, and this enabled the three of us to bring a group of Yale graduate students together with Columbia’s for several joint seminars at SIPA to present their research and to participate in invariably lively discussions on how to conceptualize and pursue their doctoral projects.

While these triangular meetings could not be continued due to cuts in funding, the local work between the two Columbia institutes continued. Bob and I were very happy to mentor students whose dissertation research was close to our respective expertise. Bob invited me to be a member of several defense committees at his Institute at which we discussed disciplinary affinities, but also understood that History and International Relations tend to use quite different tools of analysis. Thus, I remember a defense of a doctoral dissertation at which the IR members spent a good deal of time quizzing the candidate about her theoretical framework. When it was my turn, I focused on the empirical parts of her dissertation. After the meeting had gone well and the committee had recommended her for the award of her well-earned doctorate, she emailed me and confessed to having been very glad that she was also able to talk about the empirical historical research she had so painstakingly done. It was such moments that made the dialogue between IR and History so beneficial for me, and I think also for Bob. Finally, I was greatly honored when he spontaneously agreed to introduce Paul Kennedy as the keynote speaker at a conference on the occasion of my 80th birthday.

For many years now there has been much talk that scholarship must be more interdisciplinary. This certainly is a great desideratum. But when it comes to putting it into practice, departmentalism remains a powerful obstacle, even more so when student numbers are being used to move faculty lines to “popular” departments. Bob was always an advocate and practitioner of interdisciplinary research and open academic exchange, as my experience of working with him testifies. He is sorely missed now that the humanities and also the social sciences, with the exception of quantitative economics, have

¹ <https://issforum.org/admin/jervis-tribute-part-1>

² Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

increasingly come under parental and other pressures to do STEM courses. But as Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of the Ukraine demonstrated, qualitative factors continue to be as important in assessing changes in the contemporary world as they have been in the past, and perceptions, misperceptions and miscalculation as examined for many years by Bob Jervis are as topical as ever.

ROBERT JERVIS AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA: AN OVERVIEW AND APPRECIATION
BY KEN BOOTH, ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY, AND NICHOLAS J. WHEELER,
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

As we write this appreciation of Robert Jervis, a few months after his death at the end of 2021, media outlets are full of stories of major powers readying themselves for the expansion of a war across the Russia-Ukraine border.¹ TV news is reporting that soldiers, tanks, warships, and aircraft are carrying out their drills, while out of sight we know that cyber warfare specialists will be preparing for the worst. On the airwaves, we hear the obscene sounds of rockets firing, fighter planes taking to the air, and the rat-tat-tat of rifles and machine guns. History is reawakening, and major war in Europe is once again thinkable if - we hope - unlikely. Meanwhile, as this nightmare invades our senses, diplomats parade concern, ratchet up threats and counter-threats, play the mutual blame game, offer conciliatory moves, plead innocence, and flex what they hope are the right muscles.

Amid all this uncertainty and anxiety, two things are not in doubt: first, misperception will be rife, as signals and countersignals will not be interpreted accurately; and second, with the passing of Robert Jervis we have lost one of the very best guides to understanding the relationships between signalling and misperceptions in relations between states. From the 1970s Jervis taught his students, the profession, and sometimes his government, how to think more clearly about situations such as the one being faced in the far east of Europe: the dangers in the ways in which Russian President Vladimir Putin is manipulating fear; the spiralling of mutual distrust between Russia and NATO; the undertaking of tactical and strategic moves that are open to misperception; the dynamics of the “Other Minds”² problem (trying to get inside the heads of others); the ambiguous meaning of weapons systems and deployment patterns in relation to whether they convey offensive or defensive motives and intentions; the challenge of accurate signalling, by word and by action, when their meaning is ultimately determined by the possible target, not by the sender; and the unpredictable outcomes of pursuing interests through military moves in an environment of interlocking and escalating fear.

In the introduction to his second major book, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976),³ Jervis emphasised the causes and characteristics of misperception among decision-makers, and he demonstrated through numerous illustrations why this really matters. It was vital work, he argued, because specialists in the discipline of International Relations (IR) tended to assume that “decision-makers usually perceive the world quite accurately and that those misperceptions that do occur can only be treated as random accidents.” In his book, and indeed for the rest of his academic career, Jervis sought to show that this perception is “incorrect.”⁴

¹ An earlier version of this article first appeared in *Political Reflection*, Vol VII, No. II (April 19, 2022), a publication of CESRAN International (Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis); <https://politicalreflectionmagazine.com/2022/04/19/the-perceptions-of-robert-jervis-an-appreciation/>. The authors and the H-Diplo/ISSF editors thank the editors Dr. Ozgur Tufekci and Dr. Rahman Dag for their permission to reprint this adapted version.

² Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 171-172.

³ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 3.

Jervis's intellectual canvas was huge. It spanned the foundational concept of the "security dilemma" (originated by John Herz, who introduced it into the literature in 1950),⁵ "security regimes" (a concept Jervis himself invented),⁶ "security communities" (developed by Karl Deutsch and his co-researchers in the late 1950s),⁷ and the "nuclear revolution" (on which Jervis continued the pioneering work of Bernard Brodie, Glenn Snyder, and Thomas Schelling).⁸ Jervis's first published volume (which he subsequently referred to as "the signalling book") was *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970).⁹ It was based on his Ph.D., and its ambitious "driving idea," in his own words, was "why should we believe anything?"¹⁰

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As a result of Jervis's stellar career at the heart of the study of IR in the United States, he knew that he was a successful academic. We are less sure whether he fully realised how important he and his work have been in the intellectual and indeed personal lives of so many other scholars, from students at the start of their careers to long-established professors. The outpouring of warm and deeply felt tributes to "Bob" on social media and elsewhere since his death is testimony to his inspiration as an outstanding teacher and mentor.

Yet Jervis had much wider impact and renown than that treasured by his closest friends, colleagues, and students. In the very first conversation the authors of this appreciation had with each other following the news of his death, we recalled that we had been in an imaginary conversation with "RJ" - through his writing - almost since the moment we first met in 1985. In our subsequent 30-plus years of conversations and collaborations, which are still ongoing, Robert Jervis sat on our shoulders.¹¹ He will remain there. He was also there even before our first meeting, as our independent academic interests had led each of us to have read *Perception and Misperception* with great care: for one of us (Wheeler) this was the result of student enthusiasm, while for the other (Booth) it was in the course of writing a book on strategy and ethnocentrism.

At the core of our shared interest so long ago was the phenomenon of the security dilemma. From early in our teaching and research careers we recognised it as what we came to call the "quintessential dilemma"¹² in relations between decision-

⁵ John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2:2 (1950): 157-180.

⁶ Jervis, "Security Regimes," *International Organization* 36:2 (1982): 357-378.

⁷ Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁸ Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). See *inter alia* Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946); Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁹ Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Nicholas J. Wheeler, "Interview with Robert Jervis," *International Relations* 28 (December 2014): 479-504 (quotation at 485).

¹¹ See in particular Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹² See Nicholas J. Wheeler and Ken Booth, "The Security Dilemma" in John Baylis and N.J. Rengger, eds., *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 29-60 (quotation at 29).

makers at the international level of world politics. In Jervis's work we discovered a kindred spirit, and one who was already very far ahead in his journey.

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From the mid-1970s onwards, Jervis became the towering figure writing about the security dilemma in IR. In our view – as well as that of some others - the concept itself had not then made the impact it should have after its first theorisation by John Herz and Herbert Butterfield in the 1950s.¹³ In the decades since, theorists in the United States sometimes made a passing reference to Herz but never to Butterfield. With Jervis's intervention, the concept became harder for the US discipline to ignore, though it often was – as were its intellectual pioneers. An international conference held in the United States at the start of the millennium where a panel was organised on the work of Herz was one exception. Butterfield's contribution for once got a mention. We also recall that in the subsequent discussion one US scholar frankly admitted that until that point, he had believed it was Jervis who had invented 'the security dilemma' - an anecdote that speaks both to Jervis's influence and to the insularity in the discipline in parts of the US academy.¹⁴

Jervis's influence on scholars' thinking about the security dilemma has been colossal. He brought theoretical rigour to the pioneering ideas of Herz and Butterfield and did so by embracing an interdisciplinary approach. In particular, his research in IR was immersed in the latest thinking in political psychology. The result was that his explorations into the perceptual dynamics of political relations under anarchy were carried out with a sophistication that had not been seen before.

The crux of his building on the work of Herz and Butterfield was Jervis's formulation of what he called the "spiral" and "deterrence" models.¹⁵ Through them, he sought to explain how decision-makers in one state tried and often failed in navigating the uncertainties and risks about the current and future intentions of those states with the military capability to inflict harm against them. The "spiral model" was largely a sophisticated elaboration of Butterfield's earlier notion of "Hobbesian fear,"¹⁶ resting on the assumption that escalating insecurity could result from decision-makers failing to understand the true nature of their situation. In particular, Jervis pointed out that decision-makers were apt to interpret each other's behaviour as indicating aggressive intent, when the actions being taken may well have been initiated for defensive purposes. As Jervis told us in an interview in 2014, the spiral model and the security dilemma were synonymous in his own thinking.¹⁷

The spiral model was driven by the mutual misperceptions between adversaries of each other's intentions, and at its root was the insecurity and fear arising from "the anarchic setting" of international relations. Crucially, he wrote that "An actor's failure to understand that he may not have communicated his non-hostile intentions feeds spirals of misperception."¹⁸ In such circumstances, better signalling through words and action was the challenge for decision-makers seeking to wind down

¹³ Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 21-41.

¹⁴ Herz's own contribution to the panel – organised by Richard Ned Lebow - was published as "The Security Dilemma in International Relations Background and Present Problems," *International Relations* 17:4 (2003): 411-16.

¹⁵ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 58-113.

¹⁶ Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), 21.

¹⁷ Wheeler, "Interview with Robert Jervis," 496.

¹⁸ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 355.

a potential escalation of security competition: but first the parties involved had to appreciate that they were indeed potentially trapped in a “spiral.”¹⁹

If the spiral model developed Butterfield’s argument about the ubiquity of the security dilemma, the “deterrence” model built on Herz’s conclusion that the security dilemma did not explain all conflicts.²⁰ Using the example of Nazi Germany, Herz had argued that ambition and not fear might be the driver of aggressive behaviour; if this were the case, deterrence was the required response on the part of the threatened parties. This was because, according to the model’s assumption, aggressor or revisionist powers cannot be converted into “status quo” states through concessions or conciliatory signalling: deterrence alone has the potential to contain. Importantly in this view – and particularly prominent during some phases of the Cold War – was the lesson many took from the 1930s: “appeasement” of any kind, notably concessions to dictators, only fed their appetites.

The basic challenge for decision-makers, as posed by Jervis, was therefore to determine accurately whether they are in a spiral or deterrent situation with potential adversaries, and then to adopt the appropriate response. The two models structured his thinking, but like all models he acknowledged that they simplified reality.²¹

The spiral model (“the security dilemma” in Jervis’s view) was predicated on the assumption that conflict may be driven by mutual misperceptions, but that these are potentially correctable through a more subtle understanding of security dilemma dynamics. In particular, he argued that decision-makers need to appreciate how their own actions might contribute to spirals of insecurity as a result of unwittingly provoking fear in the minds of others.²² Having such an appreciation is what we call “security dilemma sensibility.”²³

Despite being a major step forward in understanding security dilemma dynamics, the spiral and deterrence models have always been open to the criticism that they are too dichotomous; they risk falling into the temptation of seeing states (in Charles Glaser’s terminology) as *either* “security-seekers” *or* “greedy.”²⁴ Critics asked: what about the possibility that states believe they can only be secure if they expand at the expense of others? In other words, what if each state in a dyad believes that its security requires the insecurity of others?

Jervis himself explored these complex questions in great depth over the decades. He argued, for example, that an adversary could be a “security-seeker” or a “greedy” state *or both*. The latter might be the case when a state may have different

¹⁹ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 81-82.

²⁰ Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 234, n.5.

²¹ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 109-113.

²² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 68-75.

²³ We define security dilemma sensibility as “the ability to understand the role that fear might play in the military attitudes and behaviour of others, including crucially the role that one’s own actions may play in provoking that fear” (adapted from Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 7).

²⁴ Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

intentions in different issue-areas, or different intentions at different points in time. The United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War were complex cases in this regard.²⁵

What Marshal D. Shulman called the “limited adversary relationship” between the Cold War superpowers revealed them as security-seekers in relation to certain issue-areas (notably nuclear weapons) where policy-makers on both sides shared and on occasion recognised a mutual interest in arms control: but at the same time, they considered themselves to be in a global ideological confrontation in which there could be no predictable stability or path to mutual security.²⁶ When the latter was the case both adversaries would seek to try and undermine the other, and in ways that would make long-term cooperation impossible. Such a relationship is what Jervis came to call the “deep security dilemma.”²⁷

Jervis characterised the Cold War as a “deep security dilemma”, with one of its defining features being the ideological fundamentalism shown in the United States by the likes of John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State for most of the 1950s. The corollary of decision-makers seeing their own behaviour as peaceful in intent, brimming with defensive self-images, has often been a failure to understand how others might see them as “enemies” and “aggressive” Appreciating this dynamic is why security dilemma sensibility is so important on the part of leaders if cooperative moves are to make any progress.²⁸

A group of mostly US scholars built on Jervis’s work and explored the practicalities of successfully signalling peaceful/defensive intentions in a context where conflict was believed to be driven solely by spiral model dynamics. Ideas included “normal methods” of cooperation-building such as dividing up a large transaction into a series of small ones; bolstering the weight of non-provocative defence capacity; encouraging transparency; and so on. The result, it was hoped, would be to alter the mindset of the adversary, and encourage cooperation rather than conflict.

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Jervis was ready to admit that his upbringing and education during the Cold War had predisposed him towards the cautious end of the spectrum on the scope for harmony in international security. This was sometimes evident in his thinking about “regime theory.”

First developed in the United States in the late 1970s in relation to political economy, Jervis led the application of regime theory to the field of international security. His chief contribution was in a reference-point article in 1982 entitled “Security Regimes.” In it he defined a “security regime” as “those principles, rules, and norms that permit nations to be restrained in their behaviour in the belief that others will reciprocate.”²⁹ In other words, it is “a form of cooperation that is more than the

²⁵ Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3 (Winter 2001): 36-60.

²⁶ For the “limited adversary relationship” phrase, and early recognition of the multi-sectoral character of US-Soviet relations, see Marshal. D. Shulman, “Relations with the Soviet Union,” in Kermit Gordon, ed., *Agenda for the Nation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1968), 374.

²⁷ Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?” 41, 56. See also Wheeler, “Interview with Robert Jervis,” 495-498. The idea that Jervis’s notion of a “deep security dilemma” is really a security dilemma is questioned by Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 67-68.

²⁸ Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*. See also Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁹ Jervis, “Security Regimes,” 357.

following of short-run self-interest.”³⁰ Jervis’s words became the standard formulation, and over the next decade his ideas were built upon by a range of other international security theorists.

In discussing the preconditions for the growth of a security regime, Jervis foregrounded the scope for misperceptions when interpreting the offense/defence ambiguities of the weapons and strategies of a potential rival state. Even if regime formation is achievable, however, he pointed out that a variety of contingent and structural factors might conspire to set in motion a spiral of mutual distrust, resulting in the eventual collapse of the cooperative edifice. Based in part on his study of the decline of the Concert of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth-century, he warned that “by controlling the risk of war and yet not becoming institutionalized and developing supranational loyalties, the Concert may have contained the seeds of its own destruction”³¹ A century later he did not regard US-Soviet relations, even during periods of détente, to have met the criteria of being a security regime.³²

For those drawn to conservative understandings of international politics, awareness of the potential for regime breakdown is always present in their thinking and behaviour. Today, such pessimism is difficult to escape even on the part of those with more open perspectives on international security. All must ask, looking at the present crisis in eastern Europe, whether the security order that developed at the end of the Cold War, and lasted 30 years, is now suffering from having failed to eradicate the seeds of its own potential destruction. This refers to the policy-makers of the leading states, especially in the 1990s, who fell short in institutionalising trust. This was evident in the ostensible “humiliation” of Russian leaders and their new state, and the apparent complacency if not hubris of the West. Are we therefore, three decades after the end of the Cold War, witnessing a desire to make gains at each other’s expense in an environment where the restraints of what was once trumpeted as a “new post-Cold War” order are losing whatever traction they once had?

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In considering how the conflictual pressures of life under anarchy might be further dampened down, Jervis emphasised the need for a comprehensive understanding of the “nuclear revolution” - the focus of a book he published in 1989. Like many of his generation, nuclear weapons had been a pressing interest and concern from his youth, and in a series of publications he discussed the complex issues relating to their potential stabilizing potential. Above all, he thought MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) ruled out major wars between major powers. More originally, he claimed that MAD threatened such catastrophe that it escaped the ambiguity of offense-defence differentiation in security dilemma thinking at the strategic nuclear level. He concluded in a 1978 article that “as long as states believe that all that is needed is a second-strike capability, then the differentiation between offensive and defensive forces that is provided by reliance on SLBM’s [submarine-launched ballistic missiles] allows each side to increase its security without menacing the other.”³³ These views were opposed by those identified with “offensive realism” and “nuclear war-fighting” positions, who continued to claim that there was advantage to be had by securing dominance at higher levels of nuclear escalation. If the logic of anarchy compelled the superpowers to

³⁰ Jervis, “Security Regimes,” 357.

³¹ Jervis, “Security Regimes,” 368.

³² Jervis, “Security Regimes,” 371-78. Writing in 1987, Joseph S. Nye took a different position to that of Jervis and argued that a security regime was regulating some issue-areas in the US-Soviet relationship, especially in relation to strategic nuclear arms control and nuclear proliferation: Joseph S. Nye, “Nuclear Learning and U.S.-Soviet Security Regimes,” *International Organization* 41:3 (1987): 371-402.

³³ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978): 167-214, here 210.

compete in this way, they argued, nuclear weapons developed and deployed (and potentially used) with discrimination could still have strategic leverage.

Below the strategic nuclear balance remained the uncertainty of the security dilemma at the level of conventional forces. Here, in the late 1970s, Jervis accepted that the security dilemma still existed: “On issues other than defense of the homeland, there would still be security dilemmas and security problems. But the world would nevertheless be safer than it has usually been.”³⁴ These views firmed up. He came to think that even military asymmetries at these lower levels were not too worrying because decision-makers could expect to be deterred by the fear of nuclear escalation. This argument was first set out in his book *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (1984).³⁵

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Given the competitive pressures of anarchy – a factor that ran through Jervis’s security regime thinking - it is not surprising that his ambitions for security cooperation were constrained during the Cold War. Following its collapse, interestingly, his interest grew in “security communities” – a development showing that Jervis’s outlook, like those of Herz and Butterfield before him, could not be confined to one exclusive position. Across his career his ideas embraced “fatalist,” “mitigator,” and “transcender” logics of international security;³⁶ such complex journeying was related to an ambivalence as to how far an understanding of the psychological can trump the competitive pressures built into the anarchic structure of international politics.

In an article in 2002 he announced a significant rethink, focused on the trajectory of “the Community” comprising the United States, the European Union, Japan, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Their trajectory, Jervis argued, represented a significant shift from a cardinal assumption in his earlier writings, namely the idea that there could be no escape from security competition under anarchy. He now wrote: “For most scholars, the fundamental cause of war is international anarchy, compounded by the security dilemma. These forces press hardest on the leading powers because while they may be able to guarantee the security of others, no one can provide this escape from the state of nature for them...what is most important is that *the Community constitutes a proof by existence of the possibility of uncoerced peace without central authority*...the Community poses a fundamental challenge to our understanding of world politics and our expectations of future possibilities” [emphasis added].³⁷

Having powerfully argued in the 1980s that regimes always collapse under anarchy, he argued at the start of the new millennium that this wider Western/liberal security community “does not have within it the seeds of its own destruction.”³⁸ Not surprisingly, his view on the embeddedness of the process of bonding within the “Community” was strongly opposed by proponents of “structural” and especially “offensive” realism. Even for those drawn to Jervis’s argument, it left two lacunae: the trajectories of Russia and China, and the nature of relations between the “Community” and the rest of the world, especially these two great powers.

³⁴ Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” 214.

³⁵ Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

³⁶ These logics provide the framework for Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*.

³⁷ Jervis, “Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace,” *American Political Science Review* 96:1 (March 2002): 1-14.

³⁸ Jervis, “Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace,” 3.

Today, the puzzles thrown up by the concepts of anarchy, regimes, and community remain as central preoccupations in the discipline of IR; and the issues involved, as indicated in our introduction, are being played out across the Russia-Ukraine borderlands. How stabilizing is nuclear overkill? Does leverage in the end come down to the balance of boots on the ground? What is being misperceived by whom? Can cooperation grow out of crisis? If so, how far can it go? And on and on. In the Cold War the cost of overestimating structural factors were the risks associated with fatalistic assumptions about what is achievable in international security, and particularly excessive military hedging in ways that an adversary was likely to misread as aggressive intent. In the post-Cold War era the cost of underestimating structural factors has been the risk that decision-makers (and academics) might be drawn into believing that efforts at mitigating or transcending security competition might have better prospects than realistically exist.

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As the words above indicate, we need not search far for evidence of the enduring relevance of Robert Jervis's work: it focused on big questions, sophisticated theorising, and rich historical analyses of the enduring puzzles of international politics. We have several times mentioned his immediate relevance to the issues swirling around the Russia-Ukraine border. Shortly before this particular crisis became headline-catching, it had been the situation across the Taiwan Straits that was being touted as the site for the next major crisis and possible war involving great powers. At issue here are Beijing's ambitions to incorporate Taiwan into the Chinese state, and the crucial matter of a potential "power transition" between the rise of China and the supposed waning power of the United States. Such a state of affairs is widely characterised in the discipline as a manifestation of what Graham Allison called "Thucydides's Trap",³⁹ recalling the much-quoted sentence of the great historian from Ancient Greece and his famous words: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable."

Robert Jervis knew brute power matters as well as the psychological factors involved in the problematics of sending and receiving signals. He argued that the nuclear revolution had made power transition by all-out war highly irrational: but he knew that "irrational" is certainly not the same as *impossible*. This may be the case even if decision-makers of adversarial states want to avoid calamity. He knew this because his research on the security dilemma had shown him the frequency, power, and negative consequences of misperception. In his closing remarks in *Perception and Misperception*, nearly a half century ago, he warned: "I strongly suspect that decision-makers have not accurately assessed the costs of various kinds of misperceptions and would be wise to correct for the tendency to be excessively vigilant."⁴⁰

Jervis's death is a sad yet needed reminder to all of us in academic life that what we do matters, not only because of what we might contribute to the body of influential ideas about IR, but also because of the potential impact of our attitudes and behaviour in our working lives as individual human beings. In writing this appreciation, pointing to Robert Jervis's many ideas and achievements, we hope in particular to encourage students and early career academics who may not be familiar with his body of work to engage with the rich legacy of a truly exceptional scholar.

³⁹ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (London: Scribe, 2018).

⁴⁰ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 424.

REFLECTIONS ON BOB JERVIS BY A FORMER CIA MANAGER AND FRIEND¹
BY PETER CLEMENT, SALTZMAN INSTITUTE OF WAR AND PEACE STUDIES, COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY

Robert Jervis, a renowned top scholar in the field of international relations and national security, passed away on December 9, 2021. Generations of Intelligence Community (IC) analysts were exposed to his seminal works, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970)² and *Perceptions and Misperception in International Politics* (1976),³ which remain relevant and influential today. Jervis, moreover, made significant contributions to the study of intelligence through his writing and his work with the CIA's Historical Review Panel (HRP, recently renamed the Historical Advisory Panel, HAP).

An external reviewer of sensitive, controversial CIA and IC analyses, Jervis subsequently published unclassified writings that provided a balanced and objective picture of the work of CIA and the Intelligence Community. His book, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (2010)⁴ offers a rare unclassified accounting of his post-mortem on CIA analysis of the 1979 Iranian revolution; the book's chapters on the Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) are a superb assessment of the analytic/thinking problems that afflicted the NIE. The CIA thought so highly of it that it is a reading in its mandatory Career Analyst Program at the Sherman Kent School. As the HRP chair for some twenty years, Jervis brought his deep expertise on US national security issues to bear in CIA and US government deliberations about releasing historical materials. He believed strongly in the value of careful de-classification to better inform the American people about US foreign policy and the intelligence world.

I first met Bob in 2005 when I was serving as a Deputy Director of intelligence, as Bob was often at Langley to work on the Iraq WMD NIE review. As I quickly discovered, his low-key, unassuming presence cloaked a keen analytical mind and great intellectual curiosity. What I only came to know after several years at Columbia was how revered Bob Jervis was because of his intellectual generosity with faculty and students alike. I often described Bob as the 'energizer bunny,' so boundless was his enthusiasm for intellectual discourse. Bob convened near-daily brown-bag lunch discussions as well as formal seminars to discuss recent articles from top scholarly journals. He also found time to craft insightful memos for former students—now policymakers—on everything from Iran to North Korea, and most recently, Russia and Ukraine.

Many students conveyed that what they remember most about Bob was his kind heart, humorous personality, and dedication to and love for his students. Thomas Christensen summed up Bob up perfectly: "As great a scholar as Bob was, what I will remember most is what a good person he was. His brilliance gave him the right to be arrogant and aloof—but he was not. He was one of the kindest people I've ever met. And his influence made us all a little better."⁵

¹ Parts of this essay appeared in the CIA journal *Studies in Intelligence* 65:4 (December 2021), <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/volume-65-no-4-december-2021/>. It appears here with permission.

² Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

³ Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperception in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁴ Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

⁵ Thomas Christensen, Comments at Columbia University memorial event honoring Bob Jervis, February 26, 2022.

REMEMBERING BOB JERVIS

BY ROBERT DALLEK, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES, EMERITUS

Shortly after I arrived at the UCLA History Department in 1964, Bob Jervis and Steve Krasner entered the Political Science Dept. They both had a keen interest in modern US history and we formed a kind of intellectual alliance, especially because my history colleagues were focused on the new social history and dismissed the importance of political and diplomatic history as the province of the elites rather than ordinary Americans. In time, Bob and I agreed to teach a course together, which was very satisfying to both of us. It wasn't long before Krasner left for Stanford and Bob departed for Columbia. In 1994, I took early retirement from UCLA and after a year as Harmsworth visiting professor at Oxford, England, I returned to the states and moved to Washington, D.C. It opened a new chapter in my relationship with Bob Jervis. He often came to D.C. to consult at government agencies, particularly the CIA. On these trips, he always stayed with us and I had the pleasure of having dinner with him during his visit, when we would renew our intellectual exchanges. His passing leaves a gap in all our lives.

BOB JERVIS, REALISM, AND MISPERCEPTIONS BY LAWRENCE FREEDMAN, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

As the crisis developed over the build-up of Russian forces around Ukraine, leading to the invasion that began on 24 February 2022, students of international relations struggled to make sense of what was going on. Because the decision to go to war was Russian President Vladimir Putin's, a considerable effort was put into trying to discern his motives and objectives. Large theoretical debates about the relevance of Realism as a guiding philosophy in the field appear to depend on whether his decisions could best be understood as a response to NATO's post-1991 enlargement, aggravated by the alliance's refusal to rule out Ukraine's eventual membership (even though this was unlikely ever to happen), or else reflected something more visceral – Moscow's refusal to accept the idea of an independent Ukraine that would follow its own distinctive path separate from that of the Russian Federation.

Once the war began, debates continued about the extent to which the US and its allies should support Ukrainian resistance and counterattacks. At what point might this support create risks of major war between NATO and Russia, with all the dangers of escalation that implied? Was it also encouraging Ukraine to fight on in ways that were most likely to end in a painful disappointment, with the country left dismembered? Alternatively, should it look like Ukraine was succeeding, could this lead to a situation in which Putin faced humiliation and so might resort to nuclear weapons as a desperate measure?

The consensus view was that the Russian action was so egregious, conducted with such brutality, that NATO countries were bound to back Ukraine - at least once it demonstrated its determination and ability to fight. The commitment once made was one from which the US and its allies dared not resile. It was vital that Russia emerge from the war chastened rather than emboldened. It soon also became apparent that there was no easy deal to be done with Moscow to conclude the war with a minimum of pain and lasting damage. Putin was an unreliable negotiating partner. More seriously, his demands were not simply about security arrangements between great powers, or even the management of a localised civil war in the Donbas, but about the continued existence of Ukraine. As it was Ukraine's security that was at stake, and they saw concessions to Moscow leading only to demands for further concessions, how could external parties engineer some optimum outcome? There might be a bargaining element to all wars but that does not mean that all end with compromise. In these distressing and tense circumstances what actually was the 'realistic' policy to adopt?

As scholars and policymakers tried to navigate their way around these issues one voice was missing. It was a common lament that this was a time when we needed Bob Jervis to help us find a way through these complex issues of practical policy and high principle. Bob would have challenged everyone, remaining sceptical in the face of certainty, probing confident assertions, questioning how key concepts were being used, and being prepared to consider historical parallels, if only to note their limited value. Most of all, he would always have been aware that the issues under discussion really mattered, that we were not just considering theoretical constructs but real lives being lost and disrupted, and terms being set for the security debates of the coming years. Along with the rest of us, he would have been enthralled and appalled by the war at the same time. It was an opportunity to test and refine our theories – but at what cost!

In this essay I make no attempt to answer the question of what Bob would have thought. That would be presumptuous. Through a somewhat circuitous route, which I shall soon explain, I sought some general guidance from Bob on how to understand this conflict, concentrating on the problem of Putin's perceptions of the world – and our perceptions of Putin's perceptions. Those familiar with Bob's work will know this was one area where his contribution to the field was enormous. He was pioneer in the application of cognitive psychology to international affairs. If we insist that theories of international relations depend for their validity on their ability to predict how individuals will make their choices, we may never be satisfied. This is especially so when dealing with autocrats. The purpose of this exercise therefore is to illuminate not only some of the specific aspects of this case but also the general problem of what can be assessed as misperceived and irrational in decision-making, and also the potential source of distortion in our own analyses.

My original intention – from before this war began - was to look back at three seminal articles Bob wrote about deterrence theory from 1979 to 1989, to consider them as examples of his distinctive approach to the scholar’s craft.¹ These articles were written during a period of great creativity and address the same theme from slightly different directions. Bob’s writing was incredibly rich, bristling with insight. We often have quite vague recollections of what was written decades ago, even in some of the classic pieces in our field, and rarely reread them because of the need to keep up to date with the latest literature. Yet old thoughts can still appear remarkably fresh and surprise us with their contemporary relevance. This became apparent once I had reread Bob’s pieces. As the war was now underway I decided to use them to explore some of the issues raised by the war. This unavoidably meant that I was going to be largely writing about the importance of misperception as an aggravating factor at times of crisis. These pieces were written just after the publication of his foundational work on *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* and that influenced all these pieces.²

Bob wrote a lot, and was writing until the end, so I know there are other pieces that would also be instructive about aspects of the current crisis. But there was continuity in his thinking. We can have some confidence that the mature Bob agreed with the young Bob on the sources and impact of misperception because of the helpful preface he wrote for the 2017 republication of the book, in which he confirmed that he was content with his central thesis.

A Note on Style and Method

In terms of my original intention to explore this scholar’s craft, I will make only five brief points.

First, Bob’s intellectual curiosity pushed aside any concern with disciplinary purity. In the preface to *Perception* he explains how he spent a year exploring the psychological literature to inform his analysis, and also how much diplomatic history he had to pick up at the same time, all in the service of a research project that was at first framed as a problem in political science.

Second, I am not sure that any of these pieces would pass muster through a modern dissertation committee. In the first, and most important, piece on deterrence theory he largely assumes a degree of familiarity with the work of the ‘second-wave’ theorists that he was assessing.³ Footnotes generally are few and far between, at least compared to, say, articles now appearing in *International Security*. There are no statistics and no hypotheses presented as propositions to be tested, as if these were matters that might be subjects to ‘proofs’ and which might help us predict events rather than simply explain them in retrospect. He was bothered by the cause/effect issue without being able to resolve it. What he shows is the value of concepts in helping us to organise our thoughts and suggesting factors that need to be considered when looking at past events and those currently unfolding.

Third, he used the concepts to explain the sources of error in policymaking but also in our understanding of the policymaking. He advised on things to look out for, and he did so in the form of a sustained argument – often it seems with himself as well as the engaged reader. Interesting insights are left in the article bracketed as matters worth examining in more detail when time permits. At times you can feel Bob resisting going off on an intriguing tangent. At one point, while making

¹ Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics*, 31:2 (January 1977); Jervis, “Deterrence and Perceptions,” *International Security*, 7:3 (Winter 1982-83), 3-30; Jervis, “Rational Deterrence: Theory and Evidence,” *World Politics*, 41:2 (January 1989), 183-20. For reasons that will soon be apparent I also looked at Jervis, “War and Misperception,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18:4 (Spring 1988), 675-700.

² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). First published 1976.

³ Bob often spoke of the influence of Tom Schelling on his thinking. Thomas Schelling, *Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1960).

an apparently convoluted point, he asked the reader to stick with him as he realised that this is a bit of stretch: “I admit that this argument is strained, and indeed I doubt that observers would follow the train of reasoning I have presented.”⁴

Fourth, particular cases were used as illustrations, to show that the phenomena being described have occurred in the past. He did not go through the rigorous process of searching for all possible cases across space and time to analyse their incidence. The big events of crisis and war are not that frequent, so in the end it is enough to show that there is a possibility that one of these events might take a particular form, in the right conditions, not that it will happen often or even at all. Bob stressed contingency throughout, warning against de-contextualising decisions and events. The method alerts to possibilities and enlightens us about the sources of our own errors as well as those of government.

Fifth, and this is relevant to current debates, Bob was sensitive to the tension between the need of theory to treat states as similar sorts of beasts, so what works with one will work with another, and the fact that in practice these beasts are different, with their own internal drivers, predispositions, and sense of vital interests.

The Problems with Realism

In his preface to *Perception* Bob explained that he came to research and write the book through his engagement with the revisionist critique of deterrence theory.⁵ This critique warned of a self-fulfilling prophecy: actions based on a misperceived view of the Soviet Union as aggressive led Moscow to treat the United States as a grave threat requiring a build-up of forces that confirmed the starting assumption in the US. This ‘spiral model’ was a classic security dilemma as “each side’s efforts to make itself more secure had the unintended effect of making the other less secure, compounded if not caused by each side’s misperception of the other.”⁶ By addressing an exaggerated menace the US policy of deterrence increased rather than reduced the risk of a nuclear catastrophe.

Bob did not agree that there was no real conflict with the Soviet Union but took seriously the charge that deterrence theorists and policymakers had assumed rather than demonstrated Soviet hostility. At the very least they should have thought about “*the possibility that their policies were depending on and if not creating dangers to the country and the world.*” As he could not then get the materials to investigate whether the perceptions of the Soviet threat were accurate, he instead decided to explore the more general problem of how states perceive each other, noting that it was one that had not received much attention from the international relations community, despite an apparent consensus that the causes of both world wars could be traced, at least in part, to misperceptions of different sorts.

This line of inquiry was geared to great power wars, and the possibility that they could be caused by a tragic misunderstanding rather than a genuine conflict of interests. This distressing thought still animates much international relations thought and explains the persistent interest in the security dilemma as a core problem in the field. At one level it is unexceptional to observe how the perceptions of the acts of one side by the other can aggravate crises. It is, however, more of a challenge to argue that without such misperceptions there would be no crisis at all. Nonetheless, this focus encouraged a debate about the dangers of provocative acts, along with inappropriate and incredible commitments, and how it can be important to exercise restraint even when there are reasons to be concerned about a developing threat.

Although *Perception* was prompted by this debate over deterrence theory and the Cold War, it turned into a much broader work. It served as the foundation for much of his work over the subsequent decade. In his 1977 article on deterrence theory,

⁴ Jervis, “Deterrence and Perceptions,” 11.

⁵ Charles Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

⁶ Jervis, Preface to *Misperception*, xiii-xiv.

Bob reviewed Alexander George and Richard Smokes's *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*.⁷ He saw the book as an important contribution to what he called the 'third wave' of deterrence theory, which provided an empirical check on the claims of the second wave.

During the first wave, which began as analysts contemplated the sudden introduction of atomic bombs in 1945, the logic of the nuclear age began to be appreciated. The work of these analysts achieved little prominence as they were not addressing the prime concerns of policymakers. This was not the problem with the second wave, which began in the mid-1950s and led to a period of remarkable conceptual innovation and a lasting influence on the way we think about nuclear weapons. Rather than discuss in detail the individual second-wave theorists, Bob described their work as "so well known that little summary is needed." For his main source he refers to James King's excellent but also, and potentially frustratingly for readers, unpublished manuscript on the *New Strategists*.⁸

At the heart of second-wave theorising he placed the game of Chicken. This served as an analogy in situations in which the first choice of both sides is to stand firm, but the second is to retreat and let the other side win rather than engage in a mutually disastrous confrontation. Each side decides whether to stand firm by examining its payoffs and estimating the likelihood that the other will retreat. Once the model was grasped it could be seen how it could lead to tactics that were contrary to common sense, such as severing communication links, and feigning anger, irrationality, or a loss of control over militant factions in one's own organization. Bob was sceptical, and used the article to develop his own critique of these theories and also the Realist tradition upon which they were based and which they had revived.

Before deterrence theory came along, he noted, Realism suffered because:

"It was so vague as to accommodate almost all behaviour and that it merely summarised what statesmen and even casual observers already knew. For all its attraction, Realism had provided few explanations for puzzling behaviour and had produced few leads for further research. So, deterrence addressed this criticism and gave Realism a new impetus."⁹

But the old problems remained. The theory had little to say about how to change the other side's motives or how to transform hostile into peaceful relations, the role of rewards as well as punishments, and paid insufficient attention to the origins of wars and courses of crises. At best it told

"statesmen how to maintain a hostile and dangerous relationship. It does not tell them how this situation might be changed, nor can they be sure whether deterrence is appropriate. And applying deterrence tactics to a state that is not a menace is likely to create a great deal of unnecessary conflict."¹⁰

Because of the abstract quality of the theory, it treated states as being similar and so did not deal with questions of ethnocentrism (do we see ourselves as better than others and how are we perceived?) though it was still grounded in the experience, culture, and values of the West. It was biased in favour of status quo powers, largely written from the standpoint

⁷ Alexander George and Richard Smokes, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

⁸ A number of copies were in circulation and I read it for the first edition of my *Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Macmillan 1981). An electronic version is available on <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Nuclear-Strategy-Jim-King-Manuscripts-ebook/dp/B005TUOEJY>.

⁹ Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," 290.

¹⁰ Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," 293.

of countries resisting change. The most familiar criticism was that it overestimated the rationality of decision-makers, especially under conditions of high stress.

When drawing attention to this feature, Bob made a point that is still easily forgotten: critics tended to suggest that the dangers of irrationality lay in emotional impulsiveness, resulting in attacks being launched or other terribly risky actions, although irrationality could also lead to passive acquiescence even at a time when belligerence might be a rational approach. There is an understandable disposition (which I share) to assume that resort to armed force is normally a bad idea, but that means that we may also miss circumstances where it makes sense.

Because the second-wave theory had been largely deductive, little effort had been made to search for supporting evidence to see whether decision makers behaved as deterrence theory said they should, and whether their actions had the expected effects. This was where the third-wave scholars came in. They had identified difficulties that were not raised by earlier critics and encouraged a “general appreciation of how easy it is for things to go wrong” and “the innumerable points at which errors can occur.”¹¹ Were there any actual examples of the smart ploys discussed by second-wave theorists, such as deliberately increasing the cost of retreating to convince others that they will stand firm, or committing to a course of action because of the reputational stakes rather than its inherent value?

We will consider presently what Bob wrote about the sources of error, but it is important to keep in mind a point he made, almost in passing, about the circumstances in which these errors might matter most. “These disabilities and complications have less impact,” he noted, “in relatively unambiguous situations, such as those involved in the deterrence of attacks to the superpowers’ homelands.”¹² This point deserves emphasis. While few did more than Bob to alert us to the risks of misperceptions, he also recognised that in some cases the essential features of a conflict could be seen in sharp relief, largely because of the importance of the interests engaged.

He distinguished between *intrinsic* interests – “the inherent value the actor places on the object or issue at stake” and *strategic* interests – “the degree to which a retreat would endanger the state’s position on other issues.”¹³ This is relevant to the familiar claim, raised regularly whenever the US backs away from a prior commitment (as in Syria in 2013) or withdraws despite a long intervention (as in Afghanistan in 2021), that one consequence will be to lead allies and partners to fear that they might be abandoned in similar circumstances. It was because a strategic interest might not flow naturally from an intrinsic interest that there was so much discussion in the deterrence literature about *commitment* – the way in ways in which a state might increase the costs to itself of retreating to improve its bargaining position.

The case studies used by the third-wave theorists demonstrated the importance of intrinsic interests. The state with the greater intrinsic interest in an issue is likely to prevail because it will gain most by doing so, as well as lose most should it retreat. The degree of intrinsic interests shapes assessments of strategic interests and then the incentives in any bargaining process. If it is lacking, any ploys employed, from making statements to moving troops, will still deprive any assertions of commitment of credibility, while if it is present, there is no need to attempt to create an artificial commitment. So here Bob was warning against overestimating the importance of commitments that are considered independently from intrinsic interests and making too much of the potential impact of the outcome of one conflict on another. The focus on intriguing and dramatic tactics in deterrence theory had come at the expense of attending to what really mattered to the parties involved – the “underlying balance of motivation.”

¹¹ Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 305.

¹² Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 311.

¹³ Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 314.

He added that because states “generally place a greater value on keeping what they have than on making further gains,”¹⁴ deterrence is usually easier than compellance. He could also have said that for the same reason, defending territory is normally easier than occupying it. That did not mean that all the status quo is worth defending. It still depended on interests. Some changes are innocuous and others inevitable and it is unwise to commit to preventing these. Here of course there was a difference between what one might want to do with nuclear deterrence, threatening punishments for a major infringement of the status quo, and a conventional defence, where consideration would need to be given to the balance of forces as well as the balance of motivation. Nonetheless this is a point often forgotten in the analyses of the Russo-Ukraine War, where there has been a focus from the start on the balance of military capabilities rather than motivation. Perhaps this is because motivation reflects emotion more than a dispassionate calculation of hard power. My view from the start of this war was that the critical difference between the two sides was that Ukrainians were fighting for their homeland and that the Russian homeland was not threatened.

The final element of Bob’s critique of deterrence theory was its apolitical character. The theory did not ask about the origins of crises but picked them up once they were underway, and assumed that both sides had high interests in their outcome. This led to a third proposition: “Most conflicts end in compromise; compromise is one of those things politics is all about. It is central to behaviour even when important interests are engaged.”¹⁵ When one is considering crises in which deterrence is in play, some political deal may well make sense, as in Berlin or Cuba, as means of avoiding war. Once a war has started, however, the intrinsic interests in the outcome of a conflict become even greater, because lives have been lost and resources expended. Some intrinsic interests render compromise impossible. Another bias in our field that we might want to consider is whether a natural desire to favour peaceful resolution of disputes through negotiations plays down the many reasons why such talks are apt to fail, especially when fighting is still underway.

This reflects a deeper bias in international relations scholarship, and one which is also natural, to assume that good theory can advise on how crises can be kept in check and stop bad situations from getting worse. In the nuclear age that naturally encourages proposals for compromise and restraint. So far this war has reinforced the theories around nuclear deterrence as the theories have worked as might have been expected. Putin warned that direct interference by NATO countries risked the most severe response, and they refrained from direct engagement, while Russia has (thus far) refrained from attacking NATO countries. The critical feature of this conflict is that it is not a great power war, and efforts have been made to stop it turning into one, but one in which a nuclear-state is trying to conquer all or part of a non-nuclear state which is being backed in its resistance by other states, some of which are nuclear. This is not unique. It was the position North Vietnam found itself against the United States. In this case it has kept many scholars, especially in the US, preoccupied less with how to ensure that Ukraine survives against Russian aggression and more with how it might turn, intentionally or inadvertently, into a full war between nuclear-armed states.

The concern about not being provocative produces arguments for restraint. Bob was interested in the problem of self-deterrence. Anticipating what an opponent might do can create a situation when one state holds back out of fear of how the other might respond. Overstating the threat, paying far too much attention to fantastical assessments, encourages timidity. “A narrowed and distorted focus on implausible contingencies has led to an exaggeration of Soviet strength which could restrict U.S. freedom of action to a greater degree than Soviet deterrence policy does.”¹⁶ During the current war there have been concerns with measures that might unduly alarm Moscow being questioned as forms of escalation. Yet moves that would have been considered provocative prior to the war have been made without producing a reckless Russian response: Sweden and Finland signed up to NATO membership, and Ukraine’s membership of the EU was set in motion (the exact issue that triggered the crisis in relations with Russia in the summer of 2013). Despite some bluster, Russia let both developments pass. Gradually inhibitions in the US, Germany, and elsewhere on the sort of weapons that could be supplied

¹⁴ Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 317-8.

¹⁵ Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 323.

¹⁶ Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception,” 18-19.

to Ukraine were eased although the debates continued, as if, for example, something fundamental might change in Russian behaviour according to whether weapons supplied would be more suitable for offensive than defensive operations or the range of artillery systems provided.

The backdrop to these debates in the West was exactly what really mattered in all of this to Moscow: was the war really about the future of the European security order or a determination to bring Ukraine firmly into Russia's sphere of influence or even incorporate it into a greater Russian state, or some complex combination of the two?

Perceptions

This brings us to the question of perceptions – both of Putin and his inner circle, and those who are trying to understand and anticipate Putin's decisions. Talk of misperception suggests the possibility of accurate perception, and Bob was wary of such claims. He wrote about the inherent ambiguity of situations and how the available evidence might support several interpretations. This was related to the wide problem of why leaders fail to act rationally.

Most individuals struggle with two key attributes of a rational person: the ability to grasp the significance of new information and the ability to deal with probabilities. Thus “the images of the other” held by decision makers are “very resistant to change,” and this will affect how they go about influencing their opponents' behaviour. When it comes to probabilities, they are prone to ignore them altogether, and so act as though events were either certain or impossible, or else estimate them carelessly, which is problematic when there is need to manipulate another's sense of risk. Nor are they good at recognising trade-offs. They will tend to believe that the policy they favour is better than the alternatives on all value dimensions, even though those values are logically independent of each other. It can be hard to admit that the same policy can both provide better security and still raise the risk of an early war. The conclusion:

“Thus, statesman often fail to weigh the costs of their decisions properly, continue to stand by an established policy even though it should be changed, and are unable to match and adjust their actions to the environment in a way that even bounded rationality requires.”¹⁷

So in complex situations, strategies that require a detailed knowledge of the environment and precise calculations, and assume that this is the case with both sides, may well misfire, although it was here that Bob introduced the qualification about the lesser impact these “disabilities and complications” had in relatively unambiguous situations.

If policy is to have desired effect it must be perceived as intended, yet an actor's perceptions are apt to diverge both from ‘objective reality’ and from those of other actors. He identified the frailties of cognition: how people consider their intentions to be sufficiently clear for there to be no concern about how they are perceived; how even in the mildest of international conflicts both sides rarely grasp the other's views; how decision makers assume that their opposite numbers see the world as they do and fail to check whether this is really the case; how they have “much more confidence in their beliefs about the other's perceptions than the evidence warrants.”¹⁸

He listed four barriers to accurate perception:

1. *Overconfidence*. People overestimate their cognitive abilities, see evidence as less ambiguous than it is, rely too much on analogies with the past as if they can provide independent confirmation of their established beliefs, treat opposing viewings cavalierly, and are over influenced by what will work in terms of recent successes and failures.

¹⁷ Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” 311.

¹⁸ Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception,” 4.

2. *Do not appreciate trade-offs in values.* Instead of weighing costs against benefits, people tend to assume that the benefits all go one way. This makes it difficult to recognise the choices that need to be made. As an example Bob cited President Jimmy Carter's desire to prevent proliferation and protect human rights, without recognising that pushing states on one front might diminish the ability of the US to push them on another, and once concessions were made on one of these goals in support of the other then there was a risk of appearing hypocritical. We might see this at the moment in the Biden administration's presentation of the war, with some justification, as one of democracy versus autocracy, yet having to do deals with other autocrats to ease the consequential energy crisis.

3. *Assimilation of new information to pre-existing beliefs.* This is what we would now call confirmation bias. People pick out from them evidence what they expect to see. Bob did not see this as always a big failing because of the ambiguity in situations. He noted that "statesmen who miss, misperceive, or disregard evidence are not necessarily protecting their egos, being blind to reality, or acting in a way that will lead to an ineffective policy."¹⁹ Nonetheless, the implication of this tendency was that images of other states are difficult to alter.

4. *Defensive Avoidance.* This is a form of denial – simply refusing to "perceive and understand extremely threatening stimuli." This, Bob suggests, may be the result of domestic political needs that require that a potential threat be characterised in a particular way. They may be too invested in one course of action to see the options available to the opponent.

These problems can manifest in how states view potential adversaries with whom they will find it difficult to empathise. States often underestimate the desperation that their adversaries feel, and incorrectly believe that the others do not see them as a threat. Leaders act in accordance with theories to which they already subscribe and are more likely to be influenced by historical analogies their country has experience first-hand rather than new data. They allow their view of their own situation to influence how view the capabilities and intentions of others.

But sometimes the problem is not cognitive limitations so much as it suits them to believe certain things. There can be strong social and political pressures to stick with a view that is not well founded, for example, holding together a domestic coalition. When pushing for a policy they will they tend to minimise trade-offs. If the alternatives to their chosen policy are bleak, they may exaggerate its chances of success, and fail to gather the information or perform the analyses to check whether this is really the case. And, when it comes down to implementation, especially when these prior errors lead to a poor strategy, the results are apt to be very different from those that were anticipated. As Bob noted, much apparent misperception was motivated. It suited those advocating particular policies to promote a view of the adversary that supported those policies. This could include presenting the danger as being greater than was actually the case. Here he gave as an example Britain's misreading of German strength prior to the Second World War. These "pessimistic assessments of German bombing were as much the product of policies as they were a cause of them."²⁰ This is a tendency that can affect academics as much as governments.

Misperception and Putin's War

At the start of 2022, the Russian military build-up could be explained as preparations for an invasion or a coercive bluff. It suited a number of countries, including Ukraine (because of the costs of mobilisation) to play down the risks. A large problem was that while it was evident that Russia could mount an invasion, it was far less clear what it could hope to achieve by doing so. Getting this assessment right depended on understanding how Putin viewed the world, and accepting that this might lead him into a reckless and counter-productive decision. Thus, an accurate perception of the threat depended on assuming that Putin had an inaccurate perception of the opportunities available to Russia.

¹⁹ Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 25.

²⁰ Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 16.

Putin's inability to accept Ukraine as an entity that is truly independent of Russia probably goes back, as with many Russians, to the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. His concerns about popular movements hostile to Russia were shaped by the Orange Revolution of 2004-5. In 2013 he sought to prevent Ukraine getting any closer to the West by coercing President Yanukovich to abandon an accession agreement with the EU. This triggered the EuroMaidan movement. Once Yanukovich fled and Russia moved to destabilise Ukraine, the core themes of an artificial country, a putsch in Kyiv, and persecuted Russian-language speakers emerged and they became staples of Putin's speeches and Kremlin propaganda. How much they were core beliefs and how much they were manufactured to provide pretexts for action remains a matter for debate.

Any assessment was complicated by Putin's belief in the possibility of a fabricated truth. The Kremlin provided many statements to explain its actions but they were often inconsistent and contradictory, designed for political effect with no attempt at verisimilitude. Putin, and his former Federal Security Service (FSB) colleagues, were capable of manufacturing incidents for immediate political ends, and making claims that their victims had responsibility for incidents in which they were hurt (such as attacks on residential buildings during the war). That being said, most of the strategy that was followed in authorising this war and in its conduct is only inexplicable if it is assumed that Putin believed what he wrote about the history of Ukraine and of EuroMaidan and then became so invested in these beliefs that he ignored any discrepant evidence, and authorised a war confident that they would prove to be correct. There is no evidence that any serious effort went into gathering information on Ukrainian political affairs and whether Russian-language speakers would naturally hail an invading force as liberators. In an autocracy few feel able to contradict the supreme leader. Once the war began, as it became apparent that the war had been launched on a deluded premise, there was no deviation for the official line. Only Putin could set a new one.

Western observers were unsure of what to make of Putin's expressed views and the warped historical narrative that appeared to underpin them. Could a *casus belli* be fashioned out of them? If one could, it pointed logically towards a war of conquest, at least of Ukrainian territory adjacent to Russia. Yet if this was motivating the military build-up, what was the point of all the demands for a new European security order that Russian diplomats made weeks before the invasion. Despite Ukraine becoming the target of military pressure, no demands were made of Kyiv. This reflected Putin's narrative – Ukraine's leaders were puppets of the US and NATO – but it was still an odd way to conduct coercive diplomacy.

Some international relations scholars turned to the more familiar geopolitical ground of blaming NATO enlargement for the war. In general terms this just did not work. However much Russia might not have liked its former allies joining NATO, the issue had been managed by other means, including the 1997 Founding Act intended to regulate NATO-Russian relations, and Ukraine's membership had not been seriously on the agenda since the Bucharest Summit of 2008. From this perspective, the conflict was a version of the security dilemma, whereby Russia had been goaded into becoming more aggressive because of a growing security threat to its western borders. But this played down the impact of Putin's particular, and poorly founded, view of Ukraine. Moreover, even when Putin described why NATO membership would be a problem, there was fanciful stories about how somehow Kyiv would drag NATO countries into a war intended to recover Crimea or get its own nuclear weapons – neither of which were likely and both of which could have been addressed diplomatically without any recourse to war.

Putin's behaviour fitted in with Bob's conclusions that perceptions change slowly and can be maintained in face of discrepant information, and that it is unwise to develop strategies that were too subtle, and were fine tuned to get just the right amount of pressure, although the balance in Putin's mind would have been different from that envisaged by Bob ("enough to show the other that the state is very serious but not enough to provoke desperate behaviour."²¹)

The Ukrainians always insisted that if war came they would fight. Did Putin take this seriously, or simply assume that his forces would roll over any resistance? Bob suggested that one of the reasons deterrence failed prior to the Second World War

²¹ Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 26.

was that the British and French failed to convince German leader Adolf Hitler not only that “they would fight if pushed too far, but also that they would continue to fight even after initial reverses.” The key message – that had not been conveyed – was that once they were committed to the fight they would carry on until the bitter end.

Putin’s failure to grasp that Ukraine was resilient and ready to defend itself flowed naturally from his delusional view of the character of the Russian state. This created a crisis for him and the Russian military as the initial offensives faltered and then had to be abandoned to allow for a focus on the contested Donbas region. As already noted, this situation had not appeared in the classic texts: the US and its allies backed a non-nuclear country to take on a nuclear-armed country to the point where it might be defeated in a military campaign apparently undertaken in support of a vital interest.

At this stage all the realist concerns about not provoking Russia rushed to the fore, as if Putin’s failure to conquer was pushing him into a corner so that he might ‘lash out’ in frustration, even though Russia was not being put under threat because of this failure. Therefore, according to this argument, the US should push for early negotiations. Then when Russian forces regrouped and began to make limited advances in the Donbas, the argument was that Ukraine could not win and so the US should push for early negotiations to get a deal to end the suffering. From both perspectives, those urging an imposed compromise were anticipating developments that had yet to occur - either the Russians or the Ukrainians facing defeat – and assuming that there was an alternative policy that could produce a better situation. The proposals for a deal always fell at the first hurdle – Ukraine ceding territory to Russia – something for which President Zelensky could not get a mandate, and which would most likely lead to continuing instability in and around the ceded territories and chronic insecurity among NATO members bordering Russia. This is where the balance of motivation came in. Whatever the hardships, Ukraine was going to fight on, and urged as a better policy that the US and its allies continue to keep providing Ukraine the weapons with which to fight and prevail.

It is also worth noting an observation made in an essay by Bob that he did not fully explore, that “incorrect explanations and predictions concerning other states’ behaviour are caused more often by misperceptions concerning their situations than by misperceptions about their predispositions.”²² Leaving aside the regular suggestions that Putin is stubborn and determined, and his statements about his ability to achieve his objectives, it is always worth checking Putin’s military options to see whether Russia was in a position to achieve what he wanted to achieve.

International Relations Theory and the War

At the time of writing (July 2022) this war is not yet over and there are no doubt more developments to come which may surprise and alarm us. My own view from the start was that it was important to support Ukraine and that many of the realist arguments against doing so, or at least to encourage negotiations that would be unavoidably disadvantageous to Kyiv, were in their own way unrealistic. But there is no point in engaging in elaborate post-mortems about the quality of individual contributions, or even the field as a whole, when we are still in no position to come to definitive conclusions. Moreover, it is important that those who have contributions to make continue to do so, take some analytical risks and accept that they might turn out to be wrong. There are large elements of ambiguity and uncertainty in the situation which can catch us all out. Even contributions that might make for embarrassing reading at a later date can still make the debate sharper and introduce considerations that might otherwise have been ignored.

But in making these contributions a degree of humility is always required. Reading through Bob’s work, the openness of his mind to new ideas and evidence is always apparent. His analysis of the sources of error in high-level decision-making is relevant to the potential sources of error in our contributions. We can become too invested in our theories and policy predispositions and look for arguments and evidence to validate them, asserting them with more confidence than warranted and playing down awkward trade-offs. We forget to ask the difficult question, which Bob urged on policy-makers, about

²² Jervis, “War and Misperception,” 677.

what would be the evidence that might convince us to change or amend our views. It was a question he always asked of others and was prepared to answer for himself.

ROBERT JERVIS, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST?

BY STACIE E. GODDARD, WELLESLEY COLLEGE, AND RONALD R. KREBS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Robert Jervis was an intellectual giant. During a career that spanned five decades, he authored some of the most significant books in the field, including *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, and *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*.¹ His work drew on and shaped not only international relations theory, but was unusually interdisciplinary, engaging fields ranging from history to psychology to sociology to environmental science and sociobiology. Jervis's influence reached well beyond the ivory tower as well, and his analyses of intelligence failures and nuclear strategy had a particular impact on the US policy community.

Jervis was not only prolific, but theoretically eclectic. He refused to be categorized. As he reported, when students would ask if he was a realist, he would reply, "To the annoyance of many of them[,] ... there is no simple answer."² Yes, Jervis was a realist insofar as he saw states as the core actors of international politics, maintained that leaders had to pursue power and interests under tremendous uncertainty, and averred that the "inability of states to bind themselves (and the knowledge that others cannot be bound) is a central feature of international relations."³ He shared realism's proclivity to pessimism and its deep appreciation of power. But, beyond these commitments, Jervis was theoretically ecumenical. He pulled liberally from social psychology, evolutionary theory, and sociology. He largely stood clear of the "paradigm wars" of the 1990s. From his perspective, "If the discipline is functioning well, each school of thought enriches others as powerful research of one kind strengthens, not weakens, the alternatives. No one approach consistently maintains a leading position: each of them catches important elements of international politics, and many of our arguments are about the relative importance of and the interrelationships among various factors."⁴

It is no accident that those of us who attended Columbia in the latter part of the 1990s, and who had a constructivist bent but also sympathy for realism, gravitated to Bob Jervis and found in him a supportive mentor.⁵ This was not merely because Jervis was theoretically open-minded. It was also because his work intersected with, and in certain critical ways even anticipated, constructivist approaches to international politics. As we discuss below, there were limits to Jervis's constructivist inclinations, and he was skeptical of mainstream American constructivists' implicitly liberal normative commitments—what he viewed as their desire to "see world politics transformed by the spread of appropriate norms, identities, and concepts of world politics."⁶ Yet, as card-carrying constructivists ourselves, we've always seen Bob's work as an inspiration, not a rival or a sparring partner. We became the scholars we are not despite Bob's interventions, but because of them. Yes, any good dissertation advisor should think alongside their advisee's project. But Bob's questions revealed not only

¹ Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989 [1970]); *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, new ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017 [1976]); *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

² Jervis, "Politics and Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (2018), 8.

³ Jervis, "Politics and Political Science," 9.

⁴ Jervis, "Realism in the Study of World Politics," *International Organization* 52:4 (1998): 971-972.

⁵ Bob Jervis was the advisor to both authors, who received their Ph.D. degrees from Columbia (Krebs, 2003; Goddard 2004).

⁶ Jervis, "Realism in the Study of World Politics," 974.

his intellectual generosity and depth, his ever-searching mind, and his encyclopedic knowledge, but also how comfortable he was with critical aspects of the constructivist worldview.

Our reflections on Bob Jervis's work extend beyond our personal experience. Much of Jervis's writing—especially on signaling, but also on psychology and systems dynamics—exhibits significant constructivist sensibilities. While he emphasized the centrality of strategic action, he understood that these interactions take place within, are enabled by, and are confined by existing systems of meaning and practice. He brought a distinctively social and relational framework to his research at the juncture of international relations and psychology. His writings on systems dynamics speak not only to the agent-structure problem—the peculiar reality that agents' choices are confined by the structures within which they reside, but that those structures are themselves produced and reconfigured by agents' choices—but also intersect with constructivists who question social scientists' ability to develop invariant causal laws and theoretical statements.

At the same time, we recognize that there were profound limits to Jervis's constructivism. He remained indebted to individualist psychology, which inhibited his capacity to move beyond individual beliefs and perceptions and grasp collective phenomena like norms, social roles, and discourses. While Jervis regularly referenced and invoked factors that are more typically associated with constructivist theorizing, he did not put these at the center of his analysis. When, on rare occasions, Jervis did train his analytical energies on international norms, he could retreat into materialist foundations.

Nevertheless, we believe that Bob Jervis set out a stimulating intellectual agenda, and perhaps even a meeting ground, for constructivist, psychologist, rationalist, and realist scholars of international politics and history. If we collectively take up that agenda, in the spirit of Jervis's searching and ecumenical mind, it will be a fitting tribute to this remarkable scholar, advisor, and human being.

Jervis as a Constructivist Fellow-Traveler

Jervis never classified himself as a constructivist, although he often suggested that his work anticipated constructivist theorizing well before it would become part of the IR mainstream.⁷ We see three areas where Jervis's work intersects productively with and complements constructivist theorizing: his attention to intersubjective meaning and interpretation; his "strategic constructivist" commitments; and his sensitivity to contingency in social explanation.

The Imperative of Interpretation

Realist in his inclinations, Jervis did not question the analytical value of starting with structural imperatives. Jervis's seminal analysis of the Prisoner's Dilemma displayed the power of structural analysis,⁸ but he also recognized that international structure, while an important starting point, rarely spoke clearly. Early in his career, in *The Logic of Images*, Jervis set out a basic belief about the world that shaped his scholarship to come: "A large number of interactions are ambiguous not only in terms of who won and lost, but also in terms of why the actors behaved as they did."⁹ Even on the most fundamental questions—from threat perception to alliance politics to the consequences of inducements and threats (carrots and sticks)—Jervis declared that "structure ... can rarely yield definitive answers." This was not just because "the external environment is

⁷ See, for instance, Jervis, "Politics and Political Science," 7.

⁸ Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30:2 (1978): 167-214.

⁹ Jervis, *The Logic of Images*, 175.

rarely so compelling as to obviate the need for difficult judgments and choices,” but because it typically allowed for deeply divergent “interpretations of behavior.”¹⁰

Jervis came to this conclusion from his grounding in human psychology, via critical reflection on the silences of game theory. In his incisive take on the “neo-neo” debates of the 1980s, Jervis began by observing that game theory’s power derives from the many factors that shape actors’ calculations and are external to the game itself, provided either by assumption or by empirical input. This was hardly an original point, but many others focused on characteristics of the actors—their exogenous preferences, beliefs, and so on. In contrast, Jervis turned to more social and processual elements. He focused on the ways in which streams of history were causally connected, through the meaning actors imparted to those events. Those imputations, he averred, transformed the actors themselves and their interactions, to the point that they were no longer playing the same game. As Jervis put it, “We often talk of repeated plays of a Prisoners’ Dilemma. But this formulation is misleading when the preferences and beliefs of the actors, and the nature of the game itself, change as it is played. What is at stake and the nature of the issue is defined over time, as actors develop their positions, in part in response to the positions taken by others.”¹¹ A self-declared social constructivist could not have put it any better. Events, in Jervis’s view, did not speak for themselves. They required interpretation. And those interpretations had deep consequences, reshaping the reality that then confronted subsequent agents.

Human interpretation of the world lay at the center of Jervis’s worldview—as it does for constructivists. Constructivists are attentive to the ways in which situations are defined, seeing such definitions as both contingent and productive. How situations are defined affects who is considered a relevant party to the interaction, what courses of action those parties can envision, and thus what outcomes follow. In a similar vein, Jervis recognized that events had no inherent meaning, that they had always to be filtered through and interpreted by human beings: “the interpretation of others’ action is rarely self-evident, but it is almost always important.”¹² He observed that “while the standard PD [Prisoner’s Dilemma] model points to four possible outcomes that need to be ranked, decision makers may define the situation differently—most frequently by ignoring the possibility of mutual restraint.” At times, he posited, “a lack of cooperation may be explained in significant measure by the actors’ inattention to the possibility of such an outcome.”¹³ It must be acknowledged that Jervis awkwardly discussed this issue in the context of actors’ preferences, as if the “definition of the situation” could be reduced simply to a preference ranking. But how situations are defined affects the very unit of analysis—and this, in turn, Jervis pointed out, affects whether we see the actors as “cooperating” or “defecting” and who we believe to have “won.”¹⁴ As Jervis once noted, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance thus indicated that the Carter administration intentionally framed the invasion of the Shaba province in Zaire “as an African—not an East-West problem.”¹⁵ Schelling had similarly observed the importance of defining the Cuban Missile Crisis as a Caribbean Crisis—as the Soviet Union preferred—or as a superpower crisis—as the United States insisted.¹⁶

Shaping Meaning: Strategy and Social Construction

¹⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 204-209, at 209, 205; see also 226-230.

¹¹ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” *World Politics* 40 (April 1988), 321.

¹² Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 336.

¹³ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 323.

¹⁴ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 329-331.

¹⁵ Quoted in Jervis, *System Effects*, 24.

¹⁶ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020 [1966]), 64.

To place interpretation at the analytical center of global politics is thus to recognize significant scope for the exercise of agency. Human beings do not merely take the world as it is, but they remake it. For Jervis, whose approach remained always grounded in psychology, this often took place in the confines of the human mind, in individuals' first-order beliefs and perceptions, in others' second-order beliefs and perceptions about others' beliefs and perceptions, and in how human agents responded, often in counterintuitive ways, to these first- and second-order beliefs and perceptions. But, on occasion, Jervis focused also on the mechanisms through which actors in global politics imparted meaning, making and remaking reality. Decades later, liberal constructivists would often treat the realm of ideas as, in Hugh Hecló's terms, an arena for "puzzling,"¹⁷ in which actors might be persuaded by the "unforced force of the better argument," à la Habermas.¹⁸ Decades earlier, Jervis started from more realist, if still constructivist, premises. His actors engaged meaning-making as a realm of competition, of "powering." They understood that social categories had material consequences, and thus they sought to bend those categories to their will and interest. However, they, to paraphrase Karl Marx, made meaning but not just as they pleased, not under circumstances they chose. For Jervis, social construction was a deeply strategic and power-laden process—but one that could not be reduced to material power alone.

Jervis paid most attention to the strategic construction of meaning in his work on signaling, particularly in *The Logic of Images*. The problem Jervis took up in this underappreciated classic is how actors convey their intentions in global politics, given the inherent problem of "cheap talk." Rationalists offer a straightforward answer to this puzzle: senders select their signals, and receivers interpret them, on the basis of cost, which, above some cut-point, constitutes a credible indicator of the actor's "type." But Jervis advanced a different, and far more constructivist, argument. Behavior, however "costly" it may be, does not seamlessly provide information, and verbal and symbolic communication is not mere "cheap talk." In fact, Jervis observed—we believe entirely correctly—that "while decision-makers rarely accept at face value others' accounts of the motives, goals, calculations, and perceptions that led to their decisions, this data is almost never ignored." In fact, he contended, "the actor who quickly, confidently, and consistently defines the situation in a given way can often convince the other that this picture is an accurate representation of the interaction, or at least that this is the situation as it appears to the actor, which is frequently all he needs to accomplish."¹⁹

Signals, he further argued, "are not natural; they are conventional. That is, they consist of statements and actions that the sender and receiver have endowed with meaning in order to accomplish certain goals."²⁰ During the Cold War, dispersing one's strategic bombers was interpreted as a signal that one was moving up the escalatory ladder, toward nuclear war. This action's power as a signal ironically derives from the fact that, as Jon Mercer notes, it "has no military significance—that's why the United States has ICBMs and submarines."²¹ As a signal whose meaning was "largely conventional," this action, Jervis maintained, could be deprived of significance, and a new signal could be adopted and invested with meaning in its

¹⁷ Hugh Hecló, *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden: From Relief to Income Maintenance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹⁸ See, among many others, Thomas Risse, "Let's Argue!: Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* 54:1 (2000): 1-39.

¹⁹ Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 174-175.

²⁰ Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 139.

²¹ Jon Mercer, "Rational Signaling Revisited," in James Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy, and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2013), 71.

stead: “The United States could announce that whenever it raised a flag with a mushroom cloud pattern over a missile base this meant that it was taking an international event very seriously.”²²

Yet Jervis conceived of processes of social construction as always deeply strategic. In his view, which shaped our own conception of the social world (even when we were not entirely aware of it!), socially sensitive political actors were not “cultural dopes” who blindly obeyed some “logic of appropriateness,” but rather were as a rule both culturally embedded and strategically sensitive.²³ For Jervis, investing and disinvesting particular signals with particular meanings—which he termed “coupling and decoupling”—was not merely a coordination game, akin to driving on the left or right side of the road. The power to define the meanings associated with certain signals was the power to define the range of actions available in given circumstances and which could tilt the outcomes of a conflict. Because there were concrete interests at stake, Jervis argued, leaders would not only strategically select signals that they believed would most likely convey—or in some cases, conceal—their intentions, but would seek to alter the meanings bound up with particular signals. Jervis took an even harder constructivist turn in elucidating actors’ efforts in global politics to shape common interpretations of motives: the “coupling” and “decoupling” of “indices.”²⁴

Notwithstanding his tendency in *The Logic of Images* to emphasize agency, however, Jervis was sensitive to the limits of agentic social construction. He was allergic to the voluntaristic individualism of liberalism. His social constructivism recognized that meanings were sometimes deeply sedimented, “taken for granted,” which impeded decoupling. He recognized the power of discursive formations that profoundly constituted the world within which individuals exercised agency. Thus he approvingly cited historians who attributed intense security competition early in the twentieth century to the prevalence of Social Darwinism, and he recognized that belief in the dominance of the military offense—the so-called “cult of the offensive”—was uniform and transnational.²⁵

Another such discursive formation that served, across Jervis’s career, as an abiding preoccupation was deterrence theory, specifically the interdependence of commitments and the need to uphold reputation.²⁶ A key axis of debate has been whether the underlying premise—that states have stable dispositions, as resolute or irresolute “types,” that guide their behavior across conflict zones—has merit. Jervis was at times skeptical,²⁷ which followed from his openness to contingent

²² Jervis, *Logic of Images*, 229.

²³ That said, Jervis did appreciate the power of habitual action (see “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 320), and thus anticipated the turn to unreflective action embodied by the “practice turn” and the “logic of habit,” represented respectively by the work of Vincent Pouliot and (Jervis student) Ted Hopf. See Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, eds., *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Ted Hopf, “The Logic of Habit in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 16:4 (2010): 539-561.

²⁴ Jervis, *Logic of Images*, Chapters 6-7.

²⁵ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 325-326.

²⁶ Jervis would surely have acknowledged the impact of the Vietnam War in critically shaping his intellectual persona and passions; he touched on it in Jervis, “How I Got Here,” ed., Diane Labrosse, *Learning the Scholar’s Craft Series*, 4 March 2020; <https://hdiplo.org/to/E198> and <https://issforum.org/essays/PDF/E198.pdf>.

²⁷ See, for instance, Jervis, *System Effects*, 168-171. But Jervis was on the whole fairly agnostic, and his views fluctuated. See, for instance, Jervis, “Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior,” in Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Behavior in the European Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20-50; *System Effects*, 171-173; and, most recently, Jervis, Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Don Casler, “Redefining the Debate Over Reputation and Credibility in International Security: Promises and Limits of New Scholarship,” *World Politics* 73:1 (2021): 167-203.

processes of “decoupling,” and his students’ research placed his intuition on more solid analytical and empirical footing.²⁸ But, he also acknowledged, “even if this view”—that actors’ have stable dispositions—“is false [...] the actor must be guided by it if others believe it”—and, by extension, even if they do not really believe it, if one believes that others really believe it. The result, as Jervis suggested, is to “require that a state’s foreign policy have a kind of perceived unity.”²⁹ Jervis always grasped that leaders may seek to act strategically, but that the existing “cultural toolkit,” in Ann Swidler’s influential later formulation, both enables and limits their capacity for strategic action.³⁰

In *The Logic of Images*, Jervis thus set out an ambitious intellectual agenda on the politics of contested meaning in global politics. Unrestrained by the intellectual history of “constructivism,” he gravitated toward a “strategic constructivism” that melded together two distinctive influences and disciplines—the rationalist economist Thomas Schelling and the sociologist Erving Goffman.³¹ Constructivists would take up this agenda only decades later, with little awareness or acknowledgment of Jervis’s important contributions. It was also an intellectual agenda that Jervis himself regrettably did not avidly pursue over the coming decades, as his research swung between its more rationalist and more psychological poles and as the influence of Goffman on his work waned. In his later publications, he expressed his “hope to return to the unfinished task of bringing signaling and perception into closer alignment.”³²

Nor should we push Jervis’s constructivism too far. While Jervis appreciated the role of intersubjective meanings in underpinning strategic action, his work did not pursue how these meanings were constructed, how they were historically rooted, or how they might change over time. Never fully able to escape individualism, Jervis saw discursive formations as ideologies, which exercised their impact by shaping individuals’ preferences,³³ rather than being more deeply constitutive. For instance, belief in deterrence logic, as encapsulated within the rhetoric of the domino theory, did not simply reside within individuals, as beliefs. As a dominant discursive formation, it was not easily displaced even when the wars legitimated in its name—notably the Vietnam War—proved disastrous. At times, moreover, Jervis suggested that there were inherent qualities of signals that made them more resonant; he did not see meanings as constructed “all of the way down.” Nevertheless, Jervis was adamant that rationalist analysis needed to take intersubjective meanings seriously, since it rested “on assumptions about each actor’s expectations about how the other will behave—expectations that form socially.”³⁴

Complexity and Contingency

Jervis thought himself a realist but, unlike some of his fellow realists, he wasn’t interested in developing a structural-determinist theory of international politics. He didn’t think such theorizing was possible or productive, partly because human beings had to make sense of structural forces, partly because the international system’s complexity generated unintended consequences, and partly because social interaction could reconfigure and even transform structures. Jervis was

²⁸ See especially Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965-1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 23; see also 168-171.

³⁰ Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51:2 (1986): 273-286.

³¹ As Jervis himself acknowledged decades later: Jervis, “Politics and Political Science,” 7.

³² Jervis, “Politics and Political Science,” 16.

³³ See the discussion in Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 325-326.

³⁴ Jervis, “Realism in the Study of World Politics,” 978.

thus deeply attentive to the central role of agency and contingency in global politics. To appreciate the contingency of social phenomena and outcomes is to recognize that the particular configuration that constitutes the analyst's object of interest could have been otherwise. Contingency similarly lies at the heart of the social constructivist worldview, which implies that social objects could have been constructed differently.³⁵ One may of course be sensitive to contingency without being a constructivist, but Jervis's reasons dovetailed nicely with constructivist sensibilities.

As Nuno Monteiro noted in a review of *System Effects*, Jervis's approach to the agent-structure problem mirrored social theoretic and IR constructivist arguments that emphasize the mutual constitution of structures and agents.³⁶ Jervis was of course skeptical of liberal dreams of transcending anarchy, and he never went as far as to say, à la Alexander Wendt, that "anarchy is what states make of it."³⁷ He found realism's fundamental insight that the international system's anarchic structure made competition among states, to a significant degree, inevitable, to be compelling. Yet *System Effects*—which he described as his favorite of all his books—provides countless examples of agent interaction transforming its environment, ranging from the natural world (the interaction between elephants and acacia trees) to individuals (how actions during "first contact" shape the emerging structure) to international relations. At times, Jervis limited the impact of interaction to characteristics of the agents themselves: "The capabilities, preferences, and beliefs of actors can also be changed by interaction."³⁸ But the consequences could also blur into features of the structure. Jervis observed that Argentina's invasion of the Falklands transformed the definition of the situation: it unified "British opinion against accepting humiliation and chang[ed] the issue for international audiences from the illegitimacy of colonialism to the illegitimacy of the use of force."³⁹ Likewise, he argued that interactions during the Cuban Missile Crisis altered the structure of the Cold War.

Jervis even went so far as to question the very distinction between agents and structures. The fact that agent interactions could have such deep transformative effects meant that "we can no longer fruitfully distinguish between actors and their environments, let alone say much about any element in isolation." In a characteristically lucid way, Jervis rendered this idea concrete by elucidating the impact of nuclear weapons, and decision-makers' response to them, on international anarchy. As he described, "We often refer to international situations as precarious, unstable, or dangerous. But, again, if statesmen perceive them as such and fear the consequences, they will act to reduce the danger—one reason why the Cuban Missile Crisis did not lead to war was that both sides felt this could be the outcome if they were not very careful. Nuclear weapons generally have this effect. Because statesmen dread all-out war, international politics is safer than it would otherwise be, and probably safer than if war were less destructive."⁴⁰

Second, Jervis dismissed structural determinism because the international environment always works through human beings. They are not automatons, reacting predictably to shifts in their environment. They are reflective, social creatures. Unlike many other realists, Jervis therefore saw a meaningful, albeit limited capacity for agency: "The failure to appreciate the fact that the behavior of the actors is in part responsible for the environment which later impinges on them," he wrote, "can lead

³⁵ On contingency and constructivism, see Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Nuno Monteiro, "We Can Never Study Any One Thing: Reflections on Systems Thinking and IR," *Critical Review* 24:3 (2012): 351-352.

³⁷ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46:2 (1992): 391-425.

³⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 59.

³⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 55.

⁴⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 59.

observers—and actors as well—to underestimate actors' influence."⁴¹ Jervis's stance on the agent-structure problem was nuanced. His actors were never romantic heroes who rose effortlessly above their circumstances. Their agency was always deeply embedded, simultaneously both made possible and confined by the context of action. Jervis was deeply appreciative of the contingency of systems' origins, believing that "many possible worlds are compatible with the basic laws of physics, chemistry, biology, and economics," but he was also attentive to dynamics of positive feedback that, once contingent starting points were established, locked in those initial contingent choices and produced "great stability after it has been operating for a time."⁴²

Jervis's focus on social interaction led him to emphasize the role of history and path dependence. "Problems arise in a context and out of a history," he observed. "When clear points of choice occur, they are often structured by the settings in which they arise." In his account, those settings could be the result of countless factors ranging from "industrial vagaries" to "unexpected events" to "the accidents of a change in relevant laws."⁴³ A superficial reader of Jervis's oeuvre might find that surprising, since Jervis's method—such as it was—seemed often to treat history as a grab-bag of disconnected examples with which to illustrate his theoretical points. While this is a sin for which professional historians often lambaste IR scholars, Jervis was never the target of this perennial charge. The historians, reading more deeply, rightly saw Jervis as a friend and fellow traveler, who appreciated that events took place within history. Jervis thus noted, in his critique of game theory, that "where the players are is strongly influenced by where they have been." As an example, he cites Britain's failure to cooperate with Germany and restrain Russia in 1914 with reference to its having done so in the immediately preceding crisis and the resulting fear that doing so again would have devastating consequences for the Triple Entente.⁴⁴ Put differently, like a good historian, Jervis was pointing out that many cases in international politics are not independent. They occur within streams of events that are causally linked, and "earlier incidents altered actors' perceptions and calculations, and sometimes their basic preferences and values."⁴⁵ While statistical databases would treat these crises as independent "cases," Jervis implied that this was an unsustainable position.

Jervis's commitment to historical context and contingency ultimately led him to be skeptical, even more than some "mainstream constructivists" about the possibility of a predictive social science. Causation is certainly not absent in Jervis's accounts, and he argued that it was possible to have some theoretical generalization. In *System Effects*, for example, Jervis set out numerous abstract mechanisms that operate across diverse realms. But he questioned whether "the discipline's desire to pin down causation by eliminating selection effects, reciprocal causation, and endogeneity ... leads to a downplaying of the importance of these phenomena not—or not only—as threats to causal inference but as fundamental forces operating in the world."⁴⁶

Limits of Jervis's Constructivism

As we have already suggested in the preceding discussions, Jervis was not a thoroughgoing constructivist. First, while Jervis was not a liberal voluntarist, who saw people as capable of making unencumbered choices, he often remained indebted to the liberal individualism of social psychology. True, he saw regulative, prescriptive norms as stabilizing features of international

⁴¹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 56.

⁴² Jervis, *System Effects*, 155-161, at 156.

⁴³ Jervis, "Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation," 320.

⁴⁴ Jervis, "Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation," 321.

⁴⁵ Jervis "System Effects Revisited," *Critical Review* 24:3 (2012), 403.

⁴⁶ Jervis "System Effects Revisited," 395.

politics, and he put significant stock at times in morality.⁴⁷ He grasped and acknowledged the significance of conventions, not only in signaling, but also in determining what constitutes “defection.”⁴⁸ But very often Jervis sought to collapse collective phenomena back into individualist, or at least aggregative, ones. His very vocabulary—preferences, beliefs, perceptions—reflected his individualist ontology. While Jervis appreciated how past social interactions could reshape these characteristics of individuals, he was rarely comfortable with a truly social ontology that attributed power to *collective* phenomena—from norms to discourses to dominant narratives. For Jervis the psychologist, these did not exist except insofar as individuals believed in them, expressed them, and adhered to them. His was often the world of the subjective, not the intersubjective.

Second, while Jervis, whose searching mind was deeply catholic did at times recognize the power of norms, conventions, narratives, discourses, and the like, they did not become a focus of his analytical energies. *The Logic of Images* might have become a shortcut to constructivism if Jervis had centered his analytical energies on the “coupling” and “decoupling” of “signals” and “indices.” Instead, he followed the path of cognitive psychology, to understand how signals were interpreted by their receivers. As a result, he devoted little attention to how actors invested signals and symbols with new meanings and why particular efforts came to fruition while others fell short. He did not explore how such conscious strategic efforts became unquestioned “common sense” and how their deeply political origins became obscured. Bob supported such work—we and others are living proof!—but he did not, except on rare occasions and in offhand passing comments, contribute directly to such research himself.

Robert Jervis and the Future of Constructivism

Jervis’s wide-ranging insights into international relations continue to influence our own work, and we think his insights should shape ongoing and future research that is grounded in social constructivist commitments. Constructivists would be well served to revisit, reengage, and build upon Jervis’s strategic constructivist approach to contested meaning and communication in international politics. Jervis rightly noted that the literature on signaling devotes much more attention to the ones issuing the signal, and their possible reasons for doing so, than to the signal recipients and how they interpret the signal. There is, Jervis observed, often a disconnect between the two, and how targets receive and make sense of signals is of equal, if not greater, importance.⁴⁹ Jervis similarly noted, in his seminal article on “security regimes,” that such regimes are possible only if “actors ... believe that others share the value they place on mutual security and cooperation”—a condition that he deemed both necessary and “not trivial.”⁵⁰ We have only to look at our own interactions with others to grasp how common miscommunication is, how often meanings are not shared. Meetings of the minds are all too rare, Jervis would note, because no two human beings have precisely the same experiences, occupy identical positions, and process information in precisely the same way. Divergent mental schemas underpin different motivated biases and perceptions.⁵¹

Constructivists often assert that ‘shared knowledge’ and ‘social facts’ constitute international politics. They commonly presume that the constellations of meaning associated with these intersubjective phenomena—from international norms to social roles—are widely shared. This is ironically not a far cry from the rationalist presumption that all actors naturally grasp

⁴⁷ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 344-348, at 348.

⁴⁸ Jervis, “Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation,” 331.

⁴⁹ Jervis, “Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inferences and Projecting Images,” in Kristen R. Monroe, ed., *Political Psychology* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 293-309. See also Jervis, *How Statesmen Think: the Psychology of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 107-124.

⁵⁰ Jervis, “Security Regimes,” in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 177.

⁵¹ See Jervis’s extensive discussion of such matters in his *Perception and Misperception*.

the meaning of signals the same way. Just as Jervis cautioned against the latter presupposition, and suggested that human psychology could explain the significant slippage between the intention of the signal's sender and the inference(s) made by the signal's observer(s), he would caution against the former—and constructivists would be well advised to heed his warning. Actors in global politics, from diplomats to officials at non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to violent non-state actors, differ in their positions and may well differ too in how they interpret and relate to intersubjective phenomena. Social objects do not act in the international arena, people do—and the act of interpretation is the pathway that leads from social phenomena to individual action. Constructivists, in our view, too often treat the meaning of social objects as settled rather than contested. The contested practice of meaning-making should center at the heart of constructivist theorizing about international politics. This is not synonymous with psychologists' focus on perception, but constructivists may be productively inspired by the psychological insight into the multiplicity of meanings that can, and are, attributed to social objects. Social life is composed of both common-sense and contested realms. The scope of those realms varies across both space and time, and political actors have good reason to devote their energies to seeking to set the unquestioned common-sense foundations of our world. Constructivist IR should not proceed from the presumption of either settled shared meaning or ever-ongoing contestation. It should devote itself precisely to understanding how social objects move across realms, in part as the production of conscious, strategic political action; why social objects fall into one or the other of these realms at different times; how settled constellations of meaning produce social outcomes; and how common sense becomes destabilized.

Second, Jervis's emphasis on interaction should inspire scholars to look more closely at process and interaction as sites of social construction and contestation, instead of emphasizing settled normative structures and constraint. Constructivism in the U.S. gained attention as a critique of structuralism, particularly neorealism's emphasis on the determinative effects of anarchy. Yet constructivists long struggled with the agent-structure problem as well, tacking between structure and agency, with little idea of how to bring them together. Some focused on how structures—normative structures rather than material ones—shaped agents' behavior, principally through socialization into the dominant rules of the game. Others highlighted the central role of transnational actors, who were often located in NGOs, in introducing new norms into and thereby reweaving the social fabric of global politics. The first group offered a more social structural determinism, seemingly with little room for agency; the second group offered appreciation of radical agency, seemingly unencumbered by structure.

Jervis's work on international systems may provide a way out. It draws our attention not to the macro-level (structure) or micro-level (agents), but to the meso-level of interaction, to “how action is situated within an interconnected and interactive system.”⁵² There are parallels here between Jervis's work and the work of “relationalist” constructivists. Relationalists, like Jervis in *System Effects*, emphasize the “theoretical and analytical significance of connections, ties, transactions and other kinds of relations among entities” which “give rise to both actors and the environments in which they find themselves.”⁵³ Starting with interaction may be a more productive path forward, allowing for a fuller, more vivid picture of the processes by which agents and structures constitute each other.

Moving to the meso-level comes with some theoretical cost. As Jervis reflected 15 years later on *System Effects*, “my book could be seen as anti-theoretical, not in the sense of abandoning abstractions, but rather in questioning the utility of a unified overarching theory.”⁵⁴ If one aspires to universal theories that apply over time and space, focusing on contingent interactions, developing general mechanisms that combine in unpredictable ways, and elucidating meso-level processes will

⁵² Jervis, “System Effects Revisited,” 396.

⁵³ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, “Reclaiming the Social: Relationalism in Anglophone International Studies,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32:5 (2019), 2.

⁵⁴ Jervis, “System Effects Revisited,” 396.

feel unsatisfying, even slippery. But Jervis's contributions stand as a reminder that one need not be a grand theorist, or offer universal, invariant models of world politics, to produce significant contributions to international relations theory.

Bob Jervis may not have been a card-carrying constructivist, but his attention to strategic action amidst contested social meaning and interpretation continue to inform our own work and, we believe, set out a productive research program for constructivists more generally. We hope that many will take up the charge—and give Bob Jervis, constructivist fellow traveler, his due.

BOB JERVIS: JACK OF ALL TRADES, MASTER OF ALL
BY JAMES GOLDGEIER, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, AND ELIZABETH N. SAUNDERS,
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We're from different generations, and we were never formally his students, but we both found ourselves drawn to Robert Jervis and his work. Other colleagues and students have written eloquently about his wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, his mentorship, and his many, many contributions to our field. But perhaps one more tribute can help tally the debt we owe him in international relations, since our work would not have been the same without his path-breaking efforts. Bob not only shaped us as individual scholars, but he also had profound effects on our work together. When writing jointly, we often have conversations with each other that begin with some version of “what would Jervis say about this?”

Jim's dissertation work and first book focused on Soviet leaders; Elizabeth's dissertation and first book addressed U.S. presidents and the use of force. Each project was heavily dependent on Bob's classic *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.¹

In the late 1980s, Jim was trying to assess the approach Soviet leaders took to international bargaining. The literature at the time was oriented toward understanding Soviet foreign policy largely as a constant, informed by history, culture, and ideology. Jim was trying to come up with an explanation for why, in his view, Soviet leaders differed in important ways in their foreign policy behavior, so naturally, he turned to Jervis. Reading back through *Perception and Misperception*, he became completely absorbed in the short five-page appendix to chapter six. “Especially for a statesman who rises to power through the political processes (as opposed to a career diplomat),” wrote Jervis, “domestic politics has supplied both his basic political concepts and the more detailed lessons about what strategies and tactics are appropriate to reach desired goals.”² There it was. At that moment, Jim knew exactly how to make sense of what he was finding in studying Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev.

Elizabeth still returns regularly to her well-loved, dog-eared copy of that book, particularly chapter four, which outlines what makes foreign policy decision-makers different. It helps put in perspective charges that decision-makers are “biased” or “out of touch.” Jervis argued that “Consistency can largely be understood in terms of the strong tendency for people to see what they expect to see and to assimilate incoming information to pre-existing images.”³ But this was not an automatic strike against the quality of their decision-making, any more than it was a guarantee of success. Jervis warned that “scholars too often apply the labels of close-mindedness and cognitive distortion without understanding the necessary role of pre-existing beliefs in the perception and interpretation of new information.”⁴

Jervis argued that biases are what make decision-makers who they are—as citizens, we want them to have short-cuts and prior experience they can draw on in crises, lenses through which to quickly sort the vast incoming array of information so they can make decisions under pressure. These biases can be pernicious and do not necessarily lead to good decisions, and

¹ James M. Goldgeier, *Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy: Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 283.

³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 117.

⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 117.

indeed can lead to pathologies in decision-making.⁵ But they also play a vital role in efficient decision-making. The recent revival of interest in elite decision-making confirms and extends Jervis' influence in this area of research.⁶

Jervis also showed how the study of individuals can be systematic. His discussion of the deterrence and the spiral model in chapter three of *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* is influential for more reasons than there are words in the English language; one is that we can explain how mental models affect decision-making with a parsimonious theory of two such models. One can argue about the details, but it is hard not to admire the theoretical simplicity of his argument about how different leaders think in crises.

Jervis did not shy away from questioning his own biases or asking hard questions about what might blind him to evidence that did not support his line of thinking. He was relentless in asking questions like, “how would we know?” and wrote an article about whether leaders matter with that very question in its title.⁷ We all try to teach students to address the issue of how we would know if we were wrong, but Jervis practiced what he preached, even in the (many, many) areas in which he had well-known arguments. He thought hard about how to think about historical evidence and what it could and could not tell us about different models of the world.

To produce such influential work on so many major areas of international relations—the nuclear revolution, deterrence theory, the role of individuals and political psychology—was already an enormous contribution.⁸ But Jervis also played many other roles—editor at the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs series, founder of H-Diplo/ISSF, chair of the CIA's Historical Review Panel—that influenced, directly or indirectly, so many scholars, including a huge number of Ph.D. students and junior faculty who were not officially under his tutelage at Columbia. He was generous with his encyclopedic knowledge of multiple disciplines, dropping highly specific references or pointers to historical evidence into reviews. An irony is that his work on individuals stressed the role of specific knowledge, but he had so much of it that he qualified as a Jack of All Trades, Master of All.

Echoing so many other tributes, we also fell under the spell of Bob's intellectual energy and curiosity. It was, of course, impossible to say no to Bob. When he reached out to us to write for an H-Diplo roundtable on presidential tapes, we

⁵ Cautionary tales include Philip Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, revised edition); Dominic DP Johnson, *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁶ Among others, see Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, D. Alex Hughes, and David G. Victor, “The Cognitive Revolution and the Political Psychology of Elite Decision Making,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11:2 (2013): 368-386; Hafner-Burton, Stephan Haggard, David A. Lake, and Victor, “The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations,” *International Organization* 71:S1 (2017): S1-S31; Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Joshua D. Kertzer, “Re-Assessing Elite-Public Gaps in Political Behavior,” *American Journal of Political Science* (2020). For reviews, see Daniel Krmaric, Stephen C. Nelson, and Andrew Roberts, “Studying Leaders and Elites: The Personal Biography Approach,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23:1 (2020): 133-151; Saunders, “Elites in the Making and Breaking of Foreign Policy,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022): 219-240.

⁷ Robert Jervis, “Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?” *Security Studies* 22:2 (2013): 153-179.

⁸ In addition to *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, other major works by Jervis that have had tremendous influence across time include *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978): 167-214; *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Even his lesser known works are gems; see for example his article, “The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24:4 (December 1980): 563-592.

immediately (well, almost immediately) said yes.⁹ What's fascinating about the tapes is the fact that while they seem straightforward – the scholar as fly on the wall listening in to government conversations – what makes them most interesting is what is not straightforward at all about them. Which conversations were taped, and which were not? Perhaps most importantly, what did participants take away from the conversations that we as scholars are listening to?

One of our favorite articles is Fred Greenstein and Richard Immerman's article on the meeting to discuss Laos between President Dwight Eisenhower and President-elect John F. Kennedy the day before the latter was inaugurated.¹⁰ Four individuals wrote up their notes from the meeting, and each of them came away from the conversation with different beliefs about what was said. A tape of that meeting would tell us what we think was said, but that is not as relevant as what the participants thought was said—their perceptions and misperceptions. The disparate notes from that meeting offer a cautionary tale for scholars, and one that we understand better thanks to the insights of Bob Jervis.

To say that Robert Jervis will be missed in the field of international relations is to say the sky is blue. But there can be no doubt that when confronting new research questions, evaluating historical evidence, or watching international events, we and so many others will continue to ask ourselves, “what would Jervis say?”

⁹ Matthew Evangelista, Goldgeier and Saunders, Luke A. Nichter, and Marc Trachtenberg, in H-Diplo/ISSF Forum 25 on the Importance of White House Presidential Tapes in Scholarship, ed., Jervis and Diane Labrosse, 2 November 2020; <https://issforum.org/forums/25-tapes>.

¹⁰ Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, “What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception,” *The Journal of American History* 79:2 (September 1992): 568-587.

REMEMBERING ROBERT JERVIS, MY ACADEMIC HERO BY LORI HELENE GRONICH, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

It is a pleasure to offer my reflections on Professor Robert Jervis. He was my teacher, my colleague, and my friend for over forty years, and he will always be an academic hero to me. His inquiring mind, penetrating insights, respectful nature, and huge heart first drew me into his orbit, and although we were seldom in the same city for very long, his impact on my understanding of international relations theory, the causes of war and peace, and the choices of foreign policy decision-makers has been profound. I am so very grateful to Richard Immerman, Mark Trachtenberg, and Diane Labrosse for including me in this tribute, and honored to be a part of his legacy.

I first met Professor Jervis at UCLA when he was teaching the graduate-field seminar in international relations. What I noticed about him first was that he sported a jaunty goatee and had a voice that could border on the monotonic, especially when he was lecturing. As time went by, though, it was his substance rather than his style that compelled my attention. His broad and deep knowledge of a variety of literatures, his pointed assessments of the work and his repeated references to historical examples that I had never known about, including the Fashoda incident, captivated me. Even now, I vividly remember two phrases he used repeatedly. To illustrate the dilemma of discerning circumstance from choice in foreign policy, he would quote McGeorge Bundy's assessment that "Pleiku's are like streetcars." That is, provocations that could be used to justify escalation during wartime occur so regularly that deferring any response until a later date is always an option. When I later met Mr. Bundy at a small seminar convened by Professor Jervis, it was hard to believe I was in the same room with these two very different men discussing the Vietnam War. The other expression Professor Jervis often used to repeat was "and then there's France." Over time, I learned that this was his way of underscoring that the French, unlike most international actors, often behaved in unpredictable ways. To him, France was always the outlier, the exception to any rule. My class paper for Professor Jervis was difficult to craft, but he liked my analysis, and recommended that I continue to study international relations. He also advised me to learn about two additional fields: American government and comparative politics. I did, and found the work very rewarding.

Ironically, I didn't get to know the significance of his own contributions to the study of foreign policy until I was writing my dissertation. Part of this may have been due to his inclination to underplay the significance of his own work, and part of it may have been prompted by the way I was introduced to the field of social psychology. At that time, the traditional focus on "hot" beliefs and emotions was being overtaken by studies that drew attention to "cold" perspectives involving unconscious judgments and biases. I eventually came to see that the two-stage inference process Professor Jervis highlighted in his work on misperception was fully resonant with my emerging view of the decision-making process, but by then he had moved on to Columbia University.¹

Without Professor Jervis, UCLA remained a vibrant intellectual home for learning. But the atmosphere was fundamentally different. Professor Jervis had always treated everyone with respect and generosity, but many of his male tenure-line colleagues were not nearly as kind or considerate. Most found it necessary to make unwanted sexual advances toward graduate student women, and few, if any, ever apologized. This certainly made us feel like we were faculty prey, and their behavior at on-campus meetings and off-campus activities often undermined our trust in our mentors. If more faculty men had been like Professor Jervis, a person who clearly loved and valued his wife and children, life in Los Angeles would have been so much easier.

When I moved from California to New York, I got to know Bob as a colleague and a friend. It was then that I got a glimpse of the research and writing techniques that made him so productive. The first thing I noticed was his habit of dictating

¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976); Lori Helene Gronich, "Expertise and Naïveté in Decision-Making: Theory, History, and the Trump Administration," ed., Diane Labrosse, H-Diplo/International Security Studies Forum Policy Series America and the World—2017 and Beyond, May 3, 2017. <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/Policy-Roundtable-1-5AH.pdf>.

letters and drafts. At the time, dictation was a luxury for those who had secretarial support or the skills to write their own software packages. I was jealous, for I had neither, but when I could afford it, I finally invested in a speech recognition program, and I have used it ever since. The second thing I observed about Bob's way of working was his meticulous use of a filing system to support every aspect of his projects. His files consisted of an amazing collection of clever quotes, notes on papers and publications, and an extensive array of historical case materials. He seemed to update it regularly, adding and perhaps subtracting things as the spirit moved him. Sometimes the entries were prompted by after-hours seminars he hosted for local political scientists whose enthusiasm was fueled by a shared passion for ideas and his special stash of coffee and Café Milano cookies. At other times entries were provoked by the small conferences he convened bringing together academic investigators and policy actors to share and develop insights. No matter what the context though, being in New York with Professor Jervis was always a delight. His leadership regularly sparked new ideas and created opportunities for everyone to grow and thrive.

Bob continued to be an important part of my academic life, even after I moved away from New York. He thoroughly reviewed my work and often included me in discussions about foreign policy and international relations theory. At one point he even prompted me to write an essay on the Trump administration and its likely decision-making patterns. He was a wonderful correspondent and a pithy email writer, and perhaps his most unheralded contribution to the discipline was his longtime chairmanship of the CIA Historical Review panel. In this capacity he used his talents for discretion, deal-making, and persistence to push the intelligence community to declassify many American foreign policy documents, making them available to researchers and policy analysts around the world.

Bob rarely seemed to travel far from home. He gave the impression that he preferred research and writing and the company of his family to plane or train rides in any direction. He did attend some professional meetings, and when he saw me in the halls at conferences, he always stopped to say hello. One time really stands out in my memory. We were walking in completely different directions when he suddenly caught my eye and leaped over a big red velvet rope to share his wonderful news. His daughter had just made him a grandpa, and his joy was clearly boundless. I think I remember him jumping up and down and showing photographs of the family, but maybe that's just my memory playing tricks on me. What I know for sure is that his growing family brought him more pleasure than all the professional prizes and awards he ever received.

Bob Jervis is my academic hero. He is an amazing example of good works and fair play. Even today, whenever I face a tough professional decision, I ask myself "what would Bob say," and then follow what I believe would be his advice. Professor Jervis was a remarkable, smart, warm, generous, and exceptionally thoughtful human being and a happy and playful granddad. I am lucky to have had the privilege of knowing him and will always cherish his memory.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF BOB
BY JONATHAN HASLAM, CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

The influence of Bob Jervis in the field of international relations - which he never viewed as a mere sub-branch of political science - was far wider than the flattering tributes thus far have indicated; not merely because he knew and interacted with such a wide array of academics, and not only because he regularly crossed the threshold back and forth from political science into history without it ever occurring to him that he might need a *laissez-passer*. H-Diplo/ISSF came to personify his tireless eclecticism.

Not least of his reasons was that the theory of international relations seemed to be going nowhere agonisingly slowly and that long troubled him. He also reached out across from the world of ideas to the adjacent worlds of strategy and secret intelligence, and the history thereof. One of my favourite and most persuasive case studies for teaching a course on secret intelligence was the post-mortem CIA study of the US failure to anticipate the Islamist revolution in Iran.¹ Until recently I had no idea that Bob was the author.

His pathbreaking work in the sixties, applying the recent findings in behavioural social psychology to the world of international politics, was certainly attempted by others; yet what made such a difference was not only his characteristic mastery of both fields but the acuteness of his judgement in teasing out the wheat from the chaff and laying everything out so lucidly.² Even when I was an undergraduate who had also absorbed what social psychology had to offer, my attempts to summarise his findings without using his exact words proved an impossible task; they had become inextricably embedded in my mind along with the subject matter. As a consequence of this, the first foray into research I ever made was that of applying his findings to the misperception of British intentions by the Soviet Union - the fear of war - in the twenties. It would never have occurred to me without having read and absorbed Jervis.

As a senior colleague Bob never let me down. Whether history, political theory or international relations were concerned, for Jervis sentiment never entered into it. This had its good and bad sides. Whatever I wrote, however, as a judge of its quality and as a referee for jobs he was utterly dependable when called upon. For me he was a mainstay. It was all about character as much as the power of mind. On the personal level Bob was a man of the utmost integrity. This was a flaw as well as a strength. If anything could lead him astray it was this, because he expected others, particularly friends, to be as honest as he was.

We fell out briefly only when I had to contend with manifest obstruction over the failure to declassify decades old secret intelligence while I was working on the Nixon administration and the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. We disagreed on the level of openness of the intelligence community.

These were rare exceptions, however. Bob was not by nature a partisan player. He celebrated difference and had cause to lament "our conformist profession."³ He rarely showed his Democrat convictions, appearing to be above party, entirely aloof from the usual crossfire. It was striking, for instance, that, for all their differences in approach to the subject, when Ken and Helen Waltz tired of Berkeley - apparently it is possible - Ken found a second home at Columbia with Jervis: the scene of his doctoral work, where for a decade they ran a highly challenging seminar jointly for some very lucky graduate students; and, to my regret, I only managed witness one of them.

¹ Obituary, *Washington Post*, 14 December 2021.

² Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics* 20:3 (April 1968): 454-479.

³ E-mail of 26 June 2020.

ROBERT JERVIS: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF THE POST-MORTEM BY RICHARD IMMERMAN, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Bob Jervis was renowned for the post-mortems that he wrote on some of the Intelligence Community's (IC) most notorious and controversial analytic reports and estimates. These post-mortems contributed considerably to Bob's emergence as the "dean" of intelligence studies, to borrow the title bestowed on him in the first round of this forum by Dick Betts, another titan in the field.¹ Moreover, although I never discussed his scholarly trajectory in any detail with him (I can hardly imagine that conversation), I'm confident that the research and writing that he did at the invitation of Robert Bowie, Jimmy Carter's Director of the CIA's National Foreign Assessment Center, in connection with the production of the post-mortem on the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 served as a catalyst for the greater attention Bob paid to intelligence from the 1980s up to the tragic day that he passed away. That post-mortem, combined with the equally important and influential one he wrote on the IC's flawed assessments of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction program, served as the foundation for his capstone book, *Why Intelligence Fails*. Initially published in 2010, it became an instant classic and is certain to remain at the very top of the canon on intelligence studies.²

Many of the contributors to Part I of this forum predictably and appropriately highlight and comment on both these post-mortems and *Why Intelligence Fails*, as I do in my introduction to it.³ My purpose in writing this short essay for Part II is to contextualize Bob's post-mortems by providing what in my judgment is a revealing supplement to them that is far less known. I stumbled upon this document while reviewing my email correspondence with Bob (I very much regret that I did not archive this correspondence more systematically) following his passing. Writing to me on an unrelated personal matter in February 2011, Bob attached what he titled "Post-mortem Plan and Questions." He explained, "I'm helping the IC with the Egypt post-mortem," adding that "I'm not sure what that will entail." He planned to travel down to the CIA's campus in Langley, Virginia later that week to discuss the project. "I am not at all sure they will do it right," he concluded.⁴

That concluding sentence signals Bob's approach to the assignment, his priorities, and his expertise. By 2011 his experience with post-mortems was extensive. I lack sources to compare his experience with that of others, but especially in terms of the time and effort he put into them, and their rigor, he almost certainly was in a league of his own. Hence when he worried about whether "they will do it right," he had a reliable baseline from which to judge. What is more, without minimizing the intellectual satisfaction that Bob received from these projects, and the extent to which they became grist for his scholarly mill, his goal from the outset, as is evident from his work plan (see below), was for these post-mortems to serve the interests of the IC by provoking introspection and providing lessons learned. (Bob appreciated the distinction between the dedicated post-mortems to which he contributed and the case studies produced by the CIA's lessons-learned program, which uniformly collected dust on the CIA library's shelves). The first bullet point of his outline identified the production of a post mortem as "a way of increasing IC capacity."⁵ Although, as he made explicit in the final article he wrote, "Why

¹ Richard K. Betts, "Bob Jervis: A Man Without Enemies," in Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *H-Diplo|ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis: Part I*; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>.

² Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). See also Jervis, "Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failures," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29 (February 2006): 3-52.

³ Richard H. Immerman, "Introduction: The Incomparable Robert Jervis," *H-Diplo|ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis*.

⁴ Jervis e-mail to Immerman with attachment, February 14, 2011 (author's possession).

⁵ Jervis email to Immerman, February 14, 2011.

Postmortems Fail,” Bob was under no illusion that his postmortems were likely to alter dramatically how the CIA went about doing its business. He never wavered from this goal of increasing IC capacity.⁶

Bob did not subsequently write anything about this post-mortem, nor did he speak about it, at least not to me. It may never have been completed. (I have heard indirectly that it was.) If it was, the political environment, then and now, bodes ill for its declassification. Because we were communicating over email, Bob identified the subject only as “Egypt.” Yet it’s easy to infer the specifics. Encouraged by the overthrow of Tunisia’s President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011, anti-government protests erupted on Egypt’s National Police Day two weeks later. Tens of thousands of protestors gathered in Cairo and other cities, and their numbers and reach grew over the following days. Long-time Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak responded with curfews, violent repression, and even a few concessions. The protests only intensified. On February 11 Mubarak resigned, and on February 13 Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution, and declared that it would exercise governing power for six months or until a new elections and a referendum on the constitution could be held.⁷ I received Bob’s email with the attached work plan for the Egyptian post-mortem the following day, precisely a month after the anti-Mubarak protests first broke out.

The logic of examining the reporting and analyses of the Egyptian Revolution from start to finish, and the weeks if not months leading up to it, is compelling. Still, I have no way of knowing when the IC and who in the IC decided to prepare a post-mortem on it, or when it solicited Bob’s assistance. What is certain is that he had little advance notice prior to putting together his recommendations about how to proceed and identifying what questions to address. Further, he makes explicit in the document that he sent to me, which he labeled “revised,” that he had not received a briefing on either the intended scope of the project or the time and resources that the IC budgeted for it. Was it to be completed “quick and dirty or slower,” and how far back in time should it begin? Most fundamentally, who was the intended audience, and what did the IC expect the project to yield? Would the CIA’s Product Evaluation Staff or the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s (ODNI) Office of Analytic Integrity and Standards contribute? Perhaps the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence might also?

Notwithstanding the imprecision of the charge, the work plan shows that Bob was able in probably less than a week to take with him to Langley an extraordinarily constructive document because it reflected his prior experience, his extraordinary scholarship, and his profound understanding of the IC’s organization and mission. The plan is insightful and sophisticated. It also anticipates areas in which the IC’s work and its work product likely came up short and therefore the IC should seek to improve in the future.

Bob’s destination that Thursday must have been the Langley campus. The CIA Original Headquarters Building (OHB) continues to house the National Intelligence Council (NIC) even though National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) are products of the ODNI, and the CIA remains responsible for most of the all-source intelligence products that a post-mortem on the Egyptian Revolution would doubtless feature. He probably at a minimum nevertheless planned to visit the headquarters of the ODNI at Liberty Crossing II near Virginia’s Tyson’s Corner, the Defense Intelligence Agency at Joint Base Anacostia–Bolling in Washington, and the National Security Agency in Fort Meade, Maryland.

The reason goes beyond their reporting on Egypt. As his work plan makes clear, Bob understood the need to assess the extent to which different IC elements and offices collaborated with one another and shared information; whether these different elements and offices, and for that matter individual analysts, differed in their judgments; and what if any peer review process was conducted of any of the products, internally within the elements and offices or jointly. Bob would have

⁶ Jervis, “Why Postmortems fail,” *PNAS* 119 (January 13, 2022), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2116638118>.

⁷ Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), “Arab Uprising: The State of the Egyptian Uprising,” *POMEPS Briefings* 6 (September 7, 2011), https://www.pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/POMEPS_BriefBooklet6_Egypt_web.pdf/.

wanted to ensure that the post-mortem team had license to interview analysts and office managers as well as access to a comprehensive set of products.

Some of Bob's most salient questions related to concerns that he had long held and expressed. When assessing the CIA's estimates of the stability of and threats to the Shah's regime in Iran, he had been struck by the paucity of resources and expertise that the agency had devoted to the issue and the compartmentalization of those analysts who "worked" it.⁸ Only someone who remained as engaged with the IC as Bob was over the subsequent three decades would sufficiently have appreciated the extent to which that challenge remained. He advised that the post-mortem investigate whether the resources—based on both analytic and collection requirements—were adequate, and, even if they were, whether the same could be said about the level of expertise and language capabilities. Did the IC's emphasis on counterterrorism come at the expense of its attention to more traditional threats, and compared to regional targets such as Iran and Iraq, had the community relegated relatively stable Egypt to something of a "backwater" status? In this regard, he wrote that the post-mortem must evaluate the pre-crisis reporting as much if not more than that beginning on January 14 and keep a careful lookout for antecedents that analysts had identified, mistaken as precedents, or ignored.

Further, that reporting had to drill down below the level of Mubarak, his regime, and his supporters. Because "our policy was to encourage democracy, but of a top-down, elite driven type (underscoring in the original)," he asked, did that lead the IC "to an underestimate of the possibilities of unrest from the bottom?" Even if they did not underestimate these possibilities, did they communicate the prospect of a revolution with the language required to get the attention of policymakers? Had analysts become so risk averse since Iraq that they omitted from their estimates scenarios that they judged unlikely or, because of gaps in their intelligence, in which they had low confidence? Perhaps even more importantly, were they derelict in their duty by shielding policymakers from discomfiting "news"? Did they speak truth to power?

Bob directly linked to the murky issue of politicization the questions he formulated regarding the prospect that the IC had assessed a revolution from below as unlikely because it followed the lead of policymakers. While disputes about whether intelligence had been politicized have raged since the War in Vietnam, they became central to the historiography of George W. Bush's decision to take the United States into a "war of choice" in Iraq, most notably in terms of the production and consequence of the 2003 NIE on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program. Bob was among those scholars who argued that while the NIE and attendant products were serious flawed and riddled with misjudgments, the intelligence on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and WMD had not been politicized, despite the efforts by Bush administration officials to do so. It did not need to be because the IC, the NIC above all, suffered from the same preconceptions as did the administration, and what is more, its judgments were reasonable given the deficient quality of the intelligence reporting.⁹

This post-mortem "assigned" to Bob in February 2011, he consequently recognized, could not avoid considering that the intelligence on Egypt had been politicized. He had not revised his judgment that, as professionals, analysts were far less vulnerable to skewing their conclusions so that they conformed to policymakers' preferences than many observers, including scholars, contended. As he wrote in his work plan, his concern was "Not politicization in the normal sense, but [the] impact of policy on what intelligence was thinking about (& what it was ignoring)." Put another way, Bob understood that too often poor tradecraft was mistaken for politicization. By searching for signs of the latter, the post-mortem could expose the former, which he deemed far more pervasive and fundamental. The post-mortem that Bob hoped the IC would produce

⁸ Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 52-54.

⁹ In addition to *Why Intelligence Fails*, 131-36; 171-74, see Jervis "Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failures: The Case of Iraq," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29 (February 2006): 3-52. For an opposing argument, see Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 139-184. Because this essay contributes to a forum that pays tribute to Bob's legacy, I must point out that *Fixing the Facts* was a volume in the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs series that Bob co-founded and co-edited.

would hold the IC's reporting on Egypt to the analytic tradecraft standards (surfacing underlying assumptions, identifying alternate scenarios, and more) that had been established and institutionalized after the Iraq WMD debacle.¹⁰

Topping the list of these standards was the quality, reliability, and scope of the intelligence itself—the evidence. More than he had at the time of the Iranian Revolution, Bob had come to appreciate that the IC's employment of the term “all-source” intelligence did not necessarily mean that judgments emerged from intelligence from all sources. Collaboration among agencies and the integration of their respective “silos” remained aspirational, and information sharing was a work in progress. So the post-mortem had to evaluate whether policymakers were receiving the right intelligence in the right form and at the right time. That included open-source intelligence. There would be much value added to a post-mortem, Bob's work plan underscored, if it addressed analysts' long-standing fetishization of “secret intelligence.” The post-mortem should not only assess how and how much analysts drew on open sources, but also compare this intelligence to that collected by covert means. To Bob, conducting a content analysis of the press coverage could prove very illuminating, and he even provided examples of columns.

The emphasis Bob placed on exploring how much analysts drew on open sources was inseparable from what became something of a pet peeve of his—analytic outreach.¹¹ Owing largely to his countless interactions and friendships with IC, particularly CIA, analysts, Bob was acutely aware of their discomfort with and even aversion to sounding out scholars and others from the unclassified universe for their knowledge. He theorized that while they recognized the benefits of learning from academics, journalists, businesspeople, and parallel experts, they feared that the more intimate their conversations became, the greater the opportunities for classified information to slip out. As a result of these cost-benefit calculations, they avoided reaching beyond the IC for expertise, or if they did find themselves at a gathering of outside experts, they didn't ask a question or say a word. Bob had been present at such gatherings and observed this dynamic. He repeatedly commented to me on his frustration. Therefore, he wanted the post-mortem to address among its first questions whether “outside experts [were] called? Who? When?” Pushing further, he deemed it important to learn if analysts had a Rolodex of experts, and he specified who should be in it. To Bob, analytic outreach was integral to all-source intelligence.

I encourage readers to review Bob's plan and his questions for themselves. The document offers something of the negative of the post-mortems that he published and with which most of us are familiar. Some day we may learn that this post-mortem was written, and if so, and if it is declassified, it would be highly instructive to juxtapose it with the ones on the fall of the Shah and Iraq's WMD program. We could therefore judge for ourselves, to return to the question that Bob posed in his email, whether “they” get it “right.” But even if his work plan came to naught, it provides a unique window into Bob Jervis's remarkable mind, his unsurpassed understanding of the world of intelligence, and his often overlooked effort to serve America's national interests.

Post-Mortem Plan and Questions

¹⁰ In part because of our conversations, but only in part, Bob, probably more than most scholars of intelligence, appreciated the importance of the analytic standards that the Director of National Intelligence approved in 2007. Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203, “Analytic Standards,” June 21, 2007, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICD/ICD%20203%20Analytic%20Standards%20pdf-unclassified.pdf>; they were revised and expanded in 2015, ICD 203, “Analytic Standards,” January 2, 2015, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICD/ICD%20203%20Analytic%20Standards.pdf>.

¹¹ As one of the contributors to the drafting of the Intelligence Community's initial directive on analytic outreach, I discussed it with Bob on multiple occasions. ICD 205, “Analytic Outreach,” effective 16 July 2008, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICD/ICD_205.pdf.

Robert Jervis revised (2/14/11)

I. Objectives, Methods, and Questions

- 1) Both a post-mortem & a way of increasing IC capacity. Working with evaluation staffs and possibly CIA's CSI.
- 2) Need to look at past false alarms, and, perhaps more importantly, search for cases where alarm wasn't sounded but in retrospect they look like Tunisia or Egypt at some stage. Minor--past immolations & incidents. What was the analysis following June death & protest?
- 3) Scope--partly a matter of resources, but also of how much time. Quick & dirty or slower? How much description and "plot summary" to establish the record is desired? How wide and far back in time should one look?
- 4) How to avoid distracting those on front lines?
- 5) Performance during crisis included?
- 6) What can reasonably be expected--e.g., can the IC be expected to say more than this could be trouble? Obvious problems in knowing more than foreign leaders (or potential revolutionaries).
- 7) Is the team--& am I--expected to make recommendations?
- 8) Who is the audience? IC leadership; rank-and-file; Congress?

II What to look for

- 1) Level of effort (both collection & analysis)--numbers at home & in the field (& how many spoke/read Arabic?). But would more resources have been likely to have made a difference?
- 2) North Africa and even Egypt seen as backwater? Did they have interested customers?
- 3) Were "good" reports held at low or medium levels?
- 4) Was there peer review?
- 5) Any outside experts called? Who? When?
 - 5a) Did analysts have a Rolodex of people like Robert Springborg (at Naval Postgraduate School, no less) or Ragui Assaad (Minnesota--[NYTimes](#) of 2/6/11)?
- 6) Compare intelligence to what open sources were saying.
 - 6a) Track number of column-inches of coverage in [NYT](#) and a few other outlets, starting with June death & protests.
- 7) How and how much were open sources used?
 - 7a) Do we really do all-source intelligence?

- 8) Reports from the military (US or T/E)?
- 9) Were we too focused on counter-terrorism?
- 10) Underlying assumptions about stability & role of security forces? We hadn't seen major revolutions recently (the "color revolutions" are a partial exception)--had we come to see revolutions as unlikely?
- 11) Ways to track feedback & expectations among protesters.
- 12) Did we share assessments with allies--and they with us?
- 13) Did analysis become more cautious after Iraq? Did analysts feel that anything they said had to be even more grounded in reports from the field?
- 14) Differences within IC?
- 15) Differences between offices or individual analysts?
- 16) Role of review process--did anyone raise basic questions?
- 17) Inhibitions against intelligence on friends?
- 18) Inhibitions against bringing bad news, especially when top officials have enough problems?
- 19) Any insights from failed states project?
- 20) Were assumptions made explicit--e.g., on role of security services? Need to "show work."
- 21) Perhaps most important--what was the quality of the pre-crisis reporting? How much did it go deeper & beyond the field reporting? How much did it take account of the work and views of scholars, journalists, and business people? Analysis of military? Any research papers?
- 22) Related--was our analysis skewed by the fact that our policy was to encourage democracy, but of a top-down, elite driven type, which could have led to a lack of attention to & an underestimate of the possibilities of unrest from the bottom? Not politicization in the normal sense, but impact of policy on what intelligence was thinking about (& what it was ignoring).
- 23) Did we track impact of rising food prices? Any other indicators of a) discontent (i.e., poll data as in Slackman NYTimes article) or b) things we thought would generate discontent & unrest?
- 24) Any routine internal evaluations?
- 25) Did we track Mubarak's health and how it—and his perceptions of it—might influence his behavior (and how other's perceptions of it might affect theirs)?
- 26) Did we have research reports on security forces, Brotherhood, etc.
- 27) Did we track the protests in the spring & how they may have increased the protesters' capacity? See, e.g., the NYT article of 2/14.

III How to do it?

- 1) Level of effort internally.
- 2) Extent and nature of my involvement.
- 3) Possible use of an external team to review draft reports--both fully cleared & 1-day secret.

BOB JERVIS: NEVER A WARLORD, ALWAYS MY HERO BY AUSTIN LONG, JOINT STAFF J5

If you were to go solely by our backgrounds and general temperaments, you would not have expected that Bob Jervis and I would have gotten along very well. To begin with, we were of different generations. In a testament to our different times, Franklin D. Roosevelt was re-elected for an unprecedented third time a few months after Bob was born, while Richard Nixon resigned rather than face impeachment a couple of weeks before I was born. Further, Bob was a Northeastern big city kid who left to attend a liberal arts college in small town middle America. I left a small town with a big Air Force base in the South to attend a technical school in the big city (still in the South).

Bob, as virtually every other essay in this collection attests, was a genuinely nice person. In particular, he had a pacific temper and was, as Dick Betts notes in one of the essays, known as a “conflict avoider.”¹ I am... not.² One particular story serves to reflect our respective personalities. While I was Bob’s colleague at Columbia, I spent a fair amount of time in Afghanistan, often as a civilian advisor to US special operations forces. I returned from one of my sojourns with a present for Bob: a large knife of the type that was given to Afghan soldiers when they completed their selection and training for the elite Afghan Commando unit. Bob was pleasantly nonplussed, a bit like a tolerant cat owner when Tabby brings home a dead bird. He graciously accepted the gift but launched into a story of being invited to a party hosted by a former academic and government official. The fancy dress party theme required male attendees to come attired as warlords; Bob said the closest he could be to a warlord was an academic dean and went dressed as such.

The list of such differences was long. I am not sure Bob ever fired a gun while I received my first firearm, a bolt action .22 rifle, when I was about age five. And yet the tranquil Yankee and the belligerent Southerner got along rather well. Brendan R. Green has already recounted the story of my first contact with Bob so I won’t repeat it,³ but Bob and I, despite the differences outlined above, became close early in my professional career. When we first met in person, circa 2004 while I was a graduate student at MIT, we had a long discussion of coercion failure and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. We concluded that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had some rather funny ideas that led to his demise.⁴ Our shared interest in the intersection of intelligence and perceptions would animate conversations for years to follow. Bob was particularly supportive of the critique of post-9/11 intelligence reform that Josh Rovner and I published.⁵

Iraq would continue to be a thread in our early relationship, since in 2007 I decided to leave graduate school to go to Iraq as a civilian. I had earlier been a proponent of studying the motivations and morale of Iraqi insurgents and had an opportunity to interview Iraqi detainees to that end. Bob’s wife Kathe similarly had an opportunity, as part of the same project, to help

¹ Richard Betts, “Bob Jervis: a Man without Enemies,” in Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis: Part I*, 24-25; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>.

² Austin Long, “Blood Sport,” *The American Interest* 4:4 (March 1, 2009); <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2009/03/01/blood-sport/>.

³ Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “The Philosopher King,” in Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis, Part I*, 54-56; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>.

⁴ Of course, leaders in the United States had some funny ideas too. See Charles Duelfer and Stephen Benedict Dyson, “Chronic Misperception and International Conflict: The U.S.-Iraq Experience,” *International Security* 36: 1 (Summer 2011): 73-100. Greg Koblenz would later argue Saddam’s ideas were more understandable, if no less terminal- “Saddam Versus the Inspectors: The Impact of Regime Security on the Verification of Iraq’s WMD Disarmament,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41: 3 (2016), 372-409.

⁵ Joshua Rovner and Long, “The Perils of Shallow Theory: Intelligence Reform and the 9/11 Commission,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 8:4 (2005): 609-637.

develop educational opportunities for juvenile Iraqis who had been detained by the US-led coalition. Bob emailed me to apprise me of this and thus I got to know Kathe in the convivial environs of Camp Victory, a sprawling installation near the Baghdad International Airport.⁶

I returned from Iraq the following year to finish my graduate thesis. I also interviewed for and accepted a position at Columbia, where I had the office next to Bob's from 2009 to 2017. This was the period when I really got to know Bob (and Kathe). He was generous with his time whenever I asked for help or critiques of a new project.

Most notable in this regard was a project that began as an outgrowth of a manuscript I had done on deterrence for the RAND Corporation, which Bob peer reviewed.⁷ The gist of the project, which also emerged from a number of conversations over dinner with my soon to be co-author Brendan Green as well as Owen Cote, was that Bob's seminal work *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* did not capture the empirical reality of the late Cold War.⁸ I argue that nuclear weapons had not totally and irrevocably changed the nature of international relations and continued rational competition drove U.S. and Soviet behavior in the 1970s and 1980s.⁹

One might think Bob would not have been supportive of this project, yet nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the thought never crossed my mind that he would be anything other than engaged with the argument and new data, which he was. Bob was an early, though not uncritical, supporter of the revisionist account Brendan and I began to articulate, much more so than some early journal reviewers.¹⁰ He would routinely cite the articles that we published even as he suggested places where our argument could use shoring up.

Since leaving Columbia and the academic world in 2017, I have missed only a few things. Having the office next to Bob is top of that short list. Fortunately, Bob and I continued to correspond routinely and he would visit me any time he was in the Pentagon. He sent me and a few other government colleagues cogent notes on China and Russia in the month before his death, tributes to his ongoing engagement with both academic and policy perspectives.

⁶ Though it does not fully do justice to our time in Iraq, see Cheryl Benard, Edward O'Connell, Cathryn Quantic Thurston, Andres Villamizar, Elvira N. Loreda, Thomas Sullivan, and Jeremiah Goulka, *The Battle Behind the Wire: U.S. Prisoner and Detainee Operations from World War II to Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2011). See also Kathe Jervis, "A School Under Fire: The Fog of Educational Practice in War." *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 2:1 (2016):115-141. I also recount some of that experience in an essay for an International Security Studies Forum on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's report on the CIA post-9/11 detention and interrogation program and Bob was instrumental in that forum: H-Diplo/ISSF Forum, No. 5 (February 16, 2015), ed. Diane Labrosse, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/61352/issf-forum-senate-select-committee-intelligence-ssci-report>.

⁷ Long, *Deterrence, From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008).

⁸ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁹ My brief summary of this argument and Bob's response can be found in "Book Review Roundtable: *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* 30 Years Later," *Texas National Security Review* (April 2020); <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>

¹⁰ See Austin Long and Green "Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38:1-2 (February 2015): 38-73, and Green and Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Strategic Balance," *Security Studies* 26:4 (Fall 2017): 606-641. Both subsequently won awards, perhaps further testament to Bob's scholarly judgment.

ROBERT JERVIS AS LIBERAL REALIST DOUG MACDONALD, COLGATE UNIVERSITY, EMERITUS

The first round of tributes to Bob Jervis on H-Diplo was enlightening. It was a pleasure, but not an unanticipated one, to see the outpouring of sadness, admiration, and gratitude that accompanied the passing of one of the great International Relations (IR)¹ scholars in the English language, and I would guess everywhere. It is somehow reassuring that so many talented people hold such similar views of him as a scholar, a mentor, a teacher, a colleague, and a human being. Again, this was expected, but it is still impressive to see in the event.²

Bob became my dissertation advisor and I his teaching assistant in 1980-1981, shortly after his arrival at Columbia University. The association continued for the next forty-one years, being especially reinvigorated with the general onset of the internet in the 1990s, which allowed the easy exchange of ideas and documents that was a mainstay of our intellectual and personal relationship. In one sense we complemented each other in our research interests. He was a deductive theorist who largely avoided systematic primary research, while I am a middle range historicist who enjoys archival research.³ We met intellectually in our mutual interest in the ontological and epistemic questions that intersect between history and social science. He told me last year that he actually considered me a military historian, while I demurred and claimed to be an intelligence-military historian who is interested in the politics of those two activities. We never followed this point up, which was fortunate for me as I do not really know what I meant by that. If we had had more time, I am sure he would not have let me get away with it without an explanation. We were not direct intellectual collaborators in our work in the sense he was with many others.

So, the fates smiled on me. I had the great fortune to have two great mentors at Columbia, Bob and William T.R. Fox, the latter one of the founders of the systematic study of IR in the twentieth century in the United States,⁴ though I focus here on Bob. Part of the attraction was that we were both historically oriented political scientists.

Bob had the wonderful trait of great teachers for empathetic critical encouragement. He joined in supporting my dissertation project, which was controversial with some at Columbia. I could not have written it without his support. Bob shared the trait among great advisors and scholars: an ecumenical attitude toward ideas if they showed promise.

Following graduate school at Columbia, our relationship was a long-distance one, but no less important for me because as one who taught at a geographically isolated teaching college with no graduate students and heavier workloads. I was

¹ This essay is adapted from a larger, forthcoming one for H-Diplo/ISSF's "Learning the Scholar's Craft" series. For the purposes of this forum, I am using "IR" interchangeably for the study and practices of world politics.

² Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis, Part I*; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>.

³ I am using "historicist" in its "original sense" as posited by the late British historian Martin Wight as a "doctrine that all values are historically conditioned, that reality itself is a historical process, and that history can teach nothing except philosophical acceptance of change." This is in contrast to the later interpretation of the word as representing a "doctrine that history has a purpose and direction, that its movement is largely predictable, and that it can (under proper interpretation) teach everything we need to know about life and prescribe our duties. In this new sense [the later version] it is a label for Hegel and Marx, Spengler and Toynbee." Martin Wight quoted in Andrew Ehrhardt, "Everyman His Own Philosopher of History: Notions of Process in the Study and Practice of Foreign Policy," *Texas National Security Review* 5:3 (Summer 2022), n.p., fn. 78, at: <https://tnsr.org/2022/03/everyman-his-own-philosopher-of-history-notions-of-historical-process-in-the-study-and-practice-of-foreign-policy/>.

⁴ Nicolas Guilhot, ed., *The Invention of International Relations Theory: Realism, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the 1954 Conference on Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). Guilhot exaggerates wildly in his use of the word "invention" here, but his portrayal of Fox's influence in the 1940s-1950s is generally correct.

somewhat out of the loop, and also had to deal with personal and family medical issues. Bob understood the constraints and was characteristically supportive in his reactions, for example, in 2000, when he called and invited me to attend a formal event to celebrate his taking office as the president of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and I had to decline. There were other such declines over the years, although I chaired a tribute panel to him and his book *The Logic of Images in International Relations* at an International Studies Association meeting in the early 1990s and attended events in his honor at Columbia University.⁵

The essay that follows – part remembrance, part analysis – is largely based on those experiences. It will concentrate on Bob’s early years at Columbia within the context of great changes taking place at the university, in the study of IR more generally, and a generational shift among its leading practitioners. These included movement away from the ‘traditional’ study of IR towards a more ‘scientific’ approach to the discipline. Both approaches centered around the notions of the parameters of sovereignty of the nation-state and the nature of anarchy in the international system. Regardless of one’s theoretical, methodological, or political perspective, those twin concerns have been the sinews of IR scholarship since the nineteenth century.⁶ The rhetoric has shifted, and definitions altered, but the basic arguments over subject matter have remained similar conceptually.

These were some of the major issues that were generally discussed and debated among the professors and graduate students in my graduate student era (1977-1985) and were an integral part of Bob’s mid-career role in the field and his influence on future developments. Indeed, at least according to Graduate Student Rumors (hereafter, GSR), that semi-informed nether world inhabited by those learning their craft at a university, Bob was hired at Columbia not only as one of the most promising young scholars in the United States (he was only forty and had an immensely influential book and article in hand, as well as significant government service in his CIA postmortem on the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979,) but also to bring the changes occurring in the study of IR to the university’s future. It was an inspired choice.

The formal sub-discipline of IR in the discipline of political science does not have a particularly long history in the United States. Perhaps because of this there has been a general lack of interest in the sub-discipline for much historiographical self-reflection until recently, and that has been done mostly by intellectual historians from outside the United States. Perhaps, too, it is partly because IR scholars fancy themselves as producing theories and concepts that are timeless, whose value crosses time and space in their relevance. If so, then concentrating on the intellectual context of their creation becomes less important. As Bob wrote as recently as 1994: “political science is a very trendy discipline. Few books or articles are cited a decade, let alone a generation, after they are written. When scholars die, their ideas die with them, although they may be reinvented later and trumpeted as new.”⁷ This may have been still largely true in 1994, never mind in 1980 when Bob arrived at Columbia, but certainly is no longer so. Bob Jervis’s ideas and other IR scholars’ contributions will long outlive all of us, as will those of many other scholars. It wasn’t until the 1980s that the early historiographical arguments began, and then in a very cursory manner. It is only in the twenty-first century that this literature has bloomed and ensured the lengthy shelf life of varying IR approaches in historical context. A lack of historiographical self-reflection in IR also obscures the changes that occur in scholarly discourse due to political developments.

⁵ Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, Reissue Edition, 1989.)

⁶ Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁷ Jervis, “Hans Morgenthau, Realism, and the Study of International Politics,” *Social Research* 61:4 (Winter 1994): 853-877, 853. I do not know why he would write such a thing. This article and many others demonstrate that Morgenthau and his ideas were quite alive long after his death.

My basic analytical claim is this: in the United States, what historically have been called idealism and realism in IR are better understood historically as two variants of a broader ideology of liberalism than autonomous intellectual constructs. Even the terms idealism and realism are somewhat deceptive, as when one looks at those who are given such labels, in the pre-World War II period and after, they are in fact amorphous groups of scholars who often had much more in common than either side would admit. The polemical demands of contemporary political and intellectual contention created numerous over-simplifications which outlasted the specific issues involved. The questions of the normative parameters of sovereignty and the instrumental necessities of anarchy have been the mainstay of political and intellectual contention, but the debate, such as it is, is over a difference of degree not a difference of kind and that binary is somewhat overdrawn conceptually, and especially politically, when applied to contemporary policies.⁸ It is my contention that what were sometimes called idealists vs. realists in the postwar milieu in fact were two different kinds of liberalism, and the contention was as much political and ideological as it was intellectual. I will replace the word ‘idealist’ with *reformist* because not many of the prewar scholars still maintained many of the prewar liberal assumptions but maintained a belief in what Fox called “pragmatic meliorism.”⁹ The liberal reformists and liberal realists of the post-World War II period adopted elements of realism not to abandon liberalism but to save it following the events of the 1930s-1940s.¹⁰

I begin with the assumption expressed by Bob that realism, liberalism, and Marxism remain the primary modes of IR inquiry, and that the new kids on the block such as constructivism have a way to go before they can compete as modes of analysis. My main interest here is in what I see in historical political context as Bob’s liberal realism.¹¹ Approached from a biography of knowledge perspective, Bob was a strong political liberal (“card-carrying member of the ACLU” he used to say) and came to intellectual maturity in the political ferment of the 1950s and 1960s, affected strongly by McCarthyism, the nuclear weapons revolution, and the Vietnam War. He believed that nuclear weapons and bipolarity had fundamentally altered IR, thus making much past liberal theorizing of security in IR of limited usefulness. This led him to a realist orientation somewhat at odds with his more general political orientation in many respects. Reconciling the two helped shape his intellectual and scholarly interests.¹²

⁸ See the excellent historiographic article on these issues in the 1930s in Peter Wilson, “The Myth of the ‘First Great Debate,’” in Brian C. Schmidt, ed., *International Relations and the First Great Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 16-32.

⁹ For an excellent brief overview of Professor Fox’s theoretical orientation and reformist liberalism, see Elizabeth C. Hanson, “William T.R. Fox and the Study of World Politics,” in Robert L. Rothstein, ed., *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations: Essays in Honor of William T.R. Fox* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 1-20.

¹⁰ For a similar argument, see Michael C. Williams, “In the Beginning: The International Relations Enlightenment and the Ends of International Relations Theory,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19:3 (September 2013), 647-665. The “Enlightenment” of which Williams writes is of an expansion of political science after World War II, not the European Enlightenments of the 18th-19th centuries. On the over-simplification of the liberal approaches of the 1900-1930s by postwar realists and other critics, see Jerome Weiss, “E.H. Carr, Norman Angell, and Reassessing the Realist–Utopian Debate,” *The International History Review* 35:5 (2013), 1156-1184; see also the essays in Schmidt, ed., *International Relations and the First Great Debate*.

¹¹ I cannot deal here with the theoretical richness of the contending ‘schools’ of the realist paradigm, for example, defensive vs. offensive realists, structuralist vs. neoclassical, etc. For an interesting overview of how Jervis’s work fits into the broader realist paradigm, see Randall Schweller, “Jervis’s Realism,” in James W. Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy, and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25-46.

¹² Bob’s dialectical and ecumenical approaches to knowledge added nuance and complexity to his views that sometimes caused him to be misunderstood, even among some of his close students. One former student once told me that he believed Bob’s was merely a ‘liberal Democrat’ who used realist verbiage to cover his real views. This is, of course, nonsense.

Bob was primarily interested in security studies, which emphasizes conflict among nation-states, and viewed IR more as a separate academic discipline unto itself, as it had become during his education in the 1950s and 1960s. Those were also the years of the dominant ‘end of ideology’ school of thought and despite his intense interest in cognitive biases and psychological processes, Bob never gave ideology much of his attention as he saw it mainly as rationalization for what were choices based on deeper beliefs and processes, at least until the Cold War was over.¹³

One of the fundamental differences between prewar theorists and Jervis, and by extension between reformist and realist liberals, was the nature of the international system itself. This is partly reflected in the confusion over the origins of IR as an object of study. Scholars and other interested observers of the systematic study of IR cannot even agree on a point of origin for the existence of IR as a subject. Some appeal to early origins reaching back into ancient times, citing sages such as Thucydides (c. 460-c.400 BCE), Sun Tzu (c. 544-c. 496 BCE,) or Kautilya (c. 375-c. 283 BCE) as early creators of analytical rather than heroic treatments of inter-polity behavior.¹⁴ Some would time the origins of IR to the emergence of the modern nation-state during and after the French and American Revolutions. Others argue that such posited continuities are somewhat forced and that the systematic study of IR was a late nineteenth or twentieth century phenomenon, beginning just before or after World War I.¹⁵ Still others argue that IR is a post-World War II development, part of a political science ‘enlightenment’ in a ‘heroic’ vision of politics emerging from the defeat of the Axis powers.¹⁶ What most of them had in common was an essentialist view of the nature of the global political world as a society, as self-conscious interacting units.¹⁷

Although siding with the structural realists on the largely asocial nature of the international system, Bob also insightfully noted that although Hans Morgenthau was a strong realist, like the reformist liberals and other pre-World War II scholars, he also viewed the international realm as a society:

Thus, for Morgenthau a degree of moral consensus among nations is a prerequisite for a well-functioning international order. In contrast to more recent analysts like [Kenneth] Waltz (and myself), Morgenthau argues that the balance of power arose not only out of the clash of competing self-interests but out of a common culture, respect for other’s rights, and agreement on basic moral principles.¹⁸

It was only when the ‘scientific’ theorists and their systems approaches that became popular in the 1960s and after, and especially with structural realists, that the international order was portrayed as literally made up of interactive ‘units’ rather than nation-states ruled and peopled by real human beings with all the contradictions and analytical overlaps that includes. Structural realism is a brilliant theory as far as it goes in explaining mechanistic ‘unit’ behavior and material processes. But

¹³ See his more ideological interpretation in Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:1 (Winter 2001), 36-60.

¹⁴ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.)

¹⁵ Constantinou Koliopoulos, *International Relations and the Study of History*. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Retrieved 1 July 2022; <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-242>.

¹⁶ Williams, “In the Beginning,” 647-665; George Liska, “The Heroic Decade and After: International Relations as Events, Discipline, and Profession,” *SAIS Review* 10:4-5 (July 1966): 5-11.

¹⁷ One of the foundational postwar articulations of this traditionalist viewpoint and the “English School,” is Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study in World Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1977). I cannot go into the history of the “English School” here, but for my purposes it is a part of reformist liberalism despite its sometimes self-declared ‘realism.’

¹⁸ Jervis, “Hans Morgenthau, Realism, and the Study of International Politics,” 14.

according to the reformist liberal scholars it does not sufficiently explain human behavior. Intellectual parsimony has its place, but this is a step too far. Although he greatly admired Waltz's work, as a political psychologist Bob saw it as of only limited use.

I will not enter such debates here in any detail, though the origins of IR are and were a matter of some importance, especially when contemplating the nature of change in the sub-discipline reflecting changes in world politics. But the variety is too immense to cover here. Let it suffice to say that Bob aligned with those like Waltz who saw the post-World War II system as fundamentally different from earlier variations,¹⁹ at least during the Cold War.

As noted, in the period under consideration (1977-1985) the primary debate at Columbia was between those who largely dated the legitimate study of IR to the postwar period (the liberal realists) and those who desired to salvage at least some of the rationalist Enlightenment political traditions of liberalism but with the harsh lessons of the 1930s and 1940s considered and learned (the liberal reformists.) These concepts were quite prevalent in the 1950s-1960s in the United States and the 'Free World' more generally. In politics, such liberal reformist theorizing led to the 'tough liberals' of the Kennedy and Johnson eras, or 'idealists with guns,' as some people said. According to this formulation both normative and instrumental considerations should be maintained over time, while recognizing that in times of crisis instrumental policies in service to state survival must take precedence, which was a lesson taken from the 1930s-1940s.

This value conflict was nothing unprecedented since the United States had sacrificed liberal values at home to protect the broader security of the country before in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. The controversy was over how or whether to do so in a "Cold War," without national survival in obvious immediate threat. Prior to World War II there were many precursors in the United States and elsewhere of the normative-instrumental debate. The American reformist liberal scholars who created the conceptual hybrid in the 1940s-1950s had already moved in that intellectual direction in the 1920s-1930s. The "legal realism" movement among American legal scholars had a significant effect on the political scientists of that period.²⁰ Concentrating on the instrumental consequences of legal decisions rather than simply on their normative ones, the legal realists led a movement toward similar concepts in other areas, especially during the New Deal period. When liberalism collapsed on the European continent in 1940, there were in place intellectual concepts that facilitated a change in policies. Such arguments were not unknown to American political science scholars. This lack of awareness of earlier intellectual movements that affected the *kinds* of precedent realist thinking that would be acceptable later to American thinkers is typical of post-World War II IR scholars in their rush to label the prewar period monolithically 'utopian.' Yet this attempt to salvage aspects of past theorizing was not some sort of nativism; reformist liberals were very cosmopolitan scholars. They believed that the earlier complexity of liberal theorizing prior to World War II, which was portrayed by early doctrinal Cold War realists as a group of lockstep 'utopians,' had largely been overlooked or, worse, inaccurately presented to post-World War II students and the public.

This perceived need to synthesize normative and instrumental values long predates World War II in liberal social science, and at least reaches back to Max Weber with his concept of ethical "substantive rationality."²¹ According to this view, to

¹⁹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

²⁰ For an excellent treatment, see Olivier Zajec, translated and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations, "Legal Realism and International Realism in the United States During the Interwar Period," *Revue Francaise de Science Politique* 65:5-6 (2015): 785-804.

²¹ Weber defines "substantive rationality" as "the degree in which a given group of persons, no matter how it is delimited, is or could be adequately provided with goods by means of an economically oriented [that is, instrumental] course of social action. This course of action will be interpreted in terms of a given set of ultimate values no matter what they may be." Max Weber, edited by Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 185.

produce useful guides for action in social life long-term values must over time trump short term material interests, although the latter might be necessary in the shorter term. In the long-term, actions must be pursued and defended (“rationalized” in Weber’s terms) by values rather than interests.²² In liberal thought and politics the process matters, and the ends do not justify the means except in extraordinary circumstances. The stuff of politics is deciding when those circumstances become extraordinary enough to forego ‘normal’ ethics. Doctrinal realists may wish it would go away, but this is a recurring policy dilemma in American foreign policy because of the continued strength of liberal ideology. It continues to bedevil American leadership in foreign policy and will do so as long as the United States is a predominantly liberal country.²³

Reformist liberals differed from liberal realists in that they were not willing to forego normative concerns for security goals so easily even while recognizing the inherent tension between the two values in the real world. They were opposed by the so-called “émigré realists,” mostly European refugees from the rise of totalitarian ideologies, and their American converts, who eschewed liberal foreign policy goals in foreign policy to varying degrees and pressed the instrumentalist case.²⁴ In addition, the new realists were skeptical of public opinion inputs into foreign policy decision-making, perhaps understandable in reaction to their recently ‘isolationist’ new national home, something that rubbed against American liberal political norms. But the actual differences were matters of degree. Reformists were not without interest in *machtspolitik*. Realists were not merely “anti-Whigs” out to get rid of liberalism in a project of various counter-Enlightenment strategies.²⁵ Much of American Cold War scholarship and politics were shaped by these competing conceptualizations of its role in the world, at least until the breakdown of the liberal Cold War synthesis into normative and instrumentalist factions largely over the Vietnam War and American policies in the developing world more generally.

Such arguments were the basis for the study of IR, according to the reformists. Power analysis was necessary but more about means than long term goals. Its simplifications did not tell us enough about human psychology and political possibilities which are necessary to understand human behavior. As William Fox put it in his 1985 critique of the influential British realist E.H. Carr:

Finding one’s way between the excessive voluntarism said to have been an American vice and the excessive involuntarism of those who believe in appeasement at any cost or those who believe in an unending struggle with the forces of darkness is difficult, but that is what gives the academic study of international relations its social utility.²⁶

He offered a distinction between the “doctrinal” realist versus the “empirical” (that is, reformist) realist:

The doctrinal realist does not need to examine how nation-state actors really behave because he has already posited how they must behave by virtue of their nation-stateness in a multi-state world

²² For a discussion, see Steven Kalberg, “Max Weber’s Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 85:5 (March 1980): 1145-1179.

²³ See President Joe Biden’s wrestling with the problem in relations with Saudi Arabia and other nations in 2022, even when American survival was not at stake, at: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/biden-juggles-principles-pragmatism-in-stance-on-autocrats/ar-AAyITZ2?rc=1&ocid=winp1taskbar&cvid=f5e0587f658e4bd19295aadb1467c505>.

²⁴ Professors William T.R. Fox and Annette Baker Fox named the most prominent emigres in 1961: John Herz, Hans Kelsen, Hans Morgenthau, Sigmund Neumann, Stefan Possony, Hans Speier, Nicholas Spykman, Robert Strausz-Hupe and Arnold Wolfers. Fox and Fox, “The Teaching of International Relations in the United States,” *World Politics* 13:3 (April 1961), 339-359, 339, fn. 2.

²⁵ See the provocative article by Nicolas Guillot, “Portrait of the Realist as a Historian: On Anti-Whiggism in the History of International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 2015:1 (2015), 3-26.

²⁶ Fox, “E.H. Carr and Political Realism: Vision and Revision,” *Review of International Studies* 11 (1985), 1-16, 6.

system. The empirical realist by contrast looks to see how they actually behave and perhaps beyond that to examining the possibilities for tolerable coexistence.²⁷

Jervis was much closer to being an empirical realist than to doctrinal and ‘structural’ realists such as John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz respectively, at least on some important questions such as the causes of the Cold War.²⁸ It is a subtle but important distinction. Hence his close attention to historical accuracy and epistemological questions that often are put aside by IR scholars in their “stylized history” or “potted” use of historical “evidence,”²⁹ that is, cherry-picking information to support a particular argument rather than dispassionately examining varying interpretations of what is available empirically about a particular form of behavior, never mind doing primary research themselves.

Jervis noted that his own use of historical examples was “couched in terms of propensities and tendencies” and using “aspects of many cases to illustrate points and demonstrate the plausibility of arguments.” Such usages were merely heuristic devices to demonstrate a point and stimulate thinking and future research, not historical analysis, though he forgivingly added “the heuristic use of crucial historical cases has proven so attractive as to overwhelm a more accurate portrait of the cases themselves.”³⁰ Perhaps still influenced by Fox, I am less forgiving of such intellectual grandstanding among the “potted” interpretations by historians of IR social science scholarship.

In sum, the differences between liberal reformists and liberal realists during the Cold War were real, though it seems they have been exaggerated by more doctrinal adherents on either side in order to “sell” favored American policies. From a scholarly perspective, the recent post-Cold War historiography of IR, which is primarily done by history scholars outside the discipline, is in the process of correcting some of these exaggerations. This was something the reform liberals were calling for as early as the 1960s. Sovereignty and anarchy remained the primary issues for both groups, the argument was primarily, as it has long been, over how to deal with them given differing policy preferences within the broad ideological category of liberalism.

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One of the reasons for Jervis’s widespread respect and influence in IR was because he tended to think dialectically, always tempering one argument with the possibility of being wrong and therefore the possible accuracy of other plausible explanations:

If the discipline is functioning well, each school of thought enriches others as powerful research of one kind strengthens, not weakens, the alternatives. No one approach consistently maintains a leading position: each of them catches important elements of international politics, and many of

²⁷ Fox, “E.H. Carr and Political Realism,” 13.

²⁸ Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?” 36-60.

²⁹ On the use of “stylized history” and “potted” history by political scientists, see Jervis, “Models and Cases in the Study of International Conflict,” in Rothstein, ed., *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations*, 64-65. For the tendency of humans to reason in support of internally acceptable opinions rather than objective truth-seeking, see Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, “Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for an Argumentative Theory,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 34:2 (April 2011): 57-74.

³⁰ Jervis, “Models and Cases,” 64-65.

our arguments are about the relative importance of and the interrelationships among various factors.³¹

Even when he believed strongly in the inadequacy of some idea – for example, reformist institutionalism, international law, etc. – he treated those ideas with respect and explained why he believed that a generally realist approach to them was superior. He sometimes articulated concepts in clear binary terms, but he did not abandon them there.³² But his ecumenical approach to ideas could lead him to take unusual positions at times and seemingly ‘waffle’ at others. He was not afraid to change his mind or take a middle position if the evidence did not permit a clearer choice. To many of us that is a feature not a bug in his thinking.

One of the few criticisms I ever heard about Bob’s work was based on this willingness to entertain virtually all contrarian ideas. According to this view, in effect, he never saw a clever idea he didn’t like. I reject this view, as I saw over the years that Bob not only promoted the unorthodox but revisited such ideas over time to see if they had panned out. Sometimes they did, and sometimes they didn’t. In private discussions he expressed this kind of disappointment in constructivism, an innovation that he had initially been enthusiastic about.³³ Over time, he argued, correctly in my view, these scholars were overlooking some of the basic insights that had already emerged in the political psychology field of which he was a leader. True to form, he did not reject constructivism but put it in his ‘we shall see’ category. He also agreed that this is a consistent problem in an unreflective discipline such as IR: you not only ignore thinking of high quality on the subject that came before, but you can claim something as ‘new’ which is only partially so without even realizing you are doing it.

Waltz’s many defenders, including Bob, counter that his structuralism is only a theory that is meant to help us understand the international system not an explanation of an international society whose complexity defies parsimonious, unified theorizing. Fair enough. But Waltz’s structuralism not only eliminated ideology, historical memory, public opinion, etc., within its parameters as a theory, but also eliminated the role of elites to a large degree, which was something new. As Waltz argued in 1997, in answer to historian Paul Schroeder’s (and separately John Vasquez’s) critique of neorealism and its version of a “system”:

Schroeder rejects structural theory because it fails to account for the motives of statesmen. Yet, as William Graham Sumner wrote: “Motives from which men act have nothing at all to do with the consequences of their action (1911).” I would say “little” rather than “nothing,” but the point is clear.³⁴

³¹ Jervis, “Realism in the Study of World Politics,” *International Organization* 52:4 (1998): 971-991, 972.

³² See Jack Snyder, “Both Fox and Hedgehog: The Art of Nesting Structural and Perceptual Perspectives,” in James W. Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy, and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 13-24.

³³ He later wrote about it: “The popularity of alternative approaches to international politics cannot be explained entirely by their scholarly virtues. Among the other factors at work are fashions and normative and political preferences. This in part explains the increasing role of rationalism and constructivism. Important as they are, these approaches are necessarily less complete than liberalism, Marxism, and realism. Indeed, they fit better with the latter than is often realized.” “Abstract” in Jervis, “Realism in the Study of World Politics,” 971.

³⁴ Waltz, “Evaluating Theories,” *The American Political Science Review* 91:4 (December 1997), 914. Waltz was specifically critiquing Paul Schroeder, “Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory,” *International Security* 19 (Summer 1994):108-148, and John A. Vasquez, “The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz’s Balancing Proposition,” *American Political Science Review* 91 (December 1997): 899-912.

What Schroeder had presented as evidence against such an approach, Waltz labeled “a mélange of irrelevant diplomatic lore.”³⁵ In answer to Vasquez’s critique, Waltz argued that Morgenthau’s type of realism “differs fundamentally from mine.” For Morgenthau, and by extension liberal realism more generally, “balances are intended and must be sought by the statesmen who produce them. For me, balances are produced whether or not intended.” Again, international structure is produced independent of human volition and humans, elite or masses, do not matter much. Even if ‘correct,’ many of us, and not only reformist liberals, are not interested in pursuing such a narrow understanding of world politics, which we see as a pluralistic, interconnected, and thoroughly human endeavor – as a society, not a system. To describe the difference in Waltz’s useful terms in *Man, the State, and War*, of three “images” or what J. David Singer called “levels of analysis” in a review of Waltz³⁶ – the human element, domestic regime type, and international system – reformist and realist liberals utilize all three, while after 1979 Waltz reduced anything important theoretically to image Three.

An intriguing question that demonstrates his ecumenicism is why Bob Jervis was such a defender of Waltz’s approach even though he disagreed with it. After all, this is the IR scholar who made the study of individual psychological behavior a mainstream intellectual concern, one who could write as recently as 2015 that:

Domestic politics is central to whether, how and when revolutionary states become socialized. Although socialization is supposed to operate most heavily on new actors, in fact revolutionary states often resist such processes, especially because they are hard to reassure. Domestic and international factors are likely to interact, as they did with [Mikhail] Gorbachev’s USSR and probably are doing with contemporary Iran, and this points to the importance of domestic politics within the other states in the system as well. For the United States domestic politics enters in both directly and in the American perceptions of the other’s domestic system because of its tradition of ‘second image’ thinking, to use Waltz’s term.³⁷

In explaining this seeming paradox, I return to Bob’s open-mindedness, pluralism, and appreciation of an elegant and contrary idea or theory. He did not fully agree with Waltz’s structural realist approach even though a realist himself. He possessed too curious and contrary an intellect to sit at one table. He agreed with Waltz that the international order was a system and was skeptical of the lasting effects of benign motives and general good faith that the word ‘society’ can imply. Moreover, both the Axis powers and the Soviet Bloc rejected the norms and goals of reform liberalism, not to mention lesser potential threats such as Fidel Castro’s Cuba or Mao Zedong’s China (and apparently in China today as per their opposition to a “rules-based” international system) who objected to them even more strenuously. What answer did reformist liberalism have other than borrowing some of the basic conceptualizations, prescriptions, and cynicism of realism? Liberalism has survived as an ideology and a research agenda because of its flexibility and willingness to learn. No one personified that

³⁵ Waltz, “Evaluating Theories,” 914.

³⁶ J. David Singer, *Review: International Conflict: Three Levels of Analysis*, Reviewed Work: *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* by Waltz, *World Politics* 12:3 (April 1960): 453-461; see also Singer, “The Levels-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations,” *World Politics* 14:1, *The International System: Theoretical Essays* (October 1961), 77-92. Since that time others have introduced additional levels that they deem important, for example, the bureaucracy, without much success. See Henrik Bliddal, “The Enduring Logic of the Three Images: Kenneth N. Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War*,” in Henrik Bliddal, Casper Sylvest, Peter Wilson, eds, *Classics of International Relations: Essays in Criticism and Appreciation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 92-100.

³⁷ Jervis, “Socialization, Revolutionary States, and Domestic Politics,” *International Politics* 52:5 (August 2015): 609-616, 609. Randy Schweller argues that Bob’s realism uses images One and Three. Schweller, “Jervis’s Realism,” 25-26. This was true during the Cold War but following its demise he increasingly referred to image two causal factors, including for the Cold War itself. See also, Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?”

flexibility more than Bob Jervis, apparently to the consternation of some (students in particular) who prefer less complex and more linear explanations of world politics.³⁸

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I left Columbia in 1985-1986 for an Olin post-doc research fellowship at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. The next year I passed over a tenure track offer from a large state university in favor of a two-year position at Colgate University. I stayed for the next twenty-seven years.

The relationship with Bob became a long-distance one. I would call him occasionally and when the internet became ubiquitous in the 1990s, I would send him documents or my opinion that I thought he might find interesting. He usually did. He would occasionally ask for my opinion on a subject. During this period, he established himself as a major academic nuclear strategist, an unusually broadly engaged social scientist, a colleague and collaborator with leading diplomatic historians, and one of the leading IR scholars in the world. Like most of his friends, colleagues, and former students, I exulted in his success. I have never heard a word of criticism of this success, not a hint of ‘why him?’ His work was simply too prolific and too good to begrudge him his fame. He was not only a superb and prolific scholar, but a generous and decent person. And a lot of fun. These qualities are not always coterminous among academics.

I will not deal with his work in this period, as we were generally interested in different things. I assume other commentators with greater knowledge will do so. But it was during this period that the Cold War ended, which for the sake of convenience I’ll date in 1989. Since it was foreseen by very few, it sent both historians and social scientists back to the drawing board to varying degrees.

In a recent academic biographical interview, Bob mentioned the effects on his own work:

Shortly after I published my second book on American nuclear strategy, the problem all but disappeared; after I co-edited a book on Soviet-American relations, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) disappeared. Friends have suggested that I should now write about AIDS, racism, or poverty [and maybe they will disappear.] I don’t think I’ll push my luck. Instead, I’ll try to understand the paradoxical and complex effects that characterize the workings of systems, especially those whose elements are people or states. This project is particularly enjoyable because almost everything I read supplies examples and stimulates my thinking.³⁹

With the nuclear threat diminished and bipolarity no longer very useful in explaining the post-Cold War world, he went looking for new lessons to learn.

In a sense, this freed him to explore other non-security subjects in which he had great interest. The leading example of this is *Systems Effects*, a book he was especially attached to in part because of the lack of interest in it prior to publication.⁴⁰ Though he characteristically kept his finger in many intellectual pies, this emphasis on “system effects” renewed his interest in cybernetics and brought him back to subsystem-level processes and to intelligence feedback mechanisms. The interest in

³⁸ For some student reactions to Jervis’s form of argumentation, see Stacie E. Goddard, “Review of James W. Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy, and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2012), H-Diplo/ISSF (16 May 2014); <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/RE23.pdf>; Snyder, “Both Fox and Hedgehog.”

³⁹ “Jervis,” *Gale Literature: Contemporary Authors* (Gale, 2022), n.p.

⁴⁰ Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.)

intelligence remained a consistent background factor in our relationship, especially in the twenty-first century. With Jim Wirtz, we formed a small discussion group on the subject that involved many fruitful discussions and exchanges.

The book, I believe, in significant part served two main purposes in relation to other scholars. First, it was an expansion on the idea that the international order is a system rather than a society (at least in the ways the reformists posed it). Though it includes an impressive array of illustrations to bolster the point (the footnotes contain amazingly broad examples from the natural and social worlds,) its IR elements are a strong argument for Waltz's position that 'units'/states interact dynamically among themselves and simultaneously with the structure of the system itself. Waltz theorizes that the system does so, but Jervis theorizes how and why they do so, and how such interaction can confound even the most rational and informed policy choices. To put his innovation in Waltzian terms, Bob borrowed from complexity theory the notion that "systems effects" occur, interact across levels of analysis, and have causal consequences, though of varying importance, at all three levels of analysis – the human, the domestic political, and the system.

He accomplishes this without using what some see as the deterministic consequences of Waltz's theory. Yes, the system constrains "unit" behavior over time in identifiable patterns, but it is impossible to predict how it will do so. Those patterns only reveal themselves during the processes of interaction and are highly contingent on material and ideational factors in all actors and at all levels, naturally some more than others. Thus, Waltz is theoretically useful in identifying and focusing attention on the presence and influence of system patterns of constraint, but as powerful as those constraints may be, 'unit'/state behavior remains contingent to a significant degree on the inputs from images One and Two. Thus, in my view, Bob took a middle position between structure and agency, arguing the processes involved are so complex that with the present state of knowledge we are theoretically just out of the starting gate. It might be remembered that following this book Bob returned to the psychological and domestic processes (e.g., intelligence/feedback) in some of his research, and his interest in what IR scholars call "historians' questions" - Waltz's "mélange of irrelevant diplomatic lore" - grew precipitously. I do not think it would have done so if *System Effects* had been meant merely as a defense of systems theory. Structuralism is a step forward theoretically but can only take us so far. As Bob complimented Waltz's work: "Even when you disagree, he moves your thinking ahead."⁴¹ With *Systems Effects* in many ways he left Waltz behind, at least on image Two.

Second, *System Effects* is clearly an answer to the recent works of economist Albert O. Hirschman, a scholar that Bob (and through him, I) admired greatly. Specifically, what peaked Bob's interest in Hirschman's recent work was his examination of patterns of argumentation against change in *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*, a book he later admitted was a "tract" based on his own reaction to what he saw as the "neo-conservative" political assault on the welfare state in the Reagan years.⁴²

Though the book was an anti-conservative "tract," Hirschman later acknowledged that it applied just as well to reformists who were defending a status quo. In my view, having discussed Hirschman with Bob, though never specifically as it pertained to *System Effects* (he gave a hat tip to Hirschman in the acknowledgments,) a secondary and largely implicit purpose of his book was to answer the 'reactionary' charge and explain how political liberals such as Waltz and himself were not against the desirability of change *per se* but, rather, skeptical of the ability to pursue it in other societies. In doing so, the reformer might just make things worse, a favorite conservative and realist, but not necessarily 'reactionary' – better: reactive – argument against reformist liberals. If the system itself confounds purposive directed change, especially from external inputs, it does not matter what the reformer desires. This is a very old argument that goes back at least to the French Revolution in modern liberal discourse. During the Cold War, the debate led to alternating periods of reformist

⁴¹ Quoted in "Kenneth Waltz," at: https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Kenneth_Waltz.

⁴² Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). His admission of the "tract" is in Hirschman, "The Rhetoric of Reaction – Two Years Later," *Government and Opposition* 28:3 (July 1993): 292-314.

intervention and cultural relativism in American foreign policy as both approaches appeared to fail.⁴³ The debate will undoubtedly continue. Indeed, it may prove intractable as it is based on deeply held subjective values that may be mutually exclusive in important ways. It would not be the only seemingly unsolvable contradiction in liberalism.

So, for me the early twenty-first century was a period of mutual exchange and occasional meetings with Bob. We had dinner together at a Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAHR) conference, that sort of thing. From 2005 to 2007, I was a visiting senior researcher at the Army War College's (AWC) 'think tank,' the Institute of Strategic Studies, working on Islamist networks in Southeast Asia, insurgencies in the region, and piracy. During my stay there, Bob had drawn up a list of actions that might be pursued to withdraw from Iraq and asked me to gather some opinions from my colleagues at the AWC, which I did discretely. He was disappointed when some of the officers I consulted agreed with his analysis but were reluctant to say so publicly as it would be branded by some as 'defeatism,' and run against the "can do" attitudes that the military must maintain to do their dangerous work. When I asked about plans for political programs that might be tried so that the US could pull out of Iraq, I was told by an officer who had served on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's staff that the Secretary had not only forbidden his staff to draw up any such plans but threatened to 'have your career' if he found anyone had done so. The United States let the Iraq nation collapse without even trying to stop it in the early days of the occupation. This was apparently based on the anti-'nation-building' 'lesson' that realists and conservatives drew from the American experience in Vietnam, a 'lesson' that had been overlearned.

My interests shifted after post-Cold War declassifications of American intelligence and a growth of translations and primary source-based histories emanating from Vietnam became available in the twenty-first century. With these developments, though the official Vietnamese and American histories are inconsistent and incomplete, I began finding many anomalies and errors in the American intelligence effort there.⁴⁴ For example, many of the conclusions from intelligence sources in the so-called 'Pentagon Papers,' which remain the motherlode of primary sources for many non-specialist scholars, are factually inaccurate, and did not include some of the highly classified SIGINT material that called much of their analyses into question (especially during the end of their research period, 1967-1968.) This raised the fundamental question of the nature of American understanding of the hybrid war, even at the highest levels.⁴⁵ Similarly, I found highly suggestive evidence, though less compelling, that the Communist side was apparently just as ignorant of actual relative conditions of the insurgency, as Southern cadres consistently misinformed them. Bob, Jim Wirtz, and I batted these numbers and documents around after about 2019 as I began working on a revision of the orthodox view of the Vietnam War. On October 6, 2021, Bob e-mailed me: "I think very few people understand that the old numbers are simply wrong." Both Bob and Jim gave me important advice and read draft chapters. I had retired from teaching in 2014, partly because my hearing was failing, and gave the project my full attention.

Then the fates turned against us. In December 2020 Bob was diagnosed with lung cancer. Then in the spring of 2021 I was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease that in my case is deteriorative and incurable. The doctors could not discover what had caused it, though one guessed that it was probably from a viral pneumonia. We joked about the cruel coincidence. I reminded him that I smoked heavily back at Columbia, and he replied, "I should have smoked!" When we discussed the improbability of both of us getting fatal lung diseases, I told him he was carrying this mentor thing too far.

⁴³ Douglas J. Macdonald, *Adventures in Chaos: American Intervention for Reform in the Third World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁴ For some of the anomalies in the infiltration levels from North Vietnam into the South that strongly suggest Northern control of the insurgency and declining support for it in South Vietnam long before 1968, see my contribution to the H-Diplo Roundtable on Edwin E. Moise's *The Myths of TET: The Most Misunderstood Event of the Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), ed., Labrosse, 16 July 2018; <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/2050015/h-diplo-roundtable-xix-44-myths-tet-most-misunderstood-event>.

⁴⁵ For a similar questioning of the orthodox view of the nature of the war, see Edward C. O'Dowd, "What Kind of War is This?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37: 6-7 (2014): 1027-1049.

Whistling past the graveyard, I suppose, but what else can one do? Poor Jim Wirtz had to put up with all this and descriptions of our respective therapies that could not have been fun to overhear. Bob rallied in the summer of 2021 as I faded. In the fall I rallied, and he faded. And then he was gone.

During the summer when he was doing well and I was not, I told him of my discouragement. The doctors said I could live for six weeks, six months, or six years. He e-mailed me that, “the only thing you can do is to keep going and be glad you are alive another day.”

A mentor to the end.

REMEMBERING BOB JERVIS BY SARA BJERG MOLLER, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Bob Jervis's academic achievements are beyond compare. His contributions to the fields of international relations, political psychology, and diplomatic history are legendary.¹ I will refrain from listing them here since any summary would fail to do them justice anyway. Instead, I want to try to capture Jervis the person, teacher, and mentor.

Like so many others, I was giddy with anticipation when I was accepted into the Ph.D. program at Columbia because it meant the chance to study with him. I was in awe of his intellectual accomplishments; I still recall how nervous I was the first time I went to his office hours. As is my tendency, I arrived much too early. I wanted to make the most of our first substantive conversation. As I loitered outside his (tiny!) office in the Saltzman Institute, reviewing my notes for our meeting, the door opened and out came a hurried Jervis. He paused when he saw me and glanced at the time before quickly muttering, "Five more minutes." I smiled and nodded, aware that his office hours didn't start until the top of the hour and that he was renowned for making use of every spare minute. To my amazement, he then proceeded to the nearby photocopier and began making photocopies – this despite the fact that there were several work study students nearby, available to assist him with the task. Here was Bob Jervis, one of the biggest names in my chosen field of study, doing his own photocopying. I probably shouldn't have viewed it as such a big deal, but having just left Washington, D.C., where I had worked for a few years before starting my doctoral studies, the sight of an individual with his status and seniority doing his own photocopying was revelatory. Even now, I still think this simple act reveals a lot about him as a person.

Clearly it made a big impression on me. Years later, I was reminded of the photocopier incident when a colleague, aware that Jervis was my advisor, shared that they had just attended an event with him at the Clements Center for National Security at the University of Texas at Austin. It was a small gathering of international relations and diplomatic historian types and, according to the story, Jervis was the only one wearing a name tag. Such was the man's humility. Later, I learned that he had been the featured speaker at the event.

Along with his humility, which was such a core part of his identity, Bob was incredibly kind. When I fell behind on my dissertation near the end of my time at Columbia because of a personal issue and had to reschedule my defense date, he (along with Dick Betts) was more than understanding; he was uncommonly thoughtful. His thoughtfulness was on display again years later. Although I knew he didn't have much time left, I wanted to share with him the news of my son's birth and sent him a short note along with a photo in late October. I certainly didn't expect a response. But in true Jervis fashion he wrote back almost immediately, and sent a witty one-liner about how my son was sleeping more peacefully than most, "probably because he can't yet follow politics." It was classic Jervis.

Visiting Jervis's office was always exciting. You never knew what book or torn out news clipping he would pull out from the towering stacks that surrounded him, but which somehow never came crashing down. Once, he opened a desk drawer and I saw floppy disks. Mind you, this would have been around 2010, long after any computer with a floppy disk drive was available for purchase. It turned out someone at Stanford had sent him a manuscript years ago, and Jervis being Jervis, had kept the original manuscript– even though the book version had long since been published.

Some of my fondest memories of studying with him include the times where I would share with him the name or author of a book I had just stumbled upon, which I thought he might also enjoy. Invariably, these exchanges involved books about World War I. More often than not, I received a reply that yes, he was familiar with that work or that author. But to soften the blow, he would also add a few encouraging words noting how the argument I was making in my dissertation was

¹ See for example: Robert Jervis. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Robert Jervis. *How Statesmen Think: The Political Psychology of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); and Robert Jervis, "A Useable Past for the Future," *Diplomatic History* 16:1 (Winter 1992): 76-84.

different and deserved more attention than it had yet gotten. For a grad student, heck, for *anyone*, struggling with their research and writing, this kind of support was incalculable.

As a teacher, he was a tour de force in the classroom. His ability to lecture for more than an hour at a time without resorting to notes would have been an impressive feat even if he wasn't such an incredibly engrossing (and funny!) lecturer. Dressed in his standard uniform – a turtleneck in the winter, a polo shirt in the summer, and khakis – he would stand at the chalkboard gleefully recounting an (usually obscure) historical anecdote while excitedly rolling a piece of chalk in his hands back and forth. Occasionally, to illustrate a certain point, he would 'scribble' something on the chalkboard behind him. I say scribble but in truth it was more like a series of dots, or sometimes a squiggly line. Although I was fortunate to serve as his TA on two occasions and thus had ample opportunity to observe him in the classroom, I never succeeded in deciphering his chalkboard scribbles. I don't know of anyone who did. But such was his enthusiasm and oratory ability that those in the room never failed to grasp the meaning behind those dots or squiggles. Thankfully, when I relocated to D.C. to take up a predoctoral fellowship, he was kind enough to send me typed comments on my dissertation chapters.

Bob was also unusual in that he offered his TAs the chance to give a guest lecture on the rare occasions when he had to travel and miss a class. Giving a lecture in a large university auditorium for the first time is nerve-wracking enough for most graduate students. But when you're "filling in" for Bob Jervis, it's another thing entirely. But such was his commitment to the teaching profession, and his faith in us, his TAs, that he afforded us this rare opportunity to hone our craft.

As an advisor, he was incredibly generous with his time. When I was caught in the difficult position of having to choose between a tenure track offer and a prestigious postdoc my first year on the job market, he offered to call the dean at my future employer to see if they'd allow me to delay my start date by a year. Although the school was ultimately unable to accommodate the request, it meant a lot to me that he would take the time to advocate for a still untested scholar like myself. On the rare occasions where I felt brave enough to share with him some of my writing, he was quick to recommend possible publication venues. He was also my introduction to H-Diplo, arranging for me to write a review several years ago on a book I had just read about NATO adaptation, a subject I told him I thought deserved more attention.²

The day you successfully defend your dissertation is always a special day; at Columbia, tradition dictates that it's also the day you're officially allowed to call Jervis, "Bob." Never quite able to bring myself to do this, I continued to use his title whenever we met. Each time I did so, he answered "Bob," first in a slightly hushed voice, and later, in a tone tinged with a hint of exasperation but never unkindness.

Bob Jervis had a towering intellect, but his capacity for kindness, as well as his commitment to lifting up the next generation of scholars and policymakers, was just as monumental. He leaves behind a chasm in the world of US national security and international relations. His colleagues, students – indeed our entire profession – owe him a debt of gratitude. And we owe Kathe and the rest of the Jervis family our gratitude as well, for sharing him with us all these years.

By way of conclusion, I hope readers will indulge this Dane a brief literary excursion instead. At the start of Shakespeare's play about the brooding Prince of Denmark, Horatio reflects on the untimely passing of the late king, telling his friend Hamlet that his father was a "goodly king." For the field of international relations, Bob Jervis was a "goodly king." For a lucky few, he was much more. We shall not look upon his like again.

² Sara Bjerg Moller, review of Seth A. Johnston. *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, ed., Robert Jervis and Diane Labrosse, 5 December 2017; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/RE37.pdf>.

IN MEMORY OF BOB JERVIS,
BY DIPALI MUKHOPADHYAY, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

I first encountered Bob Jervis's work as a freshman at Yale University in Brad Westerfield's Intro to IR lecture. I quickly understood him to be one of the great theorists of our discipline, a scholar who could deconstruct, demystify, and even predict the most terrifying of human creations: war. Most scholars only dream of achieving this in a career, but, for Bob, it was really just the beginning.

Because he refused a parochial approach to conceptualizing world politics, Bob immersed himself in the experiences of waging war, deterring catastrophe, and suing for peace with the mind of a political scientist, but also a psychologist, a historian, a sociologist, and so on. This, too, was a radical and profoundly productive analytical move in our field.

But perhaps most exceptionally, Bob recognized that war is not an elegant idea or a clever game. It is a mess – of politics and power, struggle and suffering, death and destruction. And it is marked by a constellation of decisions, big and small, made in the real world by real people, every minute of every day.

So many in the academy conceive of our work in lofty terms, constructed to be deliberately esoteric, to keep the real world out even as we claim to explain it. Not Bob. He insisted that the work of the mind speak to and be connected with the larger body (and spirit) politic. He elevated the efforts of those engaged in the public square routinely and in no uncertain terms. He taught them in his classroom, vetted their ideas through correspondence, made room for them at his lunch table, and created space for them at Columbia University to rest, reflect, and re-group.

In Washington, political scientists are not a popular bunch. But Bob was beloved. Not just for his brilliant books but also for his quiet contributions to the relentless and thankless work of policymaking. For Bob, fieldwork was time spent in the corridors of the Pentagon and the halls of Langley, where he could collect new data, help workshop a concept or program, and gather some good beltway gossip on the way home. In the real world, those analysts, officers, bureaucrats, and diplomats were his students, his teachers, and his friends. He took their ideas and their work seriously and helped both to be better in the process.

Bob often teased me about my version of fieldwork. He thought me a bit mad – and told me so – when I would head off to the Turkey-Syria border or return home from a trip to Kabul. But he tracked my moves closely, asked me questions at every turn and did not let up, even when he was dying.

On August 15th, the day Kabul fell to the Taliban, like clockwork, I got a note from Kathe – she and Bob wanted to take me to lunch, to know how I was doing. A month later, I received an email from Bob, who had been newly inducted to the National Academy of Sciences – it was a note to the Academy president, asking her to work with me to support Afghan scholars at risk. And, then, on October 27th, I had my final time with Bob, two hours in his living room, eating too many of Kathe's candied pecans while running our own post-mortem of the military withdrawal and gaming out different scenarios of Taliban rule. I owed him more reading material when I learned from Keren that he had drifted into a deep sleep.

People toss around the term "public intellectual" too casually for my taste. It is not about writing essays in fancy newspapers or joining blue ribbon commissions in the capital. It is about honoring the unglorified sacrifices of service and supporting the banal efforts of bureaucracy, championing those who do them, and contributing to their conversations as best one can. As we descend into yet another terrifying moment of war, imagine how different our world might be if more great thinkers did this noble thing, this thing of being a true public intellectual the way Bob Jervis did it. May we all strive to do it better in his memory, and may he forever rest in peace.

THE JERVISIAN STYLE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BY JOSEPH M. PARENT, UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Jervisian:

| Jer'-vis-i-an | Jer'-vis-ðan | Jer'-vĕ-šən |

- 1) adj. relating to or characteristic of the political philosopher Robert Jervis.
- 2) n. a person who supports the views of political philosopher Robert Jervis.
- 3) n. of an intellectual style that adds consistency and complexity to perspectives lacking either.

Wonder isn't a good place to start, it's the best. One way or the other, the central theme of all writing on Robert Jervis is wonder. How did he do it? How did he do so much of it? How did he do it so well? Indisputably, Jervis was a wonderful person and scholar, and my experience as his student, which continues through the present, was miraculously similar to that of others.¹ Jervis was a complex person who studied complex things, and an impartial spectator would be right to stress this complexity squared. Yet alongside those images, I would like to offer an alternative.

Just because Jervis's reflection is hard to encompass in one mirror — psychologist, historian, political scientist, sociologist, international relations theorist... and all this before the introduction of hyphens — does not mean that we can consider him only in shards.² That would be some distortion; no one worked harder to integrate insights than Jervis. There is a powerful and systemic unity to his work that, in time, merits his inclusion in the pantheon of political philosophers. Jervis was a systems theorist of the first order, his ideas operate as a system, and his efforts unified knowledge without assaulting reality. Below, I make the case for Jervis as a political philosopher qualified for canonization (or whatever the secular equivalent is).

To develop the brief, I first discuss what the Jervisian style in International Relations (IR) is. Next, I explore a counterfactual of how the world would look without it. Then, I compare Jervis's outlook to that of other political philosophers. And last, I contrast the Jervisian style to the paranoid style in American politics, and claim that the former fights the latter.

Jervisian Style

Discerning a system in Jervis's approach faces two disorienting obstacles: the obvious tensions in his thought, and its open-endedness. First, let us consider the contradictions and ambivalences in his works, which he openly confessed. For example: "I was perhaps a premature rational choice theorist, which in part explains why my recent criticisms of this approach are, I hope, based on some understanding of and sympathy for it."³ "I was always both attracted and repelled by parsimony."⁴

¹ My thanks to Paul MacDonald and Sebastian Rosato for comments. Kin claims to mine are made by James W. Davis and Green. See Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *H-Diplo/ISSF Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis, Part I*; <https://issforum.org/admin/jervis-tribute-part-1.pdf>; and Jacques E. C. Hymans, "Stanley Hoffman Now," *H-Diplo/ISSF*, Forum 33 (8 April 2022), <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/10079634/h-diploissf-forum-33-2022-importance-scholarship-stanley>.

² I would be remiss, in the midst of an optical metaphor, not to note that the daughter of the Greek personification of wonder, Thaumias, is Iris, goddess of the rainbow and messenger between humanity and the gods.

³ Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xiii.

⁴ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1.

“Abstract theorizing is crucial,” but “a deep commitment to empirical research” is essential.⁵ Usually, he preferred reason to intuition, but sometimes the reverse.⁶ His perspective was invariably interdisciplinary, and he had no qualms melding perspectives from different paradigms.⁷

Second, Jervis’s corpus is resolutely open-ended, and it is hard to encapsulate the indefinite. As he remarked early on, the examples in his first book “in no sense constitute proof. Indeed they do not show that what I claim should occur given certain assumptions does in fact occur all, or even most of, the time.”⁸ Despite a lifetime of pioneering work, his observations remained cautious and modest: “We are headed for a difficult world, one that is not likely to fit any of our ideologies or simple theories.”⁹ His first book was about putting forth an image of oneself, the second was about how states perceive the images of others, but in his last book, though he would have liked to have been able to unite them, “after forty-five years I can still make only limited steps in that direction.”¹⁰

Yet there is a visible harmony for those who look. Jervis was a consistent systems theorist, and his theories mirror his subjects. The world is a shifting collection of overlapping systems: “Very little in social and political life makes sense except in the light of systemic processes.”¹¹ Systems have (a) a set of interconnected units so that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) properties and behaviors of the whole that are different than those of the parts. Systems tend to be homeostatic, like thermostats or blood pH, and, while inputs may vary widely, outputs tend to remain within a confined range. When people populate systems, however, there can be striking tipping points and unintended effects, though these tend to be exceptional.¹²

The Jervisian style is fundamentally systemic; its answers are bands, not points. This can be frustrating at times — where is the concrete conclusion? — but it sidesteps the perils of false precision and hubris. What sometimes seems like quibbles, cavils, and technicalities are better depicted as honesty, prudence, and due process.

The approach is as social as the subject it studies. Jervis was little interested in coauthoring, but neither was he a reclusive genius. In fact, he was famous for reaching out to others, bringing them together, and brokering their exchange. “Sometimes it will be useful to ask who, if anyone, was right; but often it will be more fruitful to ask why people differed and how they

⁵ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 5.

⁶ For instance, he preferred to analogize intelligence failures to batting averages rather than fielding percentages, in spite of the fact that no reliable method to collect such data existed, much less a comparable statistic. See Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 178.

⁷ Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005), chap. 1.

⁸ Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, 17.

⁹ Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, 138.

¹⁰ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 108.

¹¹ Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6, 12-13, 16.

¹² Jervis, *System Effects*, 295.

came to see the world as they did.”¹³ The goal was not producing brilliant formulas in solitude, but collective convergence on moving targets.

To him, the problems and their remedies were as semi-stable as the world he watched. Generally, political actors tended to get into trouble with sloppy thinking: they fail to frame falsifiable hypotheses, examine crucial assumptions, ask what evidence would be present if their arguments were right or wrong, use the value of absent evidence, or employ the comparative method to isolate causal factors.¹⁴ The best antidotes are better thinking habits: preventing premature mental closure, taking conflicting views seriously, maintaining openness to change, forcing people to confront tradeoffs, and being wary of rhetoric trumping analysis.¹⁵

Similarly, Jervis thought the field functioned like the world. “If the discipline is functioning well, each school of thought enriches others as powerful research of one kind strengthens, not weakens, the alternatives.” He went on: “Popular approaches inevitably are taken too far and call up opposing lines of argument; and if any important approach is ignored for too long, scholars will return to it as the picture of international politics becomes excessively imbalanced.”¹⁶ The logic is evolutionary, except the environment is social, not natural, and the equilibria is perspectival, not biological. The payoff could be consilience, where multiple independent lines of inquiry bundle together to strengthen conclusions each is too weak to reach.

One of Jervis’s most frequent references was *Rashomon*,¹⁷ a movie about the same series of events from multiple perspectives. Each perspective is reliable enough to relay the basic facts of the story, but not enough to avoid major divergences, ostensibly because each narrator had different self-serving biases. The film never reveals where the truth lays. It’s tempting to greet this conclusion with a nihilistic shrug or a determined hope that, with the right set of eyes, the truth could be pinned like butterfly wings. Jervis succumbs to neither temptation. His work implied that the world is shared, and great things can happen when people overcome their biases and try to live in a common world.¹⁸ But reality is restless, and only the consistent application of multiple approaches can close in on it.

It’s a Wonderless Life

To isolate the impact of Jervis’s scholarship, let us consider a different movie: *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The plot is essentially a counterfactual about whether the world is better off with a particular individual in it, and Jervis was certainly fond of counterfactuals.¹⁹ He would, of course, advise some agnosticism here; a world with only one thing different may not only be

¹³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 29.

¹⁴ Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 3, 191.

¹⁵ See Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 3, 191, also Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 135.

¹⁶ Jervis, “Realism and the Study of World Politics,” *International Organization* 52:4 (Autumn 1998): 971-72.

¹⁷ Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails*, 175; Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 6, 269.

¹⁸ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 280; Erving Goffman, *Strategic Interaction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 3.

¹⁹ Perhaps also meta-counterfactuals. What if the plot had been real? Many argue that the upstate New York town in *It’s a Wonderful Life* would have been better off without the film’s protagonist. See Wendell Jamieson, “Wonderful? Sorry, George, It’s a Pitiful, Dreadful Life,” *New York Times* (18 December 2008). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/19/movies/19wond.html>; Dom Nero, “In *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Pottersville Actually Looks Way

unlikely but also difficult to chart in all its consequent changes.²⁰ Still, he would find it productive and amusing, albeit not dispositive, to imagine a world he was not born in.

With some justice, counterfactuals are often unkind to individuals because, in large social systems, the influence of individuals is typically circumscribed. As economist George Stigler once roasted his colleague Milton Friedman, “Milton, if you hadn’t been born, it wouldn’t have made any difference.”²¹ Jervis was certainly not the first systems theorist in IR, nor the first to foreground interdisciplinary perspectives.²²

Yet it would be lunacy to suggest that Jervis’s birth made no difference. Exhibit A is the citation counts and surveys that put Jervis in the top ten of IR scholars for the past few decades.²³ Exhibit B for this is the dizzying array of prominent thinkers who attest that Jervis changed their thinking. Thomas Schelling wrote, “*The Logic of Images in International Relations* has had more influence on me than anything else Bob has written. That’s partly because the ideas were absolutely new to me. The analysis focused on something I hadn’t thought about.” John Mearsheimer testifies that “virtually all the international relations scholars in my cohort... were influenced in truly important ways by his scholarship.” The list goes on.²⁴

More Fun Than Bedford Falls,” *Esquire* (24 December 2019), available at:

<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/a30315437/its-a-wonderful-life-portersville-better-than-bedford-falls/>.

²⁰ See Jervis, “Counterfactuals, Causation, and Complexity,” in Phillip Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 309-316.

²¹ Quoted in Ian Ayres, “Making a Difference: The Contractual Contributions of Easterbrook and Fischel,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 59:1 (Winter 1992): 1391. This fits with Merton’s multiples, the norm in science of simultaneous discovery. See Robert K. Merton, “Singletons and Multiples in Scientific Discovery: A Chapter in the Sociology of Science,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 105:5 (October 1961): 470-486.

²² For systemic precursors, see Norbert Weiner, *Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1948); Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957); Klaus Knorr and Sidney Verba, eds., *The International System: Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems: How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). For influential interdisciplinary precursors, see W.G. Sumner, *Folkways* (Mineola: Dover, 2002 [1906]); Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Social Theory of Georg Simmel* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966 [1925]); Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (New York: Norton, 1955); Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); and Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

²³ Jervis is in the top 3 for IR scholars in books. See <https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph>. For the latest PS 400 list, where Jervis places 10th for IR scholars, see Hannah June Kim and Bernard Grofman, “The Political Science 400: With Citation Counts by Cohort, Gender, and Subfield,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 52:2 (April 2019): 307. And for US surveys of most influential IR scholars, where Jervis has ranged from 6th to 8th since 2004, see <https://trip.wm.edu/data/dashboard/faculty-survey>.

²⁴ Thomas Schelling, “Foreword” in James W. Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xi. John Mearsheimer, “Homage to Bob Jervis,” in Immerman, Labrosse, and Trachtenberg, eds., *Tribute to the Life, Scholarship, and Legacy of Robert Jervis, Part I*, 84; <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Jervis-Tribute-1.pdf>. Christensen and Yarhi-Milo, “The Human Factor: How Robert Jervis Reshaped our Understanding of International Politics,” *Foreign Affairs* (7 January 2022), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2022-01-07/human-factor>

The influence these scholars describe is multifaceted: Jervis as a critic and convener, bringing people together, highlighting differences, noting inconsistencies, and fostering engagement.²⁵ Jervis embraced ambiguity and flux with multimethod, interdisciplinary approaches. Where some scholars take a lawyerly attitude toward their work, dutifully defending the unrepresented, and others take a chauvinistic attitude, dogmatically advocating for their sect, Jervis did neither. His role was closer to an arbitrator. He tried to get everyone in a room talking, get their stories straight, weigh and consider their briefs, and recommend a clement and appealable verdict. Nothing and no one could monopolize the truth, and being fair and inclusive provided more light and less heat. That judicious influence did not revolutionize the field, but it likely accelerated its development and expanded its appeal.

More to the point, he added wonder. Lawyers and chauvinists are tediously predictable — everyone knows what their conclusion will be — the only mystery is how they are going to get there. The reverse was true of Jervis. He put suspense in scholarship. Because he found the world so fascinatingly full of wonders, it was seldom clear where he would come out on an issue. And although one could rely on him to use ecumenical methods to get there, there were always strobe-light surprises along the way. Without his influence, surely the field would not be devoid of wonder, but it would surely be wonder-less.

Jervis as Political Philosopher

What do you call someone so systematically absorbed by the wonder of politics? Historically, there is a clear answer: political philosopher.²⁶ What separates the great from the good is their judgment. But how to judge judgment? Here, too, there is something of a consensus. Those with sound judgment are spectators who overcome the limitations of their position by entering into innumerable perspectives and consistently considering issues impartially.²⁷ They bow to none and cannot be coerced by fame, fear, or fortune. The more widely they consult and consider, the more expert they judge. Hannah Arendt calls this common sense, not because everyone has it but because it is a sense that we cohabit a common world.²⁸

Customarily, experts are equated with specialists, but the custom leads us astray in this case. Specialists sharpen the mind by narrowing it, and hone it with routine. To be sure, sympathy and self-command are skills like any other, which require training and practice. But to take social systems in the round is anathema to narrowing or routinizing; it is to be a general specialist. The division of intellectual labor has been proceeding profitably for centuries, but a critical niche in that division is the generalists, who connect the parts into a working whole. International Relations has a good claim to be a factory of general specialists, and Jervis had a good claim to be a lynchpin in International Relations. He exemplified generalism as a calling.

Jervis was a political philosopher par excellence. He possessed the universal curiosity, impartial independence, sensible intellect, and systemic cast of mind that characterizes the best of them. He never met a discipline, a paradigm, a theory, or a method that he could not learn from. He always said his favorite work was *System Effects*, and he embodied its arguments

²⁵ See Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security* 24: 1 (Summer 1999): 42-63; Jervis, “Liberalism, the Blob, and American Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies* 29:3 (May 2020): 434-456.

²⁶ See Plato, *Thaetetus* 155d; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b; Adam Smith, “History of Astronomy,” §§1-2; Dana Villa, *Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 358.

²⁷ See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I 39-40, V 9-10; Montaigne, *Essays*, I.27; Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.iii.2.2-11, III.3.3-6, II.4.1-8; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §40; J.G. Herder, “Whether We Need to Know the End of History in Order to Write History”; George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 334; Mead, *On Social Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 13, 18; Joshua Cherniss, *Liberalism in Dark Times: The Liberal Ethos in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 158, 181, 195.

²⁸ See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 219.

throughout his career. He had the power to hold a complicated subject in his palm and analyze it minutely and insightfully, then, with an impish turn, do it all over from different angle. The end result is political philosophy of the first order.

Conclusion

The Jervisian style in international politics makes a stark contrast with the paranoid style in American politics. Richard Hofstadter, himself something of a historian with a memorable writing style, coined the latter to pejoratively describe a tendency in U.S. history for conspiratorial thinking, which was often partisan and pathological, projecting the deepest desires and fears of the right onto their opponents on the left.²⁹ Hofstadter got a number of things wrong about the paranoid style — it's less partisan and more political than he advertised it — but he was right to highlight its prevalence and perils.

The Jervisian style is the remedy to the paranoid style. It gently facilitates broad, rigorous, non-partisan thought. It encourages all sides to slow down, cool off, and see things from other people's points of view. It sensitizes us to look out for what our perspective is missing, and to remember that learning is a team effort. In an age when the paranoid style threatens to destabilize the institutions of truth, we urgently need the Jervisian style.

It is sometimes believed that knowledge will bring about a disenchanting of the world, that contempt will follow familiarity. Jervis thumbed his nose at those claims. He was a political philosopher with encyclopedic interests and profound insights, who was just as spellbound by the world before his analysis as after. For the Jervisian style, the means and end of all understanding is wonder.

²⁹ See Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2008), chap. 1.

ROBERT JERVIS: HIS ENDURING LEGACY
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In his thinking about causation and concern about effects, Robert Jervis is to International Relations what Charles Darwin is to evolutionary Biology and Richard Feynman is to theoretical Physics – a pioneer whose original and unique contributions to the discipline – and the subfields that he championed – made a lasting mark. Like Darwin,¹ who showed how the natural selection of small, inherited variations increase the ability to compete, adapt, and survive, Jervis revealed that the international objectives of actors, such as deterrence and coercion, depend not only on credibility and material incentives to make threats potent, but more fundamentally on how the actors see the world and how they employ strategic signaling to influence others' perceptions of them.

Jervis progressed further to show that a full understanding of international politics requires identifying not only actors beliefs about the world and how behavior is perceived but also in recognizing that international relations is a complex system which generates both direct and nonlinear second- and third-order effects that may not immediately be obvious. Jervis invoked Darwin to emphasize the “need to take more seriously the notion that we are in a system and to look for the dynamics that are at work.” “Nothing in biology makes sense,” he quotes a distinguished geneticist as writing, “except in the light of evolution.” Likewise, Jervis insists, “Very little in social and political life makes sense except in the light of systemic processes. Exploring them gives us new possibilities for understanding and effective action; in their absence we are likely to flounder.”² Best known is Jervis's explanation of the security dilemma as the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others. This dynamic provides the rational foundation for the spiral model in which interactions among security seekers can paradoxically fuel dangerous international competition.³ Relevant for contemporary concerns, Jervis's historical analysis showed that the [first] Cold War was not the product of a security dilemma, although some elements of security dilemmas were present and intensified the conflict.⁴

Like Feynman,⁵ Bob Jervis was a theoretical genius whose insights were enriched by and ranged across multiple disciplines and domains. Both scholars deeply appreciated the importance of empirical tests and devoted considerable intellectual energy to significant policy challenges. For Feynman, it was the Manhattan Project, Los Alamos, and the Challenger space shuttle disaster commission. Jervis wrote intelligence reviews and postmortems of key intelligence failures, including the unanticipated fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979 and the claim that Iraq had active WMD programs in 2002. He chaired the CIA's Historical Review Panel and was at the center of the most important debate about the nuclear age (more about this below).

¹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. 6th ed. (London: J. Murray, 1872).

² Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Social and Political Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 295.

³ Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30:2 (1978): 167-214.

⁴ Jervis, “Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3:1 (2001): 36-60.

⁵ Those who are disinclined to study Feynman's papers on quantum mechanics or his lectures on physics or computation can still enjoy reading Richard P. Feynman, *The Pleasure of Finding Things out: The Best Short Works of Richard P. Feynman* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); and James Gleick, *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

Feynman observed that, “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself, and you are the easiest person to fool.”⁶ Jervis agreed and his insights about misperceptions and beliefs help uncover why leaders fool themselves into taking avoidable costly actions. “It is all well and good to talk about credibility, punishment, and reward in the abstract,” he noted, “but as they work out in the real world, they depend on what the targets value, believe, and think about the state’s behavior.”⁷

As others have observed,⁸ some of Jervis’s most interesting and important theoretical insights emerge from arguments he had with himself. Scientific theory, such as evolution is foundational, but Jervis pointedly also draws on Stephen Jay Gould (another scholar lost too early to cancer) to debate whether the future is driven by cycles or arrows, by patterns or contingency.⁹ Like Gould, Jervis finds each perspective has an element of truth. “The operation of natural selection does not preclude a large role for chance and accidents. Had certain life forms been destroyed or others survived eons ago—and there are no general principles or scientific laws that precluded this—life would have evolved very differently.” Jervis contends that international politics also “fit this pattern” though he acknowledges that this observation is impossible to prove.¹⁰ Moreover, “[i]f our laws are not timeless--if history resembles an arrow--some of what we have learned will not help us understand the future.”¹¹ As an example, Jervis cites alliance theory that predicted NATO’s dissolution after the end of the Cold War against the notion that the roles and motivations for alliances can change, and one might add, continue to evolve.

The parallels with Gould are further evident in the development of Jervis’s thinking about international relations as a complex adaptive system, which also draws on insights from Charles Perrow¹² and Garrett Hardin,¹³ reflecting Jervis’s inimitable rich interdisciplinary research and analysis. Seeking to explain how systems work and why so often they produce unintended consequences, Jervis underscores the tendency of interconnections influenced by previous interactions and positive and negative feedback loops to produce unexpected second- and third-order effects. A crucial advance beyond

⁶ Feynman, “Cargo Cult Science” Caltech 1974 commencement address,” in *Engineering and Science* 37:7 (1974): 12.

⁷ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 10. On a personal note, I still recall meeting Jervis for the first time as an early lesson in how inferences can succumb to the representativeness fallacy. Jervis rushed in late to a Columbia experts’ seminar on arms control dressed in his trademark khakis and Izod t-shirt, looking more like a goateed hippy just off the magic bus from Kathmandu than a distinguished professor. As the graduate student rapporteur of the seminar, I probably scowled disapprovingly, until he introduced himself. Could this person really be the author of one of the most compelling books I had read in the field – *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*? I struggled with my own attribution bias! One of my mentors at Columbia, Warner Schilling, gruffly complained that after Jervis arrived, the students were all seeing biases everywhere. Whatever happened to normal error, he demanded to know. In fact, it is well known that in *Perception – Misperception*, Jervis had set a high bar for determining the existence of bias in decision making. Bob and Warner were actually alike in their meticulous attention to historical detail, appreciation of pluralism in methods, and generous encouragement of young scholars.

⁸ For similar observations of this Jervis trait, see Jack Snyder, “Both Fox and Hedgehog: The Art of Nesting Structural and Perceptual Perspectives,” in James W. Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 13-24, 14, and Marc Trachtenberg, “Robert Jervis and the Nuclear Question,” Davis, ed., *Psychology, Strategy and Conflict*, 101-120 at 116.

⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Jervis, “The Future of World Politics: Will it Resemble the Past?” *International Security* 16:3 (1991): 39-73, 43.

¹¹ Jervis, “The Future of World Politics,” 45.

¹² Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, rev ed., 1999).

¹³ Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 162: 3859 (1968): 1243-1248.

Perrow, closer to Werner Heisenberg,¹⁴ is recognizing that system effects are strongly influenced by how actors perceive the system and strategize as well as how interactions add complexity and change the environment so that subsequent actions take place in different conditions.

Policy Implications of Coping with System Effects

Disturbing a complex system will produce several changes that require coping with unpredictability. Jervis illuminates this common problem in political life by drawing on Hardin's insight about the impossibility of locating a specific agent which will do only one thing because of the unintended consequences. "We can never do merely one thing," Hardin admonished. "Wishing to kill insects, we may put an end to the singing of birds. Wishing to 'get there' faster we insult our lungs with smog."¹⁵ Jervis could not resist underscoring the effect by providing a long list of additional wide-ranging examples, including how

"redundant safety equipment makes some accidents less likely but increases the chances of others due to the operators' greater confidence and the interaction effects among the devices; placing a spy in the adversary's camp not only gains valuable information but also leaves the actor vulnerable to deception if the spy is discovered; ... allowing the sale of an antibaldness medicine without a prescription may be dangerous because people no longer have to see a doctor, who in some cases would have determined that the loss of hair was a symptom of a more serious problem; flying small formations of planes over Hiroshima to practice dropping the atomic bomb accustomed the population to air raid warnings that turned out to be false alarms, thereby reducing the number of people who took cover on August 6."¹⁶

Jervis's point that "most actions, no matter how well targeted, will have multiple effects"¹⁷ bears repeating. Sometimes the effects are readily evident as how actual and planned cuts to oil imports to punish Russia for its aggression against Ukraine are leading to significantly higher prices and greater gains to Moscow's coffers, at least in the short run. However, not all side effects are negative, as witnessed by the *Zeitenwende* in German security policy in 2022 that includes plans to invest a €100 billion in German defense spending, send heavy weapons to Ukraine and eventually end Germany's dependence on Russian energy.

Jervis suggested that effective action is often possible by employing multiple policies that constrain and work with the dynamics of the system. In order to produce a desired change, the actor must appreciate the need to do several things, whether "Doing Things in 'Twos'"¹⁸ or other combinations.

Evidently in recognition of the system effects reverberating from Russia's war in Ukraine, the Biden administration and some NATO allies are arming Ukraine while simultaneously deterring Moscow from escalating to nuclear use and at the same time reassuring the Kremlin that Washington and NATO do not seek to become combatants or promote regime change in Russia. The administration also appears to be sensitive to tracking not only what Russia is doing with its forces,

¹⁴ Werner Heisenberg, *Encounters with Einstein and Other Essays on People, Places and Particles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Aya Furuta, "One Thing Is Certain: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle Is Not Dead," *Scientific American*, March 8, 2012.

¹⁵ Jervis added the emphasis, *System Effects*, 10.

¹⁶ Jervis, *System Effects*, 11.

¹⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 11.

¹⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 271-279.

but also what it is not doing (to date) – such as not taking steps to operationalize nuclear warheads by removing them from storage for mating with tactical nuclear delivery systems. Future research can catalog whether such analysis reflects the presence of several notable scholars currently working in the US government who would know to avoid the bias of ignoring negative evidence.¹⁹ The Biden administration also cancelled a scheduled routine nuclear test and has repeatedly judged some weapons (e.g., long-range Multiple Rocket Launch Systems (MLRS)) and tactical support measures (e.g., a no-fly-zone) too close to a red line that could trigger Russian escalation.

On the other hand, despite some realists' view that the United States has low stakes in Ukraine and should avoid paying high costs, the Biden administration and many American politicians seem convinced that failure to support a partner like Ukraine would undermine US credibility to defend other allies. This follows Jervis's contention that "beliefs about resolve, credibility, and controllability were central to the Cold War" and such beliefs recur because empirical evidence is lacking to rule them out. Jervis reminds us that one of the reasons Kennedy and Johnson decided to fight in Vietnam was to convince others that the United States would not abandon Berlin and that the US needed to stay in Berlin "to deter larger attacks on West Germany."²⁰

Jervis and the Bomb

The current attempt to both engage in while simultaneously contain a full-blown "competition in risk-taking" over Ukraine leads this essay to a third area in which Jervis made a foundational contribution—the meaning and effects of the atomic bomb. Jervis's *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* is a path-breaking study of the implications of nuclear weapon states in the condition of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and a focal point for continuing debate over strategy and the nuclear age. Jervis's core claim is one he defended to the end of his life, that "MAD is a fact, not a policy."²¹ Mutual vulnerability meant the risk of mutual suicide because there is no meaningful defense; MAD theorists contend these facts decrease the chance of a nuclear war. Even the "shadow of mutual vulnerability" (what Jervis calls MAD 4) strongly influenced beliefs of political leaders who "never had any faith that all-out war would lead to anything other than utter devastation."²²

Jervis, like other scholars (notably Kenneth Waltz²³ and Charles Glaser²⁴), openly recognized that the theory of the nuclear revolution is normative and prescriptive, and contended that states would be better off if they followed it. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that in practice actors have struggled to escape MAD more than he initially expected.²⁵ To his credit, Jervis

¹⁹ Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 223.

²⁰ Jervis, "The Nuclear Age: During and After the Cold War," in Nuno P. Monteiro and Fritz Bartel, eds., *Before and After the Fall: World Politics and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), chap. 6, 131; and Jervis, Yarhi-Milo, and Casler, "Redefining the Debate Over Reputation and Credibility in International Security: Promises and Limits of New Scholarship," *World Politics* 73:1 (2021): 167-203.

²¹ Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 74.

²² Nuclear Age, 123.

²³ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear myths and political realities," *American Political Science Review* 84: 3 (1990): 730-745.

²⁴ Charles L. Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and Glaser and Steve Fetter, "Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and US Nuclear Strategy toward China," *International Security* 41: 1 (2016): 49-98.

²⁵ Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). See also Glaser, *Analyzing*

encouraged and engaged serious challenges to the theory.²⁶ In developing this work, he acknowledged not only the important influence of prior contributions by Bernard Brodie and Thomas Schelling²⁷ but also that the theory needs some refinement in view of new empirical evidence. In particular, the nuclear revolution theory overoptimistically predicted not only “peace between the superpowers, [but also that] crises will be rare, neither side will be eager to press bargaining advantages to the limit, the status quo will be relatively easy to maintain, and political outcomes will not be closely related to either the nuclear or the conventional balance.”²⁸

Jervis underestimated the efforts by states and policymakers to gain strategic advantages while arms racing as well as the extent to which new technologies and other advances could assist such efforts, particularly by the US, which is presently the only major power with resources and capabilities to pursue the objective of damage limitation. However, even the United States has struggled with strategic defense and has to face Russia’s (and potentially China’s) determined efforts to deny the US significant possibilities for damage limitation while preserving the condition of mutual vulnerability. An example is Moscow’s development of the Poseidon intercontinental nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed autonomous torpedo designed for massive destruction of coastal cities. China also seems to be moving away from its minimal deterrent posture and more determined to preserve an assured retaliation capability despite US pursuit of technological advances and other means to erode it.

Finally, Jervis recognized that although mutual second strike capabilities decreased the chance of nuclear war they “also made it safer for either side to engage in provocations at lower levels of violence.”²⁹ The latest and most dangerous manifestation of this stability – instability paradox is evident in Russia’s prosecution of war against Ukraine while making persistent nuclear threats to deter the US and NATO from joining as full combatants. For their part, the United States and several NATO allies are significantly aiding Ukraine while warning (and reassuring) Russia that the US does not seek escalation. Washington has publicly signaled that “Any use of nuclear weapons in this conflict on any scale would be completely unacceptable to us as well as the rest of the world and would entail severe consequences.”³⁰ As mentioned, it is

Strategic Nuclear Policy; and Glaser and Steve Fetter, “Should the United States reject MAD?” For critiques see Scott D. Sagan, *Moving Targets: Nuclear Strategy and National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Green, *The Revolution that Failed: Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Green and Austin Long, “The MAD Who Wasn’t There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance,” *Security Studies* 26:4 (2017): 606-641; Long and Green, “Stalking the Secure Second Strike: Intelligence, Counterforce, and Nuclear Strategy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 3:1-2 (2014): 38-73; Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence,” *International Security* 41:4 (2017): 9-49; and Lieber and Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

²⁶ Jervis, “Author Response: Reflection on *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, 30 Years Later,” Roundtable: *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution 30 Years Later*, *Texas National Security Review*. See also the citations in footnote 25.

²⁷ Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946); and Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁸ Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, 45.

²⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 12 citing Glenn Snyder, “The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror,” in Paul Seabury, ed., *The Balance of Power* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), 184-201.

³⁰ President Joseph R. Biden, “What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2022. See also Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Jervis, “Signaling and Perception: Projecting Images and Drawing Inferences,” in *How Statesmen Think*, chap. 5, 107-124.

also likely that some members of the government fear a defeat in Ukraine will weaken deterrence for the Baltic states and Taiwan.

Jervis did not live to give us his interpretation of the latest US/NATO-Russian crisis over the war in Ukraine, with its frequent Russian nuclear saber-rattling. One of his last publications was on “The Nuclear Age: During and After the Cold War,” when it was already evident that force could again “be used to change borders in Eastern Europe.”³¹ However, Jervis continued to insist that leaders’ awareness of the possibility that they could stumble into war played a large role in keeping them further from the brink. He observed a tendency for cautious behavior when the danger of nuclear war arose in contrast to “standard theories of bargaining [that] would lead us to expect states to have been bolder and more assertive than they were, and partly because of their caution they never saw situations as hopeless.”³²

Is that prevailing sense of caution still true today and will it hold into the future? Jervis laid important foundations for future research on deterrence and wars in the shadow and under repeated threats to employ nuclear weapons. This is fortunate given that the era of multipolar nuclear rivalry has already arrived and spans multiple regions. If Jervis is right, the nuclear taboo will continue to hold, despite crises involving nuclear-armed states and security competition aiming to break the stalemate. He laid down the marker that this fortuitous outcome will obtain because the drivers of significant continuity – whether common beliefs about the basic facts created by nuclear weapons, path dependence or self-fulfilling prophecies³³ – prove stronger than the countervailing impulses.

To be sure, Jervis’s work also indicates some important causes of deterrence failure³⁴ and it has to be expected that any nuclear use would have second and third order system effects, in line with Jervis’s theory about international politics.

Strap in. We’re in a new run of the experiment on whether nuclear weapons make the world safer because they increase the costs of war and reduce the probability of major power war or more dangerous because erroneous beliefs and miscalculations in a fragile balance of terror in nuclear multipolarity could lead actors to stumble over the brink.

³¹ Jervis, “The Nuclear Age,” 118.

³² Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, 232.

³³ Jervis, “The Nuclear Age,” 117.

³⁴ For example, Jervis, *How Statesmen Think*, chap. 9, 191-215.

BOB JERVIS ON HARD PROBLEMS BY JOSHUA ROVNER, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

I was a young graduate student the first time I emailed Bob Jervis. We had never met. I asked him for comments on an idea for my dissertation, which I thought was promising. My first two attempts to pin down a research question had failed. I hoped this time would be different. What I proposed was an intelligence version of civil-military relations. At the time I told myself that I wanted to get his honest opinion about the project, but in truth I just wanted Bob to say that my instincts were right.

Bob responded the next day. In a long email – I’m sure it was longer than my pitch – he offered his own thoughts on the issue, observations and criticisms about my approach, and suggestions about the way forward. His comments were perceptive and detailed and thorough. Above all they were helpful. Bob had a way of answering questions with better questions, and of asking them in a way that encouraged me to get on with the work. None of this will surprise anyone who knew Bob, but at the time I didn’t know him at all.

I got to know him better as my dissertation progressed, and in the years that followed. We were both interested in strategy and intelligence. I had many naïve ideas about these subjects, and Bob was good enough to listen to them. As many of the memorials in this series attest, he was remarkably generous with his time. As many of his students will surely agree, his generosity was a godsend.

Bob’s willingness to engage with my half-baked ideas was proof that he was kind. But I think it also reflected his curiosity about hard problems. Strategy is a dynamic contest among thinking rivals; figuring out how this process will play out is inherently uncertain. Intelligence is a murky business involving concealment and deception; the secret services operate an environment that is inherently ambiguous. Bob gravitated towards these fields because they spoke to bigger questions about perception and misperception in international politics. I suspect he also liked the challenge.

Some problems are too hard for any single discipline. Bob was a champion political scientist, of course, but he always wanted to tackle questions from different directions. His curiosity made him allergic to intellectual siloes, and his personality made him a natural bridge-builder. He brought together psychologists, sociologists, economists, and others. He earned the trust of scholars and policymakers alike, and encouraged frank discussions about difficult policy choices. An invitation from Bob was hard to resist.

He was particularly keen to bridge the gap between political scientists and historians. In early 2010 he founded the *International Security Studies Forum* to help the process. Bob wrote the first essay published in ISSF, a meditation on the ways in which political scientists and historians understand international security affairs.¹ His purpose was not to force scholars to change their ways in order to accommodate a different discipline. Instead, he asked how their various approaches might lead to greater collective knowledge. As he put it, “These differences produce tensions between political scientists and international historians that we should not expect to be resolved. Indeed, they should not be because the diversity of perspectives benefits us all. The point is not to convert others to our viewpoint, but to understand theirs.”

I disagreed with Bob on some issues over the years, but not on this one. Indeed, his approach struck me as exactly right, and I was thrilled when I had the chance to join the editorial board. A few years later I took on the role as managing editor of ISSF. This was a wonderful experience. It gave me the chance to learn about a huge range of historical and theoretical work, to draw attention to important new research, and to facilitate debates among scholars and policymakers. Mostly, though, it gave me an excuse to email Bob.

¹ Robert Jervis, “International Politics and Diplomatic History: Fruitful Differences,” ed. Diane Labrosse, *H-Diplo ISSF*, March 12, 2010; <https://issforum.org/essays/essay-1-jervis-inagural>.

In November 2020 we renewed an old debate about intelligence and the Iraq War. Janice Gross Stein and Jon Lindsay invited us to give a virtual guest lecture in their course on intelligence at the University of Toronto. Putting us together meant the students would hear two different explanations for why the intelligence community missed the mark in its prewar estimates. Bob's explanation was a combination of familiar obstacles to analysis: confirmation bias, insufficient attention to alternative possibilities, and so on. My explanation focused on how political pressure skewed the quality of intelligence.

Even though I disagreed with some of Bob's argument, I loved hearing him make it, because he was funny and engaging and brilliant. But the best part came at the end, when the organizers asked what kinds of new historical evidence would cut against our theoretical expectations. This is usually an awkward question – it's a bit like having a judge ask you to describe the evidence that will prove your guilt. Yet in this case I had to smile, because it reminded me of something Bob put to me as a graduate student, back when all I wanted was to hear that I was right.

How, he asked, will you know if you are wrong?

ACTING IN WHICH SYSTEM? BY JACK SNYDER, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Bob Jervis said that *System Effects* was his favorite among his books, and many of us consider it his masterpiece. No doubt this wide-ranging, multidisciplinary book weighed heavily in his election to the National Academy of Science, a rare achievement in our field. Nonetheless, some feel that its gems of insight remain underexploited compared to the more thorough attention given to his other classics. This may partly reflect the fact that *System Effects* is something of a capstone work, integrating themes from earlier works on the systemic logic of the balance of power, the security dilemma in anarchy, and the perceived feedback processes that fuel conflict spirals and beliefs in falling dominoes.¹

His reframing and extending of these insights from the viewpoint of general theories of complex systems opens up new perspectives that warrant a fresh look. This includes paths thoroughly vetted in the book as well as some tantalizing bits that are less explored. Jervis's systems perspective is highly relevant to contemporary issues in a precariously changing international system that is fraught with a shifting balance of power, more tightly connected global networks, heightened dilemmas of deterrence and containment, and systemic challenges to the "liberal international order." Who knew that a stalled-out Russian invasion of Ukraine would exacerbate inflation in the US, roil global markets, and put Africa at the brink of starvation?

Jervis began with the observation that complex systems are everywhere around us. He dissected examples from ecological systems, economic markets, industrial engineering, safety regulation, and more. Almost every scientific discipline has organized part of its intellectual enterprise around finding patterns in the complex interconnections of systems and their component parts.² And yet people tend not to be good systemic thinkers, inclined instead to expect linear effects. Bob's mission was to warn against the unexpected, unintended, unwanted consequences that follow from this myopic view.³

Although he paid plenty of attention to the specific structural features that shape interactions and outcomes in systems, he told the reader not to expect him to produce a new systemic theory of international politics or of anything else.⁴ Mostly he used theories off the shelf, such as Kenneth Waltz's systemic theory for applications to international relations, because Bob said they were well suited to his "own concerns."⁵ This method launched his exploration of the central topic of the book: "Acting in a System," as he entitled the concluding chapter. Across many different systems, his goal was to find recurrent decisional conundrums, patterns of perplexing behavior, and unintended outcomes set up by systemic complexity. These pitfalls prominently include underestimating the ripple of indirect effects across tightly interconnected systems, failing to anticipate "side effects" and delayed effects, overlooking the "emergent properties" of systems that differ from the

¹ Robert Jervis, "Systems Theories and Diplomatic History," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomatic History: New Approaches*, (New York: Free Press, 1979); Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978): 167-214; Jervis, "Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior," in Jervis and Jack Snyder, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Superpower Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

² George P. Richardson, *Feedback Thought in Social Science and Systems Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Cynthia Eagle Russett, *The Concept of Equilibrium in American Social Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

³ Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

⁴ Jervis, *System Effects*, 4.

⁵ Jervis, *System Effects*, 92.

characteristics of their parts, failing to see how the consequences of one's strategy depend on the strategies of others, and misjudging positive or negative feedback effects.

Acting in Atomized, Anarchical, Mechanical Systems

In this setup, Jervis made a number of conceptual choices that prioritize some ways of thinking about systems over others. Always alert to different ways of looking at the world, he drew upon ideas and examples that are far from narrow, but nonetheless his approach proceeded in a particular direction. He highlighted particular types of system and systemic patterns. He especially featured systems with prominent differences between the characteristics of the parts and the whole, systems with loose or no equilibria, systems that are atomistic in their interactions rather than organically integrated (notwithstanding his interest in ecology), and systems in which negative feedback is stabilizing and positive feedback destabilizing.⁶ He noted that his analysis is based mainly on what the international relations literature calls the “automatic” theory of the balance of power rather than the “manually operated” version.⁷ He spent less time examining humanly designed social systems with complementary, mutually supportive parts in which positive feedback is stabilizing. Both kinds of system are of urgent concern for contemporary students of international relations, and the field is wide open for new work especially on the better integrated, organic type. Acting effectively in a system depends above all on knowing what kind of system you are acting in.

The atomized, anarchical, mechanical systems especially interested Jervis because they allow considerable room for actors' agency within the system's structure. However, such systems place heavy demands on the actors' understanding of the system's dynamics. In international politics, they require actors to develop skills of insight at the level of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to understand how the system works. Alas, so few of the actors are Bismarcks who can figure out, for example, how to expand their sphere of influence without triggering destructive resistance and then consolidate the peace with a Reinsurance Treaty.⁸ The Bidens, Putins, and Xi Jinpings of our own era are not playing at this level for reasons that Jervis's own theories anticipated. They inhabit systems that are too complex, interconnected, indeterminate, and unpredictable to master. Cognitive limitations and biases make their devilishly hard tasks even more impossible. In contrast, the central point of highly institutionalized social systems in which all vectors converge on an equilibrium is to constrain freedom of action in a way that makes everyone's choices more predictable.

Jervis's overall solution was to remember that when acting in a system you may need to act indirectly or do two things at once—perhaps a direct action toward your goal, but also a secondary action that anticipates and blocks systemic backlash that subverts the primary action.⁹ This prescription dovetails with the closing dictum of his classic *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*: as you are acting, keep an open mind. Be aware of the common tendency to see what you expect to see. Remember that information that seems loosely consistent with your prior beliefs may also be consistent with contrary interpretations.¹⁰ Monitor the results of your actions and adjust accordingly.

⁶ Jervis, *System Effects*, 12-21, 44-48, 125-137.

⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 131.

⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 198; Stacie Goddard, “When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power,” *International Security* 33 (Winter 2008/09): 110-42.

⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 271-5, 282-295.

¹⁰ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 409-424.

But the prescription of *System Effects* set an even more daunting standard. As Jervis put it, the actor can “never do only one thing.”¹¹ Although Jervis featured the problem of delayed system effects, often the secondary countervailing move needs to be made at the same time as the primary initiative. Wait-and-see may come too late. The unanticipated reaction may have already gathered momentum in a tightly coupled system. By the time Putin finds out that his blitzkrieg has failed to seize the Kyiv airport and his army is incompetent at maneuver warfare, his credibility may already be irrevocably tied to the goal of dominating Ukraine. By the time Biden realizes that sanctions against Russia have accelerated inflation in the West, price increases may have already become self-reinforcing. The Black Sea might be irrevocably closed to grain shipments before anyone starts paying attention to the dire consequences for African diets. Sometimes not knowing which two things to do can be an insurmountable problem.

Designing Systems that are Less Confounding

When this is the case, as it will often be in the kind of system that Jervis describes, the reader may conclude that the solution is not so much to do two things at once but to design a better system before systemic Galloping Gertie escapes from the stable.¹² Jervis could be masterful on this point. His field-creating article on the security dilemma prescribed verifiable nuclear arms control agreements to shift away from offensive first-strike weapons toward second-strike weapons that are distinguishable as serving only deterrent purposes.¹³ Later critics who have complained that many actually existing weapons are indistinguishable between offensive and defensive types often miss the insight that weapons can be made distinguishable by agreement.¹⁴ Jervis’s point was that you need to redesign the system to be more stable, not tightly coupled like the proverbial scorpions in the bottle. Today, those who argue for cyber deterrence based on “defending forward” through “persistent engagement” take destabilizing features of cyber systems for granted instead of working to redesign them to be less tightly coupled.¹⁵

Jervis discussed systems design issues at various points in the *System Effects* book. One of his favorite examples was Charles Perrow’s diagnosis of “normal” industrial accidents, which was later applied by Scott Sagan to nuclear accidents. These occur in systems where all of the components are safe and reliable separately but are vulnerable to “common mode failures” when a system and its backup are vulnerable to an unanticipated disturbance that knocks out both at once.¹⁶

One might think that when such flaws are identified, tinkering can fix the problem, but Jervis warned that system effects bedevil the tinkerers. Several of his marquee examples depicted regulatory efforts perverted by system effects: seat belt laws

¹¹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 10-12.

¹² Paul Schroeder, “World War I as a Galloping Gertie,” in Holger Herwig, ed., *The Outbreak of World War I* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 142-151.

¹³ Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma.”

¹⁴ Charles L. Glaser, and Chaim Kaufmann, “What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?” *International Security* 22:4 (Spring 1998): 44-82.

¹⁵ Jervis’s preliminary thoughts on the systemic risks of cyber escalation can be found in Jason Healey and Jervis, “The Escalation Inversion and Other Oddities of Situational Cyber Stability,” *Texas National Security Review* 3:4 (Fall 2020): 30-53. On loose and tight coupling, Jervis, *System Effects*, 19; Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 89-96. For an explicit application to nuclear command and control, see Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Jervis, *System Effects*, 41; Scott Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

causing drivers to speed up and kill more pedestrians, restrictions on police coercion leading to increased use of deception, and alarms on parked cars leading to increased hijackings of cars stopped at traffic lights.¹⁷ Although Jervis was not opposed to regulation, his main focus on unraveling the puzzles of acting in existing systems leaves many issues of system design and reform in need of follow up.

Systems and Their Parts

Focusing more on systems design issues might require exploring types of systems that Jervis did not emphasize, starting with his definition of a system. Jervis said that “we are dealing with a system when (a) a set of units or elements is interconnected so that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviors that are different from those of the parts.”¹⁸ The latter stipulation can be interpreted variously in ways that matter for the analysis. He started with the anodyne example that the characteristics of benzene cannot be predicted from the properties of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen, which compose it. But then he quotes the Federalist Papers authors on needing to design a constitutional system that will be stable and orderly despite the expectation that the temperament of the people who act in it will be rowdy and disorderly.¹⁹ Later he cast doubt on the reductionist argument that international systems that are composed of a homogeneous regime type will be peaceful, asking about a world of Nazi states, and he speculated that a world of all democracies might not be peaceful if the reason for the current “democratic peace” is their common opposition to the threat from autocracies.²⁰ He also invoked Adam Smith’s invisible-hand metaphor, in which selfish actors’ interactions in the marketplace produce the social benefit of efficient production.²¹

In these arguments, Jervis made his typical move of showing the power of his argument by going immediately to the hardest case—here the case where the attributes of the system invert the attributes of the parts. He also made this move in his security dilemma article, showing how insecurity in anarchy can cause war even between status quo states that have nothing else to fight about. Unfortunately many readers make the mistake of reading this as saying that the security dilemma is a theory of the causes of war that assumes that states seek only the status quo. Not so: Jervis explicitly argued that predatory aggressors’ behavior was likewise shaped by the security dilemma they faced.²²

Similarly, the case in which the attributes of parts are opposite to the attributes of their system should be seen as a hard case that tests the rule, not a necessary part of the definition of a system. Emergent properties may simply be the benefits of smoother coordination of preferences in a well-designed system rather than the inversion of opposed desires.

Indeed, many of Jervis’s examples show how systems shape the attributes of their parts, and how the behavior of the parts can create a more compatibly aligned system, such that the system and its parts become mutually reinforcing. In his discussion of structure and agency, Jervis noted that ecological systems are shaped by the behavior of the species that populate them: elephants create their own grasslands. Conversely, environments shape the characteristics of their inhabitants: Kenneth Waltz explains that anarchy socializes states, and Otto Hintze went even further, showing that

¹⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 68-73.

¹⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 6.

¹⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 14-15.

²⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 35-36, 99.

²¹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 66, 132.

²² Jervis and Snyder, “Civil War and the Security Dilemma,” in Barbara Walter and Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Germany's garrison state was the product of its especially vulnerable position in the center of the European balance of power system.²³ Completing the causal circle, the state's militarism and nationalism led to the Schlieffen Plan and World War I, thus reinforcing the Hobbesian character of Europe's anarchical system. Along the same lines, Jervis talked about the "circular effects" of Japan's need for military security and economic autarky requiring aggressive imperial expansion. This reinforced the militarism of its regime and led to the US embargo and war that brought Japan's downfall.²⁴ In these examples, system effects tend to produce feedback that leads to the alignment of the characteristics of the part with its position in the system. Note that this alignment does not necessarily make for a desirable outcome for the actors in the system. Alexander Wendt took a comparable idea of circular effects of systemic structure and actor attributes and agency in positing his "three cultures of anarchy," the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian—one of them nasty and brutish, and two of them more desirable.²⁵

Organic Social Systems and Their Parts

Systems theorists in many disciplines note the difference between "mechanical" and "organic" systems in how the whole is related to its parts.²⁶ Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and the structural-functionalists assumed that mutually supportive institutions, a complementary division of labor, and normative solidarity are necessary for a social system to fulfill core functions of social integration, adaptation, goal attainment, and pattern maintenance.²⁷ In modern society the division of labor meant that the parts of the system were not identical, Durkheim argued, but together they would need to constitute an organic whole if the system were to function and endure. Contemporary historical sociologists avoid baking in cohesive functionalism as an assumption, but many construct their theories of structure and change around the momentum of a system with somewhat coherently aligned principles and parts.²⁸

In contrast, Charles Tilly advanced opposite assumptions about the social order in a slash-and-burn essay entitled "Useless Durkheim."²⁹ He argued that the state, the nation, and the demand for democratic participation in governance emerged as a consequence of international war and domestic "contentious politics." Democracy could emerge, he argued, only when the populace was able to break the stranglehold of entitled elites.

Karl Marx might be seen as having anticipated both of these kinds of assumptions. On one hand, he assumed that feudalism and capitalism each had its own coherent organizing principle that was sustained not only by a given mode of economic

²³ Jervis, *System Effects*, 103-5; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Otto Hintze, *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

²⁴ Jervis, *System Effects*, 60.

²⁵ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 6, "Three Cultures of Anarchy," 246-312.

²⁶ Russett, *The Concept of Equilibrium*, ch. 2.

²⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1984, orig. 1893); Talcott Parsons, "The Present Status of 'Structural-Functional' Theory in Sociology," in Parsons, ed., *Social Systems and the Evolution of Action Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1977).

²⁸ For various balanced views on this, see William Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁹ The essay is in Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1989).

production but also by an integrated set of mutually supportive institutions, social roles, and norms governing social relations. On the other hand, each of these social orders gestated a revolutionary, oppositional class within the womb of its otherwise integrated, functional system—a class that emerged because of its role in the existing order but came to have an existential conflict of interest with that system and amassed the power to overturn it. As extended by Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, this was also an influential systemic theory of international relations (never mind that Waltz calls it reductionist). History disappointed the predictions of this theory, but it's nonetheless a system theory with a well specified mechanism of endogenous change.

Organic systems of various kinds get mentioned in passing in *System Effects*, but nowhere is the idea of an organic, functionally integrated system examined systematically. Even when discussing ecology and the animal kingdom, Jervis was mostly writing about atomistic, “mechanical” systems in which individual actors are competing for survival or maneuvering for advantage in the face of systemic incentives and constraints, not inhabiting socially-defined roles or following institutionalized norms. This matters in today's context because many of the most important systemic, equilibrium, and feedback effects pertain to the components of the “liberal international order,” including its highly interconnected global economy, the suddenly infamous global supply chain, the diffusion of illiberal techniques used by demagogues in backsliding democracies, and the self-destruction of the free marketplace of ideas on global social media.

But are liberal orders organic in the Durkheimian sense, and do they work differently enough as systems to matter for the kind of analysis that Jervis highlighted in the book? The answer to this may depend on the type of liberal system under discussion. The libertarian version that features atomized competitors operating in a minimally regulated marketplace would seem to fit easily into the kinds of atomistic system that Jervis featured. Analyzing the more heavily institutionalized, socially regulated version that international relations scholars call “embedded liberalism” might require some additional tools.³⁰ When Jervis commented on regulation, he mainly treated it in an atomistic way in which individuals game the system and confound the intentions of the regulators—a very good point, but perhaps not the main point about this kind of system.³¹

Self-reinforcing Versus Self-undermining Systems

Abraham Newman and Henry Farrell have explicitly theorized the liberal international information system as a self-undermining institution, whose invisible-hand principles of free-speech absolutism have interacted with the rise of new media platforms, their libertarian business model, and the populist political moment to turn a pillar of liberal democracy into its nemesis.³² This is a system effect, but one dealing with an institutionalized dimension of the international order affording a prominent role for norms, and where dynamics of hierarchy and anarchy are both in play.³³ In my view, this example shows that it is possible to analyze free speech and media systems as atomized systems, but only because they have

³⁰ John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization* 36:2 (Spring 1982): 379-415.

³¹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 68, 70-73.

³² Abraham Newman and Henry Farrell, “The Janus Face of the Liberal International Information Order: When Global Institutions Are Self-Undermining,” *International Organization* 75:2 (Spring 2021), special issue on “Challenges to the Liberal International Order,” 333-358. An earlier conceptual model for this kind of analysis in political science is the study by Avner Greif and David Laitin, “A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change,” *American Political Science Review* 98:4 (November 2004): 633-652, comparing the self-undermining governance system of the Genoese podesta with the self-reinforcing system of the Venetian empire. A possible problem is that Greif and Laitin's analysis loads the dice in favor of stability in the Venetian system by positing more cooperative actors in Venice from the outset, even before self-reinforcing dynamics kick in.

³³ Jervis, *System Effects*, 10, 58, 136-7, does discuss system effects in norm-based international regimes, drawing on Jervis's articles on the Concert of Europe, so the application to this subject is not out of his study's scope conditions.

been disastrously structured by libertarian technology platforms that enable an unregulated worldwide race to the bottom. The last time the US had a reasonably well-functioning marketplace of ideas was during the high tide of embedded liberalism in the later 1950s with the Federal Communications Commission’s Fairness Doctrine in place and the news delivered by professional journalists. That, too, produced a powerful system effect, according to an APSA prize-winning study: the absence of ideological and partisan polarization.³⁴ Let’s invent a system theory that will help us figure out how to do that again.

This raises the more general question of whether the component parts of the liberal international order—not only free speech, but also market capitalism, the rule of law, and democratic self-determination—are self-reinforcing and mutually reinforcing, or whether they have become self-undermining and misaligned. Traditionally these components have been thought to be mutually reinforcing insofar as they are anchored in common principles, such as individual liberty, freedom of contracting, and the right to self-government. In international relations, scholars have argued that the success of liberal international regimes created a coherent, powerful support coalition anchored in those who benefit from the system at the domestic and international levels.³⁵ They also argue that having compatible institutional practices and rules facilitates cooperation, whether the issue is democracies routinely managing minor frictions, sovereign states crowding out heterogeneous forms of authority, or democratic regimes’ contrasting attitudes towards democratic and undemocratic rising powers.³⁶ Even Soviet leader Joseph Stalin thought that “everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”³⁷ Empirically, greater systemic coherence may account for the finding that liberal democracies and pure autocracies are both more durable than mixed regimes.³⁸ The more it can be shown empirically that the system’s parts do hang together, the more plausible it is to analyze them as a tightly interconnected system with self-reinforcing feedback.

Empirical studies of international regimes can help diagnose system effects that may have become self-undermining. A robust literature in social philosophy and history argues that the structural-functionalists are simply wrong in depicting a harmonious uniformity across the productive, regulatory, and legitimating institutions of most societies. This literature argues that a major engine of endogenous social change is the mismatch and friction between the principles and organizational features of the various components that make up a society.³⁹ In liberalism, the classic example is the tension between free markets and democratic rule.⁴⁰

“Quasi-equilibrium”

Although not all systems tend toward equilibrium, systems theories in many disciplines and fields of application employ equilibrium as a central organizing concept. Balance of power theory in international relations has a complicated

³⁴ Markus Prior, *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Elections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁵ Robert Keohane, “The Demand for International Regimes,” *International Organization* 36:2 (Spring 1982): 325–355.

³⁶ Bruce Russett, *Triangulating Peace* (New York: Norton, 2001); Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Jack S. Levy, “Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China,” in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 11-33.

³⁷ Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 114.

³⁸ Snyder, *Human Rights for Pragmatists: Social Power in Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 40-41.

³⁹ For example, Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 1.

⁴⁰ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944).

relationship to this concept, and so does Jervis's *System Effects*. After a good, but inconclusive discussion that focuses on the systemic level, Jervis retreated to a more action-centered analysis of the negative and positive feedback that holds the concept of equilibrium at arm's length. This is a consequential choice because systems with very strong equilibrium tendencies, like markets in perfect competition, are easier to understand and act within than ones with very weak equilibrium tendencies, like oligopolistic markets.

In its most straightforward usage, a system is in equilibrium when all forces acting on it are in balance. A homeostatic system, like a thermostat or pendulum, returns to its equilibrium state after it is subjected to a disturbing force through the operation of some automatic adjustment based on negative feedback. Equilibrium does not necessarily imply a static system. It can also refer to change along a predictable "equilibrium path" in response to predictable incentives and causal forces, as in path dependence resulting from first-mover advantages and increasing returns to scale, or predictable strategic choices, as in a Nash equilibrium in game theory that leaves all players with outcomes that they cannot unilaterally improve upon.⁴¹ Finally, an exogenous shock can disrupt a system and move it to a new equilibrium—a "punctuated equilibrium." Jervis noted, though, that sometimes what looks like a sudden collapse can be caused by a straw that breaks the camel's back after the accumulation of unobserved stresses and strains that come from within the system.

The concept of equilibrium has been at the core of the "old chestnut" question of whether the balance of power tends to produce "stability" in the international system as states form alliances to defend themselves against powerful aggressors.⁴² Jervis quoted the kitchen-sink definition of Karl Deutsch and David Singer that stability means "the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur."⁴³ Given the track record of the multipolar twentieth century, it is difficult to say that the balance of power came anywhere near meeting that criterion. More insightful is the purportedly correct answer to an old Yale history department Ph.D. exam question, "when in history did the balance of power work most effectively?" No, not during the Concert of Europe, but on July 31, 1914.

Kenneth Waltz, early in his career, was enamored with the concept of a competitive equilibrium leading to peace. His 1962 article quoted the claim of Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* that "A law of equilibrium . . . for the regulation of the really wholesome antagonism of contiguous States as it springs up out of their freedom... is constituted, whereby there is introduced a universal condition of public security among the nations."⁴⁴ Waltz concluded that Kant's "system of voluntary universal law rests upon an equilibrium of forces."⁴⁵ An evolved version of this idea stuck with Waltz years later in his capstone theoretical work, *Theory of International Politics*: "Balance-of-power theory is microtheory in precisely the economist's sense. The system, like a market in economics, is made by the actions and interactions of its units, and the theory is based on assumptions about their behavior."⁴⁶ But in that book, Waltz analogized not to firms in perfect competition, which by theory produces an equilibrium of supply and demand at a given price, but to oligopolistic competition—a better match for competition among the great powers—which by theory and empirical observation

⁴¹ Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); David M. Kreps, *Game Theory and Economic Modelling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴² Jervis, *System Effects*, 99, citing works by Raymond Aron and Stanley Hoffmann.

⁴³ Jervis, *System Effects*, 95.

⁴⁴ Waltz, "Kant, Liberalism, and War," *American Political Science Review* 56:2 (June 1962): 336; see the discussion in Paul R. Viotti, *The Realism of Kenneth N. Waltz: Intellectual Luminary and Lightning Rod* (draft of November 24, 2021).

⁴⁵ Waltz, "Kant," 338.

⁴⁶ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.

produces no unique, stable equilibrium. Prudently declining to put too much weight on the equilibrium analogy, Waltz's theory of the balance of power limits itself to the less ambitious argument that states get socialized to the logic of self-help in international anarchy or else they "fall by the wayside."⁴⁷

Jervis offered many empirical objections even to these pared down claims: states don't learn efficiently, and even so, few of them get selected out of the system through the survival of the fittest.⁴⁸ Besides, committing to a balancing alliance is frequently not the best move, so learning what to do in an anarchical system is hard.⁴⁹ Jervis did due diligence based on the "formulation used in most of the literature" that a system is "unstable" if it is prone to changes, "especially wars," that alter "the number, arrangement, and goals of the states that in turn affect many patterns of behavior."⁵⁰ His conclusion from this exercise featured not equilibrium but "quasi-equilibrium," which keeps the idea of feedbacks but is wary about claiming that the outcome of competitive interaction in anarchy is stability.

More in line with Jervis's approach is the systemic effect of delayed feedback in producing disequilibrium. Delayed effects long played an important role in Jervis's thinking. In his security dilemma article, a crucial point is that the benign intentions of a rising power can change once it achieves a hegemonic position, making credible commitments impossible.⁵¹ If anyone doubts Jervis's inclination to ironic pessimism, his discussion of delayed system effects noted that the mass extinction of predators can open the field for a new cohort of even more deadly ones.⁵² Delayed effects in a system, though often of great consequence, are particularly difficult to foresee and gauge precisely. "Declinists" predicted in the late 1980s that Japan would soon rival the US for hegemony whereas "engagers" predicted that admitting China to the WTO in 2001 would consolidate its "peaceful rise."

Jervis offered the cobweb theorem, also known as the corn-hog cycle, as an example of the uncertainty and misperception created by delayed effects.⁵³ Economists have long noted that rising prices for scarce feed corn lead pig farmers to cut back on future production, while those same high prices can induce corn growers to expand production for the next year of the cycle. This outcome producing lots of corn for fewer hogs resulted in falling demand and low prices for feed, inducing corn growers to cut back for the following year just as pig farmers were preparing to ramp up production to take advantage of the lower corn prices. This cycle of overshooting and undershooting demand could sometimes last for years. Deductive economic theory predicts that whether the cobweb-shaped supply and demand graph converges toward equilibrium or diverges toward disequilibrium should depend on the price elasticity of supply and demand for the commodities, affected by such factors as the gestational period of the animals (a delayed response effect) and the size of the markets for the goods. Empirical studies found that small farmers used to be very bad at predicting future prices, generally assuming a linear projection of current prices, and they were unaware of the cycle effect (heightened uncertainty due to the time delay). Such

⁴⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 105, citing Waltz.

⁴⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 104-105.

⁴⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 195-6; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of the Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

⁵⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 98, 136, 139, 143.

⁵¹ Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," 168.

⁵² Jervis, *System Effects*, 29.

⁵³ Jervis, *System Effects*, 259.

cycles are far less prevalent nowadays because of larger, more efficient farms and bigger export markets.⁵⁴ Bob speculatively applied the theory to the production of Ph.D. students.⁵⁵

In short, creatively theorizing how to understand and act in perverse systems with disorderly or no equilibria is tremendously valuable, especially if it can be used to devise, implement, and regulate better systems that have stronger equilibrium properties that make the effective strategy more self-evident.

Positive and Negative Feedbacks as Systemic or as Rhetorical

In the fourth chapter, Jervis discussed negative and positive feedback in interconnected systems.⁵⁶ Neither is inherently desirable or undesirable, and neither has a monopoly on equilibrium effects. Negative feedback produces equilibrium in a thermostat, while positive feedback can produce movement along a predicted equilibrium path of change. Negative feedback against shaming can lead to backlash against human rights promotion, while positive feedback from wind vectors can cause a suspension bridge to swing wildly and collapse. An arms race can be seen as a system in which rivals impose stabilizing negative feedback on each other (if it ends in a peaceful stalemate), but it can also be seen as a positive-feedback conflict spiral (if it ends in war by convincing both sides that war is inevitable and creating fleeting opportunities for a preventive attack). Jervis permitted himself the side comment that without negative feedback there would not be enough stability to sustain organized society, while without positive feedback there would be no change and growth.⁵⁷

Normally we think of negative feedback as stabilizing international politics by pushing back against aggression and other disruptions that threaten the status quo. In Waltz's memorable phrase, this means that "in international politics, winning leads to losing." In contrast, positive feedback implies that changes are cumulative, success leads to success, conquest facilitates additional conquest, and outcomes snowball, perhaps accelerating as they roll downhill. Jervis analyzed three of the key mechanisms of positive feedback that concern strategists: the interdependence of commitments through their effect on reputation for resolve and signaling, bandwagon alignments with the stronger or rising power, and defeats that cumulate like falling dominoes due to their effect on morale or resources.⁵⁸

These positive feedback mechanisms assume that the parts of the system are tightly interconnected. In such a system, peace and security are indivisible. The negative feedback mechanisms are more ambiguous. If winning leads to losing because every nation is highly motivated to defend its own homeland, and if logistics and terrain give huge advantages to the defenders, that is a negative-feedback world that is resistant to conquest and not tightly coupled. But if winning leads to losing if and only if a powerful global policeman of the status quo is constantly patrolling the turbulent frontier of empire (as per the NSC 68 global containment doctrine), then negative feedback stabilizes the system only because crucial actors realize that the world is tightly coupled and dominoes could fall. Indeed, this is Jervis's distinctive insight, which he called the

⁵⁴ Donald Albert, "Swine Producers' Price Expectations and the Hog Cycle," West Economics Research Report No. 10, Department of Economics, North Carolina State University, October 1969; Jim Mintert "What Happened to the Traditional Hog Cycle?" *Farm Progress*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.farmprogress.com/hog/what-happened-traditional-hog-cycle>.

⁵⁵ Jervis, *System Effects*, 259.

⁵⁶ Jervis, *System Effects*, 125-176.

⁵⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 125.

⁵⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 166-8.

“Never Again” domino paradox.⁵⁹ Dominoes don’t fall, but perhaps only because the collapse of the first sounds the alarm and action is taken that falsifies the theory.

An important question is whether statements about the interdependence of reputational commitments and about the interconnected fate of potential dominoes should be understood as beliefs about the nature of the international system or as rhetorical claims to justify a preferred policy. The historian Frank Ninkovich writes in *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (a book that Bob owned, marked up, and cited) that the domino theory served as a metaphor for “the absence of a homeostatic, self-regulating system” and “lack of a self-equilibrating balance of power” in a “world organized as a tightly linked system...whose main feature is open-ended and uncontrollable escalation.” And “least obviously, if the chain reaction cannot stop itself, it must be checked by a force capable of analyzing the domino process and subverting its dynamics.”⁶⁰

Thus, says Ninkovich, the “metaphor” served an “ideological” function for “interventionist rationales offered up in the late 1930s and during the cold war,” in which “the symbol...became mightier than the reality.”⁶¹ Secretary of State Dean Acheson argued at the Blair House meeting on intervention in Korea that “it was important for us to do something even if the effort were not successful” even though, or perhaps because, as Defense Secretary Louis Johnson told the Blair House group, “Korea is just a symbol... It isn’t important.”⁶² For Ninkovich, the underlying motivation for this narrative, beginning already with Woodrow Wilson, was to mobilize American public support for a globalist foreign policy that would “make the world safe for democracy.”⁶³

Jervis offered only “tentative” conclusions about the validity of the understudied domino theory but called it “oversimplified and misleading.”⁶⁴ Still, he noted that domino effects are more likely to occur when offense has advantages over the defense, when key states seek spoils rather than just security, and “when patterns of behavior and conceptions of interest are in flux.” In particular, he said, “the aftermath of most large wars may similarly bring uncertainty which permits several kinds of positive feedback, including the possibility of falling dominoes.”⁶⁵

My own view is that the domino theory is one of the rhetorical myths of empire that expansionists use to justify policies that serve their parochial, political, and ideological interests in terms of the public interest in national security.⁶⁶ A question that needs more research is when and why the public and other audiences buy domino myths. This is also raises the broader issue

⁵⁹ Jervis, “Domino Beliefs and Strategic Behavior.”

⁶⁰ Jervis, *System Effects*, 54; Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), xvi.

⁶¹ Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power*, xvi-xvii, 191-195.

⁶² Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power*, 191, 193.

⁶³ Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Snyder, “Dueling Security Stories: Wilson and Lodge Talk Strategy,” *Security Studies* 24:1 (January-March 2015): 171-197; Snyder, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 255-304.

⁶⁴ Jervis, *System Effects*, 168-169.

⁶⁵ Jervis, *System Effects*, 173.

⁶⁶ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 3-4.

of the relationship between system effects and subjective perceptions of system dynamics, which may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

“Action-arousing Gloomy Vision”

The domino theory paradox is not just a clever side point. This mechanism, which together with the similar “Lijphart Effect” leads off the concluding chapter, is the central take-home point of Jervis’s book. Jervis approvingly quoted Albert Hirschman’s concept of “action-arousing gloomy vision” in characterizing both the Lijphart effect and the domino paradox.⁶⁷

Arendt Lijphart, a Dutch-born political scientist, is famous for his theory of power sharing among deeply divided identity groups, which he based on the Dutch system of bargaining among the leaders of the Catholic, Protestant, and labor “pillars.” His conceptual nemesis Donald Horowitz argued optimistically that conflicts in ethnically divided societies could be mitigated by institutions that would encourage crosscutting cleavages or break up problematic identity blocs into smaller units. But Lijphart contended pessimistically that it was pointless to try to convince entrenched groups to resist the inevitable politicization of culture. It is better, he argued, to accept that identity politics is locked in, organize politics in a way that allows people to elect their own ethnic representatives, and then give the chosen group leaders vetoes to require decision making among them by consensus.

Both the domino theory and the Lijphart effect illustrate Jervis’s general strategy of accepting the hard realities of system-created conflicts, but then using deftly tailored combinations of resistance and accommodation to achieve a tolerable outcome. Jervis’s conclusion followed this up with the more general concept of quasi-homeostasis, whereby rivals dish out “negative feedback” in a way that “reduces the amount of change that occurs as actors respond to each other.” If states push back too hard and “overshoot,” they will “try to defuse the situation by concessions” in order to sustain “the desired level of risk” needed to “bring pressure to bear in a crisis.”⁶⁸ The “quasi” indicates that this interaction with negative feedbacks does not necessarily produce a stable equilibrium. Rather it suggests calibrated resistance in the hope of moving roughly in the direction of a tolerable equilibrium. This certainly resonates with the choices being faced by the US and Russia during the Ukraine war.

Jervis concluded by stressing that the quasi-equilibrium and uncertainty of consequences in complex systems leaves considerable “room for judgment.”⁶⁹ Agency looms large in this concept of structure, and Jervis is a masterful guide to the subtle considerations that should inform its use. The problem, however, is that judgment will be exercised not only by the Bismarcks and the Martin Luther Kings, but also by the Putins and the Trumps. Uncertainty in complex systems allows latitude not only for creative problem solving but, as Jervis stressed, also for unintended consequences. It also widens the door for perceptual bias and the construction of ideological narratives.

As for the future research agenda, I think the wide-open conceptual terrain lies in the area of the effects of systems that are designed to reduce internal contradictions, not just manage them, and to foster organic complementarities among the

⁶⁷ Jervis, *System Effects*, 264, quoting Albert Hirschman, *A Bias for Hope: Essays on Development in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 284, 350-353.

⁶⁸ Jervis, *System Effects*, 280-1.

⁶⁹ Jervis, *System Effects*, 204.

system's parts.⁷⁰ But in the meantime, we need to keep our powder dry and use Bob Jervis's books as guides for how to do that wisely.

⁷⁰ Antoine Bousquet and Simon Curtis, "Beyond Models and Metaphors: Complexity Theory, Systems Thinking and International Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24:1 (2011): 43–62; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2011.558054>.

ROBERT JERVIS AND THE SOCIAL DILEMMAS OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION BY ROBERT F. TRAGER, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

Researchers at a small drug company, Collaborations Pharmaceuticals in Raleigh, NC, recently stumbled upon something that surprised them. The company searches for new medicines using artificial intelligence techniques designed to avoid potentially toxic molecules. What if, the researchers asked, they instead searched *for* toxic molecules? Six hours from the time they started the search, they had generated a list of 40,000 potential toxins. Some of these were known toxins, like the odorless, tasteless nerve agent VX – a large enough amount to be visible can be lethal when it touches the skin. But the researchers also uncovered many other agents that were predicted to be orders of magnitude *more toxic* than VX. They did not publish the list.¹

This case highlights the fact that while technological progress is opening new possibilities for human flourishing, a growing list of technologies is challenging global security. DNA printing allows pathogens to be produced and modified. Lethal autonomous weapons facilitate the deployment of large-scale, targeted violence, potentially with diminished attribution of perpetrators. Both of these technologies are diffusing to ever widening circles of actors. The misalignment of artificial intelligence systems with human values is difficult to detect and poses a variety of risks; such misalignments may already have caused political polarization within countries and between them. Advanced forms of artificial intelligence are supercharging other domains of science and may well produce new destruction-dominant technologies.

Robert Jervis took up the challenge of theorizing the impacts of technology throughout his career. The relationship between changing material possibilities and the social world fascinated him. He seemed to take as given that social worlds are objects of enormous complexity and yet one could look for relatively simple, decisive influences of technology. Thus, one wonders how he would understand the social impacts of technological change today. Would he see fundamental shifts requiring new theory? Or do the theories that helped to make sense of earlier eras apply just as well today?

It is not a question he would have taken lightly because he believed in the possibility of fundamental change. In the nuclear age, he inveighed against “conventionalization,”² treating a world with nuclear weapons like one without them. But what would he make of a world in which the binary distinction between conventional and unconventional breaks down? As lethal autonomous weapons become much more sophisticated than they are now, perhaps the same sorts of weapons that are regularly used on the battlefield could be scaled up to cause mass casualty attacks. It is unclear how norms governing use would function in such an environment.³

Indeed, Jervis criticized analysts of world affairs on many occasions for not appreciating the differing social implications of differing technologies. In the case of biological weapons, for instance, he believed that “one reason why American preparations for defense against biological weapons has been misguided is that even experts have seen biological agents within the frame established by earlier attempts to deal with chemical weapons, despite the two differing in crucial ways.”⁴ He also thought that technology influenced the security dilemma, which would be heightened when offensive technologies

¹ Fabio Urbina, et al., “Dual Use of Artificial-Intelligence-Powered Drug Discovery,” *Nature Machine Intelligence* 4:3 (2022): 189-191.

² Hans Morgenthau, “The Fallacy of Thinking Conventionally about Nuclear Weapons,” in David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf, eds., *Arms Control and Technological Innovation* (New York: Wiley, 1976): 256-264.

³ Robert Trager and Laura Luca, “Killer Robots Are Here—and We Need to Regulate Them,” *Foreign Policy* (2022).

⁴ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 53.

are advantaged over defensive ones or the two cannot be distinguished.⁵ Mobilization races, he thought could create strong incentives to strike first and thus heighten the probability of war.⁶ He thought modern technology made wars last longer.⁷

In the case of nuclear weapons, he thought they had caused a “revolution” in international affairs for two essential reasons: the mutual vulnerability of rivals and the continuing permeability of levels of violence. Unlike in conventional conflicts, in a potentially nuclear conflict one side does not become less vulnerable if it is winning the war. Both sides maintain the ability to harm the other until both are destroyed. But this does not mean that when both sides possess a reliable second strike, the sides can assume that nuclear weapons would never be used in an ongoing conventional conflict. The possibility of escalation, he thought, was due to the fog of war, human conflict psychology, and the dynamics of crises. The implication was that the nuclear balance could never be so stable that countries would freely engage in conventional conflict. He thought that countries would generally be much more reticent to engage in conflict of any sort as a result of the danger of escalation to nuclear destruction. And he thought that this situation was reasonably satisfactory. He recognized the benefit of some risk that crises would get out of control: it meant crises would be avoided. In effect, he accepted some risk of nuclear catastrophe.⁸

Cyber capabilities, meanwhile, pose “special problems in the uncertainties and ambiguities involved in, and related to the lack of shared understandings about what would constitute escalation.”⁹ Cyber, and perhaps other new technologies, heighten the tension between secrecy and deterrence. Adversaries have an incentive to announce their capabilities in order to extract concessions, but doing so makes the capabilities much less effective. Cyber vulnerabilities, once discovered, can usually be patched. Yet, Jervis thought that the prospects for cyber arms control agreements were “dim.” States would be restrained by deterrence in initiating attacks, but not in developing the capability to attack.¹⁰

While he recognized the great influence of technology on the character of international order, he was not a technological determinist. “The future,” Jervis argued, “is probably unknowable because it will depend in part on how important actors think and behave.”¹¹ He argued that “at least as important as technology are decision-makers’ choices of strategy and beliefs about the offense-defense balance.”¹² This followed because he believed that there would often be many social responses to a given material situation.

As a social theorist, Jervis tried to make room for agency, writing, “it would make no sense to criticize decisions if one believed that technology in fact *had* to determine events and the political leaders could not control their country’s arms

⁵ Jervis, “Security Regimes,” *International Organization* 36:2 (1982): 357-374, at 374; Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30:2 (1978): 167-214.

⁶ Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” 212; cf. Dan Reiter, “Exploding the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars almost Never Happen,” *International Security* 20:2 (1995): 5-34.

⁷ Jervis, “The Political Effects of Nuclear Weapons: A Comment,” *International Security* 13:2 (Fall 1988): 80-90, 86.

⁸ Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁹ Jervis, “Some Thoughts on Deterrence in the Cyber Era,” *Journal of Information Warfare* 15:2 (2016): 66-73, 66.

¹⁰ Jervis, “Some Thoughts on Deterrence in the Cyber Era,” 72.

¹¹ Jervis, “Some Thoughts on Deterrence in the Cyber Era,” 73.

¹² Jervis, “Strategic Theory: What’s New and What’s True,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 9:4 (1986): 135-162, 153.

posture.”¹³ Yet, he was not convinced that there was a better social equilibrium than the variety of mutually assured destruction that he defined. He spent a great deal of time looking for something better. Unfortunately, he concluded:

“Human thought cannot change physical realities, but can it extricate us from the predicament we have created? My conclusion is that it cannot. MAD is here to stay, no matter how much we dislike or fear it. We live in the “best of all possible worlds.”

Furthermore, even if this is not all for the best, it is not as bad as we often believe.”¹⁴ He thought it was right that we continue to search for better equilibria. He just did not believe that the search would bear fruit. Finally, he recognized that even a world without nuclear weapons would still be a world in which they could be rebuilt. In that case, their very absence might tempt some actor to try to build them in secret, and thus even if they were eliminated, the threat of nuclear devastation would remain.

Thus, nuclear capabilities were a revolution, one that led to living in the “awful situation” of being under the threat of destruction, but it was a state of affairs from which he did not think we could escape. “As long as we live,” he wrote, “we will live under the threat of nuclear destruction.”¹⁵ Was Jervis right to be sanguine about the predicament of mutually assured destruction? For his time, he seemed to be. But the history of MAD does not give us high statistical confidence that such a situation is stable over the long run.

Jervis did not, however, believe that other recent technologies had fundamentally changed international politics. For instance, he did not consider cyber capabilities to be a revolution. So, where would the emerging capabilities of today fit on this continuum? Should we expect the near future to represent another break from the past or a smooth evolution? Would Jervis predict a revolution in international affairs resulting from developments in bioengineering, nanotechnologies, autonomous weapons, or another form of advanced artificial intelligence? Of course, it is impossible to answer these questions with a high degree of confidence.

Following the logic of the nuclear revolution, one could contend that the very dangers and vulnerabilities that these technologies imply will make the world safer - or at least, not less safe, because mutual vulnerability is already the state of affairs. Yet, much of Jervis’s thinking was preoccupied with the two superpowers of the Cold War. Would his view change if the proliferation of certain technologies could not be controlled? Software, for instance, is usually easy to copy, and thus easy to spread. Will new technologies advantage the offense or the defense? On the one hand, artificial intelligence may make the oceans ‘transparent,’ undermining defense by undermining the credibility of second strikes. On the other, autonomous technologies may enable second strikes that would not otherwise have been credible.

Although he was open to the possibility that new technologies could change fundamental strategic variables, he did not think it likely that they would do so. The two fundamental forces that he viewed as shaping the international order of his time – mutual vulnerability and the slippery slope from one level of violence to another in wartime – seem likely to be with us for some time. This seems to argue for continuity. Yet, there are factors that might lead to a different judgment. These include the seemingly increasing numbers of actors in the circle of mutual vulnerability, the potential challenges to attribution of attacks, or even knowledge that an attack has occurred, the potential for large changes in the offense defense balance, and other factors.

¹³ Jervis, “Technology, Politics, and Choice,” *Journal of International Affairs* 39:1 (Summer, 1985), 191-198, 192.

¹⁴ Jervis, “MAD is the Best Possible Deterrence,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 41:3 (1985): 43-45.

¹⁵ Jervis, “MAD is the Best Possible Deterrence.”

In some sense, perhaps the Cold War era was the easy task for social theorists. In contrast to today, technological developments were relatively stable. The theorists of that time could consider known technologies. Now, social theorists must consider technologies that may be around the corner because the potential of these technologies motivates the political actors of today. Potentially heightening security dilemma dynamics, the technology races of today will arguably have more impact on national capabilities. During the Cold War, much technological competition involved competition over appearances for the sake of status rather than fundamental changes in the balance of power. This led to feats that were impressive but had little direct material benefit. The clearest example is the period from 1957 to 1962 when, at the program's height, the United States spent over 4% of the federal budget on space flight - sending people to the moon.¹⁶ Today, the US, China and other actors are openly competing in the field of artificial intelligence, an area of technology that is likely to have farther reaching impacts.

We cannot know what Jervis would have written about the technological developments of today. We know that he would not have been dogmatic. Certainly, we can wish that he were here to help us think through the social responses. We know he would have, with analysis from all angles, lively wit, unending historical comparisons, and a cataloguer's knowledge of follies, both human and social scientific.

¹⁶ Joslyn Barnhart, "Emerging Technologies, Prestige Motivations and the Dynamics of International Competition," *Working Paper*, 2.

READING BOB JERVIS
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At one point in 1983 I learned about Bob Jervis by rummaging through American political science journals in a special secret section of the Library of the Institute for the US and Canada Studies (ISKAN). I became involved in research on nuclear strategy and arms control, eminently topical subjects during the time of the “second Cold War” and the heightened tensions between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Some senior scholars at the Institute debated earnestly if President Ronald Reagan could launch a pre-emptive nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Jervis’s writings on perception and misperception hit the nail on the head for me.¹ I also liked the clarity of his language: he reasoned together with the reader, not down to him, did not abuse political science lingo and, unlike some others, showed empathy to the other side of the conflict.

In the winter of 1988-89 the Institute sent me on “a scholarly leave” to Washington for half a year. The atmosphere inside the Soviet Embassy compound, where I resided, was still one of a besieged fortress and perestroika had yet to enter its gates. My supervisor, Andrei Kokoshin, called his American colleagues at the Brookings Institution and, they offered me, a young scholar, a nice arrangement: I could sit in a reading room on Massachusetts Avenue and read historical and political science journals there. Many of them were full of jargon and math I struggled to understand, despite my love for numbers during my school years. Jervis’s publications impressed me again: they were lucid in logic and accessible in expression. I was a trained historian, not a political scientist. Yet much to my surprise, I learned more from Jervis about how to interpret international history than from many of historians, Russian and Western.

Jervis was for me a historian’s political scientist. Reading his secondary sources makes me wonder how he found time to read so much in so many subsections of international political history. He dipped into primary sources to prove that the Korean War, not the pre-existing causes, created the phenomenon of the high-pitched Cold War on American soil and in the minds of US policy-makers. Bob went against the “revisionist” New Left in doing this, but also against the deterministic current that continues to dominate political science today. How many IR scholars today would dip into a fresh volume of *Foreign Relations of the United States* to corroborate or falsify their conclusions? And how many would send their manuscript to a group of leading historians in order to consult with them on those conclusions? How many scholars today would dare to add to their arguments ‘evidence’ from the Bible, the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, or Mark Twain’s witticisms?

Bob had respect for structure, but also contingency, and above all he was keen on the peculiarities of human cognition and the roots of misperceptions and errors. For a young scholar from the Soviet Union, where a supposedly omniscient and infallible Politburo ruled, the latter aspect was particularly fascinating and revealing.

Even at the time I suspected that a “rational actor” in politics existed only in the imagination of theorists, just like “classes” existed in Marxist schemes. Inside the Soviet compound, I could see a model of different behaviour: everyone from the KGB officers to diplomats’ wives acted like perfect Soviet conformists in public, yet their material interests were far from “socialist” ideals: they behaved rather like frugal and pragmatic shoppers, and their main material idol was the US dollar, a key to the treasure-trove of American consumer goods. This rational consumption model, however, did not prevent them from entertaining most hilarious anti-American stereotypes, as if they lived not in the US capital, but in an isolated ideological sect. Life inside the compound made me think about rationality and logic of all this, and Jervis came to my assistance.

Sometime in the spring of 1989, I had a chance to meet Bob for the first time. It was at one of the conferences I was invited to, probably at Columbia University. With his special sensitivity for history and his personal experience (he travelled to the Soviet Union for the first time in 1961), Bob realised early that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s “new thinking” pointed to a fundamental change. In the preface of his book *The Meaning of Nuclear Revolution* he wrote that Gorbachev’s new

¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). This book appeared in new editions in 2015 and 2017.

objectives “may be the most important development in world politics since 1945.” He did not analyse them at that point, because of their novelty, but prudently expressed doubt that they would lead to the abolition of nuclear weapons.²

A quarter of a century later, when I focused my research on the Soviet collapse, my approach was impacted by Jervis, perhaps even more than I had realized. Just like him, I was fascinated by the role of contingency, rapid change, and misperception in history. Parallel to him, I read Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s popular work and remained sceptical regarding the conceptual vagueness of “Black Swans.” All his life Jervis studied the impact of ideas, observations, and intelligence on political decisions, and I did the same when sorting through mammoth evidence on the behaviour of Gorbachev and his successor, Boris Yeltsin, in 1989-91. In 2006, Jervis wrote: “Gorbachev followed his reforms only because he expected them to revitalize rather than destroy the Soviet Union. If he had known what he was actually accomplishing, he would not have done it.”³ In my investigation, I could see that both Gorbachev and Yeltsin consistently asserted that their policies remained the only alternatives to preserve the Union – and yet those policies aimed in two completely incompatible directions. It was only when I finished my book on the Soviet collapse that I discovered the quotation that Bob had used from Charles Kurzman about the Iranian revolution of 1979: “the revolution suddenly went from being unthinkable to being inevitable.”⁴ This was exactly what happened in Moscow in 1989-90. In any case, I used a similar phrase in describing the shift of perceptions on the Soviet collapse in the West and in Russia. My book came out only one month before Bob passed away, so he could not see it.⁵ This is a huge regret for me, since he would have been a fantastic reader and critic. No doubt, he would have found all kinds of shortcomings in it: confirmation bias, excessive hindsight, insufficient testing of alternative hypotheses, and more. Still, he would have been intensely interested, as he had always been with regard to massive historical events which had occurred against all of the predictions of social and political scientists.

Unfortunately, many in political science do not prioritize this as much as Bob did. The mainstream of political science today is not really ready for interpreting rapid, not to mention calamitous, changes. As I am writing this essay, I am thinking about a recent article by my friend, Italian political scientist Giovanni Orsina. He points to the three fallacies in Western political science literature today: using history for illustrative purposes; ignoring anthropology and psychology in favour of rational agency; and equating modernisation, as well as democracy, with a “natural law.”⁶ Bob was a life-long liberal democrat, yet his writings reveal a scholar who was deeply embedded in historic experience, curious about the illogical nature of human thinking, especially decision-making, and never triumphalist about “Western values” or the collective wisdom of “international community.” His critical and realistic voice is badly missed.

One of the lessons that Bob drew from his studies of international history is the danger of “overlearning” from the past. “A recent and important event is likely to leave a deep imprint on people,” wrote Jervis in 2006, “especially if they were in error.”⁷ Not only individuals, but bureaucracies, organisations, and network institutions like the Western commentariat find this lesson extremely hard to follow. The “overlearning” effect shaped quite a few developments in contemporary international politics. US leaders during the presidency of George H.W. Bush “overlearned” from the failure of détente and

² Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution. Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), ix.

³ Robert Jervis, “Black Swans in Politics,” *Critical Review* 21:4 (2009): 475-489, 485.

⁴ Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵ Vladislav Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁶ Giovanni Orsina, “Political Science as a Modernist Project,” (an unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the author, 2022).

⁷ Jervis, “Reports, Politics, and Intelligence Failures: The Case of Iraq,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 29:1 (February 2006): 3-52, 28-29.

this made them remain sceptical of Soviet reforms even when they saw revolutionary changes. And in Russia, the same “overlearning” effect, tinged by the sense of a colossal failure of the 1990s, made Russian President Vladimir Putin to come to conclusion that the invasion of Ukraine was the only option to pre-empt NATO expansion into Ukraine and the Western challenge to the legitimacy of his regime. This invasion, in turn, brought forward everything that Western commentariat had “overlearned” from the Munich appeasement of Adolf Hitler in 1938, peppered with quotations of military theorist Carl von Clausewitz. Failure of reason is human. As long as humans make estimates and decisions, they will repeat the same mistakes again and again. Bob Jervis knew this very well, but the realization did not diminish his respect for social science, expertise, and its predictive power. He offered yet another good lesson for all of us who continue to observe and study human history.

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