

2013

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Review

www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables

Volume XV, No. 1 (2013)

3 September 2013

(This version updates Rovner's bio)

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Roundtable Web/Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Introduction by Jacques E. C. Hymans

Francis J. Gavin. *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8014-5101-0 (hardcover, \$35.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XV-1.pdf>

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Introduction by Jacques E. C. Hymans, University of Southern California

In his new book *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age*, Francis J. Gavin mounts a direct challenge to the dominance of rational deterrence theory as the presumed best approach either for interpreting U.S. nuclear behavior or for setting U.S. nuclear policy. Gavin argues that the field of strategic studies needs to jettison its deductive models and its stylized facts in favor of the inductive, detail-oriented approach of his own discipline of international history. Of course, few would dispute that historians are better at writing history than political scientists. But Gavin's claim is that we political scientists need to become much more like historians if we are to have any hope of fulfilling our own promise of producing useful insights for contemporary policy. For many political scientists, those are fighting words.

Gavin's book contains eight concise chapters whose main empirical focus is U.S. nuclear policy choices during the 1960s and 1970s, but whose real objective is to extract lessons about the dynamics of nuclear policymaking that can be applied beyond the specific debates of that era. Gavin's fundamental message about Cold War nuclear history is that the uses and impacts of these weapons were much more nuanced and context-dependent than deterrence theorists of any stripe care to admit. The other contributors to this roundtable—Austin Long, Leopoldo Nuti, Joshua Rovner, and Philip Zelikow—have done a fine job of summarizing (as well as critiquing) Gavin's specific historical arguments, so I will not attempt to duplicate their efforts here. Instead, I will try to convey what I see as the core insights that Gavin's book contains for political scientists who want to better understand U.S. nuclear policy.

First, the strategic studies field was consumed by arguments over nuclear doctrine for the duration of the Cold War. But Gavin finds that U.S. nuclear doctrine was mostly disconnected from actual U.S. nuclear behavior. Even the apparently radical—and much-celebrated—early 1960s shift from 'massive retaliation' to 'flexible response' turns out to have been almost entirely rhetorical. Nuclear doctrine was clearly a secondary concern for the top decision-makers, and that is probably why they let the deterrence theorists take a high profile in that particular policy arena. Moreover, if nuclear doctrine was secondary then, it is surely tertiary now; at least Cold War-era politicians used to talk about it! The crucial lesson here for political scientists is to look away from the self-confident theoreticians who develop detailed pictures of the dynamics of international relations, without ever leaving their desks to find out what is really happening out there in the real world.

Second, even deeper than the strategic studies field's Cold War obsession with nuclear doctrine was its bedrock assumption that the superpowers' nuclear competition was the fundamental driver of everything else in international affairs. Gavin shows, however, that this cherished theoretical assumption was merely another myth. He finds instead that top U.S. policymakers very often treated nuclear policy choices as a means to achieve other ends that they considered more pressing, including resolving balance of payments issues or smoothing the ruffled feathers of important allies such as West Germany. In short,

presidents often treated nuclear policy choices as mere side payments to help them shore up the U.S. bargaining position on other matters. Consequently, those nuclear choices cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader politics of the day. Moreover, if U.S. leaders even at the height of the Cold War treated nuclear policy as simply one more opportunity for horse-trading, then they must be doing so even more blatantly now, when the risk of total annihilation is no longer so acute. Again, the clear lesson for contemporary political scientists is to stop acting like Ptolemaic astronomers and finally accept the inconvenient truth that the earth actually goes around the sun, not vice versa.

Third, Gavin finds that even to the limited extent that top U.S. political leaders during the Cold War did base their nuclear policy preferences directly on the potential strategic impacts, their understanding of those potential strategic impacts was heavily influenced by their subjective, intuitive, and ideologically-colored analyses of the situation, and not by the deductive deterrence logic that had been elaborated in academia. President Ronald Reagan's mystical nuclear abolitionism is one clear example here. But even President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor (later Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger, the most theoretically inclined foreign policy team in American history, adopted an iconoclastic view of deterrence that diverged markedly from the strategic studies mainstream. Indeed, the quotes that Gavin pulls from Nixon and Kissinger suggest that they may have embraced their position in part because it did contrast starkly with that of the Charles River arms control intellectuals whom they found so contemptible. Moreover, if the President and his top aides' subjective perceptions of nuclear deterrence dynamics mattered so much during the Cold War, they surely matter even more today, especially in light of the ever-increasing dominance of the White House over the rest of the executive branch. Once again, the lesson for political scientists is to stop making assumptions about the way top leaders must think, and instead to try to find out how they really do think.

Fourth, Gavin does not limit his assault to showing that the deterrence theorists didn't—and still don't—matter very much. In addition, he finds that the deterrence theorists were hardly better than the politicians in the extent to which they let their subjective, ideologically-colored intuitions bias their nuclear policy preferences. In other words, so-called rational deterrence theory was actually little more than a rationalization. Gavin's chapter on the nuclear debates of the 1970s makes this point particularly well. The policy positions of the two major camps of nuclear policy intellectuals at that time—the defenders of the stability of superpower nuclear parity, and their opponents who pushed for a return to U.S. nuclear superiority—were evidently influenced by their broader political ideologies and alliances. Worse still, both sides' policy positions were also increasingly anachronistic, because economic globalization was rapidly reducing nuclear weapons to a mere sideshow in international affairs. The main intellectual heavyweights of the day were blind to this structural change in world politics. Gavin notes that a third camp, which looked 'beyond deterrence,' was much more alert to the emergent new reality. But the specific nuclear policy implications they derived from this tectonic shift were very diverse and often rather superficial, and their direct policy impact was slight. Meanwhile, Gavin finds that the top politicians, intuitive and reactive beings that they were, gradually bumbled their way toward a nuclear policy stance that was actually not so poorly suited to the new age. In

short, not only were the deterrence theorists ignored; they were *rightly* ignored. This is a strong indictment of the strategic studies field.

I should make it clear that Gavin is not merely interested in tearing down the idols of the nuclear tribe. *Nuclear Statecraft* lays a solid foundation for a new kind of strategic studies. The ambition is to develop a more reality-based, and therefore potentially also more policy-relevant, field than the strange mixture of folk psychology, half-baked history, and fuzzy math that we have inherited from the Cold War. The carefully considered and incisive contributions of the four distinguished reviewers that H-Diplo has recruited for this roundtable set the stage for further scholarly progress in this productive direction. I highly recommend reading them. I should note, however, that the all of the scholars participating in this roundtable are either historians themselves or, shall we say, fellow travelers. As such, they mostly critique Gavin's work from within. But it would also be valuable to subject Gavin's arguments to a critique from without. Therefore, I urge scholars who are steeped in the rational deterrence theory tradition to read Gavin's book and let the H-Diplo community know what you think. Luckily, H-Diplo's open format is ideal for just this purpose. Gavin has thrown down the gauntlet; who among you will bravely pick it up?

Participants:

Francis J. Gavin is the Tom Slick Professor of International Affairs and the Director of the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas. He received a Ph.D. and M.A. in Diplomatic History from the University of Pennsylvania. His publications include numerous scholarly articles, book reviews and editorials. His book, [*Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971*](#), was published in 2004 by the University of North Carolina Press under their New Cold War History series.

Jacques E. C. Hymans is Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California and author of *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). He received his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University in 2001.

Austin Long is an Assistant Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs and a Member of the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies and the Harriman Institute of Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies at Columbia University. Long received his B.S. from the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology and his Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His publications on nuclear issues include "Osirak Redux? Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities," *International Security*, v.31 n.4 (Spring 2007) (co-authored with Whitney Raas); *Deterrence From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008) and "Proliferation and Strategic Stability in the Middle East," in Elbridge Colby and Michael Gerson, eds. *Strategic Stability: Contending Views*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013). His current projects include an examination of intelligence capabilities for counterforce targeting

during the Cold War and after.

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Joshua Rovner holds the John Goodwin Tower Distinguished Chair in International Politics and National Security at Southern Methodist University, where he also serves as associate professor of political science and Director of Studies at the Tower Center for Political Studies. Rovner is the author of *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Cornell, 2011), and "After Proliferation: Deterrence Theory and Emerging Nuclear Powers," in Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Nuclear Strategy in the Second Nuclear Age: Power, Ambition, and the Ultimate Weapon* (Georgetown, 2012). His current research involves intelligence theory, contemporary nuclear strategy, and U.S. military force in the Persian Gulf.

Philip Zelikow is the White Burkett Miller Professor of History at the University of Virginia, where he also currently serves as the dean looking after the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. A former Cold Warrior who did his coursework in nuclear strategy with Bill Kaufmann at MIT, he has held a variety of other posts in public service (aside from his academic work) but fortunately had no opportunities to practice what he learned about the effective employment of nuclear forces.

Review by Austin Long, Columbia University

Nuclear weapons have been critical to international security generally and American foreign policy since their introduction in 1945. This is almost universally recognized and, as Frank Gavin notes in the first chapter of *Nuclear Statecraft*, has spawned a cottage industry of analysts and scholars who study nuclear issues. Why then do we need yet another volume wallowing in this well-trod turf, and one that looks back at the well-understood period of the Cold War- shouldn't new work focus on new nuclear challenges such as North Korea and Iran?

Gavin's answer, a simple but provocative thesis that threads through the chapters of the book, is that much of what has been 'known' about the Cold War and nuclear weapons is simply wrong (or at best is less clear cut than is currently believed). Much of the writing on nuclear weapons, by extension, is incomplete if not inaccurate. Scholars and policymakers seeking to engage with new nuclear challenges would therefore be well served to re-examine the received wisdom about the Cold War and nuclear weapons before proceeding.

The mission of *Nuclear Statecraft*, which Gavin develops in admirably lucid prose, is twofold. The first mission is empirical and occupies the bulk of the book's chapters, as Gavin uses declassified sources to illustrate why the conventional wisdom about certain critical events or periods of the Cold War is incomplete or incorrect. The second mission is methodological and is a plea to the disciplines of history and political science to take the historical study of nuclear issues seriously. This review will address those missions in turn.

The first empirical chapter is aptly titled "The Myth of Flexible Response," and argues that American concern about balance of payments issues arising from the forward deployment of U.S. troops in Europe meant that the John F. Kennedy administration never committed to any sort of serious conventional combat in defense of NATO. Instead, like President Dwight Eisenhower, Kennedy relied on U.S. nuclear first use against the Soviets, including counterforce targeting of Soviet nuclear weapons, as the linchpin of deterrence. This disconnect between nuclear rhetoric and reality has cast a long shadow over beliefs about nuclear weapons in the Cold War, as it shows that far from accepting mutually assured destruction, the Kennedy administration believed it could, in an extreme crisis, use nuclear weapons first without automatically destroying the United States.

The chapter also begins to develop the key theme that links together the first three empirical chapters. This is the centrality of the German question to the entire Cold War.¹ Gavin shows the extent to which U.S. efforts to manage proliferation, develop nuclear and conventional strategy, and manage relations with both the Soviets and NATO revolved around Germany. Given the centrality of the German question to European affairs in the last half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, this is perhaps not

¹ For a similar argument see James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

surprising to some. Yet the standard narrative of the Cold War often elides this importance, emphasizing the global ideological struggle over the regional geopolitical struggle in central Europe. Yet it is this latter struggle, Gavin argues, that drove much of U.S. policy on nuclear weapons- in some cases even pushing the United States to collude with its ideological foe in order to manage the German question.

The second empirical chapter develops this theme further by focusing on the importance not just of Germany but of Berlin in the early Cold War. Building on and echoing other recent scholarship on the Berlin Crises, Gavin shows that the western presence in Berlin was an anomaly that could not have been maintained without nuclear weapons, yet only led to crises because of nuclear weapons.² In a world without nuclear weapons, NATO would probably have abandoned West Berlin as indefensible and without much intrinsic value. Yet, as Gavin shows, in a world with nuclear weapons West Berlin took on political significance far beyond its intrinsic value. The Berlin crises sprang from the interaction of the existence of nuclear weapons and geopolitical considerations, and the end of the Berlin crises in 1962 was a result of the codification of a status quo acceptable to all sides: Germany would remain divided and non-nuclear, and so would Berlin.

The third of these chapters reframes the U.S. effort to limit proliferation by again emphasizing the importance of shared U.S. and Soviet interests in controlling the spread of nuclear weapons, particularly to Germany and China. While the U.S. commitment to nonproliferation waxed and waned, the need to control these two potential threats to a stable nuclear order gave nonproliferation salience from mid-1960s forward. One interesting observation on the subject of this chapter appears briefly in the first chapter, where Gavin notes that beyond specific challenges to the nuclear order “... the United States has often hoped to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons by foe and friend alike, not because of any enlightened notions about world peace, but because a state with nuclear weapons can cancel out every other form of U.S. power” (27).

This observation, offered almost in passing, probably lies at the root of much of U.S. post-Cold War nonproliferation policy. For example, U.S. policymakers would prefer neither North Korea nor South Korea to have nuclear weapons, even though some would argue that survivable national arsenals on both sides of the DMZ would reduce tensions and allow a reduced U.S. role on the Korean peninsula. This almost certainly has at least something to do with preserving the current state of unipolarity, particularly with regard to conventional forces, that the United States enjoys.

The next two chapters shift temporal gears, moving from the 1960s to the 1970s and the near simultaneous emergence of nuclear parity between the United States and Soviet Union and the presidency of Richard Nixon. This time period is particularly fruitful for Gavin, as a substantial amount of material that was unavailable to scholars even a decade ago is now readily available. Gavin argues that Nixon and his foreign policy alter ego, Secretary of

² See also Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

State Henry Kissinger, viewed parity as a condition to be lamented as “... the U.S. commitment to defend Western Europe and other allies was only really credible if the United States had nuclear superiority” (112). Thus Nixon and Kissinger’s emphasis on arms control came not out of a real belief in arms control for the sake of arms control but rather to limit both sides at a time when the U.S. was not financially or politically prepared to regain superiority.

Gavin also briefly discusses the Nixon administration’s efforts to change U.S. nuclear war plans to make them more usable as well as Nixon’s efforts to manipulate risk (the so-called ‘madman’ theory). Here Gavin could have added more on the efforts, led particularly by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger under both Nixon and Gerald Ford, not only to alter war plans but to begin efforts to regain nuclear superiority through improved counterforce capabilities. In addition to issuing a new Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy (NUWEP) that would direct changes to U.S. nuclear war plans, Schlesinger pushed the military services towards more accurate nuclear weapons for counterforce targeting of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.³ In particular Schlesinger initiated the Improved Accuracy Program for the Navy’s Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile, which would make Trident, previously thought of only for second strike retaliation against cities, a potent weapon for first strike against even hardened missile silos.⁴

This latter point is important, as it bolsters Gavin’s argument that Nixon, like every other Cold War president, believed that extending deterrence to NATO required a credible threat to use nuclear weapons, and that this threat was implausible when the Soviet Union had an assured capacity to retaliate massively against the United States. Thus no president every accepted the contention that mutually assured destruction (MAD) was “a fact, not a policy.”⁵ Schlesinger’s efforts to bolster U.S. counterforce capabilities were continued by President Jimmy Carter’s Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, who refined nuclear war plans while continuing the development of accurate weapons with multiple warheads such as Trident II and the land-based MX missile. The Reagan administration continued and expanded Brown’s efforts.⁶

³ This NUWEP is now declassified and available at the George Washington University National Security Archive.

⁴ See discussion in Donald MacKenzie and Graham Spinardi, “The Shaping of Nuclear Weapon System Technology: US Fleet Ballistic Missile Guidance and Navigation, II: ‘Going for Broke’: The Path to Trident II,” *Social Studies of Science* 18:4 (November 1988) and Owen R. Coté, “The Trident and the Triad: Collecting the D-5 Dividend,” *International Security* 16: 2 (Autumn 1991).

⁵ The title of chapter 3 in Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁶ See discussion in Desmond Ball and Robert Toth, “Revising the SIOP: Taking War-fighting to Dangerous Extremes,” *International Security* 14:4 (Spring 1990).

Many civilian nuclear strategists derided these views and efforts of government officials as irrational, as captured in the title of Richard Rhodes' *Arsenals of Folly*.⁷ Instead of allowing for a strategic rationale for the growth of nuclear arsenals on both sides of the Cold War, these civilian analysts imputed their growth to irrational factors such as bureaucratic politics or simple 'arms racing' where one side's developments inevitably provoked a response by the other side. Yet Gavin cites a massive declassified study by the Department of Defense on the history of Cold War arms developments through 1972 that indicates that "[t]he facts will not support the proposition that either the Soviet Union or the United States developed strategic forces only in direct immediate reaction to each other" (127).⁸

Rather than a senseless arms race, the U.S. development of counterforce capabilities under Nixon (and after) was driven fundamentally by the geopolitics of extending deterrence to NATO. Moreover, statements and documents provided by Soviet analysts following the Cold War suggest that the development of U.S. counterforce capabilities (including the ability to track and target Soviet ballistic missile submarines at sea) was perceived by Soviet leaders as being capable of greatly limiting (though not eliminating) Soviet retaliatory capability.⁹ Thus far from being an arsenal of folly, U.S. counterforce capabilities effectively supported the desired strategic ends of U.S. policymakers by making it seem plausible, *in extremis*, that the United States could use nuclear weapons in defense of NATO without automatically facing total annihilation.

The foregoing supports Gavin's contention that the meaning of the nuclear revolution, like the meaning of every other technological revolution in military affairs, can only be evaluated in a specific geopolitical context. What seems to be overkill in one context may be required in another (the U.S. arsenal during the Cold War) and what seems an insufficiently secure retaliatory capability may in fact be more than enough (the Chinese arsenal today). Further, as the point about Schlesinger and the Improved Accuracy Program highlights, technological capabilities emerge from political decisions about

⁷ Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Knopf, 2007).

⁸ The quotation is from Ernest May, John Steinbruner, and Thomas Wolfe, *History of the Strategic Arms Competition, 1945-1972* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office, 1981), 810. It is notable that this study was done by respected academics: May and Steinbruner were both Harvard professors while Wolfe was a senior Soviet analyst at the RAND Corporation.

⁹ See for example interviews with Vitali Kataev and Alexei Kalashnikov in John Hines, et. al., *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985, Volume II: Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence* (McLean, VA: BDM Federal, 1995). See also an untitled memo from the archive of Kataev available at the Hoover Institution Archive, Stanford University, as cited in George Lewis and Theodore Postol, "European Missile Defense: The Technological Basis of Russian Concerns," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (October 2007). On tracking submarines at sea see Owen R. Cote, Jr., *The Third Battle: Innovation in the U.S. Navy's Silent Cold War Struggle with Soviet Submarines*, (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 2003) and Christopher Ford and David Rosenberg, *The Admiral's Advantage: U.S. Navy Operational Intelligence in World War II and the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 98-108.

funding and procurement rather than simply springing forth from either the scientific ether or from unthinking arms racing.¹⁰

Gavin's final two empirical chapters again move forward temporally, examining nuclear weapons and proliferation in the twenty-first century using the 'historical sensibility' derived from the study of the same issues during the twentieth century. In the first of these two chapters Gavin argues that what he terms "nuclear alarmism" (the idea that nuclear weapons were essentially stabilizing in the twentieth century but are much more dangerous in the twenty-first) is "...overstated and, in some cases, wrong, emerging from a poor understanding of the history of nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation" (135). He reviews the concerns of the twentieth century regarding the acquisition by 'rogue states' of nuclear weapons, tipping points for rapid proliferation cascades, and nuclear terrorism, finding that policymakers in the Cold War were in many cases just as concerned about these issues as those in the twenty-first century.

Gavin concludes with a chapter discussing the renewed interest in the twenty-first century in a world without nuclear weapons. In this chapter Gavin divides analysts of nuclear issues into "sanguinists" and "agonists," (158) the former less concerned than the latter about nuclear proliferation. This analytic framework is not entirely new but remains fruitful as a lens for thinking about these issues.¹¹ Gavin seems generally to side with those he terms sanguinists, though he concludes that a world without nuclear weapons would actually benefit the United States by depriving weaker states of the opportunity to counterbalance U.S. superiority in economic and conventional military capability by using nuclear weapons.

Gavin is surely correct in this assessment at present, yet U.S. superiority in these other capabilities is hardly guaranteed in the future. It is not inconceivable that the United States may, as in the Cold War, find itself needing the credible threat of nuclear use to underwrite extended deterrence commitments at a reasonable cost. Decisions about the impact of 'global zero' for nuclear weapons must therefore be made not just by looking at the past and present but also the potential future.

Beyond the specifics of these empirical chapters, Gavin's second mission is a call for both history and political science to take the study of nuclear history more seriously. This may seem obvious- if nuclear weapons are critical to international security surely studying

¹⁰ Similar points are made in Keir Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008) and Donald A. MacKenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: A Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

¹¹ See for example Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002) and Peter Lavoy, "Review Essay: The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 4:4 (Summer 1995).

nuclear history is as well- but unfortunately it is not. There are three interrelated reasons for this relative lack of interest in nuclear history.¹²

The first is the end of the Cold War, which led to an immediate collapse in interest in the specifics of nuclear issues. Even if one did not accept the maximalist interpretation of the end of the Cold War as ‘the end of history,’ it certainly seemed in 1992 that nuclear weapons and the Cold War would be less, rather than more, relevant.¹³ Thus the tremendous intellectual energy that went into thinking about nuclear weapons and the intense public interest in these issues simply dissipated in the 1990s.¹⁴

This dissipation was particularly unfortunate as the end of the Cold War actually led to the opening of archives and the declassification of material on a scale unimaginable during the Cold War. To offer but one example, the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), which oversees U.S. spy satellites, was so secret during the Cold War that even its name and existence was classified. In 1992, after more than thirty years at the center of U.S. efforts to collect intelligence on Soviet (and other) nuclear weapons, NRO’s existence was declassified. The same was true of some elements of nuclear war plans on both sides of the Cold War. Yet just as enormous quantities of material were becoming available, interest was plummeting.

The second reason, as Gavin notes, is that the logic of nuclear theory is so compelling that it is difficult to critique. Theorists such as Thomas Schelling and Robert Jervis have made detailed arguments that have deeply influenced how scholars think about nuclear weapons.¹⁵ So even though these arguments rest on incomplete history they are so powerfully embedded in the minds of many scholars that they make contrary interpretations of nuclear issues difficult.

The third and final reason is that both political science and history have moved away from deep historical study of military and diplomatic issues. Political science has unfortunately moved increasingly towards a focus on quantitative methods as the *sine qua non* of the discipline. This makes history a mere source for the coding of data points destined for the

¹² There are exceptions to this relative lack of interest, including the George Washington University’s National Security Archive and the Wilson Center’s Nuclear Proliferation International History Project.

¹³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1993). Fukuyama, to be fair, was arguing for the long run triumph of liberal democracy, not the end of any events to the contrary. However his argument was emblematic of a certain post-Cold War viewpoint that felt the history of the Cold War could provide little guidance for the future.

¹⁴ The peak of this interest was probably the early 1980s. In 1983, for example, the movie *The Day After* about the effects of nuclear war aired on ABC while Harvard University’s Nuclear Study Group published a mass market paperback version of a study entitled *Living with Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Bantam, 1983).

¹⁵ Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* and Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960) are foundational works for the study of nuclear war.

inevitable regression analysis rather than a subject for deep study. At the same time, history as a discipline has for decades now eschewed the study of military and diplomatic history, as Gavin laments in his first chapter.

The result of this state of affairs is that there is a wealth of material about the Cold War that is both underutilized and yet has potentially revolutionary implications for our understanding of the impact of nuclear weapons on international security. *Nuclear Statecraft* is therefore hopefully just the first salvo in an effort to revitalize interest in the critical issue of nuclear history. Scholars seeking to understand new nuclear challenges such as Iran and North Korea absolutely must engage with the emerging history of the old nuclear challenges of the Cold War.

For the past few years I have had the privilege of working together with the author of this book in an international project that emphasizes the importance of new historical research in the field of nuclear proliferation. I am well acquainted with many of the theses he presents in *Nuclear Statecraft* and I have often had the pleasure of hearing them straight from the horse's mouth – so to speak. I need, therefore, to make clear from the very beginning of this review that I share most of Frank Gavin's arguments and that I believe *Nuclear Statecraft* to be a most welcome, indeed a necessary, addition to the international history of the nuclear age.

This is an important book for at least two different reasons. On the one hand, it shows the relevance of historical work for our understanding of the nuclear era. Too much of our knowledge about nuclear weapons, Gavin argues, is based on theoretical assumptions which are not as strong and consistent as one would expect from their wide circulation in the academic field. Above all, the empirical basis on which they are based does not stand the test of a critical look.

The second major contribution of *Nuclear Statecraft* is actually the vast empirical research which Gavin has carried out to substantiate his thesis that history is important in order to understand the predicaments of the nuclear era. His rigorous archival work innovates our understanding of a number of critical moments in the development of U.S. nuclear strategy as well as of the role played by nuclear weapons at some crucial junctures in the evolution of the postwar international system. The implementation of flexible response, the conception and the enforcement of a non-proliferation regime, President Richard Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's attitude on arms control, are all submitted to an original and innovative scrutiny that brings out many new facets of an old story.

In my review I intend to discuss both the general and some of the more specific dimensions of Gavin's book. From a general perspective, there are several points that Gavin stresses throughout *Nuclear Statecraft* which I think are worth highlighting. The first is the running theme of the whole book: that history is messy, and nuclear history in particular is perhaps even messier, while theory is parsimonious and tidy; but the first provides a much better conceptual tool for understanding what goes on in the international system exactly because the world is full of contradictions, nuances, peculiarities and specificities that do not recur regularly. Theories may be intellectually elegant in their attempt to provide us with general interpretive paradigms, but history does a much better job of giving us a sense of the intricacies of the world out there. Gavin is not dismissive of International Relations [IR] as a field, of course: as a historian he is fully aware of the huge intellectual contribution coming from IR scholarship to our understanding of nuclear weapons and he has often engaged some of the most prominent figures in the field in a spirited dialogue about their work.¹ He

¹ See for instance, his review of Kenneth Waltz and Scott Sagan, "Politics, History and the Ivory Tower-Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2012), 573-600, and their rebuttal "Political Scientists and Historians in Search of the Bomb," *ibid.*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2013), 143-51.

is, however, quite critical of the fact that most theories about the nuclear era were constructed at a particular historical moment, and since their conception have rarely been tested against the only empirical evidence which can be used to check their validity, namely the historical documentation coming out of the archives. In particular, throughout the book he repeatedly criticizes the current spiel that we have entered a new historical age which from a nuclear point of view is far more dangerous than anything we have ever known during the Cold War. Aptly using archival evidence and the most recent historical scholarship, Gavin shows that the so-called 'long peace' thesis badly fails to describe the tensions and crises of the Cold War, and that far from having had a stabilizing effect on the international system, nuclear weapons often lay at the heart of some of the most dangerous moments of the whole period. While the current phase might have its share of frightening nuclear dangers too, Gavin argues, the past was certainly not a golden age of bipolar stability and it was, if anything, even more risky and perilous than the present. The only safe thing about the Cold War, seems to be his conclusion, is that it is past.

A second general point which Gavin also strongly emphasizes is the need to study the U.S. nuclear decision-making process within a broader context. One of the most serious flaws of nuclear scholarship, he argues, is a sort of self-inflicted conceptual incarceration which frames the study of nuclear policies and strategies. Nuclear weapons are studied separately from the larger picture as if they had been so absolutely different from anything else that politicians and strategists never mixed them with their more mundane daily chores. This might have been true for the ethereal world of nuclear intellectuals and strategists, who considered these weapons as an end in itself, but for politicians they were one of the many problematic issues they had to deal with. They were clearly much more important than other ones, of course, given their immense destructive power, but still something which could be negotiated and traded off if, and when, compromises had to be made on the bargaining table. Gavin makes this point several times and correctly shows how historians need to take a different approach and look at possible connections and interplays where the existing scholarship often does not see any. "The policies that emerged can only be understood by reconstructing the history of events and policies that were all occurring at the same time but which are rarely connected" (26). Consider for instance the pressure to develop the Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT], which Gavin links "to U.S. international monetary policy, nuclear and conventional military strategy, and political relations with West Germany" (26). Or, to cite another example which Gavin does not use but that would fit within his theory quite nicely, consider the following point made by Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman about Vietnam in the Fall of 1966:

I believe the only chance now to induce Hanoi to negotiate a settlement depends on the influence Moscow is willing and able to exert. Events in China have probably made Hanoi look more towards Moscow than Peking, but have not eliminated Hanoi's dependence on Peking. If Moscow is to take on the task of persuading Hanoi to move towards a settlement, the USSR will probably have to assume certain risks and obligations. Thus I believe we must offer some compensating inducements.

In my judgement, the overpowering desire of Moscow today is for greater stability in Europe. Regardless of how we assess developments in Germany in the years ahead, I am convinced that the Soviet leaders are deeply concerned over a possible re-emergence of a German threat to Russian security. The Kremlin desires a nuclear non-proliferation pact with Germany particularly in mind. I seriously doubt that the Soviet Union will be satisfied with a formula which would permit "hardware participation" by the Germans. A possible quid pro quo for Moscow's action in Southeast Asia would be our abandoning the hardware option in our proposals for the pact. Although few Germans really believe a NATO hardware deal is probable, its abandonment would mean to the Germans the giving up of a hope which has some political appeal.²

Whoever links *Marigold* with the Multilateral force and Article 1 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty? Vietnam scholarship, abundant as it is, has only recently started to explore the broader international context of the war, and U.S. policy on the war is rarely linked to other contemporary issues.³ The same applies to the origins of the NPT, which once again have been analyzed mostly within the framework of arms control and security studies, and rarely connected – as Gavin on the contrary does very well – to the solution of the German question. Thus the inner logic of the close epistemic communities in which academic research is compartmentalized (in IR theory as well as in history) makes it difficult to trace the dots between fields that are seldom – if ever – studied together.

In terms of its contribution to our understanding of some specific episodes of nuclear history, the book also provides a number of welcome innovative readings. The chapter on flexible response clearly shows how the intention of the John F. Kennedy administration to significantly alter the basic premises of U.S. nuclear strategy did not really have an impact for most of the 1960s. Far from abandoning the traditional reliance on a massive use of the U.S. nuclear arsenal envisaged by the Single Integrated Operational Plan [SIOP], U.S. and NATO plans practically continued to rely on it even after the Alliance formally adopted flexible response in 1967. From the point of view of the concrete implementation of the new strategic doctrine, therefore, the whole transition to flexible response was a far more contradictory and messy process than is usually described, and it was not completed until almost a decade later – if it ever was.

A large part of the book focuses on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and on the importance of the German question. Here Gavin borrows a leaf from the work of, Marc Trachtenberg, who first showed the centrality of the issue of the Federal Republic of Germany's possible

² Memorandum from the Ambassador at Large (Harriman) to President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk, October 3, 1966, in *FRUS, 1964-68*, vol. IV, 691.

³ To prove my point, even a magisterial work such as James Hershberg's *Marigold* cites the initial part of Harriman's statement on the need to look to Moscow, but does not investigate the following sentence and the linkage to the NPT: James G. Hershberg, *Marigold. The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Washington DC: W.Wilson Center Press, 2012), 193.

nuclear rearmament for the stabilization of the Cold War in the early 1960s.⁴ Trachtenberg's book, however, stopped at the Partial Test Ban Treaty as the first step towards preventing a possible nuclear rearmament of West Germany, while Gavin carries the story to its logical conclusion. In a detailed analysis of the work of the Gilpatric report, the January 1965 report by the Committee on Non-Proliferation led by Roswell Gilpatric, Gavin shows how the perspective of a Non-Proliferation Treaty met with two competing visions inside the Johnson administration. The supporters believed that it was in the utmost interest of the U.S. to conclude such a treaty at all costs, and that it was well worth making some sacrifice in the military stance of the Western alliance in order to procure Soviet support - hence giving up any future plans for German nuclear rearmament inside NATO. The opponents, a group which featured many stalwart defenders of the creation of a solid Western alliance, feared that if this was going to be the price of an accommodation with the Soviets it would entail the marginalization of West Germany inside the West. Frightened by the nightmares of what had happened in the interwar period when German grievances generated the monster of Nazi revisionism, they saw the NPT as threatening the whole logic of the postwar American involvement in Europe, and believed that the goal of non-proliferation was not worth risking the disruption of the Transatlantic world that had been carefully created until then. The story of the struggle between these two visions has been partly told before,⁵ but Gavin makes a wonderful job in dragging it out of the secluded world of arms-control history, linking it to the other issues at stake in the mid-1960s, and showing its central relevance for the evolution of the international system. The Non-Proliferation Treaty, in this narrative, is not just the central pillar of the current non-proliferation regime but was also a momentous turning point in the history of the Cold War.

More amusing, if one can afford to use such a word when talking about nuclear history, is the chapter on Nixon, showing that the President who signed a large number of arms-control agreements did not believe in arms-control at all, felt more reassured by nuclear superiority than by the logic of parity, and was happy reviving the frightening brinkmanship of the good old 1950s with which his mentors President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles first experimented - "the daring games" that Henry Kissinger boasted about at the time of the Gulf of Bengal crisis in 1971.⁶ Even more important, and well worth further exploring in the future, is the impact of Nixon's lack of confidence in non-proliferation, an attitude that, as Gavin argues, had quite a negative impact on the creation of a non-proliferation regime, particularly when coupled with the privatization measures that he was willing to implement in the nuclear power industry.

⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵ Particularly by Glenn T. Seaborg (and Benjamin Loeb), *Stemming the tide : arms control in the Johnson years* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987).

⁶ W. Taylor Fain, "We've Always Done Well With The Daring Games": The Nixon Tapes, The Indo-Pakistani War Of 1971, And The Early Travails Of Detente," in http://www.virginia.edu/topnews/fain_daring_games.html.

Finally, a last point which needs to be emphasized is the importance of the 1970s for our understanding of the evolution of the international system. In a chapter about that troubled decade, Gavin discusses the political and intellectual debate between the two contrasting schools of U.S. nuclear intellectuals, namely the nuclear stability/arms control supporters vs. the nuclear superiority group – and reaches the paradoxical conclusion that perhaps neither of them really mattered as far as the transformation of the international system is concerned. Other factors, he argues, might have been more important in shaping the evolution of international relations than any of the arguments which the nuclear experts used in their tense, often dramatic debate. The end of the Cold War, in other words, probably turned out the way it did not because either one of the nuclear experts' approaches was proved right, but because a “number of tectonic forces beyond nuclear deterrence were shaping the global order” (133) – basically “the rise of a new international system with new actors, new norms, and, most important, new metrics for power” (131). Joining a growing historiographical school that stresses the relevance of the 1970s, Gavin here is arguing that throughout that decade a number of forces – economic, financial, intellectual, and social - slowly altered the structure of the international system, thus preparing its eventual demise by the turn of the 1980s. I share this assessment of the importance of the 1970s as a sort of cradle of the contemporary international system, but perhaps I would go even further than Gavin does. I think the chapter should perhaps stress even more that the decade saw a number of momentous changes in the distribution of power and that nuclear history is - once again - an excellent conceptual tool with which to analyze them. The dynamics of nuclear proliferation in the non-Western world in the 1970s, in fact, offer an anticipation of the rise of a multipolar international system that can be best understood by looking at how a number of the future rising powers (India, South Africa, and Brazil, just to name a few) were contesting the bipolar nuclear order which the Cold War competitors were haltingly trying to set up. As Gavin argues in another chapter, nuclear history is not necessarily all Cold War history (153): we need therefore different narratives that explain the nuclear choices of a number of actors, not just through the Cold War paradigm but by looking at the intersection between local security issues and the broader international framework these states were part of when they decided to pursue, or to drop, a military nuclear program. We need, in short, more history; this is the crucial lesson of this important book, and I could not agree more; and we need nuclear history in particular because its mix of scientific, technological, economic, power and security factors helps us better understand the broader history of the world we live in. If anything, the only difference between the author and me is that Gavin seems particularly inclined to address and engage the field of security studies, while I would go one step further and conclude that *Nuclear Statecraft* deserves a broader audience. This is a book that should be read and discussed by the whole community of historians, and not just by security experts or nuclear strategists.

Frank Gavin asks important questions about history and strategy. He does not waste time on trivia. He asks how nuclear weapons affected Cold War politics, and how Cold War politics affected the superpowers' view of nuclear weapons. He questions whether the intense public controversies among nuclear theorists actually reflected private policy debates. He assesses how much of the Cold War experience is relevant today and whether nuclear disarmament is strategically wise. He wants to know if nuclear proliferation leads to war or to peace.

Gavin asks these questions not just because they are intrinsically important, but because of his belief that historians should address fundamental issues for policymakers. Many commentators believe that the world is much more complex and dangerous today than it was in the past. (I suspect that similar beliefs can be found in any era. Writers always seem sure that they are living in particularly exiting or dangerous time.) Gavin convincingly shows that there is more continuity than we are led to believe, however, which means that past policy dilemmas may provide useful insight for present choices. Good history can also help leaders understand the role of contingency and uncertainty in complex events, which may help inject some sobriety into their decisions. History is full of self-confident leaders blundering into disaster; perhaps historians can do something about this.

Gavin deplores the decline in traditional diplomatic history in American academia and deliberately sets out to reverse it. Doing so requires less professional navel gazing – that is, focusing on small questions of interest to a narrow set of scholars – and more sustained efforts to understand past policy decisions with large consequences. Of course, this means writing about events that have been covered extensively for decades, and Gavin is aware of the possibility that everything worthwhile has been said already (3). But he also believes that much of what we think we know about the nuclear age is misleading, and key parts of the popular narrative about the Cold War are wrong. He challenges the view that the nuclear age was a golden era for civilian defense intellectuals who were able to surpass military advisors and directly influence the content of strategy and policy. He argues that historians so far have failed to adjudicate the decades-long debate among hawks and doves over the coercive value of nuclear weapons. And he suggests that advocates of nuclear disarmament have overlooked the most powerful argument in their favor.

This book is certainly not Gavin's first foray into nuclear strategy. For more than a decade he has been writing some of the most important articles on the subject, some of which are edited and reproduced in chapters of *Nuclear Statecraft*.¹ These chapters cover a range of

¹ See especially "The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe during the 1960s," *International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 847-875; "Blasts from the Past: Nuclear Proliferation and Rogue States before the Bush Doctrine," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter 2005), pp. 100-135; and "Same as It Ever Was: Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Winter 2009-2010), pp. 7-37.

issues focused on nuclear strategy from Presidents Dwight Eisenhower to Jimmy Carter. I find most of Gavin's arguments convincing, especially his discussions of flexible response (Chapter 2) and the continuity between past and present nuclear dilemmas (Chapters 4 and 6). In this review I focus on the issues in the three new chapters in the book: scholarship and policy, nuclear weapons in the Berlin Crisis, and the current debate over disarmament.

History, strategy, and policy

There are three broad categories of useful scholarship. *Important* work deals with events and decisions that had large consequences for many people. Research on these events is intrinsically valuable, even if it doesn't bear directly on current policy debates. Getting the big stories right is especially important, given our collective penchant for latching onto flimsy 'lessons' of the past. One hopes that the more we understand milestone events, the less likely it is that historical myths will guide future decisions. *Relevant* history is different because the issues at stake are clearly related to current debates, even if they do not lend easy answers. Policy debates over the coercive value of nuclear weapons, for example, may turn on the notion that possession of a superior nuclear force allowed the United States to compel the Soviet Union to back down in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Historians doing relevant work may not set out to sway policymakers, and indeed their findings may prove to be largely indeterminate. Such studies simply provide the kind of background theoretical and empirical work that might inform policy judgment. *Influential* historical work, on the other hand, not only bears on current policy questions but also advocates for certain policy decisions. It emphasizes the strength of analogies while downplaying contextual differences, and draws specific lessons from past events to argue strongly for present action. Useful scholarship should satisfy at least one of these criteria. It doesn't have to satisfy all of them.

Gavin suggests that historians should write about issues that are important and relevant (13-15, 21-29). Past nuclear crises were intrinsically important because blunders could have been catastrophic. The history of the nuclear age is also relevant because of the similarities between Cold War controversies and present day dilemmas. Gavin shies away from trying to influence any specific debate, however. His goal is not to take sides in the ongoing debates over nuclear force structure, declaratory doctrine, or 'nuclear zero.' Even if he wanted to use historical studies to argue for specific policies, his focus on contingency and uncertainty would cut in the other direction. His policy preferences are implied at best.

Nonetheless, he clearly wants to see some tangible result from all this effort. *Nuclear Statecraft* describes how lessons derived from historical analysis can help guide future policy decisions. "The historical lessons," Gavin writes, "are both interesting and important in and of themselves, and they are crucial to making better policy in the nuclear arena today" (2). He hopes that they will produce the kind of empathy with past leaders that might lead to "wiser choices by all" (11). He believes in the "benefits of good historical work for understanding and even improving US foreign policy" (13). He argues, finally, that the knowledge generated by rigorous historical analysis "can lead to better theories,

policies, and nuclear statecraft” (14). Indeed, a running theme in the book is that the abstract nuclear theories from the Cold War, which were derived from economic models and game theory, did not take into account the underlying political disputes between the United States and the Soviet Union, and as a result did not “lay the foundation for the correct policies” (21). Perhaps more historical concrete was needed, and fewer airy models.

But if good historians had had more access to policymakers than game theorists, would they have done a better job? It may be impossible to answer this question, because doing so requires making a large number of overlapping counterfactual judgments. It also requires figuring out who actually persuaded a policymaker to act in any given case, and determining influence is a hard business. Even high-level government officials struggle to figure out the sources of policy judgment. As President Lyndon Johnson’s intelligence chief put it, “How do I know how he made up his mind? How does any president make decisions? Maybe Lynda Bird was in favor of it. Maybe one of his old friends urged him. Maybe it was something he read. Don’t ask me to explain the workings of a president’s mind.”²

Let’s play the counterfactual anyway. Suppose we could demonstrate that historians had played a significant role in advising nuclear statesmen during the Cold War. What would they have done differently? What would they have advised? What would they have said that would have differed from the likes of Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, Albert Wohlstetter, or Robert Jervis? How would historians have laid the foundation for better policies? And how would we have known that those policies were in fact better than the alternatives, when as Gavin himself admits, there are no obvious answers?

It is not clear that statesmen would have made better decisions under the influence of history. Gavin shows that basic ideas in the nuclear age were deeply contested and never resolved. Policymakers and their advisors often held radically different views about the purpose and utility of nuclear weapons, and sometimes individuals were inconsistent in their own beliefs. Perhaps a vigorous dialogue with historians would have softened the debate: if all sides were routinely reminded about chance and uncertainty, none would have held so tightly to their own views. And maybe policymakers would have been less bold about using nuclear weapons as coercive tools if they were sensitized to contingency and chance. This would have stopped them from taking huge and possibly needless risks. In the Cold War it may have been enough to expose policymakers to complexity in order to inoculate them against hubris and encourage serious deliberation.³

² Russell Jack Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with The Agency* (McClean, VA: Pergamon-Brassey 1989), p. 219.

³ One famous example comes from the Cuban Missile Crisis. President John Kennedy was deeply moved by Barbara Tuchman’s *Guns of August* and urged his advisors to read it. Tuchman’s book was a catalogue of tragic mistakes in the rush to World War I, and Kennedy deliberately sought to avoid the same mistakes. Tuchman’s history was deeply flawed, however, which begs the question of what the President would have done differently if he had been reading a better book. See Jordan Michael Smith, “Did a Mistake Save the World?” *Boston Globe*, October 21, 2012; <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/10/20/cuban-missile-crisis-did-mistake-save-world/hYf8nEauKjnul3fmFCg3PM/story.html>

A more pessimistic view is that nothing would have changed. Rather than using history as an intellectual check against strongly held beliefs, policymakers might simply have gravitated towards historians who supported their own world views. This kind of cherry picking would have done little to improve the quality of strategy and policy. Instead, history would have become a tool of advocacy in bureaucratic battles and public debates. Some of this goes on already, of course. Policymakers are fond of referring to histories that seem to justify some underlying wisdom in their own decisions, or at least reflect the world as they see it.

Thus if policymakers are interested in history, for reasons good and bad, then the question is not whether but how historians should try to inform their judgment. One way is to help policymakers develop what Carl von Clausewitz called critical analysis: the ability to understand and evaluate historical decisions by imagining plausible alternatives.⁴ Critical analysis is a kind of creative counterfactual exercise. Done well, participants learn how to evaluate the wisdom or folly of past decisions; identify practical options that were not taken; and speculate about the possible consequences. Critical analysis encourages novel strategic thinking while preventing counterfactual analyses from descending into ‘What if?’ fantasies. Participants need to be able to defend their historical alternatives as plausible, which requires taking into account the material, political, and institutional realities of the time. By going through this exercise they can arrive at a fair evaluation of actual decisions, while simultaneously using history to stimulate creativity and guard against tunnel vision.

Some sections of *Nuclear Statecraft* read a lot like Clausewitz, though Gavin doesn’t refer to him directly. Gavin’s focus on contingency and uncertainty is conceptually close to Clausewitz’s discussion of fog and friction. His emphasis on the primacy of politics over technology could be taken directly from Book I of *On War*. And his plea for historical empathy is similar to Clausewitz’s method of evaluating past battles from the position of the commander, and elsewhere Gavin has written about the value of conducting seminars for policymakers that resemble exercises in critical analysis.⁵ The chapters based on his previous work on nuclear strategy provide excellent raw material for these exercises. Gavin deftly lays out the competing arguments over flexible response and proliferation in the 1960s, as well as the policy debates over arms control and stability in the 1970s. These chapters will surely be useful for anyone leading graduate seminars on nuclear strategy and Cold War politics, and indeed for anyone with the opportunity to engage policymakers in historical debates with practical policy implications. They provide an invaluable resource for scholars who seek to inform the policy debate and, more broadly, for those who fight against academia’s retreat into scholasticism. Do the new chapters live up to that standard?

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 156-169.

⁵ Francis J. Gavin and James Steinberg, “The Unknown Unknowns,” *Foreign Policy*, February 14, 2013; http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/14/the_unknown_unknowns

Berlin revisited

Gavin discusses Berlin in Chapter 3, characterizing the series of U.S.-Soviet confrontations from 1958-1962 as a single prolonged crisis. The root of the problem was the unresolved status of West Germany, but the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides transformed this political dispute into a possible flashpoint for a disastrous war, and Gavin uses the crisis as a jumping off point into a major theoretical debate about the consequences of nuclear proliferation.

Did the presence of nuclear weapons needlessly exacerbate the crisis by causing leaders to exaggerate the value of the political object? Or did it encourage leaders on both sides to seek a negotiated solution instead of risking catastrophe? The first argument is familiar to “proliferation pessimists” who worry that nuclear proliferation naturally raises the risk of nuclear war; the second argument is familiar to “proliferation optimists” who are confident that the innate deterrent value of nuclear weapons will cause policymakers to become very risk averse in the face of existential destruction.⁶ The answer to the question has important implications for our understanding of deterrence theory, crisis diplomacy, and escalation. It also speaks to the ongoing debates about whether possible proliferation to states like Iran will make the world more or less dangerous.

Gavin finds evidence that supports both arguments. U.S. leaders recognized the macabre absurdity of having to stake their credibility, and thus potentially risking a nuclear exchange, on the defense of half of a city in a strategically impossible location. President Eisenhower was frustrated that he had to deal as president with the consequences of a wartime decision that he had opposed: the United States had “made an error in attempting to control Germany from Berlin, so far behind the Russian lines” (57). President Kennedy found the crisis maddening and called the situation “ridiculous” and “silly” (58), and he was aghast at the notion that he might ever fight a nuclear war over West Berlin. Nonetheless, some Americans were urging the administration to continue to demonstrate resolve in the crisis. One analyst argued that the United States “must be prepared and ready, if all else fails, to wage nuclear war,” despite the fact that such an outcome would be a “catastrophe” (65). The fact that U.S. officials could harbor such views suggests that nuclear weapons created extraordinary dangers that made Cold War crises unique. Indeed, Gavin speculates that in a non-nuclear world the standoff in Berlin would have been resolved more simply. The Soviets would have easily taken Berlin given their vast conventional superiority, and the United States would not have bothered putting up a fight (71).

But great powers have often clashed over irrelevant places. The crisis that kicked off the Peloponnesian War, for example, was in a backwater called Epidamnus, a place so distant from Athens and Sparta that it barely appears on textbook maps of ancient Greece. Much later, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck famously predicted that the next great

⁶ For a recent review of this longstanding debate, see David J. Karl, “Proliferation Optimism and Pessimism Revisited,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (August 2011), pp. 619–641.

European War would start with “some damn fool thing in the Balkans.” Great powers are perpetually concerned with maintaining their own reputation, even if they shouldn’t worry so much about it, and they intervene in distant conflicts to prevent imagined dominoes from falling. All of this happens whether or not nuclear weapons are present. Great power rivals have great power crises. So the question is not whether nuclear weapons caused crises, because crises were inevitable. The question is whether the presence of nuclear weapons caused the Cold War superpowers to back down more quickly than would have otherwise been the case.

Gavin presents evidence that neither side wanted a war and that both sides were bluffing, and he uses that evidence to argue that this created the danger of misperception (67-70). But he could have used the same quotations to argue that neither side was foolish enough to launch a first strike, because both recognized that the costs of fighting vastly exceeded the political benefits of taking Berlin.⁷ Indeed, one of the most important differences between crisis bargaining in the pre-nuclear and nuclear eras is that in the former cases statesmen could convince themselves that wars would be limited, short, and relatively painless. Not so for leaders facing the prospect of general nuclear war, because there was no way to ignore the lethality and destructive power of nuclear weapons. As the military strategist Bernard Brodie put it in 1946, “Everything about the atomic bomb is overshadowed by the twin facts that it exists and that its destructive power is fantastically great.”⁸ Kennedy’s statements bemoaning the absurdity of his position might thus be evidence that he would never have made the fateful decision to begin an existential war over the political status of a central European. Similarly, when asked what would happen if the Soviets failed to coerce the west into negotiations through nuclear threats, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev did not say that he would launch an attack. As Gavin notes, he simply answered that “we’ll try something else” (69). All of this strikes me as evidence that there is a clarifying logic of extinction, which supports the optimists’ claim that proliferation leads to mutual deterrence, crisis stability, and peace.

Gavin admits that he does not provide a satisfying answer, and he concludes that such an answer is impossible because the evidence is contradictory (74). But he does not really defend this claim. No doubt there are pieces of evidence that support both arguments; the question is whether the cumulative weight of the historical record supports one side over the other. The chapter is surprisingly thin, however, on the reasons why the Berlin crises never escalated. Gavin argues that the case is ideal for adjudicating the debate over the stabilizing or destabilizing effects of nuclear proliferation, but he does not dive into the case in nearly enough detail. Despite the disclaimer that the “primary point of this chapter

⁷ Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz made this point in a recent correspondence with Gavin. Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, “Political Scientists and Historians in Search of the Bomb,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (February 2013), pp. 143-151, at 146. Sagan and Waltz were responding to Francis J. Gavin, “Politics, History, and the Ivory Tower -Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (August 2012), pp. 573-600.

⁸ Bernard Brodie, “The Weapon: War in the Atomic Age and Implications for Military Policy,” in Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946), p. 52.

is not to reinterpret the events between 1958 and 1962,” there is no reason why he could not have spent a few pages at least on this one critical issue, even if this just included his perspective on the large secondary literature on the crisis (58). He spends much more time discussing the gradual relaxation of tension and the ultimate settlement of the Berlin question from 1963-1971, which is an interesting but different question.

What might policymakers take from his analysis? They certainly will walk away with an appreciation for the importance of politics, and they will probably empathize with Eisenhower and Kennedy. They may even empathize with Khrushchev, who was never able to succeed in Berlin despite enjoying local conventional superiority and having much more at stake. On the other hand, the chapter doesn’t suggest a range of possible policy options short of war for either side, nor does it speculate about the costs and risks associated with these approaches. And as stated above, it does not fully engage the question of whether nuclear weapons were stabilizing or destabilizing. The result is that, unlike the other chapters in the book, it doesn’t inspire the kind of critical analysis that might improve policy judgment.

The strategic value of disarmament

Gavin’s concluding chapter enters the current debate over about the prospects for universal disarmament culminating in a world without nuclear weapons. Advocates of ‘global zero’ emphasize the many dangers of proliferation. Crises are inevitable in international politics, and the more states that acquire nuclear weapons, the more likely it will be that one of their crises will escalate into nuclear war. According to analysts whom Gavin calls “agonists,” emerging nuclear powers are particularly worrisome (160). They are risk-acceptant. They are flush with ambition and high on nationalism. They have friendly relations with other rogue states and are likely to share with them. They have ties to non-state terrorist groups and might be willing to share with them, too. They have weak and untested command and control protocols. They may not be able to secure fissile material. Most importantly, they are governed by irrational leaders who are utterly insensitive to the kinds of threats and promises that work against everyone else.

The agonists argue that the long period of great power peace during the Cold War was not a simple matter of mutual deterrence. Instead, it relied on a combination of luck and a complex arms control system built upon the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty of 1970. But they fear that the NPT system is fragile and may collapse. In this event the world will become a very dangerous place. States without nuclear weapons will have large incentives to get them. The existing system of arms inspections that provides reassurance to non-nuclear powers will disappear. Security dilemmas among nuclear powers will intensify as they race to shore up their defenses in an increasingly threatening and volatile world. Vertical and horizontal proliferation may increase as a result, bringing with it all of the dangers of misperception, mistrust, and escalation, that arms controllers have fought against for so long. If it is true that the NPT system is becoming unreliable, then a serious and sustained push towards global nuclear disarmament may be the only way to prevent future nuclear nightmares.

Nuclear ‘sanguinists’ are less concerned. They argue that the possession of nuclear weapons encourages caution because the costs of using them are so high and because using them risks a response in kind. Nuclear weapons cause peace, so removing them from the world will increase the chance of war. In addition, new nuclear powers also have powerful incentives to make sure they quickly develop secure facilities and reliable command and control, so concerns about “loose nukes” are vastly overstated. Finally, they note that there have always been fears of rapid proliferation but these fears have never been realized, despite the end of the Cold War and the erosion of the NPT system. At the same time, there will always be a number of states that either possess nuclear weapons or the ability to build them quickly, meaning that universal disarmament is a pipe dream.

Gavin offers a third argument. In so doing he suggests that disarmament advocates have ignored the strongest argument available, or at least the one that might be most convincing to policymakers. Global zero might be a worthy goal, but rather than focusing on international stability and world peace, Gavin focuses on national security and U.S. power. The argument is simple: the United States enjoys overwhelming advantages in economic and conventional military capabilities over every other state in the system. These advantages should make policymakers confident about U.S. influence in the world, and they should make us all confident that U.S. security is robust and durable. But policymakers fret about losing influence, and Americans fret about their safety. One reason is that nuclear proliferation may undermine U.S. conventional advantages. Nuclear weapons have been called the great equalizer, meaning that they allow small states to overcome their material weakness and deflect great power pressure. Remove *all* nuclear weapons and they become unequal again. Countries like Iran and North Korea would no longer occupy so much attention and would not be able to inspire so much fear. The chief benefit of global zero is not that the world would become more secure, but that the United States would become more powerful.

Variations on this theme lie just beneath the surface of the current debate over Iran. Some advocates of preventive military strikes worry about the loss of U.S. power in the Persian Gulf if Iran goes nuclear. The danger is not so much that Iran will immediately make a bid for regional hegemony or launch missiles at Israel. The danger is that the United States will be very hesitant to respond if Iran does act out at some point in the future. “A nuclear-armed Iran would immediately limit U.S. freedom of action in the Middle East,” writes Matthew Kroenig. “With atomic power behind it, Iran could threaten any U.S. political or military initiative in the Middle East with nuclear war, forcing Washington to think twice before acting in the region.”⁹ Critics of preventive action argue that this is a very thin rationale for military action. The notion that the United States would start a war now because it may lose the will to start one later strikes them as bizarre. Some critics have gone further by arguing that more caution would be a good thing for U.S. grand strategy, even if it were forced on U.S. leaders. Losing flexibility would reduce the chance of strategic overextension and policy blunders. If Iran had nuclear weapons, John

⁹ Matthew Kroenig, “Time to Attack Iran: Why a Strike Is the Least Bad Option,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February 2012), pp 76-86.

Mearsheimer argues, “there’s no way that the United States... would be threatening to attack Iran now, in the same way that if Saddam had had nuclear weapons in 2003, the United States wouldn’t have invaded Iraq, and if Libya had nuclear weapons in 2011, the United States wouldn’t have gone to war against Libya.”¹⁰ Being deterred might be in the national interest.

Policymakers scrutinizing these arguments will benefit from thinking about Gavin’s analysis. Essentially he conceives of three worlds. The first world is the status quo, in which the United States enjoys conventional advantages and a nuclear monopoly over states of concern. The second is a world in which proliferation does occur in key regions, thus ending the nuclear monopoly despite continuing conventional dominance. The third world is that of global zero, where nuclear weapons have been eliminated from international politics altogether. Policymakers’ preferences are likely to follow their beliefs about which world is best. If they like the first world, then they will favor policies that extend the status quo indefinitely. This means acting aggressively against emerging nuclear powers and doing everything possible to shore up the NPT system. If they like the second world, however, they will relax efforts to prevent proliferation and may in fact try to help guide the process in order to reduce fears. Finally, if they truly like the idea of global disarmament, they will aggressively reduce the size of the U.S. arsenal while offering large incentives for other nuclear powers to do the same. They might do this out of a genuine concern for international peace, or they might do it because they relish the opportunity to operate from a position of conventional dominance without having to worry about nuclear spoilers.

Critical analysis is traditionally used to help understand past events, but some forward-looking critical analysis is badly needed here. Current and future policymakers would be well served by thinking through the plausible costs and benefits of each world described above. Gavin’s discussion provides an important starting point for such an exercise, and he provokes new thinking about global zero by making the case for the *strategic* value of disarmament, rather than making the case in moral or legal terms. Unfortunately the argument appears only briefly at the end of the book. I hope readers don’t miss it.

¹⁰ Interview on the PBS NewsHour, July 9, 2012. Transcript: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec12/iran2_07-09.html

Frank Gavin argues that there is value in studying nuclear history. As nuclear history, he mainly means the history of how leaders – U.S. leaders in particular -- wrestled with the role of these strange and horrifying weapons when they contemplated what they could do in the world. He makes at least a few large points about this history.

First, various narratives about nuclear history have worked their way into the minds of some scholars and policymakers. These beliefs about the history are often misguided. And the actual historical record is not yet well understood. So, Gavin is saying, if you hear any argument today about nuclear weapons – pro or con – that relies on assertions about this history: don't trust it.

Second, the U.S.-Soviet balance of terror was not stable. It could not be relied on to avoid war. Rather than defusing dangerous crises, it produced them. Do not be nostalgic for a supposed period of bipolar nuclear peace.

Third, concerns about new nuclear states are not new to American policymakers. All the options now being debated were around in recognizable forms during the 1960s and 1970s in discussions about the rogue or not-so-rogue states of that period. It was not so clear to the policymakers then, and is not so clear now, how much trouble or danger the U.S. should court in order to stop proliferation.

For all of these propositions, Gavin's arguments and evidence are persuasive. They are of course not all original with him, but the book is a short and well-written synthesis of both his research and that of others. If the reader is looking for a relatively brief and sophisticated way to reboot her or his understanding of the U.S. role in the nuclear age, this is it.

In this book Gavin does not claim to assay a full survey of the relationship between nuclear weapons and modern U.S. history. It is not that kind of foundational text, the kind of book that former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy was trying to offer in 1988 with his *Danger and Survival in the Nuclear Age*.¹ Some key episodes are not discussed at all.

The most significant omission, even when measured against what Gavin was trying to do, is the absence of a chapter or two on the place of institutions in America's atomic age. Gavin focuses on leaders – people like presidents and defense secretaries. For people who have misjudged how leaders thought about nuclear issues, Gavin is offering at least a partial antidote.

¹ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival : Choices About the Bomb in the Final Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988).

But most of the influential thinking about nuclear issues and the shaping of policies surrounding them did not come from these leaders. It did not even come – as Gavin points out – from the nuclear strategists and theoreticians whose arguments loomed so large in the public debate.

Instead the most influential thinking and work came from institutions like the military services, the national laboratories, and private firms. Take, for example, the most important, and the most destabilizing, development in nuclear force posture in the late 1960s and 1970s, which was the development and deployment of highly accurate ICBMs armed with multiple, independently targetable reentry vehicles (warheads) known as MIRVs. As a ‘historical sociologist’ named Donald Mackenzie demonstrated persuasively some years ago, this development primarily originated with a relatively small group of scientists and military officers at places like Lincoln Labs, Raytheon, the Navy, and the Air Force.² The Soviet version of the story echoed or mimicked this. Some of the pivotal American developers obviously were quite carried away by the wondrous possibilities of inertial guidance and new kinds of gyroscopes. And who wouldn’t be?

The most significant nuclear crisis in the late Cold War originated with the Soviet deployment of hundreds of highly capable intermediate-range ballistic missiles, called SS-20s in the West. The inner reasons for the development and deployment of these missiles lie inside the Soviet defense establishment. To rather highly placed and well-informed people like Anatoly Dobrynin, Soviet ambassador to the U.S., the deployment was a bolt from the blue, accompanied by practically no policy-level discussion at all. Of course, how this then turned into the occasion for a responsive U.S. deployment and a first-class political crisis is itself a curious story, not discussed in Gavin’s book. It centrally involved the intriguing shared belief systems of a handful of mid-level officials in the NATO nuclear policy priesthood and a West German chancellor who had been a kind of prelate of that church.

Circling back to Gavin’s most essential theme, it is about the dangerous yet multi-faceted qualities of these weapons. He does not just say they are bad. Or good. It is hard to say: Gavin does not offer a counter-narrative, an alternate straw man, of his own.

Reflect a bit on one of Gavin’s opening cases, the Berlin crisis of 1958-62. He could have also discussed the Berlin crisis of 1948-49. There is no doubt in my mind that, if the U.S. had not had nuclear weapons, and an intimidatingly sizable force of them by 1958, the Western occupation zones in Berlin – and ‘West Berlin’ itself as a political entity – would have been liquidated. This would have occurred as early as 1948. Nuclear weapons may have barely kept the peace, but they kept the West in Berlin.

Yet, as Gavin stresses, evident U.S. nuclear superiority did not prevent the very dangerous 1958-62 phase of the Berlin confrontation. And on both sides that crisis was linked, as I

² Donald Mackenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: An Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

and others have explained, to the even more dangerous missile crisis with Cuba that ignited in October 1962. In all of this the United States had to maintain the peace by presenting a bluff so seemingly reckless – America’s credible readiness to *start* using thermonuclear weapons in a conflict – that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s letters and commentary practically sputter with disbelief at an arrogance that, to him, verged on a kind of insanity.

President John F. Kennedy was not insane, of course. One reason he was willing to risk World War III to get the Soviet missiles out of Cuba is because he would rather have a Cuban crisis in October where the onus of nuclear escalation was on Khrushchev than have a Berlin crisis later in the year with the onus of nuclear escalation back on him, with readied missiles in Cuba “stuck right in our guts” as he made his choice.³

U.S. nuclear superiority mattered. And, at some level, it also didn’t. At times both of these propositions were, at one and the same time, true.

It is not easy to generalize much from this story about nuclear weapons except that they do matter, to those who have them and to those who don’t. By reintroducing some of this history and stimulating our curiosity to discover more of it and by dispelling some of the generalizations all sides found comforting, Gavin has performed a service.

³ The quotation is from President Kennedy’s secretly recorded meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Friday morning, October 19, 1962. Timothy Naftali & Philip Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings, John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises, Vol. 2* (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 582.

There are few things more gratifying than having smart people take your scholarship seriously and discuss and debate your arguments in a rigorous manner. When it is people whose work and ideas you deeply admire and respect who undertake this task, as is the case here – well, it doesn't get any better than that. I found myself agreeing with pretty much everything Austin Long, Leopoldo Nuti, Joshua Rovner and Philip Zelikow wrote in these thoughtful reviews, even the places where my arguments were found wanting or underdeveloped, and in several cases, I felt like the reviewers laid out my views better than I had. So the first order of business is to express my gratitude to them for giving me so much to think about, and to thank Jacques Hymans, who to my mind is an exemplar of how to do work on this subject, for his excellent introductory comments. I hope others take up Professor Hymans' call to continue this important conversation about nuclear history and policy.

Zelikow would like to see more about the role institutions in the nuclear age, and would have liked an exploration of the first Berlin standoff and the Euromissile Crisis. Both Nuti and Long would like to see even more about the 1970s and beyond, and Long is particular highlights fascinating developments in counterforce strategies and technology during this period. It is hard to disagree with any of this. Rovner suggests a different interpretation of the role nuclear weapons played during the 1958-1962 standoff than I did; for those interested in exploring this issue further (and the difference between historical and theoretical work more broadly) may wish to see the recent *Journal of Strategic Studies* exchange I had with Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz and decide for themselves.¹

Instead of replying to each point raised by the reviewers, I thought I might get at some of the important issues they surfaced by talking a little bit about what I was trying to accomplish. This is an odd book, one I never really set out to write. It began during my research on the history of postwar international monetary relations, when I was trying to make sense of U.S. policies to ameliorate the gold and dollar outflow caused by the American balance of payments deficit in the 1950s and 1960s.² I won't rehash the arguments here, but only point out that my archival work produced as many questions as answers, each question leading to another, each new document pointing me in directions I never could have expected. The politics of U.S. foreign economic policy led to the debates over U.S. troop withdrawals in Western Europe. These discussions pushed me towards unresolved aspects of the German question, which in turn led to a whole set of problems surrounding NATO strategy, the role of nuclear weapons, and the vexing specter of nuclear proliferation. The deeper I went into these questions, the more conceptual issues of

¹ See Francis J. Gavin, "Politics, History and the Ivory Tower-Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2012), 573-600, and Kenneth Waltz and Scott Sagan "Political Scientists and Historians in Search of the Bomb," *ibid.*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2013), 143-51.

² Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

fundamental importance emerged. These questions included, among many others -- how did policymakers view nuclear coercion, and did it work? What were the consequences of strategic nuclear parity between the superpowers? How much of a priority for U.S. policymakers was stemming, and even reversing, the spread of nuclear weapons, and how high a price were they willing to pay to accomplish these goals? And how did the history of nuclear weapons and their political consequences overlap, intersect with, and at times, diverge from the other master narratives of postwar international history, particularly the history of the geopolitical and ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States?

There was a scholarship that spoke to these issues, of course: the famed strategic studies literature that had its roots in the RAND corporation and which served as the starting point and foundation within the more recent international security literature in political science. As Long highlights, “the logic of nuclear theory is so compelling that it is difficult to critique.” But the more time I spent in the archives, the less what I uncovered in high-level policy deliberations meshed with what the so-called ‘wizards of Armageddon’ had said was shaping things. This was surprising but also exciting. Many of the questions and puzzles deemed resolved by the security studies field were (and remain) quite open.

To me, more than any specific answer I found in the archives, this experience highlighted the value of employing a historical approach to understand important nuclear questions. This is not to say one should embrace a merely empirical approach – any vigorous history requires a constant interaction between our conceptual frameworks and the evidence we find, or as I recently heard a distinguished senior scholar proclaim, a good historian seeks the perfect blend between their inner hedgehog and fox. But there are other advantages that make the historical method even more appropriate for the issue of nuclear policy. First, whereas a more social scientific strategy has the advantage of focusing like a laser on one particular issue over time, what I have called *horizontal history* allows a scholar to identify and explain connections over time *and* space. Only by following the documents – and escaping what Nuti colorfully calls “conceptual incarceration” -- could one find the critical linkages between U.S international monetary policies, the politics of the German question, NATO’s nuclear strategy, and nuclear nonproliferation. Each was an important issue in its own right, but each is typically studied separately, unconnected to the larger domestic and geopolitical context, nested within their own literature that rarely speaks to the others. Second, what might be called a historical sensibility sensitizes one to surprise, uncertainty, context, and unintended consequences more than the certain, deductive approach of a Thomas Schelling or a Kenneth Waltz. The most interesting questions surrounding nuclear deterrence and proliferation, after all, have an N of 9, 2, or 0, and are even less susceptible to either parsimonious, hedgehog theory or statistical regressions than other aspects of international relations. These two advantages lead to a third – this kind of historical research better captures and reflects how the actual policymaking process works and what it looks like. If our interest is less in impressive models than understanding what actually happened and why -- and potentially contributing to the policy debate surrounding these important questions -- then spending time in the archives is vital.

This focus on the empirical should not be understood as denying the importance of theory. As Robert Jervis recently pointed out, “Without a theory, we’re just lost. We just have all these random phenomena we can’t make any sense of.”³ The reviewers correctly point to a certain reluctance to lay out my own framework or theory, to offer what Rovner calls a “satisfying answer” to the puzzles, contradictions, and competing claims of the nuclear era. Part of this comes from my view that scholars have an obligation to try to be as objective, as opposed to normative or prescriptive, as possible. Too much of the work in this field is policy advice masquerading as scholarship, where the theory often drives what evidence is selected and how it is used. Part of it came from a sense that, as Zelikow puts it, it “is not easy to generalize much from this story about nuclear weapons except that they do matter, to those who have them and to those who don’t.” As Nuti points out, “history is messy, and nuclear history in particular is even messier.”

That said, the reviewers – and especially Long and Rovner – identified a core animating framework that I only hinted at in the book but have since come to see as critical: the idea that the United States has, since the dawn of the atomic age, consistently gone to greater lengths than we’ve recognized to stem and reverse nuclear proliferation by foe *and* friend alike, less because these weapons are destabilizing, dangerous, or immoral, and more because they are powerful deterrents *against* the United States that restrict its freedom of action. American policymakers have long understood that a world with fewer or ultimately no other nuclear weapons states would, as Long points out, deprive “weaker states of the opportunity to counterbalance U.S. superiority in economic and conventional military capability by using nuclear weapons.” What Rovner calls the “strategic value of disarmament” and a colleague and I have since come to call the strategy of “inhibition” helps explain a variety of forward leaning U.S. policies since 1945 that are otherwise puzzling.⁴ The desire to inhibit proliferation led the United States to seriously consider preventive strikes against nascent nuclear states, even those that were otherwise weak; it drove policymakers to construct aggressive nuclear forces and strategies that went well beyond the requirements of deterring the Soviets from attacking the American homeland; it also helps explain why the United States has continued and even expanded its vast array of alliances and security guarantees even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, extending its nuclear umbrella in an effort to squelch proliferation. Whether U.S. inhibition strategies have been and are *good policy* is another question altogether, but I think it is important to recognize that this impulse to limit proliferation was far stronger than we’ve allowed and has been driven by strategic considerations, which sometimes overlapped with more traditional strategies like containment and liberal internationalism but at other times were separate from, at odds with, and at times trumped those grand strategies.

³ Douglas Martin, “Kenneth Waltz, Foreign-Relations Expert, Dies at 88,” *New York Times*, May 18th, 2013, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/19/us/kenneth-n-waltz-who-helped-shape-international-relations-as-a-discipline-dies-at-88.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&> on May 25th, 2013.

⁴ Francis J. Gavin and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “The Copenhagen Tradition: Rethinking Prevention and Proliferation in the Age of Deterrence Dominance,” commissioned paper, *Tobin National Security Project*, found at http://www.tobinproject.org/sites/tobinproject.org/files/assets/Gavin%26Rapp-Hooper_US_Preventive_War_Thinking.pdf

A final point: as the reviewers observe, the book laments the state of the academy as it relates to these critical issues. On the one hand, we are living in a golden age, with unparalleled access to once classified documents from around the world. Younger scholars from both history and political science are doing path-breaking work, and increasingly the two fields (and others) are cooperating and collaborating in fruitful ways. Foundations like Stanton, Carnegie, and MacArthur and organizations like the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center are providing generous resources to support this work. On the other hand, the disciplines of history and political science are both cursed by deep, systemic problems. Most academic history departments have no time for this kind of work or the scholars that produce it. Within political science, a renewed focus on methods, and in particular, formal models and statistical analysis, is crowding out the kind of painstaking qualitative work based on archival research that is needed to understand these issues. Such trends are not just bad for students, scholarship, and universities; the decline is taking place precisely when fundamental issues of nuclear policy – from global zero to North Korea and Iran’s nuclear program – are being debated in Washington, DC and around the world. Scholars have a golden opportunity to contribute to this debate with what Rovner labels “important and relevant” work, if only the appropriate disciplines and the universities they reside in would provide the needed support. Hopefully, the discussion Hymans calls for in his introduction would be a small start towards encouraging such contributions.

Response by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

The H-Diplo Roundtable on Frank Gavin's *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* raises many important issues, and I would like to comment on a couple of them. (Truth in commenting leads me to acknowledge that the book was published in a series I co-edit, and as a reviewer I recommended it for publication.)

Although there was more to the Cold War than nuclear weapons, they were central to it. Gavin and the reviewers note that without them the U.S. probably would have withdrawn from Berlin in the face of Soviet pressure in 1948. I agree, and the point can be broadened: I wonder if the U.S. would have made a commitment to defend Western Europe at all had it not had a nuclear monopoly, and one that it expected to last significantly longer than it did.

The fate of Berlin brings up other points. To start with, even in retrospect it is not easy to explain how the West succeeded in maintaining this outpost. Of course as scholars have noted, the Soviets gained advantages because Berlin was a convenient way of putting pressure on the West, but nevertheless the gains from changing its status were not trivial and the tools for doing so were many and powerful. Because the West was not forced out we tend to take this outcome for granted. But we really shouldn't and instead should try to explain it.

Several general issues can be seen in light of the differences between the perspectives of policy-makers and scholars that the Roundtable brings out. The first is linked to what I just noted. The U.S. was actually willing to make more concessions than it did in the 1958-62 crisis. Although not willing to meet all of Nikita Khrushchev's demands, Dwight Eisenhower, and even more, John Kennedy were prepared to go fairly far. They didn't need to, and I think the general point is that mutual second-strike capability (usually) leads both sides to behave cautiously and to be willing to forego the last possible bit of advantage in order to reduce the risk of nuclear conflagration.

The second general point gets to the heart of Gavin's essays. I think he and the reviewers are quite right to see that for the U.S. the problem of deterrence was really what the strategists called 'extended deterrence'—i.e., how to deter Soviet pressure against or attacks on close allies, especially West Europe. Among informed officials, there was little worry about a direct Soviet attack. Rather, the problem was that the Soviets had—or were perceived to have had—conventional superiority in Europe, which meant that the U.S. had to be able to credibly threaten to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in order to deter a Soviet conventional attack on West Europe. Two broad approaches were debated. Some thought that the danger of escalation was great enough to deter the Soviet Union and that 'all' the U.S. needed was assured second-strike capability plus sufficient troops in Europe so that a Soviet conventional attack would lead to a war large enough that escalation to the nuclear level could not be precluded. Others felt that this was not adequate and that what Herman Kahn called "escalation dominance"¹ was needed—i.e., the ability to match or

¹ Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York: Praeger, 1965)

defeat the Soviets at any level of violence. This then meant that the U.S. needed a variety of limited nuclear options that it would be rational for the U.S. to implement if need be. What is interesting in terms of Gavin's demonstration that policy and academic strategizing were prone to diverge is that while the former view won out in the academic community, the latter prevailed among policy-makers, even for people like President Jimmy Carter whose general political views predisposed them toward less belligerent stances.

I think the reason is that people in positions of power feel a great sense of responsibility that academics cannot share. They need to face the question of what they would do in the event of a conflict, and it would be very hard for them to forego the pursuit of usable military options and instead count on their having stronger nerves than their Soviet counterparts. Academics could argue that the Soviets were not strongly motivated to attack or that, even if they were, the bargaining advantage lay with the defender and so war-fighting nuclear options were not necessary (and might even be dangerous). But those who had to think about what they would do if a terrible situation arose could not be satisfied by those responses.

Gavin and the reviewers also point to another aspect of extended deterrence that is sometimes missed. There are close links between this problem and nuclear proliferation, at least as far as allies are concerned. If neither of the two American strategies looked convincing to allies—and it is harder to reassure allies than it is to deter adversaries—then the obvious way for them to protect themselves was to acquire nuclear weapons. Indeed, President Eisenhower not only understood this logic, he thought it provided the best way out, and so wanted to see that the Europeans, either singly or collectively, had nuclear weapons, thereby allowing the withdrawal of American troops.² No one knew about this at the time, and I think it is fair to say that there would have been an uproar had they known (which is why the plans were kept secret). But for most American Presidents, this was quite unattractive, and so after a vigorous debate the non-proliferation policy became not a peripheral part of American strategy, but central to it.³

Of course it was adversaries as well as allies that the U.S. sought to discourage, and this objective continues into the post-Cold War era. Here, too, there is a split, although not as sharp a one, between policy-makers and academics. Although few of the latter go as far as Kenneth Waltz in seeing proliferation as stabilizing,⁴ most of them are not as alarmed as

² This is one of the surprising findings in Mark Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³ A good analysis (except for its first polemical chapter) is Shane Maddock, *Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981); Waltz and Scott Sagan, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate* (New York: Norton, 1995); Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, July/August 2012, pp. 2-5

the Washington community, noting that China and North Korea did not become more aggressive after acquiring nuclear weapons and pointing out that the evidence that the sub-continent became more dangerous after India and Pakistan went nuclear is doubtful at best. Here too my guess is that the difference in outlook stems from the policy-makers being in positions of responsibility. The idea of a nuclear war occurring on their watch is horrifying even if the U.S. is not a target, and they must also be concerned that even if the spread of nuclear weapons would not increase the chance of their use, it is likely to reduce American influence.

The problem of extended deterrence has another aspect that is little remarked upon. The basic logic is that the American threat was credible to the extent that the Soviets believed that the U.S. would believe that an attack on Europe was a prelude to an attack on it or that the Americans saw the Europeans as so much like themselves that they would respond to an attack on the former as though it were directed against the U.S. homeland. The latter argument was the one that was repeated most often—and the repetition was partly intended to make it a self-fulfilling prophesy. But neither observers nor policy-makers paid much attention to the opposite side of this coin. If the Americans really valued the Europeans to this extent, then the Soviets' ability to destroy West Europe gave them great leverage over the U.S., and they gained the equivalent of a second-strike capability long before they could retaliate against the American homeland. It is perhaps not surprising that those in office did not want to dwell on this implication of their policy because it is not an entirely comfortable one, but the silence of scholars is more puzzling.

The different roles of academics and policy-makers also helps explain another major finding that Gavin and the reviewers discuss. This is that for those in power, multiple issues are inter-connected, often in complex ways. During the Cold War, they had to deal with the entire globe, and could not put political, military, and economic issues into separate compartments. Academics, by contrast, specialize. They want to go into as much depth as possible, and are rewarded for doing so. Of course we would like to put all the pieces together, and occasionally someone does that to great acclaim. But more often the attempt will be seen as a superficial popularization. Instead, they specialize, and the tools they use do so as well. Each volume of the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* covers its own geographic or functional area. Even the minutes of the National Security Council and related bodies, rather than being printed as a whole, are divided among the volumes. There is much to be said for doing this, but it does not correspond to the way foreign policy is made.

Although it is neither appropriate nor possible for scholars to try to become policy-makers, in order to understand them, a greater sense of the pressures that they feel may be necessary.

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