



Interview with Robert Jervis

International Relations

2014, Vol. 28(4) 479–504

© The Author(s) 2014

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0047117814555138

ire.sagepub.com

Nicholas J Wheeler

University of Birmingham



Abstract

This interview with Robert Jervis explores the early influences on his career, his time working with Thomas Schelling and Erving Goffman, that led to his path-breaking 1970 book, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, and his more widely known (although according to Jervis himself less original) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. The rich and wide-ranging interview goes on to explore his views on the nuclear revolution, nuclear proliferation, security communities, US foreign policy, the theory–practice divide, the security dilemma and signalling and perceptions. It concludes with Jervis’ reflections on what are the fundamentals that any student and scholar of International Relations should know.

Keywords

Cold War, International Relations Theory, nuclear revolution, Robert Jervis, security communities, security dilemma

Robert Jervis (PhD, California at Berkeley, 1968) is the Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics and has been a member of the Columbia University political science department since 1980. He has also held professorial appointments at the University of California at Los Angeles (1974–1980) and Harvard University (1968–1974). In 2000–2001, he served as President of the American Political Science Association. He is co-editor of the ‘Cornell Studies in Security Affairs’, a series published by Cornell University Press, and a member of numerous editorial review boards for scholarly journals. His publications include The Logic of Images in International Relations, Perception and Misperception in International Politics, The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution, System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life, American Foreign Policy in a New Era, Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War and several edited volumes and numerous articles in scholarly journals.

Corresponding author:

Nicholas J Wheeler, University of Birmingham, Muirhead Tower, Birmingham B17 2TT, UK.

Email: n.j.wheeler@bham.ac.uk

This interview took place the day after Professor Jervis delivered the 2011 David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies Annual Lecture at Aberystwyth University (published as 'Force in Our Times', in *International Relations*, 25(4), December 2011, pp. 403–25). Conducting the interview on behalf of *International Relations* (IR) were Professors Ken Booth, Campbell Craig and Nicholas Wheeler. The interview was prepared for publication by Nicholas Wheeler, with the help of Dani Nedal and Joshua Baker. Professor Wheeler gives his thanks to Professor Jervis who carried on the conversation with him until the end of 2013.

IR: *We are going to start with some probably familiar general questions, which will be of particular interest to students. First, how did you get into this profession? Presumably when you were in High School you didn't think, 'I want to be a Professor of International Politics'?*

RJ: Well that's true, but from the age of 5 or 10, I was very interested in politics, particularly international politics. Being born in 1940, my first memories were of the Second World War, and I remember playing with books showing tanks and ships and also remember the drama of President Roosevelt's death in 1945 and, later that summer, Japan's surrender. More specifically, questions of how force was and should be used made their way from the atmosphere to my mind.

IR: *And where were you growing up?*

RJ: In New York City, and that's an important part of the story because New York was very political, my parents were political, not in the sense of participating actively in politics, but their interests were liberal and a lot of political discussion took place during my formative years. The New York milieu that I grew up in was a Liberal/Jewish intellectual one, and although my parents weren't academics, they and their friends were always interested in the wider world and certainly in the political battles both domestic and international that were being waged. I remember the first newspaper I looked at, I don't know how well I could read it at age 8, was called *PM*, and it was a liberal Democratic newspaper. It went out of business in the early 1950s after a short life, but it was typical of what the moderate left was reading and interested in.

My interest in politics was sufficiently strong that when I was in sixth grade, a group of us started a current events newspaper. I remember one of my friends who was an artist had drawn pictures of the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia, and while we didn't sell many copies of the paper, it was pretty unusual for a bunch of 12-year-olds to be interested in the purges in Eastern Europe. So it was my personal interests reinforced by my parents, the New York atmosphere and, of course, the spirit of the times, that generated a strong concern with political events and particularly international ones.

More specifically, I became very engaged at a young age with what I would later call issues of the spiral model versus deterrence models. I can remember a US plane being shot down over the Adriatic, one of the many incidents of this kind, and the Yugoslav and Soviet governments claimed that it was a US spy plane. I was indignant that anyone could believe that my government would ever do something like that (of course, we now know it was a spy plane), and I also remember pestering my parents and saying: 'What

should we do? Should we retaliate by force?' I wasn't sophisticated enough to ask about what kind of force would be appropriate or how others would respond, let alone whether it might have been the United States that had been provocative, but the general questions were there early.

They continued through the 1950s. All of us young liberals in High School and College knew that Eisenhower was a ninny; you just had to hear him speak and you just knew this was a national embarrassment. I remember, in particular, a press conference where he was asked if we'd use nuclear weapons in the Quemoy–Matsu crisis, and he just gave an incoherent answer, and you three – but maybe not the readers – know the punch line. As Fred Greenstein has shown, we have Press Secretary James Hagerty's memo of the discussion before the press comes in. Hagerty asked the President what he is going to do when the topic comes up because Hagerty knows that a good intellectual answer would get him into hot water, and Eisenhower says, 'Oh, don't worry, I'll just go round in circles and confuse them'.

Of course, all of us bought the charade, and it is surprising that no one said, 'Wait a minute, this guy was the commanding general in World War II, may not have made brilliant military decisions but he had to deal with Roosevelt and Churchill and Montgomery, and so he can't be stupid', and it was interesting that no one I know said that, although in retrospect, it is so obvious. So it shows who really was stupid.

IR: *So how did you make the jump from a keen student in High School, interested in world affairs, into a graduate degree in International Relations?*

RJ: Well, through High School, I was very interested in History because, of course, there was no social science taught; my school was good, very progressive, but they didn't have social science. And when I got to Oberlin, I knew I would either be a mathematics major or a government/political science major. In the first year, I took an introductory American politics course with Thomas Flynn (who alas never published much but was a marvellous instructor) and a calculus course; well that decided me. I do have a decent maths aptitude, but I was never able to enjoy or catch on to calculus. My American politics course started out doing Constitutional law cases which I found just fascinating, so after that first semester, it was clear I was going to be a government major and I was very interested in both American politics and international politics. Events also continued to drive my interests, and the years I was in college (1958–1962) coincided with the missile gap controversy, and there was a detailed three-part story in the *New York Times*, I still remember it, by Richard Witkin.¹ So given my interest and my hawkish predilections, this was a natural fit, and on my own I wrote a paper about the missile gap and how awful it was, and all those interests carried over into Berkeley.

I decided to go to Berkeley for my graduate study, not on the basis of the thorough research as graduate students do today but partly by having seen the movie about the protests against the House Un-American Activities Committee in San Francisco in 1960. This was important to me since I was a budding student protestor and thought 'Ah, that looks pretty good'. I also liked the idea of being quite far from home. It was also

fortunate that I hadn't done much research because if I had, I probably wouldn't have chosen Berkeley. The main IR instructor was Ernie Haas, who was a very powerful thinker, but doing things I was totally uninterested in (European integration and international organisation). He had a very good article on the varied meanings of balance of power that I found interesting when I later read it, but I can't say the same for his main research areas. So had I known the faculty, I probably wouldn't have gone there, but fortunately they hired as a visitor Glenn Snyder, and in college, I had read his *Defence and Deterrence* because the library would put up the dust covers of new books they had acquired and every couple of days I would go and look at them.² And I found that book fascinating, and about the same time, I also found Thomas Schelling's *Strategy of Conflict*, which was inspiring.³

Glenn was a visitor at Berkeley for my first 2 years, and he taught the 'Theories of IR' course which introduced me to all sorts of stuff I'd never heard of, particularly Arnold Wolfers and his book *Discord and Collaboration*.⁴ The course and book led me to think, 'Okay, that's what I want to do', and I saw a way to do it that was analytical, but still close to real international politics; it wasn't so abstract as to lose contact with the events of the day.

IR: *You had a more hawkish starting point than many would probably imagine: where do you think that came from?*

RJ: Yes, I had a liberal background, but don't forget that in the New York context, the typical liberal was Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which combined domestic liberalism with staunch opposition to Stalin and the Soviet Union. It included people like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. This was the dominant attitude. I think all of us in the 50s were hard-line. We felt Eisenhower was not being tough enough, and where that came from is hard to tell, but it was really in the atmosphere. I can't remember a big spectrum on those issues. We all felt we had to wage the Cold War effectively, and at that point, it would not have occurred to me to adopt or even really entertain what we now call revisionist theories or a spiral model.

IR: *But was ideology doing a lot of the work in the sense that the hawkishness came from anti-communism?*

RJ: That is a very good question that I can't fully answer. I certainly don't claim to have thought this through on my own at the time, so my views reflected beliefs that were widespread. I think in that period, the general sense was of the menace posed by the rise of Soviet power, the missile gap and Soviet economic growth; we were all anti-communist, which I still find easy enough to defend. That combined with being a liberal Democrat meant that we were very critical of anything the Eisenhower administration would do, and so it was very easy to see it as flabby and as just not meeting the Soviet threat. And it's really striking if you go back and read Kissinger's introductory paragraph to *The Necessity for Choice* (1960) because it's really quite incredible when he says: 'the country cannot afford another decline like we've had since the start of the Cold War'. The whole perception in the late 50s was that we were slipping behind.⁵ So all this would fit with, I wouldn't

say a belligerent stance, and none of us wanted a preventive war, but we did want to stand up to the Soviets in, say, West Berlin, although many of us were ambivalent about Quemoy and Matsui.

Some of this hawkishness came from the sense – quite incorrect but very, very widespread – of American decline and that led I think to the view that the Cold War had to be waged vigorously, not only on a military front but also the feeling that we were losing out in the battle of ideas for the Third World. But the connection between domestic liberalism and the foreign policy hawkishness is interesting; it works for people like Schlesinger who was a generation older, all of them had thought it through, but I think for people of my generation, we absorbed it with our fingertips, from the atmosphere; it wasn't until late High School or college that I would claim to have any really independent, or perhaps pseudo independent, thinking about it.

IR: *We'll move on soon to nuclear issues, but before that we would like to discuss your interests that led to the books, The Logic of Images in International Relations and Perception and Misperception in International Politics.*

RJ: Well this is an odd story, but first a comment on nuclear weapons. One of my first memories was of a false VJ day parade, that is a day or two before Japan actually surrendered. My family rented a summerhouse on Fire Island, and I remember this big parade for what we thought was the Japanese surrendering. It was a day or two premature, but it was preceded by Hiroshima so that was present in my thinking really early, and we grew up with nuclear weapons. I remember the air raid drills being quite common and a fair amount of discussion about those as a kid and I remember quite vividly, it must have been when I was 12, shortly after the first H-bomb test in 1952, they took the picture of the mushroom cloud and inserted a profile of Manhattan Island. The bulk of the Island fit in the stem of the mushroom and that really did catch my attention. As I said, this interest in nuclear weapons continued into college and graduate school and made me very interested in the critiques of deterrence. I was still very much a hawk then, so I read them very critically. These were Charles E. Osgood's *An Alternative to War or Surrender*, Amitai Etzioni's *The Hard Way to Peace* and a couple of others, and they had a much more psychological perspective.⁶

IR: *What was your reaction to Osgood's book, An Alternative to War or Surrender?*

RJ: I thought it was politically naïve and a bad misreading of the Russians; I thought what he was saying would lead to a form of appeasement and I mean that as a critique, not as a smear.

But then, I was very interested in the questions Osgood was exploring, although more from the perspective of variants of deterrence. Once I'd read the books by Schelling and Snyder, I found a very congenial way of thinking and the intellectual tools to explore topics that I was interested in, and then in my second or third year in graduate school, there was a big conference about issues of strategy that included both Schelling and Anatol Rapoport, who was a leading critic of deterrence. Rapoport later wrote a very

critical review of *The Logic of Images* (I met him years later and we got on very well).⁷ He attacked me as a Schelling protégé, which was half correct, but the other half was my indebtedness to Erving Goffman. He was reading the book partly correctly as being on what he considered the wrong side of the debate ideologically about the Cold War. I wasn't happy with the review because it was not a well-rounded understanding of the book, but like everything Anatol wrote it was interesting.

But at the time of the conference, what I was really struck by in the debate between him and Schelling was what I would develop in Chapter 3 of *Perception and Misperception*: they were talking as though they had competing general theories of international politics, but as I listened to them, I thought that's not correct, they are really arguing about the nature of the Soviet Union and Soviet goals, intentions and motives.⁸ But that's not what they are talking about – they're not understanding their own disagreement.

So I decided I'd want to look at that issue and also decided that while the critics of deterrence were wrong on the issue, they were right that perceptions were an important topic, we don't see the world in an unmediated way – and you don't have to be a post-modernist to know that. But people in IR had not written about that subject; there was a really big hole, so I started working on things dealing with perceptions, especially of intentions; how you decide whether if the other side has shot down a plane over the Adriatic you should shoot down one of their planes or whether maybe they shot it down for a good reason and you should try discussions and see if you can move to the Pareto frontier. So how people reach judgements about other countries, how they draw inferences from inherently ambiguous information, was interesting, and those processes were psychological, so I started working on that.

I hadn't gotten too far, but – and this is something that graduate students will appreciate – I thought I'd almost finished my dissertation. So this being my fourth year in graduate school, I went on the job market. I had one interview that didn't yield anything, but fortunately I had sent my thesis prospectus to Tom Schelling, and Tom found it interesting and agreed to see me. He was spending the year in London, but he was coming back for a weekend and said, 'Well if you can be in Cambridge (Massachusetts) on this date I would be glad to see you'. I saw him and then after I sent him another paper he said, 'Why don't you come to the Center for International Affairs for a couple of years, I have research money', and I thought this was going to be what we now call a post-doc. But little did I know that I had hardly scratched the surface of the dissertation. I really thought I was this far from completing and I was just this far from starting it, an example of Albert Hirschman's concept of the 'hiding hand', that if you know how difficult some projects are you never would start them, but once you get far enough to see the difficulties, you're far enough in so that you can't back out.

But the main story is that as I was working on perception, I realised that it is only half the problem. States are perceiving others, but they are simultaneously trying to project an image to the other side, to manipulate the other side's perceptions sometimes for deception but not always; the image you are trying to get the other side to believe can be the correct image. I realised that this was a part I couldn't omit so I thought I would do a chapter on it. Then or shortly before I had read Goffman's *Presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life and he was teaching sociology at Berkeley at that time, so I went over and met him.⁹ I'd been warned he was an extraordinarily difficult person, which I think he was, very strange and could be very difficult, but he couldn't have been kinder to me and he was very helpful and we talked for a long time, and it turned out Tom had also given him some money to come to Harvard at the same time that I was going.

I was working on these two tracks of the signalling and perception simultaneously, and sometime in the first year at Harvard, I realised that this was impossible that it was much too large and I couldn't do it. I also realised that the intellectual styles that I was using in the two projects were different, so I asked my committee if I could take the signalling chapter, which was already growing out of control, and expand it into a dissertation. Fortunately, dissertation committees at Berkeley didn't supervise, gave us tremendous rope and said 'sure'. In fact, because my work was so idiosyncratic, even when I was doing perceptions, it was hard to find someone to supervise my dissertation. They weren't interested. However, Aaron Wildavsky, who was an Americanist, who had taught me at Oberlin, said in his distinctive Brooklyn accent, 'I'll do it'. Anyway, neither he nor the rest of the committee gave me much advice, but at least they didn't get in the way.

So it was clear that the signalling was going to be a more discrete project which I could do in a reasonable length of time, and the next year and a half I did what turned out to be *The Logic of Images*.¹⁰ It was a much, much harder book to write than the one on misperception, and it is a more original book, because the misperception book is put together from what a lot of other people had done, which I consider a very honourable form of scholarship, and it is mostly what my scholarship is – putting down what others have done in a somewhat different way. But the signalling book, although it could not have been written without Tom Schelling and Erving Goffman, was pretty much built from the ground up, and no one had done anything like it. And the driving idea, which gets picked up later by others in signalling, is why should we believe anything? How and why do past words and actions indicate what the actor will do later? What is the status of behaviours as casting light on how the actor will behave in the future? I still think this is a marvellous question and key to lots of things that are extraordinarily difficult and just great fun. And I had to develop the concepts because they were not there and I had to do a lot of hard thinking. I'm not sure I got the concepts exactly right, but for understanding politics, I think I got the concepts better than those of the economists.

IR: *Why do you think people should still read Logic of Images?*

RJ: Well, *Logic of Images* is premature rational choice, combined with premature constructivism. There was a student of Tom's who I hadn't met, Michael Spence, who is, of course, the founder of the signalling work in Economics. Mike had read Tom's work, and Tom had given him my work, and Mike says in the introduction to his book that he was very influenced by it, and he then did it a different way which was more appropriate for his domain of economics, where you have a much larger series of more regular routine interactions and where his notion of 'costly signalling' did a lot of analytical work. I think that has some utility for us, but we need to be careful – espionage may reveal important information about the other side, but this is not a 'costly signal'. An act of aggression can be taken as diagnostic even if it was easy and cheap to take; my

friend George Quester says that Reagan's firing of the air controllers impressed the Soviets with his toughness, but cost was not central. I've discussed this more in 'Signalling and Perception'.¹¹ The point is, as Mike says, the importance of behaviour that one type of actor would take but another type wouldn't be as likely to, and this may not involve costs.

What is also crucial and often missed is that signalling doesn't have any impact except for perception and that if you are a clever signaller you know that and you have to design your signals in terms of how you think others will perceive them. So the idea of a purely deductive theory of signalling I think has fundamental flaws right from the beginning, and ironically, political scientists have forgotten some of the basic lessons of political science and in parts of economics as represented by Schelling and strategic interaction. Signalling should not ignore, as Schelling puts it, the essentially empirical nature of it. Now, in *Logic of Images*, I tried to be empirical in my normal way of having all these anecdotes, especially getting into the area of deception. I read what was then the available literature, largely British, on deceptions in the Second World War, although the history was not fully declassified at that time. But there was enough to get a lot of great and illuminating stories. But the dominant style of analysis that I used was deductive.

When I got *Logic of Images* done, I went back to the perception side. When I was Assistant Professor at Harvard I'd sketched out quite a bit of it, certainly Chapter 3 which was built on the basic questions of conciliation versus force that I'd started with when I heard Schelling and Rapoport lecture at Berkeley. But I hadn't really dug as deeply as I needed to into the psychology. So when I got to University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I spent the first year in the Psychology library reading through every issue of every relevant journal in psychology for the past 20 years. You couldn't do this now, because psychology like political science and IR has had an explosion of journals. It was still a lot of work, but there were only a handful of journals and I didn't read everything in every issue. I had to get the volumes out and look at the table of contents, and in each issue, there were one or two I'd have to read. But it was that detailed work in the psychology that I think gives *Perception and Misperception* the real bulk that it needed not only to be a long book but also to have a real underpinning in the experimental psychology.

IR: *Moving on now to nuclear issues, how far do you think the concept of the nuclear revolution, which you have written about so authoritatively in relation to the Cold War, remains critical at the end of the Cold War?*

RJ: It is an interesting and important topic that I have not thought through completely, but first, we, of course, do have at least one, maybe two, nuclear adversaries – Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Our relations with them are nothing like what they were with the Soviet Union, but the folks out in Omaha do have to think worst-case and so do have war plans for them – and I'm sure they do for us – and some of the basic arguments there would apply as long as those countries have a second-strike capability, which is debatable as you know. Daryl Press and Keir Lieber argue that they may not have.¹² I'm not

competent to referee that, but the dispute is an important one that gets into the nitty-gritty of nuclear weapons which I don't do. But I doubt if any American president would think that he (or she) could launch a nuclear attack against Russia or the PRC and not lose at least a couple of cities, and this means that the old arguments are relevant. I'd come back to the pacifying effect of nuclear weapons, the fact that everyone knows that, as Gorbachev and Reagan said, 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought', which as a sound bite is really quite profound. We take this for granted, but that's not the way international politics was before nuclear weapons. I think that this sense that war has to be avoided is extremely important, and I also think that deterrence does matter when you think about how much of a danger proliferators are. The reason I opposed the Iraq War was not that I doubted that Saddam was developing WMD, but that even if he got nuclear weapons, the combination of American and Western nuclear and conventional superiority meant that he couldn't do a lot with them. Whatever the right answer is (if there is one), some of the questions are the same even though the Cold War is over.

Some of the answers may be unpleasant. Tom Christensen, a former student of mine, a good friend and marvellous scholar, has an article arguing that the Chinese view is that they could not quite paralyse the United States, but that by developing a certain level of nuclear force they could convert the game into one where there is 'competition in risk-taking' (the concept developed by Schelling which I have built on in my work), where it is the country that has the most intense preferences for prevailing on an issue and therefore higher resolve and willingness to run higher risks can face down a much larger military power.¹³ That's not a conclusion I welcome, because I like to believe our relations with China can develop better than that, and Tom himself is not pessimistic about Sino-American relations; he's not a China hawk, but he does say that the arguments that he and I developed about risk-taking lead one to be cautious about Sino-American relations. The Chinese think in those terms, and this leads them to see ways in which they could do well despite being in a militarily inferior position. So I think bits and pieces of the argument do apply.

And one final thing in this context, although you didn't ask, is the interaction between my thinking about IR theories and more practical international politics. I'd always been interested in nuclear strategy and taught it, and, of course, *The Logic of Images* has elements of this in it. But *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* didn't grow out of an intellectual agenda.¹⁴ What happened was that I started work as a consultant for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the fall of 1978, and I went over and saw a friend in the Pentagon in systems analysis, and this was at the time when they were talking about building the MX (what became later labelled by its supporters the 'Peacekeeper' missile). I was a bit sceptical and asked, 'What are the arguments here? Why do we really need this?' and so he said, 'Oh okay, I'm working on this' and pulls a short paper out of his drawer. I read it and said, 'This is a piece of shit', which it was. So he made a face and pulled out a longer paper. I read it with some care and said, 'This is better but, come on, the argument just doesn't hold up', and he said:

Ah, you've just read the most sophisticated paper in the US government about this issue. This paper is so sophisticated that it will not leave PA&E [Program Evaluation and Analysis], not because it is so highly classified, but because it's got much in it about the utility of nuclear weapons in international politics, and no one in the government is willing to read a paper like that.

I was truly shocked and so on the plane back to Los Angeles I sketched out the article that I thought would be titled 'Why Minuteman Vulnerability Doesn't Matter'. And then as I wrote it, I thought, 'No, that's not the issue, the issue is whether it is nuclear superiority that matters'. This story is relevant because my work in this area came not so much from reading the journals and deciding to take it on but more from seeing, 'Oh my God, we're building this thing, and nobody has thought through the issues'.

IR: *Just to clarify one thing you said about the Chinese. There is a debate in the United States at the moment about whether the United States should accept a mutual hostage relationship with the Chinese. Are you saying that the Chinese are thinking in terms of the conventionalisation of nuclear strategy?*

RJ: Not quite. Tom's chapter has the Chinese believing that nuclear weapons are indeed in a different category, but that they believe that even with a very small force they can stalemate us on the nuclear level and use their greater interest and resolve to prevail, something that would be harder to do in the pre-nuclear era.

IR: *Broadening the agenda: what do you think the implications of the nuclear revolution are for realism?*

RJ: I think that is a crucial question that none of us have fully come to grips with. Campbell Craig has a good book on how Realist scholars dealt with whether and how nuclear weapons were compatible with their views.¹⁵ It is an enormously different world when you can't have a big war and even more if you get to a point where because of that and other reasons war literally becomes unthinkable. I think that one of the major challenges for the IR community that has not been fully picked up on is the question you're posing: what is international politics like without war as the *ultima ratio*? What are the tools that state leaders are using to handle the changing game of international politics and what role are our ideas playing in shaping those tools? The only thing that gives me pause is that people always say, 'Oh we are in an era of transition', but this does seem to be a very, very deep divide pulling eras of history apart.

IR: *Some would say that we do have the tools, pointing to the way international politics have evolved in Europe: this, it is claimed, is what the future could look like more generally. Is this where the security community argument comes in?*

RJ: I talked about the formation of a security community among the developed states (i.e. war being unthinkable within this group) in my 2001 address as President of the American Political Science Association.¹⁶ My current argument about the security community idea is one that combines elements that some could argue are incompatible with each other. I do think ideas and norms are very important, but I also think that US forces stabilize the situation. When people ask me, 'Is it safe to pull American troops out of Europe?' I say, 'Oh yes, I'm pretty sure it is, but I don't want to run the experiment – one chance in

twenty is not worth it'. The American troops don't cost that much. If I were betting, I'd bet it's safe, but just as I trust your driving skill, I still put my seat belt on when we drive out of here for added protection. But despite Europe's success in ending war, I can't see replicating the European experience in the rest of the world anytime soon.

- IR: *A really depressing conclusion about the European story is that the European powers only got to where they were in the 1950s and beyond because they had the experience of two World Wars behind them.*
- RJ: I'm not totally pessimistic about other parts of the world having to go through the crucible of war to achieve new levels of cooperation, partly because of nuclear weapons.
- IR: *If you think nuclear weapons are doing a lot of the work in terms of reducing the risks of war, both in Europe and elsewhere, could you follow Waltz's proliferation logic? Why not spread nuclear weapons to others and let security communities flourish under the cover of nuclear weapons?*
- RJ: There's real logic there, and Ken and John Mearsheimer have the tremendous intellectual virtue of taking a powerful line of argument and being willing to follow through the implications.

Ken did not want to go to war to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons, and neither do I. But in my conversations with him, he made it clear that while this wouldn't call for a US strike, he didn't want Iran to get nuclear weapons, and he didn't think that they would make the world safer – this is interesting given his earlier arguments. I know Ken's article in *Foreign Affairs* ('Why Iran Should Get the Bomb') takes a more extreme position: he did that to stir things up.¹⁷ I believe that the basic stabilising logic works, but it helps when there are things to buttress it. The Cold War stabilised over a long time, and everyone developed both the technologies and the intellectual apparatus over time. And the United States and Soviet Union had the enormous advantage of being separated by 5000 miles, and once the German border became semi-stable and then Berlin became stable in the 1970s, it became hard to imagine how you could start a war. But India and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, Israel and so on don't have those advantages.

- IR: *How useful and transferable do you think the European model is?*
- RJ: Europe has been a situation where many other things are conducive to peace developing, and so I don't see the European model as especially interesting for the rest of the world, although it is enormously important in itself. Furthermore, while I think Europe will stay at peace, the European ability to cooperate on many issues is much less than many people had expected say, 20, 30 years ago or even 10 years ago.
- IR: *But you wouldn't, say in 1980, have been thinking that the European Union (EU) would have become so large in terms of the number of members, would you? Things change.*
- RJ: That is a very interesting question. How much unity would the core have had if the EU hadn't expanded? That's a very intriguing counterfactual. Of course, some argue that some of the countries urged expansion just so the Union

wouldn't become more unified. I think it would be very helpful for international politics if Europe was a coherent actor, but I don't think this will happen in the foreseeable future.

IR: *So what do you make of the Cold War looking back?*

RJ: Well, one thing that concerns me is what I see as the politicisation of the history of the Cold War. You see in the United States today that people who are hawks in the war on terror want to read the Cold War one way, and I think we'll get better history if we divorce it from issues such as our current policies towards Iran. It's perfectly possible to be a revisionist on the Cold War and to think that if Iran gets nuclear weapons it is going to be dreadful and if you have to use force you should. I don't find anything that's incompatible here. But there is one legitimate intellectual link, which is a form of the Marxist argument which is totally out of fashion in the United States.

If you look at American foreign policy, at least since the end of the Second World War, if not before, the Realist argument is we opposed expansionist states. That argument then leads to where most Realists are in terms of prescription and expectations for US policy, which is to offshore balancing or selective engagement. But that isn't what the United States has done since the end of the Cold War; it has been much more assertive, if not expansionist or aggressive. And most Realists have said that this is bad. A group of us signed the ad in *The New York Times* before the war in Iraq opposing it; most of us were very sceptical of the Libyan adventure, and many of us think we shouldn't still be in Afghanistan. But what the Realists haven't fully confronted is the question of why the United States is behaving in a way that is different from what our theories would lead us to expect. Realism and parts of Liberalism have a problem with theories being both descriptive and prescriptive. John Mearsheimer acknowledges this and says that if states behave foolishly, it embarrasses his theory. So the question for a Realist is to explain American foreign policy, and here is where I get back to continuity and what a Marxist would say. That is the view that the United States is driven by the economy or by ideology and strategic culture or by some combination of them, and that Washington is a bully and that the continuity in American behaviour from the Cold War to post-Cold War shows that the earlier behaviour can't be explained by the Soviet threat. This is a very interesting potential line of argument and although I'm not convinced that it is right – and I don't want it to be right – I think it has to be entertained seriously. This is something the American scholarly community has not done.

IR: *How far does parochialism affect foreign policy?*

RJ: I find it a fascinating subject, and in my graduate 'Theories of IR' course, I assign three pieces on American foreign policy that I think symbolise or epitomise the three main, although not the only, avenues to answering this question. One is Ted Lowi's chapter from *The End of Liberalism* on the impact of the separation of powers on US foreign policy.¹⁸ He argues that because of the separation of powers, American Presidents have to oversell problems and oversell solutions because Congress is usually more independent than parliaments.¹⁹ This, he claims, leads to a pattern of American exaggeration of threats and

forms of utopianism. This is part of or central to the necessities of the American political system. There is a marvellous essay by Wolfers, co-authored (with Laurence W. Martin) on the Anglo-American tradition, which stresses that the United Kingdom and the United States have a similar approach. It is characterized by the tradition of voluntarism, choice and morality, and this distinguishes the United States and the United Kingdom from the continental powers.²⁰ The reason isn't that they are better than the continental states, but that they, and especially the United States, have a fair amount of what C. Vann Woodward called 'free security'.²¹ Yours in the United Kingdom is not as free as ours in the United States because the Channel isn't wide enough, and after you people did us the pleasure of burning Washington, the United States had nothing that threatened it until Hitler. The United Kingdom, of course, didn't have it so good, but it did compared to France or even Germany. I assign the last chapter of Louis Hartz's *Liberal Tradition in America* where he argues that the United States was founded as a 'liberal fragment', so it never went through feudalism, never had a bourgeois revolution against the aristocracy, never developed a militant working class, and therefore can't understand most of the world: it has a parochial view of it.²² This is also consistent with what Morgenthau said in *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*.²³ These are very different arguments about the sources of American parochialism. I wish there was more work building on them, trying to make the arguments more rigorous, getting systematic evidence and seeing whether and how they might be combined.

IR: *Let's move the discussion from this to the broader question of how you see the theory/practice interface? We have had 90 years of academic International Relations, yet there are still considerable failures in US Foreign Policy – even Realists could not get the Bush administration to think sensibly and so on. What does this say about International Relations as an academic project? This is a question particularly pertinent here, where David Davies set the ball rolling by establishing the Department in Aberystwyth in order to generate knowledge to contribute to a better world.*

RJ: Well, I am not ambivalent but I am probably schizophrenic on the subject. On one hand, I deeply believe in the study of international politics and political science as aesthetics, as gaining pleasure from the attempt to understand the world for its own sake. If I could study the international politics of the nineteenth century or the eighteenth century and really understand it, I would go to my grave happy. But as I say this is to view it as an aesthetic project and while I think there should always be a place for this kind of understanding in a wealthy society, I am also drawn back (unlike some International Relations scholars) to the challenges of the real world, especially because we are so frequently challenged by things that just don't seem to make much sense. The temptation is to ask, 'Oh my God why are they being so stupid?' Sometimes they are, but I have taught long enough so that many of my former students are in government, and they are not stupid, and they do know a lot of IR. I do send them emails, and when I'm in Washington can talk to them in some detail because I have security clearances, and this allows me to indulge myself by giving advice. I like to think

that what I've learned in international politics helps me ask some good questions that my former students may not have thought of, and the people they are interacting with who haven't had social science training probably haven't thought of them either. So I think that knowing IR does help us analyze situations and probe more deeply, but we don't have great impact (which may be just as well because I'm not sure how many answers we have). Overall, I wouldn't want our intellectual enterprise to be judged by its ability to improve policy.

IR: *When you had the opportunity to get involved with the CIA, did you think, 'now I'll understand things I didn't understand before', or was it, 'now I have been thinking about these things so much I am going to be able to ask better questions and produce better policies'?*

RJ: It really was some of each. There was a hope that I had learned enough so I could be of some utility to these people, but a lot was you know 'well what does it really look like from the inside?' and 'what are the set of problems that intelligence faces that I hadn't considered?' I've learned an enormous amount from the episodic contacts that I've had, as reflected in my book *Why Intelligence Fails*, but I also have to say that while my sense of how a government works is a little better, it still isn't very good.²⁴ The US government is so large, with so many pieces, players and layers, and with such a brew of institutional interests, views of the world and contingencies, that it is hard to figure out how things work on any one issue, let alone broader patterns.

IR: *Has it made you rethink any of the core theoretical postulates of your academic life?*

RJ: That's a good question. The answer is 'No, but it might have had I served full time'. I have asked that question of Steve Krasner and a couple of others. And Steve impressed upon me just how much is improvised, how much is done on the fly, how much that you would think governments would have thought things through when they haven't and from what little I have seen, I picked up that as well. And it has given me sympathy for the incredible pressures that US decision-makers are under. But my students who have gone into government like Tom Christensen and Victor Cha don't seem to have come out of government with a fundamentally different view from the one they went in with.

IR: *Has there been a US administration in terms of foreign and defence policies that you totally admired?*

RJ: No, and I think that's part of feeling that we could always do it better. The George H. W. Bush administration looks better in retrospect, and even at the time I thought they handled the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany well. And they did the Gulf War well, even if you can perhaps blame them for being too slow to change the policy on Saddam. And, of course, compared with what came later, it makes Bush I look better, but they also had pretty good procedures, and it was a serious group of policy-makers.

IR: *Are you part of the school which is revisionist about Reagan in terms of his second term?*

RJ: Well, there's still an enormous amount of the history that we still don't know. And one important aspect, often neglected by International Relations scholars

(Rose McDermott is an important exception here with her *Presidential Leadership, Illness, and Decision Making*) is the role that mental and physical health play in influencing leaders.²⁵ It is important to remember that Reagan was in quite bad physical shape after the assassination attempt. In this regard, it is easy to forget that presidents and other leaders usually come to power when they are getting quite old, and many of them have had a history of medical problems. And then they are in a job which puts them under enormous stress. Reagan was pretty healthy before the assassination attempt, but he almost died from that wound, and my sense from a couple of doctors I've talked to is that it's not clear that he ever fully recovered. Even if he did, he lost the time that he really needed at the start of the administration, when the learning curve is very steep and when you find out what the hell the presidency is. So in a real sense, I'm not sure he ever gets on top of the job. And then I believe the Alzheimer's starts to kick in, certainly for the last years of his second term. So what impact did all this have on his functioning? That said, I do give him credit for overriding the really hawkish advisors who thought the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was trying to deceive the West.

IR: *You don't think the transformational moment came when he realised a few months later how close nuclear war came during NATO's nuclear exercise, Abel Archer, which Soviet decision-makers believed could be a countdown to nuclear war?*

RJ: You know when I first read this argument, I found it plausible, but now, there's quite a debate about how dangerous this episode was and how much it affected Reagan.

IR: *Because Beth Fischer's book 'The Reagan Reversal' argued this?*²⁶

RJ: Other people have said, 'No, the real change comes before'. The Keith Shimko book on Reagan (*Images and Arms Control*) is very interesting in this regard.²⁷ When Reagan comes to power, his form of anti-Sovietism is really very different from that of Weinberger and Perle. It has within it the opportunity to change. But it fits with my general view of IR that Abel Archer would matter by making Reagan understand the security dilemma. He realised that 'Oh my God they actually are scared of us', and I think it was very important that he understood that. And the other thing Reagan had was the ability to deceive himself because he told himself the story that in the first years of his administration, we had this big military build-up and that we couldn't negotiate until this was completed. But once that was done, he told himself we are now in a much better position to negotiate. This was rubbish! I mean who knows where that money went, with all those incredible rat holes it went down! But look at the military balance: it's the same 2 or 3 years into Reagan's first term. Reagan had this marvellous ability to convince himself that now it was different, so now we could be serious with the Soviets.

So one thing I'm interested in concerns emotions, which is justly receiving increased attention by IR scholars, especially Jon Mercer and Rose McDermott.²⁸ This includes people's ability to deceive themselves in the way that can get them into terrible trouble

later. Partly because of his career in the movies, Reagan had a great ability to tell stories to himself and others, and the way to make them convincing is to believe them even – or especially – if they are wildly wrong. Here, the story had a happy ending because it gave him the confidence to deal with Gorbachev. Of course, this isn't the whole story. He did believe in abolishing nuclear weapons, and he also refused to make what at the time many of us believed were very reasonable compromises but instead to hold out for fundamental changes in the USSR. He was a 'second image' thinker, to use Waltz's term, in that he thought that a state's foreign policy reflected the nature of its domestic regime, and he turned out to be largely correct!

IR: *As part of this discussion on US administrations, in 2005, you wrote that the Bush doctrine would probably collapse under its own weight. Did it?*

RJ: Yes, I think so, and even if it has not collapsed, I certainly think it was weakened in two ways. The first was a growing recognition that it is not very easy to develop democracies. Having said that, a lot is going to depend on how Tunisia, and especially Egypt, go in the longer term.²⁹ The second was the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, which has convinced a lot of people that you want to be really cautious in thinking that going to war will lead to the setting up of democracies. Libya will be another very interesting case here. When I was writing in 2005, I expected Iraq to end up worse than it looks now. But who knows where Iraq will be in another 2 years? [in 2011].

IR: *Can we move then to the security dilemma? In addition to the nuclear revolution, the other conceptual idea with which you are closely associated with is, of course, the security dilemma, and you've done more than anyone to develop the concept after Herz and Butterfield's pioneering contributions. Does it remain, for you, a core concept of the field of International Relations?*

RJ: Yes, I certainly think it does. Of course, I didn't invent the security dilemma, and it goes back to at least one reading of Thucydides – there are other readings of course. Also, as you say, Herz, Butterfield, Wolfers and Waltz all played their part. But I am the one who keeps rubbing people's noses in it. I didn't really understand the security dilemma until I was working on the spiral and deterrence models, but then it became a central pillar in Chapter 3 of *Perception and Misperception*.

IR: *What led you to the security dilemma as you were writing Chapter 3?*

RJ: Well, I was led to it through thinking about the question of Soviet intentions and motives. Crudely put, the question was whether the Soviets were aggressive or peaceful. This led me to think more about how conflict could arise even if both sides' prime goal was security. So as I started writing Chapter 3, I re-read Butterfield and Herz and developed the idea of a 'spiral model' which entraps actors in escalating insecurity because of both misperceptions and the inherently competitive nature of security in a condition of anarchy. I think it's central to many issues today in conflicts like United States–Iran, United States–North Korea and India–Pakistan. In all these, we can ask the same question we asked during the Cold War: is there a Pareto frontier to which we could all safely move? That is, are there arrangements that are better for all the

actors? If so, where is the Pareto frontier in policy terms, and what are the impediments to getting there? Of course, we may be on the frontier and conciliation can't make the situation better, or even if we are not, it may be that the impediments just cannot be cleared away. But at minimum asking if we are in a security dilemma clarifies a lot of issues. I think we also need to consider situations of what I later called a 'deep security dilemma', in which expansion is seen as necessary in order to gain security, although one can argue that this isn't really a security dilemma.³⁰ Shiping Tang has also written about cases where countries want to expand but where their motive, to use Charlie Glaser's language, is to gain security.³¹

Now, some of my hawkish friends like Colin Gray argue that thinking about the security dilemma and the prisoners' dilemma is just irrelevant because most of the problems in international politics derive from aggressive states, and most people who take this position go to a second image view. There's a lot to that, so when I teach my introductory IR classes after spending a lot of time on aspects of anarchy, the security dilemma and cooperation, I give the critiques – that in principle, the security dilemma could exist, but really if you look at international history, it is not relevant to Hitler, not relevant to Stalin, probably not relevant to Khrushchev and perhaps not relevant to Kaiser Wilhelm. And we then return to the debates about the origins of the First World War that partly turn on the relevance of security dilemma arguments. Some say:

No it wasn't the ideology of the offensive and mutual insecurity that led to war; it was the fact that the Germans wanted to dominate Europe because they were not satisfied with their position. You people who want to explain things in terms of the security dilemma are just barking up the wrong tree in terms of the understanding of the real history.

My reply comes in a weak and a strong versions. The weak version is:

Well we can talk about whether it applies or not, but what's obvious is the importance of the question of whether it applies or not, and you can't rule it out at the start. Unless we begin with that question, we're going to truncate both our intellectual understanding and the policy debate, so that even at the end of the day if we say the security dilemma is not relevant, you really have to spend a lot of time and intellectual energy and work to get there.

The stronger version is that the security dilemma in fact often does apply, and I've come to believe this because writing *Perception and Misperception* made me more of a dove.

I still go back and forth on this in the Cold War, but I do think that part (though not all) of the Iranian–United States and North Korean–United States interactions are captured by the security dilemma. I used to believe that you could get the North Koreans out of the nuclear game, that the North Koreans only wanted security of their regime and there was a Pareto solution to be reached. During the late 1990s, Victor Cha said that he thought this was wrong, and I now think either that he was right at the time or the misguided policies of the Bush administration before Victor joined it increased the problem and introduced irreversible changes in North Korea so that now the conflict is deeper

than it was initially.³² But I'm still sympathetic to an attempt to a deal with North Korea and, even more, Iran that takes the security dilemma into consideration.³³

IR: *When you use the term 'the security dilemma', are we right in thinking that what you mean by that is the spiral model?*

RJ: Yes.

IR: *But would you agree there are ambiguities here? In Chapter 3 of Perception and Misperception, there is a tension. On one hand, you say that better knowledge of the security dilemma – understanding the cognitive dynamics and interplay – opens up an explanation that emphasises misunderstandings and lack of empathy, but on the other hand, you say there is a cost to this type of spiral explanation which is the slighting of the role of the system in inducing conflicts. You then talk about the system inducing conflict and a kind of 'incompatibility' which is not 'illusory', but is actually real and deep. Could you elaborate on what you really mean by that?*

RJ: These questions are quite important and I've not thought it through fully, although it does go to both a number of historical cases and to what we mean by the security dilemma. And I was struck by how much the definition of a security dilemma turns on the question of uncertainty in the book the two of you did (*The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*) and by Tang's article and book (*A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time*).³⁴ Uncertainty is a central element in two ways: first, you can't be sure of the other side's short-term intentions, and second, the more fundamental problem is that even if I'm certain that your intentions today are benign, there is no way of guaranteeing the future. I get annoyed when some people say, 'Oh the people who write about the security dilemma only are concerned about the difficulties of inferring intentions today'. Well, no, that's not right. When Herz and Butterfield wrote about it, and certainly when I wrote about it, we put this second component in. The problem in stressing the second component raises the question of whether the first component really matters. And if you take the structural element (i.e. that people and states can change) too seriously, you get a picture that clearly is just not descriptively correct. The United States doesn't worry about British nuclear weapons, and it doesn't even worry about French nuclear weapons, and we don't really worry about the latent German and Japanese nuclear capability. If you went into the Pentagon or the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and said, 'What about Japanese nuclear weapons?' they'd say, 'Oh yes, they can get them in a month or so'. But if you were then to say, 'IR theory tells us that intentions can change, so you should worry about this', they would laugh at you, and I think they'd be right. And so clearly people at a certain point are willing to truncate their worries about the future.

IR: *But if the Chinese and the Russians gave up their nuclear weapons would the Pentagon start worrying about the Japanese?*

RJ: Yes, that's a very good point and that's really interesting. John Mueller has written about the conservation of enemies, and I think there is a lot to it.³⁵ When some problems disappear, we then focus on others rather than feeling that the

world is now much better. Now it isn't entirely irrational to move something up on our worry list when more pressing problems are solved, but I think there is a large element of human psychology in it as well. I'm a partial believer in evolutionary psychology, and I think it is hard-wired to pay attention to whatever is the greatest threat no matter what its size is, and there are the obvious institutional interests at work as well because the security apparatus is prone to see threats and needs them in order to thrive.

This is related to your previous question. People do worry about the changes that could occur in the future, and that's part of what I talked about in Chapter 3 of *Perception and Misperception* where I use a famous quotation from one of the Tsars: 'That which stops growing begins to rot'. The idea here is that the only way you can get security is to keep expanding, and so in the Cold War article ('Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?'), which is one that I really like, I first talk about the notion of a 'deep' security dilemma, as I mentioned earlier.³⁶ What I was getting at with this was the argument that because of their different social systems, the United States and Soviet Union viewed the other as inherently hostile. And certainly on the Soviet side and partly, I think a little less on the American side, there was the crusading element in trying to speed up the forces of history that would eventually make the other side become like us. So it has that offensive component. But for both sides, it also had a very strong defensive component. Our belief was: 'As long as they are communists, they are going to be making trouble for us', and their belief was: 'As long as we were capitalists, we were going to be making trouble for them'. In principle, at some level, both sides would have settled for security and wouldn't have had to struggle so much, but it was a 'deep security dilemma' in that each side believed that as long as the other side was what it was, you could never be secure. And, of course, either or both may have been correct.

IR: *But that's not a spiral though is it?*

RJ: It isn't in that uncertainty didn't play a role here, but it is or at least resembles a security dilemma in that both sides 'only' want security but can't reach it. Jennifer Mitzen and Randy Schweller similarly argue that much of the real problem is that states are too certain that the other is hostile.³⁷

IR: *Because there is no way in which you could find a solution that is mutually acceptable?*

RJ: Exactly. And that's why Shiping Tang says – and you too said – that it's not a security dilemma because uncertainty isn't the problem. So I'm ambivalent on that, but you're right that it doesn't have the dilemma feature and it's not built on uncertainty.³⁸ Paul Roe has written about what he calls the 'broad security dilemma' and as I understand it, his conception is similar to my deep security dilemma.³⁹ It has the aspect of the security dilemma in that it produces an unwanted conflict or war, and so overlaps with John Mearsheimer's, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, which we categorize as offensive Realism.⁴⁰ But as Mearsheimer's title indicates, this is a tragedy because there's a better world we all want to reach but can't. Remember that when Wolfers talked about the security dilemma (without using that term), he contrasted tragedy with evil

(‘The Pole of Power and the Pole of Indifference’, in *Discord and Collaboration*).⁴¹ The tragedy is that we would not need to fight, and we’d be satisfied with security, giving up our offensive hopes to change the other side, if God would come down from heaven and guarantee our security. So there’s a world, a better world, a Pareto optimal that we would take if we could get there, but we can’t get there.

IR: *This formulation seems to challenge what some take as one of your central contentions, namely, that if decision-makers properly understood the spiral and didn’t play it as a deterrence model game, then they could find mutual security.*

RJ: Unfortunately, in the world I just described, unlike a ‘normal’ security dilemma, an understanding of it doesn’t get you out of it unless you then come to believe that the other side is going to be fairly reasonable and we can deal with it without having to fear that it is trying to dominate or destroy us. But the basic problem here is that even if the state understands that the other side is driven by security, there is no escape from unending security competition unless we can figure out a way to meet the other side’s security needs. Nevertheless, there may be ways in which it is possible to make both sides secure. There might have been ways to do this during the Cold War, and it might be possible today with countries like Iran and North Korea. There could be better thinking about ways in which we can reassure the other side and meet its legitimate needs for national security and regime security (if one were willing to reassure regimes that are despicable). But I personally would be willing to give whatever regime security guarantees one could in return for ending their nuclear programmes, so in that way, the awareness of the problem might lead to policies that could deal with it. On the other hand, it may be that these regimes believe that the United States and the rest of the world are a menace to them in a way that can’t be changed. If so, then understanding doesn’t lead to a way out, and perhaps to call this kind of situation a deep security dilemma confuses more than it clarifies.

IR: *Do you think that the spiral model and the deterrence model set up too dichotomous a framework for explanation? In other words, might prudent policy-making lie in trying to combine both axioms, as argued by your former student Thomas Christensen?*

RJ: I think this is an extraordinarily difficult question to answer. How can you mix promises and threats productively without getting the worst of both worlds? Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing in their very good book (*Conflict among Nations*) talk about the sequencing problem and argue that in many situations, you need to first show that you are tough and then you have to be more conciliatory.⁴² The first challenge is to convince an opponent that they are not going to get what they want and think they can get, but then you have to be willing to negotiate. In some ways, you can see this happening during the Cold War over West Berlin and in the Cuban missile crisis and its aftermath. We convinced the Soviets that we were not going to get squeezed out of West Berlin and then after, in this case after almost 10 years after, we were able to engage in productive negotiations, although it took quite a bit to convince Nixon and Kissinger that there was an opportunity to negotiate seriously. The problem of combining

and sequencing threats and promises is crucial for both policy and theory, and we don't have enough studies of it. I see this as central to reaching a settlement with Iran, as I discussed in my *Foreign Affairs* piece in relation to Iran.⁴³

- IR: *Going back to your work on signalling and your classic book, The Logic of Images, the fundamental problem is that if you're sending deterrence signals at the same time as you're sending conciliatory signals, then the receiver of the signal is going to be very confused and will then revert back to their fundamental beliefs about an adversary. So, if it's an inherent bad faith model that is running, are they going to discount any positive moves as just noise?*
- RJ: It's an enormous problem, and Wallace Thies has an excellent book about this in Vietnam called *When Governments Collide*.⁴⁴ It shows some of these problems, especially because the United States was using force and all sorts of things meant that there was divergence between the way the bombing was intended and what actually happened. It may be slightly easier when you're sending messages in sequence because you're doing one set of messages first, and then at a certain point, you can switch to the other track. But it's hard, and our whole scholarship on this is weak because we haven't put both sides (signalling and perception) together. But one of the beauties of Cold War scholarship is that we can now get a better sense of the real interaction, how the Soviets interpreted things we were doing, what meanings the Soviets intended to convey by doing certain things and whether any meaning at all was involved in some messages and behaviour.
- IR: *Do you think the security dilemma remains a central concept in International Relations and something that students should learn?*
- RJ: Oh absolutely, I don't think it's just my parochialism that leads me to say that it's hard to understand security politics – which is a lot of the field – and even various parts of International Political Economy (IPE) like tariff or currency wars, without understanding multiple facets of the security dilemma.
- IR: *So would you still say as you did in Perception and Misperception that the security dilemma can only ever be 'ameliorated but not abolished' given your later writings on security communities? Or do you want to say that security communities represent a fundamental transformation of world politics such that violence can be delegitimised to the point of achieving international peace without a Leviathan? If this is so, does it represent a significant inconsistency in your work? Or, would you prefer to rescue the proposition that the security dilemma can only be ameliorated but never abolished and argue that security communities represent an exceptional kind of situation?*
- RJ: I think it is. At this point, the security dilemma doesn't operate in Europe but it might be like a zombie and come back to life. I think it's unlikely, but the history of world politics is a history of things we haven't imagined, both good and bad occurring.
- IR: *So you wouldn't say it's a permanent structural transformation?*
- RJ: No, no, I guess nothing is permanent.
- IR: *One way of characterising IR theorising during your career has been the proliferation of approaches, with the security dilemma alone left standing. What*

else is left standing? What should the student of contemporary International Relations be taught?

RJ: Well, I think there are lots of serious ideas. I think the realism–institutionalism debate was overdone, and I argued in my article (‘Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation’) that institutionalism is very close to defensive realism.⁴⁵ As Bob Keohane said, institutionalism makes the same assumptions as realism and I think the real contribution was showing that under some circumstances, agents can use institutions for a variety of purposes, especially to facilitate cooperation.⁴⁶ But institutionalism isn’t a full-blown competitor to realism.

I think the fundamental third image–second image dispute lasts, and especially, the second image in the various liberal variants that democracies are fundamentally different and that domestic politics often plays a very large role, as Campbell Craig and Fred Logevall argue for the Cold War.⁴⁷ A basic challenge to realism (but not to neoclassical realism) is the idea that democracies are different and that you simply can’t follow Waltz and ignore either the regime type or the narrow domestic interests and how they are aggregated through domestic institutions. I also think that constructivists, although they often shoot themselves in the foot by the way they frame their claims, are right to bring back a focus on ideas. Tracing the relationships between ideas and material interests is obviously one of the broadest questions of the social sciences and that is shared by some fields in the humanities as well, and while we can’t solve it, we can’t afford to duck it either.

I’d also say that although rational choice theory (it really is an approach and not a substantive theory) has all sorts of problems and can squeeze the life out of the politics – either domestic or international – it is right to pay careful attention to micro-foundations, whether in the individual as an actor or an interest group as an actor or the state as an actor – and then to say ‘Now let’s pin it down, don’t engage in hand-waving but let’s take the causal argument step by step’. Whether you put it down in the math or not doesn’t really matter, but I want to see how the actors are acting, what their interests are, why they are doing this and how this can occur in equilibrium. Working through the arguments with care can lead us to see old questions more clearly and may raise new ones. This approach can get too removed from the world of actual decision-making and statecraft, but I do think that rational choice will and should endure because, done well, it points to the role of strategic interaction that is so central to IR and cuts across the second and third images; it even fits into some aspects of constructivism.

We don’t have time to go into all the other pluses and minuses of rational choice, but let me just note one characteristic that can be both, depending on how it is done. The focus on logic and deduction is valuable because it allows you to say, ‘If these premises and this starting place is correct, then the following should happen’. And this is good both for allowing you to see the logic of the model and for generating ideas and potentially testable propositions. But this is dangerous if it leads you to think that what follows from the argument must be true. I’ve been in a couple of conversations with proponents of rational choice who when confronted with pretty clear findings that violate their models say, ‘That can’t be true!’ rather than reacting with questions such as ‘Where did my model go wrong? And how do I explain this aspect of the world?’ So either this approach can be misused by making you dogmatic or it can be used productively to illuminate

puzzles. In any case, this will be around for a long time and not only because political scientists like to ape better-paid economists.

IR: *Finally, we have asked you about many theoretical innovations during your long career: what do you think the 'next big thing' will be in theorising international relations?*

RJ: The most honest answer is 'I don't know'. But I guess I should try to do better than that – so I will guess, even if this is still somewhat of a cop-out. But I think – or hope – that there won't be one 'big next thing'. I always root for pluralism; I hope we'll see several lines being pursued. I really dislike it when someone refers to an area or theory as 'the cutting edge'. The person who says that usually refers to the kind of research that he or she is doing. In fact, there always are several areas that are very productive, in part, because interesting ideas and research of one type leads to multiple ideas and cross- and counter-currents. My guess is that the 'next big things' will be sparked by two kinds of unpredictable developments. First, events in the world are likely to have an impact, even on abstract theories. Second, a lot depends on an individual or small group just coming up with a bright idea, and this is almost by definition unpredictable.

That said, I know that some people believe that the field is turning away from grand theories.⁴⁸ There certainly is something to this, and the growing popularity and sophistication of statistical studies has led to a narrowing of the questions that are being asked. But narrow hypotheses can both derive from and shed light on broader theories, and I think it is too early to write the obituary for conceptual and theoretical thinking.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Richard Witkin was on the staff of *The New York Times* from 1954 until his retirement in 1989.
2. Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
3. Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).
4. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962 [1949]).
5. Henry Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).
6. Charles Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Amitai Etzioni, *The Hard Way to Peace: A New Strategy* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).
7. Anatol Rapoport, 'Games Nations Play', *Semiotica*, 9(3), 1973, pp. 272–86 (review of Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970; 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989)).

8. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
9. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).
10. Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*.
11. Robert Jervis, 'Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inferences and Projecting Images', in Kristen Renwick Monroe (ed.) *Political Psychology* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), pp. 293–312.
12. Keir A. Leiber and Darryl G. Press, 'The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy', *Foreign Affairs*, 85(2), 2006, pp. 42–54.
13. Thomas Christensen, 'The Meaning of the Nuclear Evolution: China's Nuclear Modernization and US-China Security Relations', in James W. Davis (ed.) *Psychology, Strategy, and Conflict: Perceptions of Insecurity in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 121–54.
14. Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).
15. Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
16. Robert Jervis, 'Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace, Presidential Address, American Political Science Association 2001', *American Political Science Review*, 96(1), 2002, pp. 1–14.
17. Note from the editors: Robert Jervis edited the final text after the interview. See 'Why Iran Should Get the Bomb', *Foreign Affairs*, 91(4), July/August 2012, pp. 2–5 for Waltz's more extreme position.
18. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), ch. 6.
19. Editor's note: the vote in the House of Commons on 29 August 2013 overriding UK Prime Minister's David Cameron's preference for joining the United States in striking Syria is an important exception.
20. Arnold Wolfers and Laurence W. Martin, *The Anglo-American Tradition in Foreign Affairs: Readings from Thomas More to Woodrow Wilson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956).
21. C. Vann Woodward, 'The Age of Reinterpretation', *American Historical Review*, LXVI, October 1960, pp. 2–8.
22. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955).
23. Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1946).
24. Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).
25. Rose McDermott, *Presidential Leadership, Illness, and Decision Making* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
26. Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).
27. Keith Shimko, *Images and Arms Control: Perceptions of the Soviet Union in the Reagan Administration* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
28. Jonathan Mercer, 'Emotional Beliefs', *International Organization*, 64, Winter 2010, pp. 1–31; Jonathan Mercer, 'Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War', *International Organization*, 67, Spring 2013, pp. 221–52; Rose McDermott, 'The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of

- Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science', *Perspectives on Politics*, 2, June 2004, pp. 691–706.
29. Editor's note: in reading Jervis's thoughts on the Arab spring, readers should remember the interview was conducted in April 2011, and these comments were added in the fall of 2013.
 30. See Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 67–8) for an argument which questions how far Jervis's notion of a 'deep security dilemma' is really a security dilemma.
 31. Shing Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
 32. Victor Cha, 'Hawk Engagement and Preventive Defense on the Korean Peninsula', *International Security*, 27(1), 2002, pp. 40–78.
 33. For Jervis's writings on Iran, see 'Getting to Yes with Iran: The Challenges of Coercive Diplomacy', *Foreign Affairs*, 92, January/February 2013; 'How Intelligence and Policy Intersect' (RSIS Working Paper No. 257, April 2013); 'On the Road to Yes with Iran', *Foreign Affairs*, November, 2013.
 34. Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*; Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time*.
 35. John Mueller, 'The Catastrophe Quota: Trouble after the Cold War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 38(3), 1994, pp. 355–75.
 36. Robert Jervis, 'Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 3(1), 2001, pp. 3–60.
 37. Jennifer Mitzen and Randall Schweller, 'Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War', *Security Studies*, 20(1), 2011, pp. 2–35.
 38. See Booth and Wheeler 2008, which distinguishes between 'security dilemmas', where there is unresolvable uncertainty, and 'strategic challenges', where there is tactical but not strategic uncertainty. See also Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time*.
 39. Paul Roe, 'Actors Responsibility in Tight, Regular, or Loose Security Dilemmas', *Security Dialogue*, 32(1), 2001, pp. 103–16. See also Roe, *Ethnic Violence and the Societal Security Dilemma* (London: Routledge, 2005).
 40. John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).
 41. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, pp. 83–7.
 42. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).
 43. Editor's note: Jervis added these reflections after the interview during the final editing.
 44. Wallace Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (London: University of California Press, 1992 [1980]).
 45. Robert Jervis, 'Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate', *International Security*, 24(1), 1999, pp. 42–63.
 46. Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, 'Institutional Theory as a Research Program', in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds) *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 71–108.
 47. Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
 48. Personal conversations with a number of colleagues, especially Stephen Van Evera; more recently, this was the topic of a special issue of *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(3), 2013, especially John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, 'Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing Is Bad for International Relations', pp. 427–58.

Author Biography

Nicholas J Wheeler is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation, and Security at the University of Birmingham. His publications include (with Ken Booth) *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); (with Mlada Bukovansky, Ian Clark, Robyn Eckersley, Christian Reus-Smit, and Richard Price) *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); and (with Ian Clark) *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy 1945–55* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). He has also written widely on humanitarian intervention and is the author of *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). He is co-editor with Professor Christian Reus-Smit of the Cambridge Series in International Relations.