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# Interview with Kal Holsti

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Kalevi J. Holsti retired from his position as Killam Professor Emeritus in the Political Science Department of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in June 1999. Prof. Holsti's long and wide-ranging career has produced a number of classic works in the IR field, among them *The Dividing Discipline* (1985), *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (7th edn., 1994), *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648–1989* (1991), and *The State, War, and the State of War* (1996). The following interview was conducted in January 2001 in Vancouver. A number of alterations were subsequently made to the raw transcript in consultation with Prof. Holsti.

## The state of the field

**Q.** You have discussed in your work the normative dimension of IR and social-scientific inquiry. Do you think, to quote the Noam Chomsky essay, there is something called the 'responsibility of intellectuals'?[1] Do you think that IR scholars have a responsibility to be public intellectuals, and how can they most effectively engage with the policymaking community and the broader public?

**A.** I haven't made up my own mind entirely, even though I have thought about it for forty years. What you might call pure academic knowledge—that is to say, research and writing for the sake of creating knowledge, of creating understanding, of making a highly-complicated world more intelligible to yourself and your students—is in itself an accomplishment. There are many who argue that it is insufficient; that academics have a *social* responsibility to become involved in social-policy debates and to put forward their concerned views. I am sympathetic with that up to a point, but I am also aware that as a teacher, paid from the public purse, I have a responsibility *not* to use the classroom as a pulpit. My responsibility is to help students develop analytical and other skills, and not to confuse teaching with advocacy. As a citizen, however, I have a more general responsibility to participate in public life where my expertise can be useful. Yet, there has always been a tension between the academic hat, on the one hand, and the public proponent's hat on the other. Some people argue that academics should become prophets and agents of 'emancipation',

[1] Noam Chomsky, 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', in James Peck (ed.), *The Chomsky Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 59–82.

as it were. I am not sympathetic with that point of view, for the simple reason that prophets and emancipators think they know the answers before they have done the research. On the other hand, if asked in a public forum for my opinions on specific issues, I am pleased to reply, but that is a responsibility of citizenship, not of scholarship.

**Q.** How would you describe the balance that you personally have tried to strike between academic and intellectual inquiry, on the one hand, and a normative perspective on the other? What was the balance that first animated you when you entered the profession, and has that evolved since?

**A.** Someone working in international relations does not necessarily have to be a policy advocate, but the problems that one chooses to investigate are essentially normative. You choose to study the problem of war, for example, because it remains an immense social problem. That was not always the case. Until the eighteenth century, most people regarded war as an act of nature, or an expression of God's displeasure with the human condition. It was just *there*, and you did not worry or write about it. Now, because wars have an incredibly high human cost, there is a fairly obvious social problem that requires investigation. So the selection of the problem, to give a focus on international conflict and war, is a normative choice. I could be out studying oceanography or ecological problems, which should command a certain amount of attention as well. But war, to me, represents the ultimate failure of politics. It symbolises the inability of men (generically speaking) to arrange ways to live in reasonable harmony, and of organising change so that most parties benefit in the long run. These concerns, not the pure quest for science or knowledge, generate the research. The research can stand on its own, because it has tried to make intelligible a highly-complicated problem, and to make people see things, perhaps, in a way that they did not see them before—particularly to see the larger patterns of historical development, rather than individual occurrences and individual crises. Then it is for the policymakers who are elected—academics are not elected—to use that information in whichever way they think appropriate. I am not a politician; I would probably be a disaster as a politician. But to the extent that the research international relations scholars have generated becomes part of the intellectual equipment of policymakers, it can have an effect. And there are many examples where major foreign policy decisions and actions were based largely on academic research. The land mines treaty is one; the Kyoto protocol is another.

**Q.** A couple of questions about the state of the field and recently-prominent trends. In 1985 you wrote *The Dividing Discipline*,[2] examining the state of the IR field at that time, and the difficulties of generating a coherent or overarching research agenda and set of questions to unify the field. How do you appraise the coherency and also the relevance of international relations inquiry today? What are the destructive and constructive trends that you perceive?

[2] K.J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

**A.** There has been a great deal more fragmentation of the field since 1985. There are now more specialisations, and small groups of people working in highly distinct areas. This is probably an inevitable consequence of several factors. One is the increasing number of people in the field; the second is the end of the Cold War, which has made people alert to a whole new range of problems—ecological and gender problems, for example—that nobody was concerned with twenty years ago. The overarching problem for international relations scholars in Europe or North America until recently was the problem of war between the Communist bloc and the West. This was a time of great anxiety, and quite naturally, academics were focused on the problems and issues that existed under the Cold War rubric. Now that we no longer have that conflict, people have turned their attention to other problems.

It is hard to say that there is any longer a particular core to the field. We are engaged in debates about how to define the field, whether it is a discipline—which it is not—and what should be its limits. Should we, for example, be studying the problem of male-female relations in the context of the family as a part of international relations? Some people say we should. My view is that we have a distinct *field* of study, one that has its limits. The limits are flexible, but there nevertheless. Alan James published several years ago a vigorous defence of a state-centric core to our field. I found his arguments persuasive and not diminished by those who see any sociological phenomenon as relevant to the field. Our field should be basically concerned with the relations between states, and relations between societies and non-state actors, to the extent that those relations impinge upon and affect the relations between states. When we go far beyond these domains, we get into areas of sociology, anthropology, and social psychology that are best dealt with by people in those disciplines.

**Q.** You do not think of IR as a discipline? Why not?

**A**. It is not a discipline because it does not have a unique or distinct set of theories and methodology. It is a subject that draws upon the insights and concepts and methodologies of a variety of fields, such as psychology, history, geography, anthropology, and law. Moreover, as I observed earlier, the appropriate subject matter of the field is highly contested.

**Q.** You have said that 'We have to acknowledge the abandonment of the great project of developing a grand theory of international politics/relations'.[3] Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

**A.** I am not sure if it's good or bad, but it is inevitable. The search for an overriding theory reflected the revolution in thinking about international relations in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the importation to the study of international relations of the scientific model of inquiry. It assumed that in social life, as in physical life, you could develop a single theory to explain a defined set of phenomena. But international

[3] K.J. Holsti, 'Scholarship in an Era of Anxiety: The Study of International Politics during the Cold War'. in Tim Dunne et al. (eds.), *The Eighty Years' Crisis 1919–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

relations scholars cannot even define under a single rubric the phenomena to be described and explained! So we have none of the prerequisites for a formal science, that is to say, a system of formal hypotheses and testing of a defined set of problems that encompasses the most important aspects of political life at the international level. The best we can do is have interpretations of international relations, and to try to make a very messy world somewhat more intelligible. That means we have to compress and we have to make shorthand of highly complex issues. But that is not the same as a science. Of course scientific methods can and should be used to explain discrete phenomena. There has been a lot of very valuable research done on recurring patterns of behaviour such as alliances, enduring rivalries, arms races, international regimes, and so on. But it seems difficult to link them all into a *single* theory of international relations. I am all in favour of models and other abstract enterprises because they help bring intelligibility to an inherently messy subject matter. But they do not in themselves constitute a theory of the subject.

**Q.** You have also described a prevailing 'mood of boredom' in the IR field.[4] I wonder if you could expand on that. Does it pose a danger when it comes to attracting promising new students to the field?

**A.** I offered that comment in 1996, when attacks on the more traditional or conventional perspectives on international relations were raging everywhere. I wanted to understand the particularly vituperative criticisms of the day. It is partly a problem of generations. Today's students do not necessarily want to study what their professors studied. Each generation wants to make its own imprint on the field. When we look around us, we see a whole range of new problems of which we were not aware thirty years ago. These include ecological problems, economics, gender problems, and issues of epistemology. Quite understandably, people want to explore these new issues, and do not want to be constrained by the intellectual agenda of their predecessors. So it may be that the older issues—the issues of war, peace, and order—which were the normative core of international relations for 250 years became boring compared to exciting new problems.

**Q.** Do you think there is some antidote possible *in* these new agendas to whatever boredom there is in the field? Do you see them as arousing the same kind of excitement among new generations of students that the older questions aroused among earlier generations?

**A.** There are always debates in the field. There were immense debates in the 1960s between the more traditionally-oriented scholars and the so-called behaviourally-oriented scholars. These debates were sometimes vicious: people really abused each other, even on a personal level. This kind of 'cold warring' infected departments and critically damaged the trust and intellectual pluralism that are the hallmarks of the academy. The postmodernist challenge has led to the same kind of behaviour: the

[4] Kalevi J. Holsti, 'Along the Road of International Theory in the Next Millennium: Four Travelogues', ch. 3 in Robert M.A. Crawford and Darryl S.L. Jarvis (eds.), *International Relations: Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 117.

rejection of antecedent knowledge, the attempt to create something entirely new, to question all that has gone on before, and to suggest that it was all wrong. You might say that intellectual warfare is dramatic but I do not think it necessarily leads to a very happy or productive intellectual community. How can one do good work in an aura of intolerance and political correctness? On the other hand, I think it is fair to say that today the *Review of International Studies*, the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Alternatives*, or *International Organization*, are intellectually more interesting than they were thirty years ago. The range of issues; the new kinds of insights; the willingness to consider historical context, norms, and ideas as important routes to explaining international relationships—all these had been run out of the field under the rubric of behaviouralism. That was a mistake at the time, and I am personally pleased to see a lot of it return to the field. Renewed interest in international law is another favourable development. Among other reasons for my pleasure is that North American scholars can re-establish intellectual contacts with IR scholars in other parts of the world where behavioural fashions never took hold. This is particularly the case with IR scholarship in Latin America.

Having said this, I am somewhat concerned that too many people may be spending time discussing great issues of epistemology and metaphysics. I am interested in international relations more than philosophy. We are here because we are interested in a field of human *activity*. We must be sensitive to the ways we approach its study and raise questions about the whys and hows of knowledge. But beyond a certain point—and I cannot define exactly where it is located—concern with epistemology may lead us to lose sight of the subject matter. The greatest texts of our field were written by those who were deeply immersed in the subject, and not by epistemologists.

**Q.** You have referred to the 'profound pessimism and epistemological narcissism' of postmodernism and post-positivism.[5] Do you see anything *positive* in post-positivism? Do you feel that there are interesting new avenues of inquiry opening up? Are students responding to these critiques and taking an interest in them?

**A.** There are both pluses and minuses. Postmodernist or post-positivist critiques compel people to think thoroughly about things they have been doing, and the assumptions underlying them; to be more theoretically self-critical. Postmodernist scepticism toward totalising projects; the exploration of meaning in diverse social contexts; and questioning our propensity to think in terms of binary opposites (warlike–peaceful, order–disorders, and the like) are important contributions. There are also negatives. For example, some post-positivists have argued that scholarship can never be an 'innocent' activity and that theorists of international relations are complicit in all that's wrong in the world. I do not accept that assertion. The argument that all knowledge is fundamentally political stretches the meaning of that term beyond comprehension and can only lead to fear and intolerance. I do not accept the postmodernist mantra that all knowledge is individual, that one's intellectual position necessarily reflects only one's social position, race, gender, income,

[5] K.J. Holsti, 'The Problem of Change in International Relations Theory', UBC Institute of International Relations, Working Paper no. 26 (December 1998), p. 4.

religion, or whatever. Standpoint epistemology—the idea that knowledge is highly personal and that life experience determines what we see and what we analyse—has some validity but is far too deterministic. This type of epistemology denies the possibility of generalisation, which is something that we have all accepted since at least the time of Socrates and Aristotle. It leads logically to the position that anybody's knowledge is as good as anybody else's, and that any subject in international life is equally important. Some have argued, for example, that the daily life of a market woman in Accra is as important for our knowledge of international relations as reading a book by Hedley Bull or Quincy Wright. There is nothing *wrong* with the market woman's tale; it may be very interesting, and may open up some minds on certain issues. But her story and a formal piece of scholarship cannot be compared. To argue that there can be no knowledge outside individual experience is a very negative and pessimistic point of view. Experience may colour perspectives but does not determine all of it.

**Q.** When the dust has settled—not that it ever *will* settle fully—how do you think what you have referred to as the "classical tradition" will be viewed in the broader development of IR theory? What do you think are its abiding strengths and most serious weaknesses?

**A.** Its main strength is that it is concerned with a central set of problems, dealing with the sources, causes, and consequences of the relations between states. It has an overriding normative concern with the sources of war and the conditions for peace and international order. These are problems that have commanded systematic attention at least since the eighteenth century, and to a certain extent before then as well. They are no less interesting or compelling today than they ever were. Take the problem of humanitarian intervention. This is not an issue that arose with Somalia or Haiti. It is a perennial problem of a system of states—a system that has at its core notions of sovereignty, legal equality, and the norm of non-interference. These fundamental rules help provide a good deal of international order. But can those rules be waived in the event that governments systematically abuse their populations? Under what conditions can a state or a group of states with armed forces intervene in the internal affairs of another state? Are not moral imperatives as important as legal ones? Can a responsible citizen fail to assist a drowning woman just because a sign on the side of the lake states that swimming is prohibited? Intervention was the issue that some of the participants in the Thirty Years' War faced. It was a central question in the essays of Grotius, Wolff, Pufendorf, and Vattel. And we haven't resolved it since! It remains highly contested. Feelings run high, and policy choices are difficult to make. Contributors to the classical tradition have a great deal to say about such problems, and it is well to remember that they offer many more insights and persuasive arguments than many contemporary analysts have developed.

The problems raised in the classical tradition are not peripheral. They are not problems of identity politics, or domestic politics, or the household, or any current fad. They condition the ways that economies function; they condition the way that international relations function; and we perennially worry about them and debate them. No matter how much the field fragments, until these problems disappear, the

core of the field is still going to be centred around them. Ultimately, they have to do with force, and wars of various kinds, and intervention. All the other problems—for example, ecological ones—are added to these, but they are not the core problems.

One of the main weaknesses of the field—and particularly the modern version of realism—is a scepticism toward historical change. Some remain convinced that if you read Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, you will learn all there is to know about international relations. Others believe that Morgenthau's textbook,[6] which is a masterpiece of political analysis, is all you ever need to read to understand the essential characteristics of international or world politics. Many scholars are still imbued with the conceptual equipment of the 1950s or the 1930s, and are analysing potential adversaries and their behaviours as though what they are doing today is exactly the same as what their predecessors were doing 150 years ago. They are not willing to acknowledge that some central characteristics of international politics have changed. This is not to argue that realism has nothing to tell us. It is an important part of the story of international relations, but it is only one part of it.

**Q.** You have argued that the centre of gravity in international relations is gradually shifting away from the United States and towards the UK, Europe, and Japan. What do you see as the significance or potential of that shift away from American hegemony in IR, and do you see different trends or concerns animating the inquiry in the United Kingdom and on the continent?

**A.** With the exception of the University of Aberystwyth in the United Kingdom after the First World War, international relations historically has been an American field of study. There are more professors of international relations in the United States than in the rest of the world combined. It has taken the Europeans, with the exception of the English, a long time to develop the field as a legitimate area of academic inquiry. In Europe, with the exception again of England, prior to twenty or thirty years ago, international relations was subsumed under the field of diplomatic history and/or international law and organisation. There has been a blossoming of international relations-type scholarship on the continent in the last twenty-five years. The 'English School', which is a particular way of characterising the primary characteristics of international relations to emphasise the importance of norms and institutions in moderating the clash of power between states, has even an older pedigree. It is now making significant inroads into the United States. I have been an adherent of this particular school, because it sees both sides of the face of Janus—the side of conflict and war, and the side of peace and institutional collaboration. Realists in the United States have tended to view only one side.

In Europe, there has been a tremendous development of talent, particularly in Germany and Scandinavia. There are a few figures in France and Italy, and also in Holland. But Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan to a lesser extent have been the most vibrant areas of recent international relations scholarship. Much of the work is innovative and more accommodating to international law and diplomatic history.

[6] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th edn., revised (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

**Q.** Do you think there is an advantage to inquiry in Europe and the United Kingdom, in the sense that these are not inquiries necessarily taking place under the rubric of the global hegemony of the society in question? Do you think it frees international scholars when they are not so tightly bound to national policy directives?

**A.** That is a big issue I raised in the 1985 book *The Dividing Discipline*. I regret it has not declined a great deal, although the increasing influence of the 'English School' demonstrates that intellectual fertilisation can proceed transnationally. In most countries where there is an academic field of international relations, there are tendencies for academics to become sucked into the policymaking vortex, either through institutions such as think-tanks of various kinds, or through the research arms of foreign ministries. The explanation for this is fairly simple. In most countries, academic salaries are abysmally low, and researchers have to take on contract-type work or public media exposure to earn supplements to their meagre incomes. Moreover, there is a natural propensity for academics to view the world through national lenses. International relations then become closely connected with national problems and priorities. When you get involved in these kinds of issues, immediately you take on the worldview and become sympathetic with the interests of your own country. On their side, government officials rarely talk to academics unless it is about the immediate problems they face. They are not interested in theory or scholarship, but in informed opinions about the problem of the day or week or month. With the decreasing costs of communication, however, the possibilities of forming international research and scholarly networks to ponder theoretical problems may improve.

## The state of the world and the state of war

**Q.** You have devoted a lot of your recent research efforts to the problems of conflict and humanitarian intervention in the so-called Third World. I wonder if you would start by briefly summarising the concept of 'wars of the third kind', and the challenge that you feel this type of conflict poses to traditional IR framings of war and the international system?

**A.** Since 1945, there has been a dramatic decline in the incidence of wars *between* states, and a dramatic increase in the number of wars *within* states. Most of the victims, the people who have been killed by violent means, since 1945 have been victims of their own governments, or of militias composed of their own neighbours, and not of foreign armies. Realism and the traditional perspectives on international relations do not tell us very much about the sources of these domestic wars. In order to get a purchase on these problems, you must delve into other areas: comparative politics, economics, resource depletion, demography, and a whole set of issues that were not ordinarily incorporated in traditional framing of the problem of war. To understand the Rwandas and the Somalias of the world, you have to have a sensitivity that goes beyond theories about alliances and deterrence and the massive body of research that developed during the Cold War. Deterrence theory or nuclear

weapons do not make much sense in the context of Rwanda or Somalia. Our implicit understanding of war as a Clausewitzian enterprise needs re-examination. Many wars today are not politics pursued by other means. The participants do not necessarily seek to win wars. On the contrary, they seek to develop a war culture so they can profit personally from the many criminal and extortionist practices they use to fund their violence. The dividing line between war and criminality is difficult to locate in many current conflicts. Rousseau claimed that in war, one kills in order to win. But in some contemporary wars, Rousseau is reversed. Hitler, following European and American colonial wars in the nineteenth century, sought to win in order to kill. The purpose of war was and is not to win in the normal sense, but to eradicate and ethnically cleanse civilian populations and to profit from criminal activity. Many contemporary wars more closely resemble the One Hundred Years War or the Thirty Years War than the classical wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Perhaps the good part of this sad story is that none of these kinds of conflicts is likely to escalate into a serious international war. You may get an armed intervention, but I do not think that anybody in Washington, London, or Moscow is willing to start a nuclear war to try to suppress the warlords of Somalia or the al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

**Q.** You mentioned the colonial legacy, which is something that you have emphasised in analysing state weakness in the Third World. How significant do you think that legacy is in terms of modern conflict? Do you think it is sometimes overstressed by self-interested or self-exculpating elites?

**A.** One needs to have an open mind about the sources of these conflicts, and not assume, as many people did in the early 1990s, that all wars within states are necessarily ethnic wars. But the colonial legacy is still very strong. The basic problem was to transform what was by any definition a highly-artificial political mechanism —that is, a colony—into a modern state. The borders were artificial; they were drawn for reasons that had everything to do with strategy and deal-making among European diplomats, and little to do with the populations involved. To transform these highly-artificial things called colonies into coherent national societies, in which the various groups composing the new country can live with each other with a reasonable degree of trust and tolerance, is difficult. The Indians have managed fairly well. One of the miracles of the twentieth century is that India has not collapsed. But not all former colonies have been as astute or lucky.

At the time of independence, few of the so-called national liberation fighters ever spoke about going back to pre-colonial political forms. Most accepted the concept of the Western nation-state. It remains the model. There are some, particularly among Muslim groups, who challenge the concept today, but the Western state model seems to have prevailed. It is not easy to start with something as artificial as a colony and convert it into a highly efficient, effective state. Some have been real successes, like Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago, Botswana, and Mauritius. It is unfortunate that we only study the disasters, and seldom study the success stories. There is a good deal to be learned from them.

**Q.** Do you have any idea what it is? What variables come to mind?

**A.** The most important is inclusiveness. There must be a deliberate policy by governments not to exclude specific groups from participating in the political system. If you look at Rwanda, Burundi, or Liberia and other places, the one thing they have in common is that one group—whether a minority or a majority—systematically excludes other groups from political participation, from government largesse, and from government programmes. In some cases excluded groups were thrown out of the country; in other cases they were killed in genocides or politicides; in yet other cases they were simply denied the vote or in other ways discriminated against. In the countries that have succeeded, there is an attempt to be politically inclusive. In the case of Malaysia, there are programmes that, although highly unpopular among some, have tried to give special advantages to the subordinate groups, the Malays, as compared to the Chinese. There is no single formula, but the common characteristic of successful transformation from colony to modern state is an inclusive political system and political parties that transcend ethnic and language groups and that focus instead on policy differences. Government transparency and strong anti-corruption policies are also important.

**Q.** Shifting from the domestic to international framework of conflict and crisis, you have issued some fairly strong criticisms of the conduct of the diplomatic process prior to the Kosovo war, which you described as '*faux* diplomacy' aimed more at provoking Milosevic into war than at peacefully resolving the conflict. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that phenomena such as dictatorship, exclusionary practices towards minorities, and ethnic cleansing are all key factors in paving the way for conflict, up to and including mass murder and genocide. How, in general, do you think the challenge of dictatorship and internal state violence is best met by the international community, and what specific role do you think military force does or should play in that equation?

**A.** This is the immense dilemma of the international relations of our post-Cold War generation. There is no simple answer to it, quite frankly. I am sceptical about intervening militarily to oust regimes that do not conform to certain standards usually set arbitrarily by other states. In 1968, Leonid Brezhnev said: under our political value-system, we have a right to intervene in Czechoslovakia, and throw out a government that we consider hostile to the socialist system. In Kosovo, we had a group of NATO leaders who stated that the political system in Yugoslavia does not conform to our view of how governments are to treat their minorities and human-rights issues, and therefore we have a right to intervene militarily—even though we did not get approval from the Security Council of the United Nations to do so.

If there are going to be armed interventions, they should meet certain tests. First, they have to be in accordance with the principles and procedures of the Security Council of the United Nations. When the Security Council determines that the actions of a government towards its own citizens constitute a threat to international peace and security, then the Security Council members have a right or even obligation (under Chapter VII) to use economic and other forms of sanctions, including military force. That was the formula that was used in the sanctions against South Africa and interventions in Haiti, Kampuchea, Bosnia, and elsewhere. In the case of Kosovo, both the Chinese and the Russians adamantly opposed the argument that the way that Milosevic was dealing with the Kosovar population was, in fact, a threat to

international peace and security. They contended that the United Nations had neither a responsibility nor a right to use military force. NATO went ahead anyway, claiming a greater obligation: lives are at stake, people are being injured, and they are being expelled from their homelands; NATO thus had a duty to go in and save them. This was a classical case of political and ethical concerns overriding legal procedures. The NATO decision was morally defensible, if legally suspect. Western errors were made, however, not in March 1999 when the bombing began, but in the period between October 1998 and the Rambouillet *diktat*. Milosevic brought upon himself the troubles in Kosovo, but the Europeans and Americans championed the cause of the KLA and attempted to create, at Rambouillet, a virtual protectorate in Kosovo. This was tantamount to partitioning Yugoslavia and was no doubt part of the reason Milosevic began the campaign of ethnic cleansing. The armed intervention was partly the result of a failure of Western policy.

**Q.** You have expressed some scepticism about the concept of 'ethnic conflict', and the value of ethnicity as a variable in analysing cases of war and social upheaval. What are the grounds for your scepticism?

**A.** In multi-ethnic societies, most people get along most of the time. There is nothing inherent about ethnic differences that drive them to conflict. There are many societies that have one or more ethnic, religious and/or language groups, or some combination of them, where people have been living in relative peace for generations—for centuries, in some cases. Again, why don't we study the successes? Why is it that until fairly recently, Fiji—which was an artificial colony as well—cohered, and people, though they did not have much to do with each other, developed a political system where they essentially respected each other? The same goes for Mauritius and many other places. So there is something that is happening when leaders mobilise groups into the position where they begin killing each other. Ethnic violence is rarely spontaneous. It occurs occasionally, but in most instances, it results from political leadership and mobilisation or from the breakdown of public authority.

**Q.** You have suggested that the role of ideas is missing in the realist and other theories of war. How would you summarise that role, and does the prominence of ideas in your analysis suggest that we might not have reached the end of history, ideologically speaking?

**A.** This perhaps relates to your earlier question about the weaknesses of realism, and I should have mentioned that realism is essentially a materialist explanation of political behaviour. Power and domination seem to be the guiding motives. But the fact is that most people are willing to use violence or to go to war for *ideas*. War is inherently a normative enterprise. Perhaps in the eighteenth century, people went to war because the king told them to, and they had no alternative. Today, you have to have *reasons* to go to war. Vietnam clearly demonstrated that when your ideas are not reputable, legitimate, or broadly accepted, you are going to have a large number of defections: war resisters, people leaving the country, draft dodgers, people going AWOL, and the rest. It's a manifestation of a lack of legitimacy.

Realism has never been very concerned about this. But the more you study history, the more you understand that the great historical movements, such as colonialism,

are essentially driven by ideas: ideas about what is right and wrong; religion; paternalistic ideas; and racial and racist ideas. People cannot be mobilised and governments cannot spend billions of dollars or francs or marks on great foreign adventures, unless they can sell these adventures in terms of ideas. Sometimes the ideas express fear, security, status, feelings of inferiority or superiority, or prestige, but frequently they involve grander causes. The ideational dimension of foreign policy has been missing in realist analysis. It is quite surprising that the first book on ideas and international relations by an American author—actually, an edited volume—came out less than ten years ago.[7] When you read the great realist textbooks, there is little analysis of the role of ideas as sources of foreign policy behaviour. But ideas have been around since Socrates; how can you ignore them? Without them, you cannot see change in history, and therefore you tend to see international politics as a very static game.

**Q.** Another thing that has been around since Socrates, and before, is the role of revolution, which is obviously closely tied to the realm of ideas and ideologies. If you see a continuing prominence of ideas in international politics, do you also see revolution continuing to play a significant role, and do you feel that's insufficiently appreciated in the IR field?

**A.** Fred Halliday's book makes a convincing argument that revolutions have probably caused more wars than any other phenomenon, and wars have very frequently been the source of revolutions.[8] It works both ways. Here is another thing that has been missing in traditional studies of international relations. There is a bias towards continuity and regularity, overlooking the historical record, which is there for anyone to see: that revolutions and war are intricately related.

**Q.** How seriously do you take the nuclear threat in the post-Cold War era? Do you think the attention devoted to the nuclear strategies of 'rogue states' and terrorist movements is commensurate with the risks that those actors pose, and are you concerned by ongoing US attempts, in particular, to develop an anti-ballistic missile technology?

**A.** I am concerned about the missile defence technology for a variety of reasons. The 'rogue state' phenomenon is overemphasised. I have made the point elsewhere that during the Cold War, the United States spent almost six trillion dollars of taxpayers' money to develop a nuclear doctrine and deployment of hardware to prevent war. First they called it 'massive retaliation', then 'mutually-assured destruction'. Academics and policymakers thought that, while not perfect, it was probably the best way to deal with nuclear weapons: nobody in his right mind would use such weapons under conditions where they knew that they would face obliteration or retaliation. Now, if the logic of deterrence was good for the Cold War, why should it

[7] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[8] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

not work against North Korea or Iran? Implicitly, this idea for a national missile defence system says that the whole theory of nuclear deterrence is false. It implicitly says we wasted six trillion dollars; now we want to spend up to two hundred billion dollars for an anti-missile system that may not work against a threat that does not yet exist. And if it did, there are other, less dangerous, ways to deal with it. If the United States were to share the missile defence technology with China and Russia, it might bring some security increments. In its present design, however, it is likely to spawn a new nuclear weapons arms race. In my opinion, the American scheme is really directed against China, not against so-called 'rogue' states. If effective, it would cancel China's miniscule deterrent force and require it to expand its ICBM capacity dramatically. Such a counter-move might then compel India and Pakistan to expand their nuclear arsenals.

There is of course another argument in favour of missile defence: such a system would prevent rogue or any other kinds of states from threatening to launch a missile attack on the United States in order to deter it from using conventional forces, let us say, in defence of a Taiwan under Chinese attack. In other words, an American national missile defence system would augment its capacity to intervene abroad without having to face nuclear threats. But one has to question whether this is a realistic scenario. Would you spend up to 200 billion dollars on a wobbly system to deter others from making threats that have only a low degree of credibility?

The campaign against terrorism has demonstrated that weapons of mass destruction are more likely to be used by organisations such as al-Qaeda than by states. If this is the case, then an anti-ballistic missile system does not address the problem; it is irrelevant to it.

**Q.** I apologise for asking rather a clichéd question, but perhaps you can get a purchase on it. In terms of the central challenges that humanity is facing in the new millennium, where do you see the issue-areas that are of central importance and that have perhaps not been paid sufficient attention within IR?

**A.** I am not certain the problems are necessarily international relations problems. We have made immense progress in the texture and quality of international relations for most of the world in the last fifty years. More people live today in relative peace and security than have ever done so in history. They do not have to worry about foreigners invading them tomorrow, or next year, or next decade.

Maybe I live in a very quiet corner of the world, in Vancouver, but even if you go to most places in Europe, Asia and South America, none of the fears of foreign attack that ordinary people had for most of the twentieth century exist any longer. We have the luxury of worrying about somewhat lesser-order problems. This is why, to a certain extent, international relations as a field has fragmented. We *do* have other pressing problems, but they are not short-run, immediate problems. Global warming is a huge problem, but very few people are really exercised about it, because we have a hundred years to deal with it. In 1939, you didn't have a hundred years to deal with Hitler; you had one day. It's quite appropriate and understandable that people today would be concerned about different problems.

Africa represents an area of very major concern. There is just so much failure there, and so little good news. So many of the world's refugees are Africans. The development profiles of most countries are deteriorating. Africa has been ignored

since the end of the Cold War. But on a moral basis, people have to start to think seriously about what, if anything, can be done, and done on a systematic and sustained basis.

**Q.** Finally, many people have referred to the events of September 11, 2001 as 'the day the world changed', implying a major if not fundamental transformation in the global political order. Do you agree?

**A.** The answer depends upon the scale, time dimension and types of change one has in mind. Certainly hundreds of millions of people felt the impact of the events of September 11, and continue to do so. Many lost a great deal of money, and the budget costs of waging the 'war on terrorism' will weigh heavily against other priorities. But there has certainly been no 'fundamental transformation' of the global order. Major international institutions have not changed significantly; traditional rivalries regrettably remain unresolved; the contemporary American penchant for unhelpful forms of unilateralism has not diminished; the dilemmas of weak states persist, as do the deadly wars that infect them. Even in areas where we might expect change, as in the case of a serious re-examination of American policies in the Middle East, there has been mostly more of the same.

I detect only two major areas where the events of September 11 hastened fairly significant trends that were already developing. The first is in Russia's increasing identification with Western causes in general, and with the war on terrorism in particular. Russia's concern with Chechnya-type developments in its southern flank gave it a coincidence of interest with George W. Bush's 'war on terrorism'. That common interest has muted, if not trumped, fundamental Russian-American disagreements on missile defence, the expansion of NATO, and the extension of American military facilities in Russia's 'near abroad'. It remains to be seen whether this common interest will prevail as concerns about terrorism diminish.

The second change is the vast mobilisation of interest in, and concern for, the phenomenon of terrorism. I heard through a satellite phone about the attacks of September 11 while on a fishing trip in the wilderness of British Columbia. My first reaction was that the heads of the CIA and FBI would roll. They did not, but in my opinion the events of September 11 reflect an amazing intelligence failure. Washington and other national capitals over the past half-dozen years have had other priorities, including Clinton's peccadilloes. They appear to have been almost oblivious to developments in the al-Qaeda network. No doubt there were plenty of people issuing warnings in the highest levels of government (including the Gore Commission's revelations about lax airline security), but they brought little response among the top policymakers. The impression the media gave prior to last September was that there were just a handful of fanatics in Afghanistan. The military victory has produced an amazing amount of material that undermines the media's portrayal of bin Laden's organisation. That it grew to such proportions without attracting serious international attention represents a major failure of local and national intelligence reporting. The love affair with gadgetry and high tech surveillance is no doubt partly responsible. It is disturbing that an attack of the size and audacity of September 11 was required to wake up governments and to reveal the real dimensions of the problem.

Intelligence failures do not constitute a 'transformation of the world order', of course, but the revival of security issues, albeit in a new format, is a significant change. It does not, however, rank up there with the end of the Cold War or the victories of World War II. It remains to be seen whether its consequences will remain there for the *longue durée*.

Finally, although it does not constitute a transformation, I was surprised to see the re-emergence of the McCarthy syndrome, mostly in the United States but even in Canada. People who raised serious questions about the correct policy response to the events of September 11 were savagely attacked. Academics were notable targets. I did not agree with many of their analyses, but I was struck by the vigour of the assaults against those who did little more than to argue that there should be a debate about some of the issues. I am not sympathetic with those who hold that the exercise of fundamental freedoms is unpatriotic. This was an ugly form of change, but one, I hope, that will not endure. With the exception of the two trends noted previously, I do not believe the texture of international relations has changed significantly since September 11, 2001.