FROM MILLTOWN TO THE WIDE WORLD

Bruce Russett

I'll start at the very beginning, and then proceed to what will be primarily a chronological trajectory, but one interspersed with some particular topics that don't fit neatly into the timeframe. It may ramble a bit, but please bear with me.

I was born in 1935 in a small New England industrial city (North Adams, Massachusetts). Sociologically, my family was somewhere between upper working class and lower middle class. My parents weren't highly educated, but nonetheless greatly valued education – our house was full of books, avidly read by all three of us. My mom finished high school and a year of business school, which at that time meant typing and double-entry bookkeeping (a lost art). When Dad was fourteen his appendix ruptured and abscesses raged throughout his body. It was so bad that he never went back to high school. He got a factory job at General Electric and, as was then common, apprenticed as a toolmaker, which he did well: well enough that when World War II broke out, he had a draft deferment.

My earliest political memories are about war and peace. The first (at age five) is of President Roosevelt's campaign for a third term, during which he appeared in public in an open car. Mom remarked that he shouldn't do that; someone might shoot him. "Who, a Republican?" I asked. She then told me about Nazis. My second "political" memory is of Dad, with my toy ships arrayed on a large map of the North Atlantic, showing me how the British sank the battleship *Bismarck*. The third memory is of Pearl Harbor Day. (My first "book," at age seven, was a scrapbook about it, with newspaper clippings and photos, and a purple-prose commentary. I wish I had it now.)

I was not a refugee, my home was not bombed or occupied, no relatives went to the gas chambers, and I was too young for the army. Nonetheless, World War II was an intense proxy experience. I was small for my age and not very strong; war games became my outlet for aggression. Another early memory is of air-raid drills and blackouts. Though I didn't know it, it was pretty unlikely that the Germans would bomb North Adams. Much later I understood that the government was manipulating us to encourage patriotic self-sacrifice. That realization contributes to a strain of populism and distrust of authority that runs through my work. I also remember vividly the day

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the United States dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima. Mom, a woman usually with remarkable empathy for others, in this instance was overwhelmed by what I suppose were her maternal instincts, saying, “Now they’ll do it to us.” The Japanese couldn’t, and later the Russians didn’t. But this was my entry into a world of cold war and nuclear deterrence.

With the support of some high school teachers and my parents’ sacrifices, I won a partial scholarship to Williams College, six miles away. Williams often did this as a sort of affirmative action. I was the first in my line to go to college, though cousins and uncles had done so. I was hardly a man of the world, having never been west of Rochester or south of Washington. So I wasn’t keen on staying close to home, but Williams was a fine place and financially feasible.

For a potential career I considered but discarded some of the obvious doing-good possibilities for an upward-striving youth, such as clergyman and doctor. Instead, I wanted to do good in some area of politics and international affairs. (I was a member of the World Federalists in high school.) But first I needed to learn what doing good might mean, and how to do it. So I quickly settled on political science as a major, later expanding it to the elite hybrid major in political economy. I found that I liked writing, the theoretical rigor of economics, and empirical work on public opinion. I also encountered powerful intellects and fine teachers in political science and economics. All were men of the world as well as intellectuals, and under their influence I took seriously the possibility of teaching at a college or university. Each cared and helped, but most influential were two economists who recognized my need to see the world.

They nominated me for a Rhodes Scholarship, but I didn’t make it to the finals. So they pointed me to King’s College, Cambridge, which offered a one-year Diploma in Economics (equivalent to a master’s degree), and set to finding the funds to make it possible. They cobbled together two small scholarships and a senior essay prize. They changed my life. Intellectual activity mattered at King’s and in the friendships I made there. I studied economics—especially development economics—in the shadow of John Maynard Keynes under three distinguished Keynesians, with a little political philosophy thrown in. I spent a full year in Britain, save for the wonderful six-week-long vacations during the academic year providing the opportunity to wander around France, Germany, Holland, Italy, and Spain. That constituted the first year of a career that took me all over the globe.

I returned to America for a Ph.D. in political science at Yale. The greatest legacy of those years may have been to give me enough of the air of a man of the world to make a good first impression on a history graduate student at Yale, Cynthia Eagle. We clicked, and she was my marvelous wife from 1960 to her death in 2013, a soulmate sharing similar interests and values, and fully my intellectual equal, or more. We wanted several children, and had four. That meant she was willing to postpone full-time pursuit of her career while I took on the role of chief breadwinner. This was the 1960s, remember. Nonetheless, she finished her Ph.D. in 1964 and for a long time taught at Yale

on part-time, short-term appointments—meanwhile writing three excellent books. A very determined professional woman. In 1990 she became a tenured professor of history, and in 2001 Larned Professor—the chair Gaddis Smith previously held.

But back to my Yale graduate education. My roommate at Williams had told me that to be a political scientist I should take higher mathematics. I told him he was crazy. It was 1955, and he was crazy. So I didn't. But he was also right. Nonetheless, the combination of political economy at Williams and Cambridge gave me a leg up at Yale, which was exactly the right time and place. Three giants, Bob Dahl, Karl Deutsch, and Harold Lasswell, were making the study of politics self-consciously scientific, and I became an enthusiastic spear-carrier. Deutsch was the man in international relations, and at his peak. Despite my absent math training, my education in economics gave me a pivotal comparative advantage.

After my degree in 1961 I went to MIT. MIT had tried to hire as professor of international security studies a distinguished man (William Kaufmann) at the RAND Corporation, but he had turned them down at the last minute. It was a new field, and I had some credentials for it, so they gave me a job as instructor—at that time it was a new Ph.D. position, below assistant professor. But a month later Kaufmann called MIT saying he accepted after all. So I started work in a redundant position.

A year later, an assistant professorship at Yale opened up, carrying what was, for the time, an exceptional package of resources for pursuing my research. My former mentor, Karl Deutsch, had one of the first two NSF grants in international politics. He would buy out half my teaching time, provide summer salary, and the financial resources to hire research assistants, a secretary, and computer time. (Yes, we paid by the minute then.) I would have to work on Deutsch's pet project, producing the first big compilation of political, social, and economic data on all countries in the world. After a little discussion he agreed that I would be first author, out of alphabetical order. And I did a lot of work of my own choice, work that would have been impossible without his grant.

Most of my work in those first years was in the vein of statistical analysis of the characteristics and behavior of large-scale political systems. This meant a struggle—not just in the usual sense of trying to get tenure at an elite institution, but in the sense that the social scientific revolution in international relations was still taking place.

We "scientists" were still relative outsiders in the profession. So while getting tenure in 1968 meant "making it," it also left me, reinforced by my working-class background, feeling "in" but not really "of" the establishment. I found myself adopting the position of establishment critic; that is, using my newly privileged status as an opportunity to take positions critical of established political or scholarly wisdom. (I still think that's what tenure is for at a place like Yale.) I was no radical—a populist, never Marxoid—but felt somewhere on the left. Yale's Political Science department expected us to be social scientists, not ideologues, and that was fine. Yale also produces men of affairs like Dean Acheson and both Bush presidents. (Take your pick.) Yale

expects us to speak to our country's leaders, present and future, about how the world was and could be.

My choice of research programs reflected this. I didn't want to spout off about matters on which I had little or no expertise, so have always chosen topics with policy implications. Recurrent themes are war prevention, nuclear deterrence and arms control, democracy and foreign policy (U.S. policy in particular), international organizations (especially the UN), and the political effects of international trade. Also the causes of social and economic inequality within and between countries – something I pursued early. Decades later I returned to that in a term of leave at Harvard, doing empirical work on inequality, life expectancy, and the public health consequences of civil wars.

My dissertation book, *Community and Contention: Britain and America in the Twentieth Century,* was the first to bring a lot of data to a Deutschian perspective on international relations. I say perspective rather than theory, because on close inspection I did not find a very systematic theory. So I had to try my own hand. I showed him my theory chapter only after the dissertation was finished.

Soon afterward Hayward Alker, another assistant professor whose work Deutsch facilitated, and I coauthored the book *World Politics in the General Assembly* (1965), analyzing countries' voting behavior. Thirty years later this gave me entry to a big project on the United Nations. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali wanted an outside evaluation to propose reforms to the organization and asked the Ford Foundation to support an international commission of experts for the purpose. Ford in turn turned to Yale, and to Paul Kennedy and me to staff the commission. Paul and I saw it as a big opportunity, though he was more sanguine than I about any real reform coming out of it. But it was a great chance to learn about the UN and do serious policy work. It was fascinating, and intellectually worthwhile, even though very little reform happened. And it gave me a chance to do applied social science on the UN over the next decade.

Back to the 1960s. As a child of the Cold War, I believed in containment, yet was no hawk. For a while I approved of the Vietnam War, turning fully against it only in 1967. That turn came from trying to understand how we got there, and to what effect. Normatively, I discovered the long-standing Christian just war theory, also present in international law, and decided the Vietnam War failed to measure up in the costs imposed on the United States and, more importantly, on the Vietnamese people. I was to come back to just war theory a decade or so later, as I'll explain in a few moments. But it also led to scientific work on the causes of U.S. military spending and what seemed a case of imperial overreach. As always, my goal was to turn ideological opinion into a proposition that could be tested scientifically. This empirical work persuaded me that such policies were driven more by a hubris deriving from the success of America, and its allies, in World War II. I did a book with Yale Press entitled *What Price Vigilance?* I continued with the topic on and off over the next decades, including an article in 2012 with Bill Nordhaus of Yale and John Oneal, my long-term collaborator. (I had

a publisher's inquiry about republication of the book with a long new preface, but before I could finish the publisher was struck down with a terminal illness.) I think I can make a case for *plus ça change,* etc., and that the burden of proof lies with those who believe otherwise.

While the Vietnam War was still on I also tried my hand at a policy book (*No Clear and Present Danger,* 1972), speculating about whether U.S. full entry into "the great war" was necessary. The book sold well—and still does. It made me many friends among libertarians. It also made me some "friends" that I did not want, and—understandably—a bunch of enemies. Chastened, I learned the hazards of public controversy, and of policy recommendations not based on solid social science.

That brought me to deterrence, and when and how it might succeed in averting big wars. I did scientific books and articles on that, and on arms races and arms control. Social science on such topics meant "big" science with clerical and research assistants, travel, working with coauthors, including then-current and former Yale Ph.D. students, and with scholars at other American institutions and in Scandinavia and Israel. I've benefited enormously from having coauthors with great ideas and technical skills. All this felt much like a physical or biological scientist running a laboratory, albeit sort of a virtual laboratory. It was also expensive and made possible only by numerous grants from public agencies and private foundations. I am ever grateful for that.

The work on deterrence, coupled with my exposure to just war theory, led to a belief that the government and policy wonk consensus on the nuclear retaliatory policy articulated in 1967 by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was both unnecessary and fundamentally immoral. The policy, called "assured destruction," required an ability to strike back against the Soviet Union with a force "sufficient to destroy one-fifth to one-third of her population and one-half of her industry." This meant not only strikes against Soviet military forces that would unavoidably kill civilians. It meant deliberately targeting population centers. (Aside: Long after that speech I was sitting in the Leningrad ballet next to Alain Enthoven, who had been assistant secretary of defense. He remarked, uneasily, that this theater had been "ground zero" for an American missile. Upon leaving DOD he moved entirely out of nuclear policy into the field of public health and never looked back.)

So I struggled with this policy and proposed an alternative I called a "counter-combatant" deterrent. It was badly received by many friends in the arms control community and the political left, who thought it would make nuclear war more likely. Then Bryan Hehir, a priest with a Harvard Ph.D. then heading the social justice department for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in D.C., gave some talks on just war theory at Saint Thomas More Chapel here at Yale. Afterward, he and I had a private conversation, deep into the night, and found we were not far apart.

Meanwhile, the Bishops Conference came under heavy pressure from many Catholics, both clerics and laity, to make an official statement on the morality of nuclear deterrence. That statement was to take the form of a so-called Pastoral

Letter approved by at least a three-quarters majority of all American bishops. The conference had a custom of issuing such letters, but this one promised to be over-the-top more controversial. Bryan asked me to take the role of principal consultant on the ten-member staff to prepare it. Other members would be five bishops and, as nonvoting specialists, Bryan, a couple of other clerics, and another layman. One of the bishops was John O'Connor, a political and theological conservative, and another was well known for espousing nonviolence. It was the full spectrum, with three in the middle with little previous involvement. Our chair, Joseph Bernardin, had to produce a consensus document. (Bernardin ultimately got an honorary degree from Yale for it, and both he and O'Connor became cardinals.) In due course Bryan and I produced a first draft. Over the next two years the committee engaged in an unprecedented public outreach, taking testimony from a full spectrum that included many non-Catholics. We all were caught up in this rush of fresh air and klieg lights. When the third draft was released for public comment, some officials in the Vatican let us know they were not pleased, and prepared to make their own views public. That put us between the rock and a hard place (so to speak), and we began to despair. But Bernardin said he would like to tell them to go to hell, but that we had to save the document, with its integrity and ours intact. He managed it cleverly, and our parts on deterrence were professionally defensible. The conference rejected amendments that would have destroyed its coherence, and the document then got 96 percent yes votes from all the bishops. Subsequently there were letters on other topics, but not by such an ecumenical process. The Vatican had its own ways to prevent that.

There has never been a straight A paper on this immensely complex problem, but maybe this one merits an A minus. I assigned it, with full disclosure, as one reading for a lecture course titled "Evaluating Nuclear Strategy." Lecturing about nuclear weapons sometimes depressed me, but I was pleased by the tolerance most students showed for a document by Catholic bishops. (I usually prefer the give-and-take of seminars, notably one called "Classics of International Relations," designed to show students where, from Thucydides to the present, current ideas originated. For the past two years the Koerner Center sponsored it, but provostial funding for emeriti teaching dropped into limbo.)

When the scandal of clerical child abuse broke loose, the liberal chaplain at Saint Thomas More asked me to produce a big conference in 2002, and a subsequent book edited with a very distinguished historian and former president of Williams, Frank Oakley. Oakley was well known as an authority on centralized papal control vs. those who had historically resisted. His heart and intellect were solidly with the resisters. So were mine, with my long commitment to democracy and suspicion of entrenched authority. And so was our 2004 book, *Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church,* applying those sentiments in a new arena.

Meanwhile, as a scientist I had been developing a theory about why countries governed as democracies would be more peaceful, at least with other democracies,

than would dictatorships and other autocracies. And not just a theory, but a research program to test my hypotheses rigorously—back to big science. I had wanted to learn more about the Arab-Israeli conflict, and got a Fulbright to Tel Aviv University. Much of my thought and collaboration for the research project stemmed from a long conversation with an Israeli political scientist one evening. In time there were many more coauthors, again including current and former students, plus Melvin and Carol Ember from the Human Relations Area Files, who had a Yale affiliation with headquarters on upper Prospect Street. When my first book on this topic came out, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (1993), John Oneal, whom I hardly knew then, asked me to breakfast during a conference. He told me he very much liked the book, but I hadn't tested the role international trade might play in war avoidance. I agreed, but said I was not ready for another big data gathering and analysis project. He then proposed to do the data work, and I could do the write-up. Thus began a two-decade collaboration, and one in which we both did much data work and much writing. Our research ultimately supported both his hypothesis about trade as a force for peace and mine about democracy.

Meanwhile I discovered Immanuel Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace," which, though rooted in the Enlightenment era, seemed to make remarkably good sense of what we were testing empirically. The big difference was that Kant also saw international law and institutions as a third peace-inducing influence mix. Kant's writing had been dismissed by most "realist" political scientists as hopelessly idealistic and incompatible with the prevailing view that the world was an anarchic Hobbesian arena of never-ending struggle for power. (Kant's title, perpetual peace, didn't help. He needed a good agent.) So here we were challenging another kind of authority, and that demanded really big science that included international organizations as a key element in the system. We used a huge data set on which countries fought each other, or didn't fight, in every year since 1886. We regard our effort as much akin to what some epidemiologists were doing to find the causes of disease. Also to geologists who try to predict earthquakes. Identifying the place is relatively easy, but the when is much tougher. Ours was no deterministic "always democracy, never conflict prediction," but a probabilistic "the more democracy, the fewer and the less violent the conflicts." The statistical evidence needs to be supplemented by case study materials about the internal politics of who actually makes the decisions, and how. Part of our theory took a Darwinian evolution turn. Democracies, as well as avoiding war with one another, more often than not win their wars with dictatorships, provide a stable rule of law that encourages investments, and form international organizations with other democracies. All this could over many years give them a competitive survival advantage in the international arena. Seeds of this appear in Kant—long before Darwin.

Our 2001 book (*Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*) largely confirmed our hypotheses, and a view that a Kantian-like set of influences actually had grown up to mitigate what had been regarded as a never-ending

struggle, especially so in Europe where prominent political leaders had been agents for radical institutional change after the horrific example of World War II. It attracted many scholars on both sides of the theoretical divide. Big science is sort of a contact sport, with reputations and livelihoods at stake. Political scientists tend to be especially competitive, and this became really big science. We interested enough scholars that many of them pushed the research program forward, some as coauthors, many not. Others did their best to refute us and had to show why our data or analysis was wrong. Almost unbelievably, we had about ten tough challenges and didn't lose a one.

All this continues, but I've tired of the numbers game. My book *Hegemony and Democracy* (2011) pulled together a collection of my earlier articles that bear on the question of whether a democracy can be a successful hegemon and, in the process of trying, really remain a democracy. I have more questions than answers about that, but its contemporary relevance is obvious.

Jim Tobin, Yale Economics Nobel Prize winner, once remarked that econometricians have a half-life of about seven years and then should find something else to do. By that standard I was long past the best-sell-by date on my barcode. I had always enjoyed the contact sport of science and think of a line by George C. Scott, playing General Patton beholding the smoke and chaos of a battle he had just won in North Africa: "God help me, I do love it so." I also recall General Douglas MacArthur's address to Congress after Harry Truman rightly pulled him from his command in Korea. He ended by quoting an army ballad, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away."

One great "old soldier" of my discipline died two decades ago but has not faded away. That was Karl Deutsch, and a German publisher has asked me to do a biographical/bibliographical book, *Karl W. Deutsch: Pioneer in the Theory of International Relations* (forthcoming 2017 with Charles Lewis Taylor as coauthor). I had never done anything like it, but I have enjoyed the archival work and interviews it requires. Few people who knew him remain, and perhaps no one who worked with him and his legacy as much. So, as Ishmael said at the end of *Moby-Dick*, "I only am escaped alone to tell thee."