

TNSR:

Who We Are,

What We Do,

and Why You

Should Care

Francis J. Gavin, PhD

Texas National Security Review: Volume 1, Issue 1 (December 2017)

Print: ISSN 2576-1021 Online: ISSN 2576-1153

The Texas National Security Review launches today. What do you need to know about this ambitious project aimed at changing the way we generate policy-relevant and policy-accessible knowledge about the world's toughest challenges?

Today, we launch a new journal and I am honored to serve as the chair of its editorial board. The goal of the *Texas National Security Review* (TNSR) is to become the intellectual home to a growing global, interdisciplinary network of scholars working on questions of foreign policy, international relations, and national and international security. With generous and deliberate support from the University of Texas, this journal seeks the best, most innovative scholarship that transcends disciplines and speaks to a wider world. Over time, we hope TNSR will become the go-to source for scholars, decision-makers, military and government practitioners, and concerned citizens from around the world thinking about questions of war and peace.

This journal is animated by four core principles:

1. Questions of war and peace are of fundamental importance.

International conflict, competition, and cooperation shape the world that we live in. War has been both a great scourge on humanity as well as a driver of historical change, for both ill and good.

The profound consequences of war unfold along a wide spectrum, from heart-wrenching individual tragedies to the very structure and shape of the modern state and the global economy.

The study of war and peace goes far beyond assessing the tactics of the battlefield or understanding the diplomacy between capitals: It would be impossible, for example, to comprehend a variety of crucial issues, from modern medicine and public health, technology, finance, accounting, taxation, literacy, mass education, race and gender relations — to say nothing of how humans move about, what they eat and wear, and how they communicate with each other — without reference to war. Most national cultures, including literature, music, visual art, and even language, are suffused with reference to or inspiration from conflict. War and peace challenge and shape our core beliefs, our ethics, and our sense of identity. Still, despite great intellectual effort, we know far less about the causes, conduct, and consequences of war and

peace than we'd like.

Over time, the questions surrounding conflict and cooperation have become even more complicated and consequential. Civil war, clashes driven by scarcity and environmental change, irregular conflict, information attacks, and terrorism have joined great power competition as pressing concerns. New technologies and new domains alter how and where conflict takes place. The power of norms, culture, and institutions to shape outcomes is recognized if not fully understood. The shadow of nuclear apocalypse hovers over international politics, surpassed only by the fear of some yet unknown pathogen-wreaking havoc.

TNSR recognizes and appreciates that the scope of study surrounding war and peace is extraordinarily wide-ranging, the questions endless, and the answers of great interest and consequence to the world beyond the ivory tower.

2. Scholarship on these questions should strive to be rigorous, creative, and cumulative.

What are the best ways to examine and explore crucial questions surrounding war and peace? To succeed, our scholarship must be held to the highest standards of rigor and excellence. TNSR seeks to go far beyond the world of punditry and to encourage work that generates powerful and consequential questions, employs clear and convincing research designs, and produces innovative insights. TNSR also recognizes the benefits of divergent communities of scholars, from different intellectual backgrounds and traditions, engaging in rigorous debate and cross-fertilizing ideas. Furthermore, style matters. It is hard for important ideas to be influential if few people read or understand the writing.

We also recognize that achieving these goals is not easy. There are different views of what constitutes rigor, impact, style, and creativity in scholarship. Even cumulating knowledge is hard. Despite over a century of effort and scores of books, scholars still cannot agree on what caused World War I. Even when consensus on such matters is elusive, however, TNSR believes rigorous debate and discussion has

great merit and makes everyone smarter.

TNSR is agnostic as to method and discipline, as long as the tools used to answer the question are appropriate and employed rigorously and honestly. We are not, however, interested in methodological prowess or in theory generation for the sake of itself. Archival work in scores of government repositories is beside the point if the issue examined is unimportant or if the findings are buried in jargon. Certain questions lend themselves more clearly to certain approaches. Quantitative analysis may be crucial to examine international financial flows. On questions surrounding nuclear weapons, where the Ns we truly care about are 9, 2, and 0, regressions for their own sake may hold less appeal. In other words, methods and research design are tools to identify important questions and to try to answer them the best one can. They should not be ends in themselves. Our authors will have succeeded when their arguments and evidence engage and enlighten those who do not share their methodological and disciplinary preferences and backgrounds.

In the end, we will not be the final arbiters of what constitutes great scholarship: over time, our readers and the wider world will determine TNSR's value. A richer, deeper understanding of important questions surrounding war and peace will be our measure of success.

3. Our work should confront big questions of great concern to a larger public and be written in a way that is accessible to them.

In the pages of our sister publication, *War on the Rocks*, many voices from the national and international security communities have talked about ways for scholars and thinkers to engage different audiences and communities, to confront questions of great interest and consequence in ways that reach and influence those beyond the ivory tower. There can be an unfortunate tendency in academic scholarship to ask small-bore questions and to write for “inside baseball” audiences (see principle 4). TNSR seeks scholarship on war and peace that go beyond these limits. We will also publish, in a separate section, insights and provocations from policymakers, military leaders, and others outside of the academic bubble.

That being said, we are not unaware of the potential pitfalls of a devotion to policy relevance. It is not the role of scholars to curry favor with governments or important people or institutions or to advise them on day-to-day decisions.

Many of the most important issues surrounding war and peace have little to do with daily grind

policy, such as shifting demographic patterns, slow developing but critical shifts in national and international economic circumstances, and the impact of new technologies. Great scholarship can provide longer temporal and chronological reaches, more global and comparative national approaches, and broader topical horizons. We do not seek to court historians or scholars using these pages to get a job on Capitol Hill or in this or the next administration. Good work will challenge deeply held beliefs and assumptions. The best scholarship is often unpopular to those in power and makes people and institutions uncomfortable. TNSR does believe, however, that scholarship should be public-minded, policy-accessible, and engage issues and audiences beyond universities. War and peace are too important to be discussed and debated in a manner that appeals only to the professorate.

4. The current institutional structure for understanding issues of war and peace is not performing as well as it should.

Few would contest the importance of rigorous, accessible, relevant, and innovative scholarship on questions of war and peace. Why then do we need a new journal?

TNSR is motivated both by a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge: It is our belief that the way universities allocate resources, incentives, and support to teaching and producing scholarship on issues of conflict, competition, and cooperation is sub-optimal. To understand why, reflect upon the role that disciplines play in universities, the function that journals play within disciplines, and how these factors influence the incentive structure for scholarship. Consider the two disciplines that have, in the past, been seen as responsible for studying and teaching about war and peace: history and political science. The story is discouraging.

Academic history departments have all but abandoned serious scholarship on the causes, course, and consequences of war. If you doubt this, take some time to look at the most “prestigious” academic history departments — say, the top 15 in the United States — and count how many professors are working on what one might consider issues of international conflict, competition, and cooperation. Even if you were to take the broadest definition — perhaps a scholar whose work focused on “sports tourism in the 1920s” — the numbers would be small compared to other subjects, with many large departments having no tenured faculty working on these issues. Examine the handful of

professors who do work on these issues in these departments, then ask — how many are under the age of 60? Are you confident their university will replace them with a scholar working on similar issues when they retire? Next, make a list of the scholars you think are doing the best historical work on war and peace. Are they in departments of history in major research universities? Or are they employed by schools of public policy, centers for international affairs, and even political science departments?

The discipline of political science has done far better, especially the sub-fields of international relations and comparative politics, where talented scholars of all ages fill departments and teach interesting courses. The narrow concerns of the discipline, however, often burden this scholarship. An obsession with methods and theory for their own sake, inaccessibility and jargon-laden prose, efforts to mimic economics and physics, and other shortcomings too often plague political science scholarship. Those outside the discipline might wonder if the overall contribution made by political science to general understanding of issues of war and peace has been relatively modest, given the amount of human capital invested.

Not all observers will agree with these assessments, and we encourage you to prove us wrong, either in the pages of *TNSR* or more established disciplinary outlets. To see where you stand, perform the following task: Look over the articles published by the intellectual gate-keepers — the leading disciplinary journals in both history and political science — over the past few years. If you find their offerings to consistently provide rigorous, engaging, compelling, accessible insights into important questions of war and peace, and leave you saying “more of this please,” then *TNSR* may not be for you. If you think we can and should do better as a community, we welcome your help, guidance, and submissions.

This brings me to the opportunity: we hope *TNSR* will become the outlet for those who want to see their disciplines do better on principles 1 through 3. But we passionately believe questions of war and peace should engage disciplines and methods beyond history and political science. Economics, anthropology, psychology, law, public health — the list of disciplines whose insights bear on conflict, competition, and cooperation is long. Scholars from any discipline who share these principles should feel welcome in the pages of *TNSR*. In fact, one might imagine these principles animating a new way of organizing research, teaching, and public outreach in higher education around questions of war and peace, a field perhaps

devoted to international history, strategy, and statecraft. One step at a time, however....

We recognize that what we propose will be difficult. We expect to make many mistakes along the way. We seek your advice, your guidance, your participation. Most of all, we count on your support for the mission to generate and disseminate innovative, rigorous, accessible, and influential scholarship on the critical issues around war and peace. ■

Francis J. Gavin is the Chairman of the Editorial Board of the *Texas National Security Review*. He is the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and the inaugural director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at SAIS-Johns Hopkins University. His writings include *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2012).