

*INTRODUCTION TO THE  
VERITAS PAPERBACK EDITION:  
I SING OF ARMS AND THE MAN*

*Anne-Marie Slaughter*

Woe to the Stimson lecturer who ventures on this volume before she has prepared her text. When Ian Shapiro at Yale invited me to give the 2015 Stimson Lectures, I took a look at the list of former Stimson lecturers, saw Thomas Schelling's name, and was honored to be in such distinguished company. I conceptualized my own project based on his great book *The Strategy of Conflict*. But I did not turn back to *Arms and Influence*, although I remembered reading excerpts from it in college. If I had, I might well have been too intimidated to write anything at all.

As it turns out, we can take heart. Schelling wrote *Arms and Influence* first, and then inaugurated the Stimson Lectures, at least as he tells it, with "lectures drawn from this book." Thus he reversed what has become the normal course; giving the lectures and then turning them into a book manuscript. But still, what a standard he set!

Start with Schelling's spellbinding clarity, even when he is writing about subjects as complex and murky as crisis diplomacy. Reading along, it is possible almost to *feel* his mind slicing through difficult problems. To take just one example among so many, he ranges easily from ancient Greece and Gaul through the American Civil War, the American Indian wars, World War II, and conflicts in Palestine, Algeria, and Central Africa to show examples of the deliberate military infliction of pain.

Against that backdrop, however, he shows us that "in the great wars of the last hundred years," the infliction of pain as a military strategy was more the exception than the rule. "It was usually military victory, not the hurting of the people, that was

decisive.” And then Schelling draws the insight that sets up one of the central premises of the book. Over this period, “Military action was seen as an *alternative* to bargaining, not as a *process* of bargaining.” No longer. With the advent of nuclear weapons, everything becomes bargaining, because military victory in a great war becomes indistinguishable from cataclysm.

Interestingly, Schelling’s clarity is always leavened with humanity. He is the ultimate bargainer, game player, chess master—the cool logician who can distill abstract principles from the fire and fury of a superpower rivalry based on mutual assured destruction. But here he is on Leo Szilard, the Hungarian-German-American physicist who discovered the chain reaction and encouraged the building of the atomic bomb. Schelling writes that Szilard “delighted in putting his ideas in shockingly pure form.” Accordingly, Szilard proposed that if the Soviet Union invaded a country that the United States was committed to protect, the United States should destroy a Soviet city of “appropriate size.” Indeed, the United States should even “publish a ‘price list’ indicating to the Soviets what it would cost them, in population destroyed, to attack any country on the list.” Szilard accepted that of course the Soviet Union would probably attack an equivalent American city in return; U.S. willingness to accept such punishment would be a sign of our resolve and thus part of the deterrent.

“A cold-blooded willingness to punish the enemy for his transgressions,” Schelling writes of Szilard, “even if it hurt us as much as it hurt them, he considered an impressive display.” Schelling himself disagreed. The entire point of *Arms and Influence* was—is—to ensure that decision makers with nuclear arms at their disposal always remember that their ultimate goal is influence *without* actual use. The posting of a “price list” would diminish the humanity it is so necessary to preserve.

Schelling also reminds us of his own humanity with the many examples he draws from everyday life: traffic, games, and above all, parenting. He assures his readers that “‘salami tactics’ . . . were invented by a child,” then provides a charming description of what happens when a parent tells a child not to

go into the water. The child begins by putting only his feet in the water—assuring the parent that he is not “in” the water; if the parent acquiesces, Schelling concludes: “Pretty soon we are calling to him not to swim out of sight, wondering whatever happened to all our discipline.” It is easy to imagine him in his study in the middle of his family, or venturing out into Boston traffic—the professor who would be the target of the bombs rather than the pilot who drops them or the president who orders them dropped.

It may be counterintuitive that a scholar credited with introducing game theory to the study of international relations, a branch of political science, was admired among at least some economists for resisting “the trend toward formalization.” On the contrary, “his career reflects the deep sense that stories should be about human beings, not merely utility functions, and that formalization, while fruitful in some respects, tends to kill key human qualities.”<sup>1</sup>

So how well has *Arms and Influence* worn over the fifty-three years since its first publication? Much of the text is still fresh, even as it reminds me on every page just how changed much of our world is from the seeming Cold War certainties I grew up with. Schelling’s opening insight, directly tied to the dawn of the nuclear era with the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is that force can be used not to conquer but to *hurt*, and that the threat of that hurt is a strategic asset.

As I have said, Schelling was well aware that the use of force to hurt, to sow terror, pain, and destruction, dated back to the beginning of recorded time. But he also saw that those uses had typically followed military victory, which was still “the price of admission.” It followed, therefore, that “military strategy” had been the “science of military victory.”

Yet in a world in which military victory in great-powers war, at least, means mutual annihilation, the value of arms is their influence, not their use. Hence the title of the book. Military strategy becomes the ability to deploy and direct that influence: “the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence.”

And so we are back to bargaining. “The power to hurt,”

Schelling wrote, “is bargaining power. To exploit it is diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy.” It is “the diplomacy of violence.” Schelling’s goal in the book is to identify and set forth some of “the principles” that underlie this diplomacy, based on observation and analysis rather than prescription.

He denies any prescriptive intent, rejecting the idea that the book is about policy. Indeed, in one of his many fascinating asides, Schelling points out that “policies ought to be consistent, but interesting principles almost always conflict.” He insists that he is not advocating for any particular course of action, although he acknowledges that readers are likely to be able to discern his “prejudices” at various points.

And yet. The power of Schelling’s analysis—that clarity again—is such that after reading *Arms and Influence* any policy maker will be guided by the principles that Schelling uncovers and be aware of the choices posed when they conflict.

Consider, for instance, Schelling’s discussion of “the diplomacy of ultimate survival.” He begins by describing a speech by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in June 1962 in which he enunciated a “counter-force strategy” against the Soviet Union, stating that the “principal [U.S.] military objectives . . . should be the destruction of the enemy’s military forces, not of his civilian population.” Schelling sees this refinement of mutual assured destruction as the extension of deterrence even into war, and even into the largest war.

He goes on, using appropriately hard-boiled strategic terminology, to frame this innovation in terms of the recognition that “live Russians and whole Russian cities together with our unspent weapons might be our most valuable assets.” But the prescription is clear: the making of war plans and even “the design of weapons” should aim for maximum survival rather than maximum extermination. That principle and its accompanying prescription seem equally relevant today.

Another concept that Schelling developed that has ready relevance to contemporary international politics is that of “compellence,” a “threatening action that is intended not to forestall some adversarial action but to bring about some desired action,

through ‘fear of consequences.’” Compellence is a subset of coercion, but coercion also includes deterrence, whereas compellence uniquely describes the coercive use of power to compel an adversary to act.

The United States frequently finds itself these days in the position of trying to compel China to take action that we desire it to take, such as playing by global rules of trade, navigation, boundaries, and human rights. In all of these cases we wish China to desist from some action that it is already taking, but the desistence requires compellence. Deterrence has already failed.

Schelling’s explication of the steps necessary for compellence are just as applicable to President Trump in the South China Sea or in global markets as to President Johnson in Vietnam. Above all, compellence requires “*initiating* an action (or an irrevocable commitment to an action) that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds. The overt act, the first step, is up to the side that makes the compellent threat.”<sup>2</sup>

In the South China Sea, both the Obama and the Trump administrations have initiated the sailing of U.S. warships through waters that we and the rest of the world recognize as the high seas and that China is trying to make de facto territorial waters by creating artificial islands out of mudflats. But Schelling could have told them that such efforts could never compel China to desist from its island building. Deterrence, he explains, “tends to be indefinite in its timing.” The consequences threatened by one side will occur whenever the other side crosses the line. Compellence, by contrast, “has to be definite: We move, and you must get out of the way. By when? There has to be a deadline, otherwise tomorrow never comes.”

Periodic exercise of navigation rights can compel the Chinese not to make good on their territorial claims by actually firing on U.S. ships, but only a blockade of the islands in question would be likely to bring about true compellence, much as the U.S. quarantine of Cuba did in the Cuban missile crisis. In trade, by contrast, the Trump administration has followed Schelling’s playbook, imposing sanctions and then threaten-

ing higher sanctions on a date certain unless China agrees to specific concessions. As of this writing, that strategy has compelled China to make concessions but not to stick to them; time will tell.

Addressing China's alleged strategic use of technology manufactured by its companies to advance the interests of the Chinese government, or even its theft of intellectual property, is far more complicated. Here we see the limits of *Arms and Influence* for an age in which arms themselves still include nuclear and conventional military weapons but have expanded to embrace computer viruses, suicide bombers, and social media bots. And as the range of those arms suggests, governments must often struggle even to be heard amid the cacophony of the thousands of individuals and organizations seeking influence.

Schelling recognized the problem of addressable threats; he wrote about the difference between trying to compel an individual to take a desired action and trying to compel a government. He also, contrary to popular caricature, never assumed perfect rationality on the part of decision makers. Indeed, he insisted that strategists plan to deter *any* enemy: "not only a cool-headed premeditated decision that might be taken in the normal course of the Cold War, at a time when the enemy does not consider an attack by us to be imminent, but also a nervous, hot-headed, frightened, desperate decision that might be precipitated at the peak of a crisis, that might result from a false alarm or be engineered by somebody's mischief."

Still, how to apply the logic of *Arms and Influence* to the contemporary spaghetti bowl of global politics? Who is aiming what message where, to try to deter or compel what behavior? Superpower rivalries continue, as do nuclear weapons; when Schelling wrote a new preface to the 2008 edition of the book, he observed the many changes that had taken place since the 1960s and commented that "nobody worries (that I know of) about nuclear confrontations between the new Russia and the United States." What he found absolutely astonishing—"a development that no one I have known could have imagined"—was the continuation of what has now become the nuclear taboo.

Perhaps not for terrorists, a prospect Schelling contemplates. On reflection, he says, he hopes that terrorists smart enough to acquire a nuclear weapon and leaders of governments such as Iran and North Korea will read *Arms and Influence* and appreciate his insights into the value of having but not using their nukes. I agree with him. I would encourage the governments of all nuclear powers—legal and illegal—to read it and pass it on to their strategists.

Yet *Arms and Influence* has little or nothing to say about how to combat so many of the threats that it is the business of military and foreign policy professionals to worry about. Climate change and all its associated evils for so many countries and their populations, even if for others it brings some good. Global pandemics. Global terrorist networks and the criminal networks that so often feed them: drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and money laundering. Horrific civil wars that engulf entire regions, often still fueled by great power competition by proxy. Corruption, environmental degradation, poverty and despair that drive millions of people toward the dream of a better life in richer countries.

So many of those problems are problems not of conflict but of connection: misconnection, disconnection, hyperconnection. Bad people who are connected across borders and good people who are not. International organizations charged with solving global problems that are unable to connect systematically to the many different corporate and civic actors, even to the right level of government actors, necessary to make a difference on the ground. Elites who are densely and constantly connected to each other and not to anyone else. People around the world who are connected electronically to visions of a better life but not connected to any meaningful hope or course of action to achieve it.

This is not Schelling's world. His players start apart, typically in an adversarial posture, and then find their way to some form of connection through implicit or explicit bargaining processes. He writes about "connectedness," but in the context of deterrent and compellent threats. He points out that the United States

put troops in Berlin to connect its promise to defend Berlin to a physical situation: a Soviet action against the Western sectors of Berlin would have to harm Americans, which would then be more likely to trigger the American response. He wonders whether a similar “connectedness” is necessary to make compelling threats more effective. Connection, for him, is relevant only to the strategy of conflict.

But why, I often wondered, don’t we pay as much attention to the strategy of connection as the strategy of conflict? Why don’t we focus on who is connected, and how, and for what purpose? Schelling drew on the academic literature of game theory to help students of conflict identify the mutual interests that turned apparently zero-sum situations into positive-sum bargaining. The academic literature on connection—at least connection in networks—is vast and multidisciplinary. Why can’t we distill and apply that theory to concrete cases of connection in the same way?

Which takes us back to the call I received from Ian Shapiro sometime in 2013, inviting me to give the Stimson Lectures a year or two hence. As noted at the outset of this brief essay, I looked down the list of former lecturers and saw Schelling’s name. I might have quailed at the company; even to conceptualize a project patterned on his work was daring, and perhaps presumptuous. But in the four ensuing years in which I worked on the lectures and the manuscript that ultimately became *The Chessboard and the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World*, Thomas Schelling was my inspiration and my guide. How much greater the honor, then, to be able to introduce this wonderful new edition of his work.

### Notes

1. Daniel B. Klein, Tyler Cowen, and Timur Kuran, “Salute to Schelling: Keeping It Human,” *Econ Journal Watch* 2, no. 1 (2005), 159–64, 160.

2. Emphasis in the original.