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## Threats of War, Chances for Peace

Preventing the spread of war will depend on strategies that recognize the shared interests of adversaries

By Jeffrey D. Sachs

Although climate change, deforestation and depletion of groundwater are all serious threats to sustainable development, the biggest threat to future well-being remains the specter of war. The world was at the brink of a nuclear conflict during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and could quickly find itself there again in South Asia, the Middle East, the Korean peninsula or some other hot spot. The Cuban crisis was transformed, through President John F. Kennedy's political vision and dexterity, into the beginning of arms control in the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. That historic breakthrough offers timely lessons for today.

The events of late 1962 through mid-1963 are well known. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gambled by trying to position offensive surface-to-ground nuclear missiles in Cuba, cheating on promises to limit the Soviets' Cuban arsenal to defensive weapons. The U.S. caught the Soviets in midcourse of installing the missiles and imposed a naval quarantine. The Soviets agreed to withdraw the offensive missiles in return for a U.S. commitment not to invade Cuba and a secret pledge to remove nuclear missiles from Turkey at a later date. After coming within hours of war, the U.S. and the Soviet Union went on a few months later to sign a test ban agreement.

How does one go from the brink of war to a breakthrough peace treaty in under a year? Kennedy's methodological starting point was to avoid vilifying the Soviet Union or declaring the adversary to be evil. At every step, Kennedy assumed that Soviet counterparts were rational, though not necessarily beyond mistakes in their chosen actions. He assumed that the Soviet Union would seek tactical advantages where it could get them but would pull back from self-annihilation.

Today's game theorists would describe Kennedy's strategy as "generous tit-for-tat" (GTFT). A player adopts a position of cooperation as long as the other side does, too. If the second player begins to cheat, the first player stops cooperating as well, to show the cheater that there are adverse consequences to the collapse of this arrangement. The door remains forgivingly open to future cooperation, however, if the cheater reverts to form. And generously, the first player might initiate renewed cooperation, with a view to enticing the former cheater to reciprocate. GTFT is so successful and robust that many evolutionary biologists suppose that the basic strategy is somewhat hardwired in human attitudes.

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***Kennedy believed the potential for cooperation was grounded in our common humanity.***

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As Kennedy later explained his thinking: "In short, both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race. Agreements to this end are in the interests of the Soviet Union as well as ours.... And even the most hostile nations can be relied upon to accept and keep those treaty obligations, and only those treaty obligations, which are in their own interest." He stressed the need to avoid humiliating one's adversary. "And above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy--or of a collective

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death-wish for the world."

Kennedy's sentiments were radical at the time, but he believed that the potential for cooperation was grounded in our common humanity. "For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal." As we face today's challenges and threats, we will do well to grasp the insight that our counterparts and adversaries, like us, are searching for survival and for a future for their children. As occurred 45 years ago, that critical insight might prove to be the key to keeping us alive and secure.

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