

# From the Chancery: Still Thinking

Andrew L. Johns

As usual, with apologies to Peter King (the sportswriter, not the former New York congressman)....

1. I think that I am more than a little disappointed that the 2022 World Cup is being held in November and December rather than in June and July (especially given where it will be held, which is another issue altogether). Yes, yes, I know that the heat in Qatar makes a summer schedule unworkable and dangerous for the athletes...not to mention that the staggering/depressing number of injuries to key USMNT players—I'm especially looking at you, Weston McKennie, Tyler Adams, and Gio Reyna—make the extra months to heal and train extremely welcome...assuming that we actually qualified (still pending as of today). But I have great memories of watching World Cup and European championship matches at past SHAFR conferences with some serious soccer fans, and I will definitely miss that. Plus, just think of all of the lectures I will have to cancel this fall to avoid conflicts with the match schedule....

2. I think that, occasionally, the diplomatic world and the academic world collide. Three years ago, Beijing Sport University Press decided to publish a Chinese language version of the book I co-edited with Heather Dichter, *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations since 1945*. The pandemic delayed the publication of the translated edition—not unusual, as many of us experienced and are continuing to endure issues and delays with academic presses—but it looked like things were still on track as late as last fall. But after Heather made several media appearances in which she made comments about various concerns regarding the Beijing Winter Olympics, the press suddenly backed out of the deal. Clearly, criticism of anything about the Games or China's involvement was problematic enough for the Chinese government that retribution was required. Kudos to Heather (and other scholars and journalists) for rightly calling out the regime, both on the troubling problems with the Games and on other issues like the treatment of the Uyghurs; the lost opportunity for a translation of our book is a small price to pay to highlight these problems. I would be quite interested to hear about anyone else who has had a similar experience with Chinese presses, archives, or other institutions...maybe even in a future *Passport* article.

3. I think that Brian Etheridge will do a terrific job as SHAFR's inaugural Electronic Communications Editor. For those of you who do not know him, Brian has been an important part of SHAFR for over two decades, and he has an intelligent, ecumenical, and wide-ranging perspective on the organization and the role it can and should play in both the academic and policy worlds. SHAFR's Twitter feed, website, public engagement, podcast (yes, that is in the works), and media strategy—among his multitude of responsibilities in this role—are in excellent hands.

4. I think that both academic freedom and freedom of speech are under direct assault across the United States and on university/college campuses from a variety of authoritarian forces—on both the left and the right. Whether it is “cancel culture,” or the increasing number of cases of book censorship, or the various laws against teaching certain topics that are being passed or considered in state legislatures, or the attacks on university tenure systems, or the efforts to enforce ideological and lexiconic orthodoxy on campuses, the environment in which we live, work, publish, and comment has become increasingly toxic, unpredictable, perilous, and uncertain. This is especially true for academics—like me—who do not have the protection provided by tenure...but all of us face these challenges. We need to do all we can individually and collectively to hold the line against these trends and maintain the guardrails that allow us to explore ideas, assert opinions, and publish research without fear of retribution or being silenced—even if they are unpopular, heterodox, or lack ideological purity...regardless of where that ideology might fall on the political spectrum. This is neither a left vs. right nor a woke vs. MAGA issue; this is effectively an existential crisis for the academy.

5. I think that it would be great to have a photo spread in a future issue of *Passport* that included positive things that came out of the past two years with COVID. Pandemic pets, tattoos, babies, hairstyles, beards, hobbies....anything that may not have happened without the travails we have endured since March 2020 but that would be uplifting to our community.

6. I think that, by the time that you are reading this column in early April 2022, there will be about ten weeks until the SHAFR conference kicks off in New Orleans. I may or may not have purchased my plane tickets last December. I definitely have a countdown on my phone. I will be at the Westin all weekend (don't let that deter you from going to the conference)—eating beignets and jambalaya, listening to live music, and engaging in a few (OK, maybe more than a few) casino-based activities. If that weren't enough, the program put together by Emily Conroy-Krutz and Daniel Immerwahr looks terrific—especially since there will be actual panels with actual three-dimensional people with actual personal interaction in actual rooms; a social event at the World War II Museum, which, if you have never been there, is excellent; and Laura Belmonte's presidential address. I cannot be the only one who has three years of pent-up socializing ready to be released in and around the French Quarter...along with three years of comments posing as questions waiting to be unleashed on panelists at Tulane in June. *Laissez les bons temps rouler.*

7. I think that U.S. diplomacy over the past two decades has become more reactive and less innovative than at any point since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It will be fascinating to see the scholarship on the early 21st century as it develops as scholars grapple with this era, try to understand how and why this has occurred, and figure out what the short- and long-term ramifications will be for the country and the world.

8. I think that I am thrilled that SHAFR decided to create a Council seat specifically to represent the interests of members of the organization who are employed at teaching-centered institutions. While research is a major component of SHAFR's mission, teaching is the other half of that equation—and an aspect of the profession that has not been well represented in SHAFR's leadership over the years. IMHO, Molly Wood is the perfect person to serve as the inaugural Council member in this seat. If you have concerns or issues relating to teaching the history of U.S. foreign relations that you believe the organization should consider, let Molly know.

9. I think that I am also thrilled that SHAFR decided to make the Peter L. Hahn Distinguished Service Award an annual prize. There are so many members of the organization who deserved to be recognized for their extensive—and frequently unacknowledged—service that we could probably give this award out on a monthly basis. Thanks to everyone who gives generously of their limited time and energy; without that commitment, SHAFR could not function.

10. I think that the Biden administration's failure to keep faith with U.S. citizens and Afghani allies during the U.S. withdrawal in the summer of 2021 and in the months that have followed was a monumental and despicable failure of leadership. Full stop. Of course, that does not mitigate the problematic decisions of the previous two decades or excuse what the resurgent Taliban have done since assuming control over the country. But as one U.S. colonel angrily commented

as Afghans seeking to escape clung desperately to the outside of U.S. transports as they flew away, "Where is the moral courage?"

11. I think that the importance of viewpoint diversity cannot be overstated. Let's not be so arrogant (or delusional) as to believe that we have all of the right answers on every political, social, intellectual, or historiographical question and that anyone who disagrees with us is evil, uninformed, or misguided. Embrace Mill's Trident.

12. I think that we should all be aware of the fact that we have scores of SHAFR members who have faced a plethora of challenges over the past couple of years—and not all of them due to the pandemic. Serious physical and mental health concerns (both individual and family), employment issues, and existential crises of all stripes seem to have proliferated since we all last met in person at the Renaissance in June 2019. I know we all have our own concerns and that the pandemic has limited our bandwidth for a lot of extraneous things, but we should try to be sensitive to our friends and colleagues, and do what we can to support them in whatever they are dealing with. Most of the time, these problems are far more significant and carry far more weight than they will let on. Just listening and showing some empathy can sometimes make all the difference in the world.

13. I think that the perennial problem of access to historical documents should be of deep concern to all of us. The stories about Trump-era documents being destroyed, thrown away, or flushed down the toilet at the White House (not to mention being spirited out of the West Wing to Mar-a-Lago) are only the latest obstacles to scholars seeking to understand the history of U.S. foreign relations. The on-going changes to the presidential library system and document storage, the inexplicable desire of agencies to destroy documents after a mere seven years, and the evergreen problems relating to classification issues only exacerbate these concerns. Huge props to Richard Immerman for his yeoman efforts over the years with the Historical Advisory Committee; to SHAFR for joining CREW in its efforts at document preservation; to SHAFR's Committee on Historical Documentation for its work on these matters; and to everyone who has filed a FOIA request or worked to ensure government transparency and the continued access to documents that so many of us need for our work—and that we all need to keep the U.S. government accountable. I am deeply reluctant to support advocacy by SHAFR on many, if not most, issues, but the organization is absolutely right to take a leading role in confronting these problems.

14. I think that, as of this writing in late February 2022, that almost any comment on the Russian invasion of the Ukraine would be premature. But a couple of things do stand out: the willingness of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Sweden to forego the 2022 World Cup by refusing to play Russia in a qualifying playoff, which led to FIFA banning Russia from the competition; the Ukrainian Interior Ministry not only taking down road signs to confuse Russian troops but

also changing the ones that are still up to essentially read “F\*\*\* you;” the Tik Tok videos explaining how to drive captured Russian tanks; and former heavyweight boxing champions Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko—along with thousands of regular civilians from all walks of life—voluntarily joining the Ukrainian military to fight for their country’s freedom. The invasion will have profound international implications including significant global diplomatic, military, and economic consequences, the extent of which may not be apparent for years or even decades. Let’s hope that international leaders continue to rise to this challenge, avoid further escalation, and figure out a quick and lasting path to peace.

15. I think (following up on the previous two thoughts) that SHAFR—and all professional organizations—need to stop passing resolutions on everything. The impulse to weigh in on current events, opine on political/social/cultural issues, or express love or hatred for a particular idea or person has become ubiquitous in academia. Hardly a week goes by without a resolution advocating for or against... something. With the proliferation of websites, social media, and other outlets for expressing opinion, individuals have the ability to speak out on any issue about which they feel strongly. Advocacy in which an organization purports to speak for all of

its members should be narrowly defined, restricted to issues of direct concern to the organization and its mission, and these statements should be relatively rare to underscore their significance. For SHAFR, the CREW lawsuits and access to documents fall into that category; announcing support for a political position or country—whether related to contemporary U.S. foreign relations or not—does not. The recent decision to sign on to the AHA resolution on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a perfect example of misplaced advocacy. The invasion and Putin certainly deserve scorn, but disapproval and censure should not come from SHAFR collectively.

16. I think that, despite the fact that my university will not let me break up my course on the history of U.S. foreign relations into two (or three) parts—trying to squeeze material from 1776 to the present into one semester is basically impossible—I love teaching about early U.S. foreign relations. So many interesting events, ideas, and people with so much connective tissue to contemporary issues.

17. I think that you are stuck with me for another five years since Council decided in early March 2022 to reappointment me to another five-year term as editor.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

**SHAFR’s Nominating Committee is soliciting nominations for elected positions.**

The 2022 elections will fill the following positions:

- **Vice President/PresidentElect** (1 vacancy, 1-year term, followed by a 1-year term as president and then a 2-year term on Council)
- **Council members** (3 vacancies, 3-year term)
- **Nominating Committee** (1 vacancy, 3-year term)

Please submit nominations (including self-nominations) to the members of the Nominating Committee by email no later than **June 30, 2022**. Nominations must include the nominee’s name, email address, institution (if applicable), and a statement of the nominee’s qualifications. The committee particularly seeks nominations that offer specific details about the nominee’s service to SHAFR and commitment to the field. It is helpful to indicate whether you have contacted the nominee about his or her willingness to serve.

Nominating Committee members:

**Kathy Rasmussen**, *Chair*  
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