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To What Ends Military Power?

Robert J. Art

From the end of World War II until now, America's conventional wisdom about the efficacy of military power as an instrument of foreign policy has changed in dramatic fashion twice. Each change in the conventional wisdom was caused by a war, first by the Korean, then by the Vietnamese. The first change occurred almost instantaneously, with the onset of the Korean War. The second took much longer to materialize, coming only after military success repeatedly eluded America in Vietnam. Each change in the conventional wisdom was produced by a market shift in the thinking about the role that military power could and should play in America's foreign policy. Each change, consequently, altered the balance that had previously been struck among the military, economic, and political tools of statecraft.

From the end of World War II until June of 1950, the foci of America's efforts were Europe and Japan. The prime tools of policy were economic aid and political commitment. Military power, especially in the form of military assistance and of the deterrent effect of her nuclear monopoly, was not irrelevant to America's policy. But military power took third place because fears of internal political subversion, not direct military attack, were what dominated official American thinking. The North Korean attack shattered that assumption. With fear of direct attack now prime, America proceeded to globalize her containment policy, to elevate prior commitment to defend others to a fine art, and to militarize her foreign policy. The hallmarks of the fifties and sixties were large defense budgets, proliferation of alliance and other forms of military commitments, and military interventions. The Vietnam War was both the epitome of that era and its apogee.

The second change—and the third phase—began in the late 1960s. The Nixon Doctrine, which meant that U.S. allies would henceforth have to provide the cannon fodder for future land wars, represented official recognition of the domestic revulsion against the exercise of military power. But

Many of the ideas and some of the passages in this article are drawn from a larger essay that will appear in B. Thomas Trout and James E. Harf, editors, *National Security Affairs: Theoretical Perspectives and Contemporary Issues* (The Regents Press, University of Kansas, 1980). I am grateful to Messrs. Trout and Harf for their permission to draw from that essay. I am also indebted to Mr. Stephen Van Evera for his unusually perceptive comments.

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two other factors were also at work in devaluing the central role that military power had played. By the early 1970s, America publicly recognized, in the form of the 1972 SALT I Accord, that her strategic nuclear superiority over Russia had ended. Similarly, by unilaterally closing the gold window and in effect devaluing the dollar, America in 1971 publicly testified to the waning of her economic preeminence. The hallmarks of the 1970s were the touted complexities of economic interdependence, the reluctance of the foreign policy elite to contemplate military interventionism, and a decline in America's overall military position relative to Russia's. The inability, or unwillingness, of America to take military action against OPEC symbolized to most the devaluation of military power as a tool of policy.

Early in 1980, we are clearly in the midst of a third seachange in the conventional wisdom. Deep concern over Russia's perceived worldwide political and military advances is the underlying factor for change. Frustration with seeming impotence against OPEC and reaction against loss of American prestige are contributory. We may well be on the verge of a prodigious and sustained increase in military spending.

In view of what is likely to be before us, it is vital to think carefully and precisely about the uses and limits of military power. That is the purpose of this essay. It is intended as a backdrop for policy debates, not a prescription of specific policies. It consciously eschews elaborate detail on the requisite military forces for scenarios $a \dots n$ and focuses instead on what military power has and has not done, can and cannot do. Every model of how the world works has policy implications. But not every policy is based on a clear view of how the world works. What, then, are the uses to which military power can be put? How have nuclear weapons affected these uses? And what is the future of force in a world of nuclear parity and increasing economic interdependence?

What Are The Uses Of Force?

The goals that states pursue range widely and vary considerably from case to case. Military power is more useful for realizing some goals than others, though it is generally considered of some use by most states for all of the goals that they hold. If we attempt, however, to be descriptively accurate, to enumerate all of the purposes for which states use force, we shall simply end up with a bewildering list. Descriptive accuracy is not a virtue *per se* for analysis. In fact, descriptive accuracy is generally bought at the cost of

analytical utility. (A concept that is descriptively accurate is usually analytically useless.) Therefore, rather than compile an exhaustive list of such purposes, I have selected four categories that themselves analytically exhaust the functions that force can serve: defense, deterrence, compellence, and “swaggering”.¹

Not all four functions are necessarily well or equally served by a given military posture. In fact, usually only the great powers have the wherewithall to develop military forces that can serve more than two functions at once. Even then, this is achieved only vis-à-vis smaller powers, not vis-à-vis the other great ones. The measure of the capabilities of a state’s military forces must be made relative to those of another state, not with reference to some absolute scale. A state that can compel another state can also defend against it and usually deter it. A state that can defend against another state cannot thereby automatically deter or compel it. A state can deter another state without having the ability to either defend against or compel it. A state that can swagger vis-à-vis another may or may not be able to perform any of the other three functions relative to it. Where feasible, defense is the goal that all states aim for first. If defense is not possible, deterrence is generally the next priority. Swaggering is the function most difficult to pin down analytically; deterrence, the one whose achievement is the most difficult to demonstrate; compellence, the easiest to demonstrate but among the hardest to achieve. The following discussion develops these points more fully.

The *defensive* use of force is the deployment of military power so as to be able to do two things—to ward off an attack and to minimize damage to oneself if attacked. For defensive purposes, a state will direct its forces against those of a potential or actual attacker, but not against his unarmed population. For defensive purposes, a state can deploy its forces in place prior to an attack, use them after an attack has occurred to repel it, or strike first if it believes that an attack upon it is imminent or inevitable. The defensive use of force can thus involve both peaceful and physical employment and both repellent (second) strikes and offensive (first) strikes.² If a state strikes first

1. The term “compellence” was coined by Thomas C. Schelling in his *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). Part of my discussion of compellence and deterrence draws upon his as it appears in Chapter 2 (pp. 69–86), but, as will be made clear below, I disagree with some of his conclusions.

2. Military power can be used in one of two modes—“physically” and “peacefully.” The physical use of force refers to its actual employment against an adversary, usually but not always in a mutual exchange of blows. The peaceful use of force refers either to an explicit threat to resort to force, or to the implicit threat to use it that is communicated simply by a state’s

when it believes an attack upon it is imminent, it is launching a preemptive blow. If it strikes first when it believes an attack is inevitable but not momentary, it is launching a preventive blow. Preemptive and preventive blows are undertaken when a state calculates, first, that others plan to attack it and, second, that to delay in striking offensively is against its interests. A state preempts in order to wrest the advantage of the first strike from an opponent. A state launches a preventive attack because it believes that others will attack it when the balance of forces turns in their favor and therefore attacks while the balance of forces is in its favor. In both cases it is better to strike first than to be struck first. The major distinction between preemption and prevention is the calculation about when an opponent's attack will occur. For preemption, it is a matter of hours, days, or even a few weeks at the most; for prevention, months or even a few years. In the case of preemption, the state has almost no control over the timing of its attack; in the case of prevention, the state can in a more leisurely way contemplate the timing of its attack. For both cases, it is the belief in the certainty of war that governs the offensive, defensive attack. For both cases, the maxim, "the best defense is a good offense," makes good sense.

The *deterrent* use of force is the deployment of military power so as to be able to prevent an adversary from doing something that one does not want him to do and that he might otherwise be tempted to do by threatening him with unacceptable punishment if he does it. Deterrence is thus the threat of retaliation. Its purpose is to prevent something undesirable from happening. The threat of punishment is directed at the adversary's population and/or industrial infrastructure. The effectiveness of the threat depends upon a state's ability to convince a potential adversary that it has both the will and power to punish him severely if he undertakes the undesirable action in question. Deterrence therefore employs force peacefully. It is the threat to resort to force in order to punish that is the essence of deterrence. If the threat has to be carried out, deterrence by definition has failed. A deterrent threat is made precisely with the intent that it will not have to be carried

having it available for use. The physical use of force means that one nation is literally engaged in harming, destroying, or crippling those possessions which another nation holds dear, including its military forces. The peaceful use of force is referred to as such because, while force is "used" in the sense that it is employed explicitly or implicitly for the assistance it is thought to render in achieving a given goal, it does not result in any physical destruction to another nation's valued possessions. There is obviously a gray area between these two modes of use—the one in which a nation prepares (that is, gears up or mobilizes or moves about) its military forces for use against another nation but has not yet committed them such that they are inflicting damage.

out. Threats are made to prevent actions from being undertaken. If the threat has to be implemented, the action has already been undertaken. Hence deterrence can be judged successful only if the retaliatory threats have not been implemented

Deterrence and defense are alike in that both are intended to protect the state or its closest allies from physical attacks. The purpose of both is dissuasion—persuading others *not* to undertake actions harmful to oneself. The defensive use of force dissuades by convincing an adversary that he cannot conquer one's military forces. The deterrent use of force dissuades by convincing the adversary that his population and territory will suffer terrible damage if he initiates the undesirable action. Defense dissuades by presenting an unvanquishable military force. Deterrence dissuades by presenting the certainty of retaliatory devastation.

Defense is possible without deterrence, and deterrence is possible without defense. A state can have the military wherewithall to repel an invasion without also being able to threaten devastation to the invader's population or territory. Similarly, a state can have the wherewithall credibly to threaten an adversary with such devastation and yet be unable to repel his invading force. Defense, therefore, does not necessarily buy deterrence, nor deterrence defense. A state that can defend itself from attack, moreover, will have little need to develop the wherewithall to deter. If physical attacks can be repelled or if the damage from them drastically minimized, the incentive to develop a retaliatory capability is low. A state that cannot defend itself, however, will try to develop an effective deterrent if that be possible. No state will leave its population and territory open to attack if it has the means to redress the situation. Whether a given state can defend or deter or do both vis-à-vis another depends upon two factors: 1) the quantitative balance of forces between it and its adversary; and 2) the qualitative balance of forces, that is, whether the extant military technology favors the offense or the defense. These two factors are situation-specific and therefore require careful analysis of the case at hand.

The *compellent* use of force is the deployment of military power so as to be able either to stop an adversary from doing something that he has already undertaken or to get him to do something that he has not yet undertaken. Compellence, in Schelling's words, "involves initiating an action . . . that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds."³ Compel-

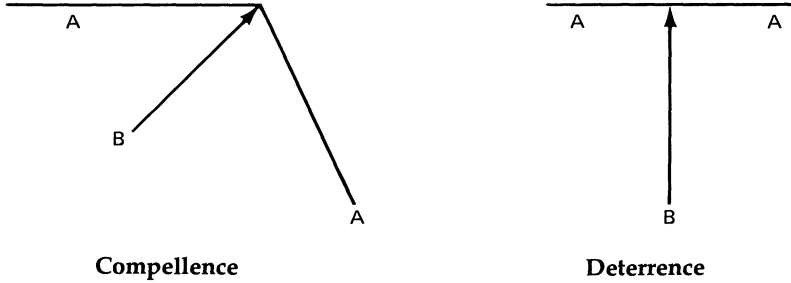
3. Schelling, p. 72.

lence can employ force either physically or peacefully. A state can start actually harming another with physical destruction until the latter abides by the former's wishes. Or, a state can take actions against another that do not cause physical harm but that require the latter to pay some type of significant price until it changes its behavior. America's bombing of North Vietnam in early 1965 was an example of physical compellence; Tirpitz's building of a German fleet aimed against England's in the two decades before World War I, an example of peaceful compellence. In the first case, the United States started bombing North Vietnam in order to compel it to stop it from assisting the Vietcong forces in South Vietnam. In the latter case, Germany built a battlefleet that in an engagement threatened to cripple England's in order to compel her to make a general political settlement advantageous to Germany. In both cases, one state initiated some type of action against another precisely so as to be able to stop it, to bargain it away for the appropriate response from the "put upon" state.

The distinction between compellence and deterrence is one between the active and passive use of force. The success of a deterrent threat is measured by its not having to be used. The success of a compellent action is measured by how closely and quickly the adversary conforms to one's stipulated wishes. In the case of successful deterrence, one is trying to demonstrate a negative, to show why something did not happen. It can never be clear whether one's actions were crucial to, or irrelevant to, why another state chose *not* to do something. In the case of successful compellence, the clear sequence of actions and reactions lends a compelling plausibility to the centrality of one's actions. Figure 1 illustrates the distinction. In successful compellence, state B can claim that its pressure deflected state A from its course of action. In successful deterrence, state B has no change in state A's behavior to point to, but instead must resort to claiming that its threats were responsible for the continuity in A's behavior. State A may have changed its behavior for reasons other than state B's compellent action. State A may have continued with its same behavior for reasons other than state B's deterrent threat. "Proving" the importance of B's influence on A for either case is not easy, but it is more plausible to claim that B influenced A when there is a change in A's behavior than when there is not. Explaining why something did not happen is more difficult than explaining why something did.

Compellence may be easier to demonstrate than deterrence, but it is harder to achieve. Schelling argues that compellent actions tend to be vaguer in

Figure 1



- | Compellence | Deterrence |
|--|--|
| (1) A is doing something that B cannot tolerate | (1) A is presently not doing anything that B finds intolerable |
| (2) B initiates action against A in order to get him to stop his intolerable actions | (2) B tells A that if A changes his behavior and does something intolerable, B will punish him |
| (3) A stops his intolerable actions and B stops his (or both cease simultaneously) | (3) A continues not to do anything B finds intolerable |

their objectives than deterrent threats and for that reason more difficult to attain.⁴ If an adversary has a hard time understanding what it is that one wishes him to do, his compliance with one's wishes is made more difficult. There is, however, no inherent reason why a compellent action must be vaguer than a deterrent threat with regard to how clearly the adversary understands what is wanted from him. "Do not attack me" is not any clearer in its ultimate meaning than "stop attacking my friend." A state can be as confused or as clear about what it wishes to prevent as it can be about what it wishes to stop. The clarity, or lack of it, of the objectives of compellent actions and deterrent threats does not vary according to whether the given action is compellent or deterrent in nature, but rather according to a welter of particularities associated with the given action. Some objectives, for example, are inherently clearer and hence easier to perceive than others. Some statesmen communicate more clearly than others. Some states have more power to bring to bear for a given objective than others. It is the specifics of a given situation, not any intrinsic difference between compellence and deterrence, that determines the clarity with which an objective is perceived.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

We must, therefore, look elsewhere for the reason as to why compellence is comparatively harder to achieve than deterrence. It lies, not in what one asks another to do, but in *how* one asks. With deterrence, state B asks something of state A in this fashion: "do not take action X; for if you do, I will bash you over the head with this club." With compellence, state B asks something of state A in this fashion: "I am now going to bash you over the head with this club and will continue to do so until you do what I want." In the former case, state A can easily deny with great plausibility any intention of having planned to take action X. In the latter case, state A cannot deny either that it is engaged in a given course of action or that it is being subjected to pressure by state B. If they are to be successful, compellent actions require a state to alter its behavior in a manner quite visible to all in response to an equally visible forceful initiative taken by another state. In contrast to compellent actions, deterrent threats are both easier to appear to have ignored or easier to acquiesce to without great loss of face. In contrast to deterrent threats, compellent actions more directly engage the prestige and the passions of the put upon state. Less prestige is lost in not doing something than in clearly altering behavior due to pressure from another. In the case of compellence, a state has publicly committed its prestige and resources to a given line of conduct that it is now asked to give up. This is not so for deterrence. Thus, compellence is intrinsically harder to attain than deterrence, not because its objectives are vaguer, but because it demands more humiliation from the compelled state.

The fourth purpose to which military power can be put is the most difficult to be precise about. *Swaggering* is in part a residual category, the deployment of military power for purposes other than defense, deterrence, or compellence. Force is not aimed directly at dissuading another state from attacking, at repelling attacks, nor at compelling it to do something specific. The objectives for swaggering are more diffuse, ill-defined, and problematic than that. Swaggering almost always involves only the peaceful use of force and is expressed usually in one of two ways: displaying one's military might at military exercises and national demonstrations and buying or building the era's most prestigious weapons. The swagger use of force is the most egoistic: it aims to enhance the national pride of a people or to satisfy the personal ambitions of its ruler. A state or statesman swaggers in order to look and feel more powerful and important, to be taken seriously by others in the councils of international decision-making, to enhance the nation's image in the eyes of others. If its image is enhanced, the nation's defense, deterrent,

and compellent capabilities may also be enhanced; but swaggering is not undertaken solely or even primarily for these specific purposes. Swaggering is pursued because it offers to bring prestige "on the cheap." Swaggering is pursued because of the fundamental yearning of states and statesmen for respect and prestige. Swaggering is more something to be enjoyed for itself than to be employed for a specific, consciously thought-out end.

And yet, the instrumental role of swaggering can not be totally discounted because of the fundamental relation between force and foreign policy that obtains in an anarchic environment. Because there is a connection between the military might that a nation is thought to possess and the success that it achieves in attaining its objectives, the enhancement of a state's stature in the eyes of others can always be justified on *realpolitik* lines. If swaggering causes other states to take one's interests more seriously into account, then the general interests of the state will benefit. Even in its instrumental role, however, swaggering is undertaken less for any given end than for all ends. The swaggering function of military power is thus at one and the same time the most comprehensive and the most diffuse, the most versatile in its effects and the least focused in its immediate aims, the most instrumental in the long run and the least instrumental in the short run, easy to justify on hard-headed grounds and often undertaken on emotional grounds. Swaggering mixes the rational and irrational more than the other three functions of military power and, for that reason, remains both pervasive in international relations and elusive to describe.

Defense, deterrence, compellence, and swaggering—these are the four general purposes for which force can be employed. Discriminating among them analytically, however, is easier than applying them in practice. This is due to two factors. First, we need to know the motives behind an act in order to judge its purpose; but the problem is that motives cannot be readily inferred from actions because several motives can be served by the same action. But neither can one readily infer the motives of a state from what it publicly or officially proclaims them to be. Such statements should not necessarily be taken at face value because of the role that bluff and dissimulation play in statecraft. Such statements are also often concocted with domestic political, not foreign audiences in mind, or else are deliberate exercises in studied ambiguity. Motives are important in order to interpret actions, but neither actions nor words always clearly delineate motives.

It is, moreover, especially difficult to distinguish defensive from compellent actions and deterrent from swaggering ones unless we know the reasons

for which they were undertaken. Peaceful defensive preparations often look largely the same as peaceful compellent ones. Defensive attacks are nearly indistinguishable from compellent ones. Is he who attacks first the defender or the compeller? Deterrence and swaggering both involve the acquisition and display of an era's prestigious weapons. Are such weapons acquired to enhance prestige or to dissuade an attack?

Second, to make matters worse, consider the following example. Germany launched an attack upon France and Russia at the end of July 1914 and thereby began World War I. There are two schools of thought as to why Germany did this. One holds that its motives were aggressive—territorial aggrandizement, economic gain, and elevation to the status of a world empire. Another holds that her motives were preventive and hence defensive. She struck first because she feared encirclement, slow strangulation, and then inevitable attack by her two powerful neighbors, foes whom she felt were daily increasing their military might faster than she was. She struck while she had the chance to win.

It is not simple to decide which school is the more nearly correct because both can marshal evidence to build a powerful case. Assume for the moment, though, that the second is closer to the truth. There are then two possibilities to consider: 1) Germany launched an attack because it *was* the case that her foes were planning to attack her ultimately, and Germany had the evidence to prove it; or 2) Germany felt she had reasonable evidence of her foes' *intent* to attack her eventually, but in fact her evidence was wrong because she misperceived their intent from their actions. If the first was the case, then we must ask this question: how responsible was Germany's diplomacy in the fifteen years before 1914, aggressive and blundering as it was, in breeding hostility in her neighbors? Germany attacked in the knowledge that they would eventually have struck her, but if her fifteen-year diplomatic record was a significant factor in causing them to lay these plans, must we conclude that Germany in 1914 was merely acting defensively? Must we confine our judgment about the defensive or aggressive nature of the act to the month or even the year in which it occurred? If not, how many years back in history do we go in order to make a judgment? If the second was the case, then we must ask this question: if Germany attacked in the belief, mistakenly as it turns out, that she would be attacked, must we conclude that Germany was acting defensively? Must we confine our judgment about the defensive or aggressive nature of the act simply to Germany's beliefs about others' intent, without reference to their actual intent?

Figure 2
The Purposes of Force

Type	Purpose	Mode	Targets	Characteristics
Defensive	Fend off attacks and/or reduce damage of an attack	Peaceful and physical	Primarily military Secondarily industrial	Defensive preparations can have dissuasion value; Defensive preparations can look aggressive; First strikes can be taken for defense.
Deterrent	Prevent adversary from initiating an action	Peaceful	Primarily civilian Secondarily industrial Tertiary military	Threats of retaliation made so as not to have to be carried out; Second strike preparations can be viewed as first strike preparations.
Compellent	Get adversary to stop doing something or start doing something	Peaceful and physical	All three with no clear ranking	Easy to recognize but hard to achieve; Compellent actions can be justified on defensive grounds.
Swaggering	Enhance prestige	Peaceful	None	Difficult to describe because of instrumental and irrational nature; Swaggering can be threatening.

It is not easy to answer these questions. Fortunately, we do not have to. Asking them is enough because it illustrates that an assessment of the *legitimacy* of a state's motives in using force is integral to the task of determining what its motives are. One cannot, that is, specify motives without at the same time making judgments about their legitimacy. The root cause of this need lies in the nature of state action. In anarchy every state is a valid judge of the legitimacy of its goals because there is no supranational authority to enforce agreed upon rules. Because of the lack of universal standards, we are forced to examine each case within its given context and to make individual judgments about the meaning of the particulars. When individual judgment is exercised, individuals may well differ. Definitive answers are more likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

Where does all of this leave us? Our four categories tell us what are the four possible purposes for which states can employ military power. The attributes of each alert us to the types of evidence for which to search. But because the context of an action is crucial in order to judge its ultimate purpose, these four categories cannot be applied mindlessly and ahistorically. Each state's purpose in using force in a given instance must fall into one of these four categories. We know *a priori* what the possibilities are. Which one it is, is an exercise in judgment, an exercise that depends as much upon the particulars of the given case as it does upon the general features of the given category.

What Has Been the Impact of Nuclear Weapons?

Have nuclear weapons affected either the need that states have for force or the uses to which military power can be put? Stated succinctly, the answer is "no" and "partially."

Nuclear weapons have not obviated the need of states for military power. As we shall see, nuclear weapons have brought some significant changes to international political life, but transformation of the anarchic environment of state action is not one of them. The need for military power derives from the self-help nature of international relations, itself a consequence of anarchy. Nuclear weapons have enabled some states to help themselves better than other states heretofore could, but they have not produced an effective world government and thereby eradicated the necessity for self-help. Because nuclear weapons have left anarchy untouched, military power remains integral to every nation's foreign policy.

Rather, what nuclear weapons have done is to alter the ways in which states that possess such weapons use their military power. For those states, nuclear weapons have downgraded the function of defense, ruled out physical nuclear compellence, enhanced deterrence and nuclear swaggering, and left unclear the utility of peaceful nuclear compellence. To this statement, however, three caveats must be immediately made. First, it would be a mistake to ascribe all the changes in the ways nuclear states have used their military power simply to nuclear weapons. The changes wrought have been due as much to *whom* has had them as it has been to *what* the weapons are physically capable of doing. Second, the changes have manifested themselves primarily in two sets of relations, those between the two superpowers and those between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Nuclear weapons have not left untouched the relations between each superpower and the nations of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia; but the effects on these relations are not readily evident, uniform, nor necessarily far-reaching. Third, nuclear weapons have not eliminated the need for nuclear states to deploy non-nuclear forces, nor have they diminished for most non-nuclear states the utility that conventional forces have for attaining their foreign policy goals vis-à-vis one another. In short, nuclear weapons have profoundly affected how some states have used force; but not all states have experienced a radical transformation in the ways that they have employed their military power. One can be impressed equally by the enduring realities of international politics and by the changes nuclear weapons have wrought.

Nuclear weapons can be enormously destructive. They need not be. As the post-World War II era has progressed, scientists have produced "diversified" nuclear weapons. States can now have big ones and small ones, clean ones and dirty ones (those producing a little or a lot of radioactive debris), cheap ones and expensive ones. The destructive power of nuclear weapons today runs the gamut from a few kilotons to many megatons. They can be launched from artillery, aircraft, surface ships, or submarines. They can be targeted on railroad junctions or on a megalopolis. They have permeated the forces of the two superpowers such that today both have nuclear arsenals that when combined total over 25,000 warheads. And yet, in spite of their large number and diversified uses, since their emergence in 1945, nuclear weapons have been physically used only twice, once on August 6 and again on August 10, 1945, by the United States against Japan in order to bring World War II in the Pacific to a close. Why, then, have a few states acquired so many nuclear weapons, and why do so many states want to acquire even

a few of them, when not one state professes a desire to use such weapons physically against another?

To ask the question this way is to highlight the effects that nuclear weapons have had on the four functions of force. First, nuclear weapons have helped shift the peacetime planning of the super and great powers away from defense and victory in a general war to prevention of it. This is not to say that no thought or effort at all goes into planning for defense and victory if such a war should occur, only that preventing its occurrence has become the overriding priority of these powers. Why? The answer is that with nuclear weapons, as Schelling puts it, "victory is no longer a prerequisite for hurting the enemy."⁵ One can now destroy an enemy without first having vanquished him. Nuclear weapons have separated the power to hurt from the power to defeat. America and Russia each have it within their power to kill the bulk of the population of the other without first having destroyed the other's military forces. America and Russia can each absorb a devastating blow from the other and still retaliate in kind. A general nuclear war between these two offers the reality of mutual annihilation, of simply two losers and no winners. A general nuclear war between the two superpowers does not have to look like that. But it easily could. Therefore, because of what nuclear weapons can do, the avoidance of situations that could lead to such a war between them has the highest priority for each superpower. Because defense against a large scale nuclear attack has been deemed impossible, preventing such an attack by deterring it has become the goal. In a mutual assured destruction (MAD) situation, the peaceful use of force tends to prevail.

Second, nuclear weapons have not been used for physical compellence, save by the United States against Japan in 1945. Such usage has been avoided for three reasons: first is the fear of escalation and loss of control; second is the commitment to preserve the belief that nuclear weapons are different from conventional ones, even when at low kilotonages, the effects of nuclear weapons are practically indistinguishable from those of conventional weapons; third is the determination of the two superpowers to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to states other than the six that now unequivocally have them. In their relations with one another, the two superpowers have generally avoided acts of physical compellence of any kind. Such acts carry with them great risks of escalation to a general war. Each superpower, moreover, is too strong and too concerned with its world-wide image to allow itself to

5. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

be pushed around so blatantly by the other. In their relations with the other's major allies, the two superpowers have also avoided such compelling actions for the same reasons that they have observed restraint in their one-to-one relations. Neither superpower nor the other nuclear states have employed physical nuclear compellence against non-nuclear states because of the far-flung alliances and quasi-commitments of the other superpower and because of the presumed effects that such actions would have on nuclear proliferation. As will be discussed shortly, nuclear weapons bring many advantages to the nuclear states, especially to the two superpowers. In order to retain their monopolistic position, the nuclear states must refrain from actions that increase the incentives of non-nuclear states to join the nuclear club. Using them in acts of war against the nuclear have-nots is not the way to attain this result.

Third, nuclear weapons have much swagger appeal for the great powers of today. Every recent era has had its prestige weapons—dreadnoughts in the 1894–1914 period, bombers and aircraft in the interwar period, nuclear missiles in the postwar period. In each era, those powers that were great, or had the wherewithall to be great, had, or acquired, the period's prestige weapons. For the great powers of the pre-nuclear era, prestige weapons bought prestige because they enhanced the nation's power, autonomy, and security. For the smaller powers that could afford very few of them, such weapons bought greater notice but not greater security or great power status. Today, nuclear weapons have bought prestige for the nuclear great powers, but have not catapulted them into the ranks of the superpowers. Nor is it evident that such weapons have made England, France, India, and even China more secure than they would be without them. Britain and France have argued that their nuclear forces have made them more secure than if they had had to rely solely on the American nuclear guarantee. Both, however, consider themselves dependent ultimately on the United States for their security vis-à-vis Russia. For if they took seriously their own arguments, they would have left the NATO Alliance long ago. India has the interesting virtue of being protected by both superpowers, of having been brought under America's nuclear umbrella in 1965 and of having signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Russia in 1971. The greater security that India has acquired by her "peaceful" nuclear explosion of 1974 is not evident. It is not even clear-cut whether China's nuclear forces make her more nearly secure against Russia. America's interest in playing off China against the Soviet Union is probably her best guarantee of security.

It is a mistake, however, to argue that nuclear weapons have no security value at all for these great powers. This is, after all, an uncertain world. Ten hydrogen bombs may be as good as one thousand in order to deter an attack. But the contribution to their security that these weapons make is indefinite enough and the opportunity costs of acquiring strategic nuclear forces, even for these great powers, high enough, to argue that security alone cannot account for the decision to go nuclear. Surely swagger motives loomed heavily in the decision of each. With her nuclear weapons, England for a time was able to buy into the councils of the superpowers when her other resources no longer justified a position as a preeminent world power. With her *force de frappe*, France was better able to pursue *grandeur* and strike a position more independent of the United States. With her claim to be the leader of the world's nonaligned nations severely tarnished, India's nuclear capability bolstered her sagging prestige. With a rapidly aging conventional army, China's nuclear forces, rudimentary though they are, nevertheless enable her to claim to have at least a foothold into the modern sinews of strength. Some of the same motives that impelled the present great powers to go nuclear are at work today in the great powers of tomorrow, such as Brazil. Because nuclear weapons are one of the prime symbols of today's militarily powerful and politically important state, they enable their possessors to lay claim to be something more than mere regional powers. For the great power nuclear state, even if the capability for a world role is not there, the aspiration and pretension to it are. And, after all, in international politics, aspiration and pretension to greatness are two important ingredients.

Fourth, the political utility of peaceful nuclear compellence is not clear because it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about its efficacy from the few instances in which it has been employed.⁶ Peaceful compellence, it will be recalled, involves actions that do not cause physical destruction to a state but that require it (or threaten to require it) to pay a significant price until it changes its behavior. Arms races are the most prevalent form of peaceful compellence. If entered into and intensely pursued, they will result in one adversary altering the behavior of another, or in one adversary countering the actions of the other and producing a stalemate, or in war between the two of them.

6. See Part Two of Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), for a detailed analysis of most of the post-1945 cases. Although their book centers on nuclear deterrence, several instances of peaceful nuclear compellence are reviewed.

The American-Russian nuclear arms race is one instance of peaceful nuclear compellence, but the extent to which each has been able to compel the other is difficult to ascertain. The motives of each superpower in acquiring large, sophisticated nuclear forces have involved goals other than compellence of one another, such as, for example, the preservation of the cohesion of their respective alliances, the retardation of the spread of nuclear weapons, and the courting of domestic political pressure groups. Because the motives of each have been mixed, the measurement of results is complex. An action not designed to compel but that in fact does can hardly be termed successful compellence. Not only the mixture of motives but the incompleteness of evidence makes assessment of this arms race difficult. One can, for example, argue with plausibility that the United States has succeeded in compelling Russia to accept, if not embrace, the logic of mutual assured destruction, and, equally, that it has failed to compel her to do so. In support of the former position, one can point to the severe limitations on ABM systems built into the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Accords in order to demonstrate that the Russians have accepted the principle that the nuclear offense should always get through. In support of the latter position, one can point to Russia's current active civil defense program and to the extensive modernization of her offensive, hard-target-kill systems in order to argue that her acceptance of an ABM limitation in 1972 was only a tactical step designed to stave off an American ABM system at a time when the Russians thought the Americans held a lead in defensive technology. The problem is that the evidence supports both positions. As the example makes clear, the mixture of motives and the ambiguity about results make definitive assessment of the compellent aspects of this arms race difficult.

Similar difficulties surround the assessment of the political utility of compellent nuclear threats issued by the superpowers.⁷ Was it Khrushchev's threat to use nuclear weapons against England and France, or Eisenhower's firm opposition and threat to cut off American oil supplies, that caused England and France and Israel to withdraw their invasion of Egypt in 1956? Did Khrushchev in fact issue his threats precisely because he knew that the United States was opposed to the Suez invasion? Was it Eisenhower's threat in early 1953 to use nuclear weapons against China, or war weariness, prolonged military stalemate, and especially the re-evaluation of Soviet for-

7. Recall the distinction between deterrent threats and compellent threats. The former are threats designed to persuade an adversary *not* to change his present behavior. The latter are threats designed to persuade an adversary to *change* his present behavior.

eign policy after the death of Stalin in March, that brought the Chinese communists to conclude the Korean armistice on July 27, 1953? Was it Kennedy's implied threat that he would risk nuclear war, or America's local conventional superiority and ability to invade Cuba and humiliate Russia, that caused Khrushchev to remove Russia's offensive missiles from Cuba in 1962? Moreover, how valid a test of the efficacy of peaceful nuclear compellence for the future is the Cuban case, when one superpower had practically a first strike nuclear capability vis-à-vis the other, a condition unlikely to occur again? Was it America's going on a low level, world wide nuclear alert in the midst of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, or America's pre-determined, calculated strategy of producing a military stalemate (and saving the encircled Egyptian Third Army) as the necessary precursor to negotiations to conclude a real peace, that dissuaded the Russians from sending troops unilaterally into that war? The answers to these questions are not clear cut, and that is precisely the point.

The factors that make judgments about the efficacy of compellent nuclear threats highly tentative also explain the rarity of their occurrence. There are only three possible outcomes to the issuance of a compellent nuclear threat: 1) the threat produces the desired change in the threatened nation's behavior; 2) the threat does not produce the change in behavior and the threatener then implements his threat (uses his nuclear weapons); or 3) the threat does not produce the change in behavior and the threatener chooses not to implement it. The problem with compellent nuclear threats is that the first is not a likely outcome because both the threatener and the threatened are fully cognizant that the second is not a likely outcome either. That leaves the third as the most likely outcome, but then such threats become merely idle ones.

In order for threats to be effective, the persons against whom they are directed must believe that the threats will be carried out if the actions they are designed to produce are not forthcoming. If compellent nuclear threats had to be implemented, they would carry high risk of bringing on a nuclear war, limited or total, because other nuclear nations, especially one or both superpowers, depending on the circumstances, would not be likely to permit the threatener to act with impunity. Each superpower has publicly pledged itself to prevent the use of nuclear weapons and to prevent others from being blackmailed or blasted by them. If either superpower permitted nuclear weapons to be used with impunity, the credibility of its extensive commitments would be weakened and nuclear proliferation further stimulated, two conditions neither superpower wishes to see materialize. But if compellent

nuclear threats were issued, were ineffective in producing the desired change in behavior, and were then not carried out, the threatener would suffer a loss of face. Because (or as long as) all nations still desire to preclude the physical use of nuclear weapons, compellent nuclear threats carry little credibility, except in the most pressing, vital, or exceptional circumstances. And in those few instances in which they are issued, because of the great risks potentially involved, they are guarded, ambiguous, or leave sufficient room for backtracking. It is for these reasons that compellent nuclear threats are both rarely made and usually carefully hedged when made.⁸

Are we to assume from the discussion thus far that the changes wrought in international relations by nuclear weapons are merely purported, not real? America and Russia, after all, still deploy extensive conventional forces and still spend the bulk of their defense dollars on them. America's possession of nuclear weapons did not stop the formation of the OPEC cartel nor break it up, did not enable her to win in Vietnam, prevail in Angola, or impose her will in the Middle East. Russia's possession of nuclear weapons has not stopped the slow erosion of her control over Eastern Europe nor enabled her to regain ideological supremacy in the world communist movement. Nuclear weapons are of little utility for overt compellence, have never been tested for their defensive value, and appear suited primarily for deterring attacks on the superpowers' and their allies' homelands and secondarily for swaggering by the great powers. Are we therefore to conclude that nuclear states, particularly the superpowers, are "nuclearly muscle bound", that they cannot use such force politically because all nations believe that it is too destructive to use physically?

Such a conclusion is clearly wrong. Simple analysis will show why. First,

8. Eisenhower's threatened use of nuclear weapons against the Chinese communists in 1953 illustrates this point perfectly:

One possibility (to hasten progress in the armistice talks) was to let the Communist authorities understand that, *in the absence of satisfactory progress, we intended to move decisively without inhibition in our use of weapons, and would no longer be responsible for confining hostilities to the Korean Peninsula*. . . . In India and in the Formosa Straits area, and at the truce negotiations at Panmunjom, we dropped the word discreetly of our intention. We felt quite sure it would reach Soviet and Chinese Communist ears.—From Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, quoted in George and Smoke, p. 238.

General Mark Clark, chief United Nations negotiator at Panmunjom, communicated a subsequent threat in the following fashion:

If . . . the Communists rejected this final offer and made no constructive proposals of their own, I was authorized to *break off* the truce talks rather than to recess them, and to carry on the war in new ways never yet tried in Korea.—From Mark Clark, *From the Danube to the Yalu*, quoted in George and Smoke, p. 239.

the capability that each superpower has to deter attacks on its homeland is not trivial. With its nuclear retaliatory capability, each superpower has achieved a degree of security more comfortable than that which any other great power in the post-feudal era, with the possible exception of England from 1815 to 1900, ever enjoyed. To be secure in a world where others are insecure is a decisive advantage. It means that each superpower has been released from the overweening concentration on physical security that has plagued every other great power of the past. It means that each superpower is freer than other nations to divert its energies and resources to tasks other than buying security. It means that each superpower can use the protection of its nuclear umbrella in order to bargain for and wrest concessions, political, economic, or military, from other nations. It means that each superpower, because it deals from a position of bedrock strength, has the essential prerequisite for conducting an effective diplomacy. One need only compare the post-1968 era with the decade before World War I or that before World War II in order to see how much freer from security worries are the superpowers today than were the great powers yesterday. Such security, finally, can be bought "on the cheap." In order to assure their retaliatory capability, each superpower need spend no more than one quarter to one-third of its defense budget on strategic nuclear forces. Precisely because security can be bought so cheaply with nuclear weapons is each superpower able to use the bulk of its defense dollars on conventional forces, which can be readily employed and more finely tuned.⁹

To state, therefore, that nuclear weapons have little political utility because they best fulfill only the function of deterrence misses the point. It is precisely because of the high degree of security which nuclear deterrence supplies for each superpower that three potentially useful political advantages are created to be exploited diplomatically: 1) a wide margin of safety for diplomatic maneuvering (and error); 2) a capacity to trade its nuclear protection for those things that each superpower values highly and wants from others; 3) a security so efficiently provided that many resources are freed up for other pursuits. Compared to the advantages enjoyed by most nations, these are considerable benefits. Nuclear weapons may be poorly suited for overt com-

9. The \$25 to \$40 billion that the United States spends on its strategic nuclear forces is not cheap absolutely. But the percentage of the total defense budget of \$125 billion for FY 1979 that this \$25 to \$40 billion represents is quite small compared to what great powers of the past had to spend from their total defense budgets to buy security from attack. The assertion must be viewed in comparative terms to see its worth.

pellence, but simply to stop at deterrence in assessing their political utility is wrongheaded. Between simple deterrence and overt compellence lies a large, fertile field for the informal, subtle, behind-the-scenes political employment of nuclear weapons. To focus solely on security, then, blinds one to the political advantages that a nation more nearly secure from attack than others thereby gains. In a world in which security is the prime requisite for successful diplomacy, those who have more of it are better placed to conduct an effective foreign policy than those who have less of it. The superpowers are better placed than the four nuclear great powers, but those four are better placed than the non-nuclear great powers. It is, therefore, the second-order effects of nuclear deterrence that are critical to consider when weighing the political advantages that nuclear weapons bring to their possessors.

Second, it is mistaken to assume that the great destructive potential of nuclear weapons *per se* diminishes their political utility, that somehow great power can lead to utter impotence. There exist two powerful restraints on the physical and political uses of nuclear weapons. One has already been discussed, namely, the intent of the superpowers to avoid those actions that will strengthen the incentives of other nations to acquire nuclear weapons.¹⁰ As the "market leaders," the superpowers understandably do not want the advantages they gain from their forces to be diminished by a gradual erosion of the nuclear oligopoly and of their own special duopolistic position.¹¹ If the superpowers reap political benefits from their forces without using them physically, if the short term risks in so using them are extraordinarily high, and if such use would stimulate their spread over the medium term, then simple logic dictates avoiding their warlike use and exploiting their peaceful use. But even their peaceful use must be exploited with subtlety; for if the advantages of having them are too clearly demonstrated or too fully and blatantly exploited, the incentives for others to acquire them will be enhanced further. It is, therefore, not the devastation alone that nuclear weapons can

10. The 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Accord (SALT I) between the two superpowers makes explicit this intent. Appendix 9 of the Accord sets forth the intention of the two nations "to remove the danger of nuclear war and of the use of nuclear weapons". Accordingly, they both agree to act in ways "so as to exclude the outbreak of nuclear war between them and between either of the parties and other countries". The desire to prevent nuclear war has an anti-proliferation intent to it in addition to the other obvious reasons for the policy. See Mason Willrich and John B. Rhineland, *SALT—The Moscow Agreements and Beyond* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. 340.

11. For an argument that powerfully sets forth the reasons why the superpowers should not worry about the spread of nuclear weapons, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "What Will the Spread of Nuclear Weapons Do to the World?" *Adelphi Paper*, forthcoming.

wreak, but the desire of the superpowers to preserve their privileged position, that inhibits their physical use and constrains their political use.

Another powerful restraint is presently at work: America's strategic nuclear power is checked by Russia's strategic nuclear power. This has not always been the case. For four years (1945–1949) America held a nuclear monopoly. For the next fifteen years (1950–1965) she had a decisive superiority. For five of those fifteen years (1961–1965) she may even have had a first strike capability vis-à-vis Russia. But even during the years of its strategic nuclear inferiority, the Soviet Union, with its intermediate range missiles and bombers, was able to check America's strategic superiority by holding Western European cities hostage to nuclear threat. And ever since the late 1960s the Soviet Union, with its extensive intercontinental missile capability, has been able to hold American cities hostage too. The simple fact is that for most of the post-1945 era, each superpower has been able to balance the nuclear forces of the other with its own, even when it did not have an intercontinental retaliatory capability.¹²

For the foreseeable future, the strategic nuclear balance between the two superpowers is nearly "indestructible".¹³ Each superpower can deter the other. Neither, therefore, can conquer the other. Each can offset any strategically destabilizing actions of the other. Neither, therefore, can hope to achieve a decisive superiority. Each worries about the other's likely reactions to nuclear threats or actions that it might initiate against third parties. Neither, therefore, can be "footloose and free" with its nuclear forces against third parties. Both, moreover, restrain the present nuclear great powers (and will do so for any future entrants) in the uses to which they can put their nuclear forces. The two superpowers are "doomed" to compete without hope of victory. One's nuclear power checks the other's. Nuclear weapons are thus subject to the same laws of international politics as are conventional weapons: it is not absolute but relative power that counts; it is power checking power that restrains the exercise of force. It is because *two* competing superpowers have such large strategic forces, not because each has great nuclear power *per se*, that both are constrained in how they can use it. It takes only "two to balance", and it is the superpower's nuclear *pas de deux* that helps set the parameters for the political utility of these weapons.

12. The United States did not have a reliable intercontinental bomber capability until the early 1950s. Its bases in Europe were essential to provide it with the ability to strike at Soviet territory.

13. The word is Kenneth Waltz's. See his *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1979), chapter 8.

Third, in assessing their utility, it is wrong to expect from nuclear weapons that which is beyond the capability of military power in general to achieve. There are inherent limits to what force can accomplish. Military power can be used to conquer the territory of another nation, but not to conquer the minds of its inhabitants. Military power is a necessary ingredient for political power, but is no substitute for political support and political leadership. Military power can create the necessary political preconditions for an economy to prosper, but cannot substitute for the industry of a people or for a sound trading and monetary policy.¹⁴ First and foremost, a state uses its military power to check, deter, or defend against the forces of another nation. With greater difficulty it tries to compel others, but compellence, as we have seen, is difficult to achieve. Force can easily be used to maim and kill, but only with greater difficulty and with great expenditure of effort, to rule and pacify. Nuclear weapons can maim and kill more swiftly and with greater ease than can conventional weapons, but they do not thereby automatically enable one nation to rule or pacify another, nor to bring political harmony to its populace. The effectiveness with which military functions can be discharged does not translate directly into the effectiveness with which political functions can be performed. If that were the case, then military power alone would be sufficient to conduct a successful foreign policy. But that, clearly, is not the case. If one nation possesses a military edge over another, it is in a stronger bargaining position than it would otherwise be. But it still has to bargain, and it is here that diplomatic-political skills and economic resources come into play. In international relations, superior military strength means enhanced resources with which to bargain, but does not guarantee outright control. As Kenneth Waltz has succinctly put it: "Inability to exercise *political* control over others does not indicate *military* weakness."¹⁵

Even for the greatest of nations, moreover, military power is always in short supply. Great powers have great ambition and, consequently, need to ration their military power among competing goals. Smaller powers have great needs and little wherewithall to satisfy them and, consequently, must carefully husband their military power for the most pressing needs. For the great and small alike, there are, in addition, always opportunity costs in the

14. For a brilliant sketch of the role that American military power played in creating the political conditions conducive to economic and monetary expansion, see Robert Gilpin, *U. S. Power and the Multinationals* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), chapter 4.

15. Kenneth N. Waltz, "National Force, International Structure and the World Balance of Power," *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 21, 1967. Reprinted in part in Robert Art and Robert Jervis, editors, *International Politics* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 252.

exercise of military power. Except in those situations in which a nation is fighting for its very existence, there are always good reasons for limiting the amount of force actually applied to achieve a given goal. Thus, military power is a necessary ingredient for political and economic success in international relations, but not the *sole* ingredient. No matter how militarily powerful a nation is, force cannot achieve those things for which only political skill and economic industry are suited. In an anarchic world, it is better to be militarily strong than weak. But such strength alone, especially when there are other strong powers, is not a panacea. Therefore, to expect from nuclear force that which force in general is poorly suited to achieve is to attribute to the particular type that which is not valid for the class in general.

Nuclear weapons have made a difference to the way that states relate to each other, but they have not radically transformed their relations. These weapons have affected less what states aspire to than how they go about achieving their aspirations. What nuclear weapons have not done is therefore as important to note as what they have done. Nuclear weapons have not made their possessors omnipotent, but neither have they rendered them impotent. Nuclear weapons have not been the great equalizers, automatically catapulting their great power possessors into the ranks of the superpowers; but they have given the nuclear great powers more independence than they might otherwise have had. Nuclear weapons have not obviated the need for most states, even the great nuclear powers, to conclude alliances in order to enhance their security; but these weapons have strengthened the ability of the superpowers to rely less on external alignments (alliances) than internal efforts (second strike retaliatory forces) for their security. Nuclear weapons have not ended war, but so far they have helped to prevent a general war between the superpowers from breaking out.

In the final analysis, it is the last effect that is the most profound. Nuclear weapons have not brought peace to the world, but they have helped to prevent the world wars that plagued the planet in the first half of the twentieth century. By definition, the strongest powers are the most important actors in international politics. What they do vitally affects what happens to the lesser powers. In the past, whenever most or all of the great powers fought amongst themselves, the other nations were inevitably dragged into war. This was the case for the three great power wars of the last two hundred years—the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, World War I, and World War II. Since 1945, the emphasis in the peacetime military planning of America and Russia, this era's great powers, has shifted from defense and

victory in a general war to prevention of it. Fears of the consequences of a general nuclear war have helped cause this shift. Nuclear deterrence has been the prime mechanism of prevention. Nuclear deterrence has thereby reinforced the stability in superpower relations (stability defined as a low probability of general war) that is an inherent propensity of a bipolar structure. Nuclear weapons have not ended rivalry between the superpowers, but they have helped to make it stable and predictable. And that stability, the hallmark of post-1945 international relations, has in turn benefited the rest of the world.

What Is the Future of Force?

If the past be any guide to the future, then military power will remain central to the course of international relations. Those states that do not have the wherewithall to field large forces (for example, Denmark) or those that choose to field forces far smaller than their economies can bear (for example, Japan) will pay the price. Both will find themselves with less control over their own fate than would otherwise be the case. Those states that field powerful military forces will find themselves in greater control, but also that their great military power can produce unintended effects and that such power is not a solution to all their problems. For both the strong and the weak, however, as long as anarchy obtains, force will remain the final arbiter to resolve the disputes that arise among them. As has always been the case, most disputes will be settled short of the physical use of force. But as long as the physical use of force remains a viable option, military power will vitally affect the manner in which all states in peacetime deal with one another.

This is a conclusion not universally nor even widely held today. Three schools of thought challenge it. First are those who argue that nuclear weapons make war, nuclear or conventional, between America and Russia or between the NATO Alliance and the Warsaw Pact unthinkable. Hopefully that is the case. But, as we have argued, one does not measure the utility of force simply by the frequency with which it is used physically. To argue that force is on the wane because war in Europe has not occurred is to confuse effect with cause. The probability of war between America and Russia or between NATO and the Warsaw Pact is practically nil precisely because the military planning and deployments of each, together with the fears of escalation to general nuclear war, keep it that way. The absence of war in the European theater does not thereby signify the irrelevance of military power

to East-West relations but rather the opposite. The estimates of relative strength between these two sets of forces, moreover, intimately affect the political and economic relations between Eastern and Western Europe. A stable balance of forces creates a political climate conducive to trade. An unstable balance of forces heightens political tensions that are disruptive to trade. The chances for general war are quite small, but the fact that it nevertheless remains possible vitally shapes the peacetime relations of the European powers to one another and to their superpower protectors.

Second are those who argue that the common problems of mankind, such as pollution, energy and other raw material scarcities, have made war and military power passé. In fact, their argument is stronger: the common problems that all nations now confront make it *imperative* that they cooperate in order to solve them. This argument, however, is less a statement of fact about the present than a fervent hope for the future. Unfortunately, proof of how the future will look is not available in the present. Cooperation among nations today, such as it is, should not make us sanguine about their ability to surmount their conflicts for the good of all. It takes a strong imagination, moreover, to assume that what some nations term common problems are viewed as such by all. One man's overpopulation, for example, is another man's source of strength. China and India are rightly concerned about the deleterious effects of their population growth on their standard of living. But Nigeria, whose source of power and influence within Africa rests partly on a population that is huge by African standards, is not. The elemental rule of international relations is that the circumstances of states differ. Hence so too do their interests and perspectives. Not only do they have different solutions to the same problem, they do not always or often agree on what are the problems. As long as anarchy obtains, therefore, there will be no agency above states powerful enough to create and enforce a consensus. As long as anarchy obtains, therefore, military power deployed by individual states will play a vital role both in defining what are the problems and in hastening or delaying their solutions. Only when world government arrives will the ability of every nation to resort to force cease to be an option. But even then, the importance of force will endure. For every government has need of an army.

Finally, there are those who proclaim that the nations of the world have become so economically intertwined that military power is no longer of use because its use is no longer credible. A nation whose economic interests are deeply entangled with another's cannot use force against it because to do so would be to harm itself in the process. Interests intertwined render force unusable—so believe the "interdependencia theorists." Two of the leading

proponents of this view have forcefully argued that when "military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region," then "complex interdependence" prevails.¹⁶ Under such a condition:

As military force is devalued, strong states will find it more difficult to use their overall dominance to control outcomes on issues in which they are weak. . . .

The negligible role of force leads us to expect states to rely more on other instruments in order to wield power. . . .

Intense relationships of mutual influence exist among these countries, but in most of them force is irrelevant or unimportant as an instrument of policy.¹⁷

This condition of complex interdependence now obtains for the United States in its relations with its key allies—Western Europe, Canada, and Japan. And it can be expected to hold for America's relations with other nations where military power is not usable.

This view of the world is odd. How can American military power, which is the cement binding the great powers of the free world together, be "irrelevant or unimportant as a tool of policy?" American military power has created and sustained the political preconditions necessary for the evolutionary intertwining of the American, Canadian, Japanese, and Western European economies. That which the commitment of American power has created and sustained could easily unravel should the commitment be withdrawn. It is therefore strange to argue that force has no utility among states that are closely united when force has been responsible for uniting them. The Japanese, Canadians, and Western Europeans know that they remain dependent for their security on American military power, especially the American nuclear umbrella. It would be odd indeed if this dependence were not exploited by the United States on political and economic matters of interest to it. Military preeminence has never ensured political and economic preeminence. But it does put one nation in a stronger bargaining position that, if skillfully exploited, can be fashioned for non-military goals. Force cannot be irrelevant as a tool of policy for America's economic relations with her great power allies: America's military preeminence politically pervades these relations. It is the cement of economic interdependence.

A simple example will clarify the point. In 1945, convinced that competitive

16. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), p. 25.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 30, and 32.

devaluations of currencies made the depression of the 1930s deeper and longer than need be, America pushed for fixed exchange rates. Her view prevailed, and the Bretton Woods structure of fixed exchange rates, with small permissible variations monitored by the International Monetary Fund, was set up and lasted until 1971. In that year, because of the huge outflow of dollars over a twenty-five year period, the United States found it to its best interests to close the gold window—that is, to suspend the commitment to pay out gold for dollars that any nation turned in. Under Bretton Woods the relations of the free world's currencies to one another were fixed in the relation of each to the dollar, which in turn was fixed in value by its relation to the standard “one ounce of gold equals thirty-five dollars.” By closing the gold window, the United States shattered that standard, caused the price of an ounce of gold in dollars to soar, destroyed the fixed benchmark according to which all currencies were measured, and ushered in the era of floating exchange rates. In sum, America both made and unmade the Bretton Woods system. In 1945 she persuaded her allies. In 1971 she acted unilaterally and against their wishes.

Under both fixed and floating exchange rates, moreover, the United States has confronted her great power allies with an unpleasant choice. Either they could accept and hold onto the dollars flowing out of the United States and thereby add to their inflation at home by increasing their money supplies; or they could refuse the dollars, watch the value of their currencies in relation to the dollar rise, make their exports more expensive (exports upon which all these nations heavily rely), and threaten a decline in exports with the concomitant risk of a recession. America's economic and military strength has enabled her for over twenty years to confront her great power allies with the choice of inflation or recession for their economies. America did not have to use her military power directly to structure the choice this way, nor to make and break the system. Her economic strength, still greater than that of most of her great power allies combined, gave her considerable bargaining power. But without her military preeminence and their military dependence, she could never have acted as she did. America used her military power politically to cope with her dollar valuation problem.¹⁸

18. Even Nye and Keohane admit that “when the direct use of force is barred among a group of countries, . . . military power can still be used politically” (*Ibid.*, pg 28). Militarily strong states will try to link their military strength to economic and political issues in order to get their way. The fact that they admit to the efficacy of military power politically in a situation of complex interdependence makes it hard for the reader to accept the validity of their prior claim

In a similar vein, others argue that the United States can no longer use its military power against key Third World nations to achieve its aims because of its dependence on their raw materials or because of its needs to sell them manufactured goods. In order to assess the validity of this argument, four factors must be kept in mind. First, the efficacy of military power should not be confused with the will to use it. In the mid- and late 1970s, as a consequence of the experience with Vietnam, America's foreign policy elite was reluctant to commit American conventional forces to combat. Its calculation has been that the American public would not tolerate such actions, except for the most compelling and extreme of circumstances. The non-use of American military power in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the late 1970s stems as much from American domestic political restraints as from anything else.

Second, it is important to recall a point made earlier about the inherent limits of military power to achieve economic objectives. A superior military position can give one state a bargaining edge over another in the conduct of their bilateral economic relations, but bargains must still be struck. And that requires compromise by both parties. Only by conquest, occupation, and rule, or by a credible threat to that effect, can one state guarantee that another will conduct its economic relations on terms most favorable to the (would-be) conqueror. Short of that, the economic relations between two states are settled on the basis of each state's perception of its own economic interests, on differences in the strength, size, and diversity of their economies, on differences in the degree to which each state coordinates the activities of its interest groups and hence centrally manages its economy, and on the differential in their military capabilities. Because military power is only one of the ingredients that determine the economic relations between two states, its role is not always, nor usually, overriding. By itself superiority in arms does not guarantee, nor has it ever guaranteed, superiority in economic leverage. In this sense, although there may be clear limits on what the United States through its military power can achieve in its economic relations with the Third World, much of the constraint stems from the limits that inhere in translating military power into economic ends.

that force is "irrelevant as a tool of policy." Nye and Keohane have confused the issue because they have committed the cardinal error of measuring the political utility of force by the frequency with which it is used physically.

Third, America's economic power relative to others has waned in the 1970s. The 1950s were characterized by a United States whose economic and military power far surpassed that of any other nation. With the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global military power in the 1970s, America's freedom to intervene militarily around the world, unimpeded by concerns about the counteractions of another global power, has drastically declined. But America's economic freedom worldwide has also waned. Whether measured by the diminished role of the dollar as the world's reserve currency, by the persistent lack of a favorable trade balance, by a smaller percentage of the world's trade accounted for by American imports and exports, by a decline in the productivity of its labor force, or by a greater dependence on imported raw materials, the United States economy is not as self-sufficient and immune from economic events beyond its borders as it once was. Analysts disagree over the extent to which, and the reasons why, the health of the American economy has become more dependent on the actions of other nations; but they do not disagree on the fact of greater dependence.¹⁹ If the hallmark of the fifties and sixties was America's military and economic preeminence, the hallmark of the seventies has been America's passing the zenith of her power and the consequent waning of this dual preeminence.

A diminishment in the economic power of a state is not easily compensated for by an edge in military capability. When that military edge also wanes, such compensation becomes even more difficult. Although the United States remains the world's strongest economic *and* military power, the gap between her strength in each dimension and that of other nations has narrowed in the seventies from that which was the case in the fifties and sixties. It is therefore wrongheaded to assert that America's diminished ability to get what it wants economically from allies and neutrals is due solely to the devaluation of military power. It is wrongheaded to assert that military power is devalued because it cannot solve economic problems when economic problems have never been readily or totally solved by military measures. It is wrongheaded to blame on military power that which has military and economic causes. The utility of force to a state for compellent purposes does diminish as the relative military power of a state declines. But the utility of

19. For clear statements of two views on the degree of dependence, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, chapter 7, who sees only a slight increase in America's economic dependence on foreign economic activity; and Nye and Keohane, *Power and Interdependence*, chapters 2, 3, and 8, who see a much greater dependence.

force for compellent economic purposes declines even more when a state's economic bargaining power concomitantly wanes.²⁰

Fourth, force cannot be efficiently used to achieve goals when ambivalence exists over the goal to be attained. America's increasing dependence on oil imports classically illustrates this problem. Many have taken the decision by the United States not to use military power against OPEC nations in order to get them to lower the price of their oil as a sign of the devaluation of military power in the contemporary world. It would, of course, be absurd to deny the fact that as many of the OPEC nations make strenuous efforts to strengthen themselves militarily, often with American help, the ability of the United States to wield military power against them diminishes. It would be absurd to deny the fact that the potency of the Third World's virulent nationalism has restrained the great powers in their military adventures against those nations. It would be absurd to deny that the 1970s are not different from the 1870s and 1880s, when the European great powers, restrained only by their fears of each other's counteractions, intervened militarily at will in Asia and Africa against poorly armed and politically fragmented "nations." Clearly the political and military conditions for great power military intervention in such areas have drastically changed since then.

It would be equally absurd, however, to ignore the restraint on the use of force imposed by the inherent ambivalence of the United States with regard to the price it should pay for imported oil. In the short term, America's interest is in a stable supply of cheap oil; but if pursued over the long term, such a policy will yield an ever-increasing dependence on foreign oil (as happened by the early 1970s precisely as a consequence of just such a policy), a decline in the replenishment of world oil reserves because of the very cheapness of oil (and especially that of the Middle East), and the lack of a vigorous program to develop alternative energy sources. In the short term, cheap oil reduces America's balance of payments deficit, reduces inflation, and removes a drag on aggregate demand. Over the long term, it promotes greater dependence and rapid depletion of the world's oil reserves. In the short term, expensive oil worsens the nation's balance of payments deficit,

20. Simple though it may sound, this view is at odds with one of the popular current theories, that propounded by Nye and Keohane. For them, "complex interdependence" obtains when military power is devalued as an instrument of foreign policy. I have argued that such a view distorts what has occurred. The world is more complex, if not more interdependent, for the United States, simply because of the waning of her economic and military strength. Nye and Keohane's explanation for what they term complex interdependence is, to my taste, too simple.

increases inflation, and lessens aggregate demand. Over the long term, it promotes conservation, the search for more oil, the development of alternative energy sources, and the likelihood of a decreasing dependence on foreign energy imports.

Faced with such a Hobson's choice, how should America use its military power? It is within her military capability, if she chose to invest the necessary resources, to invade Saudi Arabia, which has a quarter of the world's proven reserves of oil, and secure the oil fields, or better yet, Kuwait, which has smaller though still sizeable reserves, but many fewer people. It would be difficult, but it could be done. *Should* it be done? In the face of the unpleasant choice posed above, and solely on its economic merits, the benefits to the United States of such military intervention are not self-evident. And that is the point. Military power is not useful for solving an economic problem which has no simple or single best solution. Certainly much of America's restraint in her dealings with OPEC, if not her downright ambivalence, stems from an uncertainty over what is in her own best economic interest, or from an unacknowledged but tacit agreement by her foreign policy elite that a rise in the price of imported oil is to America's long-term interest. If it be the latter, then understandably the United States has opted for a stable supply of expensive oil and has used her influence and military power in the Middle East to that end.

American actions aside, the record of the late 1970s simply does not support the assertion that the efficacy of military power is on the wane. Recent Russian successes in Angola, Ehtiopia, Southern Yemen, Afghanistan, and Cambodia have all been predicated on the use of Russian military power, sometimes in concert with that of Cuba. Because she continues to pour huge resources into her military machine, Russia evidently does not believe that force has lost its potency. In their relations with one another, conventional military power for the Third World nations remains a vital instrument of foreign policy. Simply recall these events of the last four years: The Tanzanian-Ugandan War, the Northern Yemen-Southern Yemen War, the Ethiopian-Somalian War, the Sino-Vietnam War, the Cambodian-Vietnam War, the Libyan-Egyptian border clashes, the Libyan-backed insurgency in Chad, the Angolan-backed insurgency in southern Zaire, the Moroccan takeover of the Spanish Sahara, and the Algerian-backed Polisaro War against Morocco. Nuclear weapons continue to entice and lure the non-nuclear power. Brazil and Pakistan in particular are in dogged pursuit of them. China urgently seeks to modernize its obsolete military forces. The NATO Alliance has

committed itself to a three percent real increase in its military spending. Above and beyond that, sentiment in the United States is building for a tremendous increase in military spending.

The efficacy of force endures. It must. For in anarchy, force and politics are connected. By itself, military power guarantees neither survival nor prosperity. But it is almost always the essential ingredient for both. Because resort to force is the ultimate card of all states, the seriousness of a state's intentions is conveyed fundamentally by its having a credible military posture. Without it, a state's diplomacy generally lacks effectiveness. Force need not be physically used to be politically useful. Threats need not be overtly made to be communicated. The mere presence of a credible military option is often sufficient to make the point. It is the capability to resort to military force if all else fails that serves as the most effective brake against having to do so. Lurking behind the scenes, unstated but explicit, lies the military muscle that gives meaning to the posturings of the diplomats. Diplomacy is the striking of compromises by parties with differing perspectives and clashing interests. The ultimate ability of each to resort to force disciplines the diplomats. Precisely because each knows that all can come to blows if they do not strike compromises do the diplomats engage in the hard work necessary to construct them. There is truth to the old adage: "The best way to keep the peace is first to prepare for war."