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*THE ART
OF COMMITMENT*

No one seems to doubt that federal troops are available to defend California. I have, however, heard Frenchmen doubt whether American troops can be counted on to defend France, or American missiles to blast Russia in case France is attacked.

It hardly seems necessary to tell the Russians that we should fight them if they attack *us*. But we go to great lengths to tell the Russians that they will have America to contend with if they or their satellites attack countries associated with us. Saying so, unfortunately, does not make it true; and if it is true, saying so does not always make it believed. We evidently do not want war and would only fight if we had to. The problem is to demonstrate that we would have to.

[It is a tradition in military planning to attend to an enemy's capabilities, not his intentions. But deterrence is about intentions—not just *estimating* enemy intentions but *influencing* them.] The hardest part is communicating our own intentions. War at best is ugly, costly, and dangerous, and at worst disastrous. Nations have been known to bluff; they have also been known to make threats sincerely and change their minds when the chips were down. Many territories are just not worth a war, especially a war that can get out of hand. A persuasive threat of war may deter an aggressor; the problem is to make it persuasive, to keep it from sounding like a bluff.

Military forces are commonly expected to defend their homelands, even to die gloriously in a futile effort at defense. When Churchill said that the British would fight on the beaches nobody supposed that he had sat up all night running once more through the calculations to make sure that that was the right

policy. Declaring war against Germany for the attack on Poland, though, was a different kind of decision, not a simple reflex but a matter of "policy." Some threats are inherently persuasive, some have to be made persuasive, and some are bound to look like bluffs.

This chapter is about the threats that are hard to make, the ones that are not inherently so credible that they can be taken for granted, the ones that commit a country to an action that it might in somebody's judgment prefer not to take. A good starting point is the national boundary. As a tentative approximation—a very tentative one—the difference between the national homeland and everything "abroad" is the difference between threats that are inherently credible, even if unspoken, and the threats that have to be made credible. To project the shadow of one's military force over other countries and territories is an act of diplomacy. To *fight* abroad is a military act, but to *persuade* enemies or allies that one would fight abroad, under circumstances of great cost and risk, requires more than a military capability. It requires projecting intentions. It requires *having* those intentions, even deliberately acquiring them, and communicating them persuasively to make other countries behave.

Credibility and Rationality

[It is a paradox of deterrence that in threatening to hurt somebody if he misbehaves, it need not make a critical difference how much it would hurt you too—if you can make him believe the threat.] People walk against traffic lights on busy streets, deterring trucks by walking in front of them.

The principle applied in Hungary in 1956. The West was deterred by fear of the consequences from entering into what might have been a legitimate altercation with the Soviet Union on the proper status of Hungary. The West was deterred not in the belief that the Soviet Union was stronger than the West or that a war, if it ensued, would hurt the West more than the Soviet bloc. The West was deterred because the Soviet Union was strong enough, and likely enough to react militarily, to make

Hungary seem not worth the risk, no matter who might get hurt worse.

[Another paradox of deterrence is that it does not always help to be, or to be believed to be, fully rational, cool-headed, and in control of oneself or of one's country.] One of Joseph Conrad's books, *The Secret Agent*, concerns a group of anarchists in London who were trying to destroy bourgeois society. One of their techniques was bomb explosions; Greenwich Observatory was the objective in this book. They got their nitroglycerin from a stunted little chemist. The authorities knew where they got their stuff and who made it for them. But this little purveyor of nitroglycerin walked safely past the London police. A young man who was tied in with the job at Greenwich asked him why the police did not capture him. His answer was that they would not shoot him from a distance—that would be a denial of bourgeois morality, and serve the anarchists' cause—and they dared not capture him physically because he always kept some "stuff" on his person. He kept a hand in his pocket, he said, holding a ball at the end of a tube that reached a container of nitroglycerin in his jacket pocket. All he had to do was to press that little ball and anybody within his immediate neighborhood would be blown to bits with him. His young companion wondered why the police would believe anything so preposterous as that the chemist would actually blow himself up. The little man's explanation was calm. "In the last instance it is character alone that makes for one's safety . . . I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly."¹

We can call him a fanatic, or a faker, or a shrewd diplomatist; but it was worth something to him to have it believed that he would do it, preposterous or not. I have been told that in mental institutions there are inmates who are either very crazy or very wise, or both, who make clear to the attendants that

1. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923), pp. 65-68.

they may slit their own veins or light their clothes on fire if they don't have their way. I understand that they sometimes have their way.

Recall the trouble we had persuading Mossadegh in the early 1950s that he might do his country irreparable damage if he did not become more reasonable with respect to his country and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Threats did not get through to him very well. He wore pajamas, and, according to reports, he wept. And when British or American diplomats tried to explain what would happen to his country if he continued to be obstinate, and why the West would not bail him out of his difficulties, it was apparently uncertain whether he even comprehended what was being said to him. It must have been a little like trying to persuade a new puppy that you will beat him to death if he wets on the floor. If he cannot hear you, or cannot understand you, or cannot control himself, the threat cannot work and you very likely will not even make it.

Sometimes we can get a little credit for not having everything quite under control, for being a little impulsive or unreliable. Teaming up with an impulsive ally may do it. There have been serious suggestions that nuclear weapons should be put directly at the disposal of German troops, on the grounds that the Germans would be less reluctant to use them—and that Soviet leaders know they would be less reluctant—than their American colleagues in the early stages of war or ambiguous aggression. And in part, the motive behind the proposals that authority to use nuclear weapons be delegated in peacetime to theater commanders or even lower levels of command, as in the presidential campaign of 1964, is to substitute military boldness for civilian hesitancy in a crisis or at least to make it look that way to the enemy. Sending a high-ranking military officer to Berlin, Quezoy, or Saigon in a crisis carries a suggestion that authority has been delegated to someone beyond the reach of political inhibition and bureaucratic delays, or even of presidential responsibility, someone whose personal reactions will be in a bold military tradition. The intense dissatisfaction of many senators with President Kennedy's restraint over Cuba in early 1962, and

with the way matters were left at the close of the crisis in that November, though in many ways an embarrassment to the President, may nevertheless have helped to convey to the Cubans and to the Soviets that, however peaceable the President might want to be, there were political limits to his patience.

A vivid exhibition of national impulsiveness at the highest level of government was described by Averell Harriman in his account of a meeting with Khrushchev in 1959. "Your generals," said Khrushchev, "talk of maintaining your position in Berlin with force. That is bluff." With what Harriman describes as angry emphasis, Khrushchev went on, "If you send in tanks, they will burn and make no mistake about it. If you want war, you can have it, but remember it will be your war. Our rockets will fly automatically." At this point, according to Harriman, Khrushchev's colleagues around the table chorused the word "automatically." The title of Harriman's article in *Life* magazine was, "My Alarming Interview with Khrushchev."² The premier's later desk-thumping with a shoe in the hall of the General Assembly was pictorial evidence that high-ranking Russians know how to put on a performance.

General Pierre Gallois, an outstanding French critic of American military policy, has credited Khrushchev with a "shrewd understanding of the politics of deterrence," evidenced by this "irrational outburst" in the presence of Secretary Harriman.³ Gallois "hardly sees Moscow launching its atomic missiles at Washington because of Berlin" (especially, I suppose, since Khrushchev may not have had any at the time), but apparently thinks nevertheless that the United States ought to appreciate, as Khrushchev did, the need for a kind of irrational automaticity and a commitment to blind and total retaliation.

Even granting, however, that somebody important may be somewhat intimidated by the Russian responsive chorus on automaticity, I doubt whether we want the American government to rely, for the credibility of its deterrent threat, on a corresponding ritual. We ought to get something a little less

2. July 13, 1959, p. 33.

3. *Revue de Défense Nationale*, October 1962.

idiosyncratic for 50 billion dollars a year of defense expenditure. A government that is obliged to appear responsible in its foreign policy can hardly cultivate forever the appearance of impetuosity on the most important decisions in its care. Khrushchev may have needed a short cut to deterrence, but the American government ought to be mature enough and rich enough to arrange a persuasive sequence of threatened responses that are not wholly a matter of guessing a president's temper.

Still, impetuosity, irrationality, and automaticity are not entirely without substance. Displays can be effective, and when President Kennedy took his turn at it people were impressed, possibly even people in the Kremlin. President Kennedy chose a most impressive occasion for his declaration on "automaticity." It was his address of October 22, 1962, launching the Cuban crisis. In an unusually deliberate and solemn statement he said, "Third: it shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union." Coming less than six months after Secretary McNamara's official elucidation of the strategy of controlled and flexible response, the reaction implied in the President's statement would have been not only irrational but probably—depending on just what "full retaliatory response" meant to the President or to the Russians—inconsistent with one of the foundations of the President's own military policy, a foundation that was laid as early as his first defense budget message of 1961, which stressed the importance of proportioning the response to the provocation, even in war itself.⁴ Nevertheless, it

4. Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter have evaluated this statement of Kennedy's in "Controlling the Risks in Cuba," *Adelphi Papers*, 17 (London, Institute for Strategic Studies, 1965). They agree that, "This does not sound like a controlled response." They go on to say, "The attempt, it appears, was to say that the United States would respond to a missile against its neighbors as it would respond to one against itself." And this policy, they say, would leave open the possibility of a controlled, or less than "full," reaction. Even if we disregard the word

was not entirely incredible; and, for all I know, the President meant it.

As a matter of fact it is most unlikely—actually it is inconceivable—that in preparing his address the President sent word to senior military and civilian officials that this particular paragraph of his speech was not to be construed as policy. Even if the paragraph was pure rhetoric, it would probably have been construed in the crisis atmosphere of that eventful Monday as an act of policy. Just affirming such a policy must have made it somewhat more likely that a single atomic explosion in this hemisphere would have been the signal for full-scale nuclear war.

Even if the President had said something quite contrary, had cautioned the Soviets that now was the time for them to take seriously Secretary McNamara's message and the President's own language about proportioning military response to the provocation; if he had served notice that the United States would not be panicked into all-out war by a single atomic event, particularly one that might not have been fully premeditated by the Soviet leadership; his remarks still would not have eliminated the *possibility* that a single Cuban missile, if it contained a nuclear warhead and exploded on the North American continent, could have triggered the full frantic fury of all-out war. While it is hard for a government, particularly a responsible government, to appear irrational whenever such an appearance is expedient, it is equally hard for a government, even a responsible one, to *guarantee* its own moderation in every circumstance.

"full," though, the threat is still one of nuclear war; and unless we qualify the words, "any nuclear missile," to mean enough to denote deliberate Soviet attack, the statement still has to be classed as akin to Khrushchev's rocket statement, with allowance for differences in style and circumstance. The point is not that the threat was necessarily either a mistake or a bluff, but that it did imply a reaction more readily taken on impulse than after reflection, a "disproportionate" act, one not necessarily serving the national interest if the contingency arose but nevertheless a possibly impressive threat if the government can be credited with that impulse.

All of this may suggest that deterrent threats are a matter of resolve, impetuosity, plain obstinacy, or, as the anarchist put it, sheer character. It is not easy to change our character; and becoming fanatic or impetuous would be a high price to pay for making our threats convincing. We have not the character of fanatics and cannot scare countries the way Hitler could. We have to substitute brains and skill for obstinacy or insanity. (Even then we are at some disadvantage: Hitler had the skill and the character—of a sort.)

If we could really make it believed that we would launch general war for every minor infraction of any code of etiquette that we wanted to publish for the Soviet bloc, and if there were high probability that the leaders in the Kremlin knew where their interests lay and would not destroy their own country out of sheer obstinacy, we could threaten anything we wanted to. We could lay down the rules and announce that if they broke any one of them we would inflict the nuclear equivalent of the Wrath of God. The fact that the flood would engulf us, too, is relevant to whether or not the Russians would believe us; but *if* we could make them believe us, the fact that we would suffer too might provide them little consolation.⁵ If we could credibly arrange it so that we had to carry out the threat, whether we wished to or not, we would not even be crazy to arrange it so—if we could be sure the Soviets understood the ineluctable consequences of infringing the rules and would have control over themselves. By

5. This is why Gandhi could stop trains by encouraging his followers to lie down on the tracks, and why construction-site integrationists could stop trucks and bulldozers by the same tactic; if a bulldozer can stop more quickly than a prostrate man can get out of its way, the threat becomes fully credible at the point when only the operator of the bulldozer can avert the bloodshed. The same principle is supposed to explain why a less-than-mortal attack on the Soviet Union by a French nuclear force, though exposing France to mortal attack in return, is a deterring prospect to the Soviet Union; credibility is the problem, and some French commentators have proposed legally arranging to put the French force beyond civilian control. American tanks in an anti-riot role may lack credibility, because they threaten too much, as the bulldozer does, even in the use of machine guns to protect each other; so a more credible—a less drastic and fully automatic—device is used to protect the armed steel monsters: a mildly electric bumper.

arranging it so that we might have to blow up the world, we would not have to.

But it is hard to make it believed. It would be hard to keep the Soviets from expecting that we would think it over once more and find a way to give them what my children call "one more chance." Just saying so won't do it. Mossadegh or the anarchist might succeed, but not the American government. What we have to do is to get ourselves into a position where we cannot fail to react as we said we would—where we just cannot help it—or where we would be obliged by some overwhelming cost of not reacting in the manner we had declared.]

*Coupling Capabilities to Objectives:
Relinquishing the Initiative*

Often we must maneuver into a position where we no longer have much choice left. This is the old business of burning bridges. If you are faced with an enemy who thinks you would turn and run if he kept advancing, and if the bridge is there to run across, he may keep advancing. He may advance to the point where, if you do not run, a clash is automatic. Calculating what is in your long-run interest, you may turn and cross the bridge. At least, he may expect you to. But if you burn the bridge so that you cannot retreat, and in sheer desperation there is nothing you can do but defend yourself, he has a new calculation to make. He cannot count on what you would *prefer* to do if he were advancing irresistibly; he must decide instead what he ought to do if you were incapable of anything but resisting him.

This is the position that Chiang Kai-shek got himself into, and us with him, when he moved a large portion of his best troops to Quemoy. Evacuation under fire would be exceedingly difficult; if attacked, his troops had no choice but to fight, and we probably had no choice but to assist them. It was undoubtedly a shrewd move from Chiang's point of view—coupling himself, and the United States with him, to Quemoy—and in fact if we had wanted to make clear to the Chinese Communists that Quemoy had to be defended if they attacked it, it would even have been a shrewd move also from our point of view.

This idea of burning bridges—of maneuvering into a position where one clearly cannot yield—conflicts somewhat, at least semantically, with the notion that what we want in our foreign policy is “the initiative.” Initiative is good if it means imaginativeness, boldness, new ideas. But the term somewhat disguises the fact that deterrence, particularly deterrence of anything less than mortal assault on the United States, often depends on getting into a position where the initiative is up to the enemy and it is he who has to make the awful decision to proceed to a clash.

In recent years it has become something of a principle in the Department of Defense that the country should have abundant “options” in its choice of response to enemy moves. The principle is a good one, but so is a contrary principle—that certain options are an embarrassment. The United States government goes to great lengths to reassure allies and to warn Russians that it has eschewed certain options altogether, or to demonstrate that it could not afford them or has placed them out of reach. The *commitment* process on which all American overseas deterrence depends—and on which all confidence within the alliance depends—is a process of surrendering and destroying options that we might have been expected to find too attractive in an emergency. We not only give them up in exchange for commitments to us by our allies; we give them up on our own account to make our intentions clear to potential enemies. In fact, we do it not just to display our intentions but to *adopt* those intentions. If deterrence fails it is usually because someone thought he saw an “option” that the American government had failed to dispose of, a loophole that it hadn’t closed against itself.

At law there is a doctrine of the “last clear chance.” It recognizes that, in the events leading up to an accident, there was some point prior to which either party could avert collision, some point after which neither could, and very likely a period between when one party could still control events but the other was helpless to turn aside or stop. The one that had the “last clear chance” to avert collision is held responsible. In strategy when both parties abhor collision the advantage goes often to the one who arranges the status quo in his favor and leaves to

the other the “last clear chance” to stop or turn aside. Xenophon understood the principle when, threatened by an attack he had not sought, he placed his Greeks with their backs against an impassable ravine. “I should like the enemy to think it is easy-going in every direction for *him* to retreat.” And when he had to charge a hill occupied by aliens, he “did not attack from every direction but left the enemy a way of escape, if he wanted to run away.” The “last chance” to clear out was left to the enemy when Xenophon had to take the initiative, but denied to himself when he wanted to deter attack, leaving his enemy the choice to attack or retire.⁶

An illustration of this principle—that deterrence often depends on relinquishing the initiative to the other side—may be found in a comparison of two articles that Secretary Dulles wrote in the 1950s. His article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1954 (based on the speech in which he introduced “massive retaliation”) proposed that we should not let the enemy know in advance just when and where and how we would react to aggression, but reserve for *ourselves* the decision on whether to act and the time, place, and scope of our action. In 1957 the Secretary wrote another article in *Foreign Affairs*, this one oriented mainly toward Europe, in which he properly chose to reserve for the Soviets the final decision on all-out war. He discussed the need for more powerful NATO forces, especially “tactical” nuclear forces that could resist a non-nuclear Soviet onslaught at a level short of all-out war. He said:

In the future it may thus be feasible to place less reliance upon deterrence of vast retaliatory power. . . . Thus, in

6. *The Persian Expedition*, pp. 136–37, 236. The principle was expressed by Sun Tzu in China, around 500 B.C. in his *Art of War*: “When you surround an army leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard.” Ptolemy, serving under Alexander in the fourth century B.C., surrounded a hill, “leaving a gap in his line for the enemy to get through, should they wish to make their escape.” Vegetius, writing in the fourth century A.D., had a section headed, “The flight of an enemy should not be prevented, but facilitated,” and commends a maxim of Scipio “that a golden bridge should be made for a flying enemy.” It is, of course, a fundamental principle of riot control and has its counterparts in diplomacy and other negotiations.

contrast to the 1950 decade, it may be that by the 1960 decade the nations which are around the Sino-Soviet perimeter can possess an effective defense against full-scale conventional attack and thus confront any aggressor with the choice between failing or himself initiating nuclear war against the defending country. Thus the tables may be turned, in the sense that instead of those who are non-aggressive having to rely upon all-out nuclear retaliatory power for their protection, would-be aggressors will be unable to count on a successful conventional aggression, but must themselves weigh the consequences of invoking nuclear war.⁷

Former Secretary Dean Acheson was proposing the same principle (but attached to conventional forces, not tactical nuclear weapons) in remarkably similar language at about the same time in his book, *Power and Diplomacy*:

Suppose, now, that a major attack is mounted against a Western Europe defended by substantial and spirited forces including American troops. . . . Here, in effect, he (our potential enemy) would be making the decision for us, by compelling evidence that he had determined to run all risks and force matters to a final showdown, including (if it had not already occurred) a nuclear attack upon us. . . . A defense in Europe of this magnitude will pass the decision to risk everything from the defense to the offense.⁸

The same principle on the Eastern side was reflected in a remark often attributed to Khrushchev. It was typically agreed, especially at summit meetings, that nobody wanted a war. Khrushchev's complacent remark, based on Berlin's being on his side of the border, was that Berlin was not worth a war. As the story goes, he was reminded that Berlin was not worth a war to him either. "No," he replied, "but you are the ones that have

7. "Challenge and Response in U.S. Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, 36 (1957), 25-43. It is interesting that Secretary Dulles used "nuclear war" to mean something that had not yet been invoked when "tactical" nuclear weapons were already being used in local defense of Europe.

8. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1958, pp. 87-88.

to cross a frontier." The implication, I take it, was that neither of us wanted to cross that threshold just for Berlin, and if Berlin's location makes *us* the ones who have to cross the border, we are the ones who let it go though both of us are similarly fearful of war.

[How do we maneuver into a position so it is the other side that has to make that decision?] Words rarely do it. To have told the Soviets in the late 1940s that, if they attacked, we were obliged to defend Europe might not have been wholly convincing. When the Administration asked Congress for authority to station Army divisions in Europe in peacetime, the argument was explicitly made that these troops were there not to defend against a superior Soviet army but to leave the Soviet Union in no doubt that the United States would be automatically involved in the event of any attack on Europe. The implicit argument was not that since we obviously would defend Europe we should demonstrate the fact by putting troops there. The reasoning was probably that, whether we wished to be or not, we could not fail to be involved if we had more troops being run over by the Soviet Army than we could afford to see defeated. Notions like "trip wire" or "plate glass window," though oversimplified, were attempts to express this role. And while "trip wire" is a belittling term to describe an army, the role is not a demeaning one. The garrison in Berlin is as fine a collection of soldiers as has ever been assembled, but excruciatingly small. What can 7,000 American troops do, or 12,000 Allied troops? Bluntly, they can die. They can die heroically, dramatically, and in a manner that guarantees that the action cannot stop there. They represent the pride, the honor, and the reputation of the United States government and its armed forces; and they can apparently hold the entire Red Army at bay. Precisely because there is no graceful way out if we wished our troops to yield ground, and because West Berlin is too small an area in which to ignore small encroachments, West Berlin and its military forces constitute one of the most impregnable military outposts of modern times. The Soviets have not dared to cross *that* frontier.

[Berlin illustrates two common characteristics of these com-

mitments. The first is that if the commitment is ill defined and ambiguous—if we leave ourselves loopholes through which to exit—our opponent will expect us to be under strong temptation to make a graceful exit (or even a somewhat graceless one) and he may be right. The western sector of Berlin is a tightly defined piece of earth, physically occupied by Western troops: our commitment is credible because it is inescapable. (The little enclave of Steinstücken is physically separate, surrounded by East German territory outside city limits, and there has been a certain amount of jockeying to determine how credible our commitment is to stay there and whether it applies to a corridor connecting the enclave to the city proper.) But our commitment to the integrity of Berlin itself, the entire city, was apparently weak or ambiguous. When the Wall went up the West *was* able to construe its obligation as *not* obliging forceful opposition. The Soviets probably anticipated that, if the West had a choice between interpreting its obligation to demand forceful opposition and interpreting the obligation more leniently, there would be a temptation to elect the lenient interpretation. If we could have *made* ourselves obliged to knock down the wall with military force, the wall might not have gone up; not being obliged, we could be expected to elect the less dangerous course.

[The second thing that Berlin illustrates is that, however precisely defined is the issue *about* which we are committed, it is often uncertain just what we are committed *to do*.] The commitment is open-ended. Our military reaction to an assault on West Berlin is really not specified. We are apparently committed to holding the western sector of the city if we can; if we are pushed back, we are presumably committed to repelling the intruders and restoring the original boundary. If we lose the city, we are perhaps committed to reconquering it. But somewhere in this sequence of events things get out of hand, and the matter ceases to be purely one of restoring the status quo in Berlin. Military instabilities may arise that make the earlier status quo meaningless. A costly reestablishment of the status quo might call for some sort of reprisal, obliging some counteraction in return. Just what would happen is a matter of prediction, or guess.

What we seem to be committed to is action of some sort commensurate with the provocation. Military resistance tends to develop a momentum of its own. It is dynamic and uncertain. What we threaten in Berlin is to initiate a process that may quickly get out of hand.

The maneuver in Lebanon in 1958—the landing of troops in a developing crisis—though not one of the neatest political-military operations of recent times, represented a similar strategy. Whatever the military potential of the ten or twelve thousand troops that we landed in Lebanon—and it would depend on who might have engaged them, where, over what issue—they had the advantage that they got on the ground before any Soviet adventure or movement was under way. The landing might be described as a “preemptive maneuver.” From then on, any significant Soviet intervention in the affairs of Lebanon, Jordan, or even Iraq, would have substantially raised the likelihood that American and Soviet forces, or American and Soviet-supported forces, would be directly engaged.

In effect, it was Khrushchev’s turn to cross a border. Iraq or Jordan might not have been worth a war to either of us but by getting troops on the soil—or, as we used to say, the American flag—we probably made it clear to the Kremlin that we could not gracefully retreat under duress. It is harder to retreat than not to land in the first place; the landing helped to put the next step up to the Russians.

*Coupling Capabilities to Objectives:
The Process of “Commitment”*

[In addition to getting yourself where you *cannot* retreat, there is a more common way of making a threat. That is to incur a political involvement, to get a nation’s honor, obligation, and diplomatic reputation committed to a response.] The Formosa resolution of 1955, along with the military assistance agreement then signed by the United States and the National Government of the Republic of China, should probably be interpreted that way. It was not mainly a technique for reassuring Chiang Kai-shek that we would defend him, and it was not mainly a

quid pro quo for something he did for us. It was chiefly important as a move to impress a third party. The primary audience for the congressional action was inside the Soviet bloc. The resolution, together with the treaty, was a ceremony to leave the Chinese and the Russians under no doubt that we could not back down from the defense of Formosa without intolerable loss of prestige, reputation, and leadership. We were not merely *communicating* an intention or obligation we already had, but actually *enhancing* the obligation in the process. The congressional message was not, "Since we are obliged to defend Formosa, we may as well show it." Rather: "In case we were not sufficiently committed to impress you, now we are. We hereby oblige ourselves. Behold us in the public ritual of getting ourselves genuinely committed." ⁹

9. There is also sometimes available an internal technique of commitment. It is, in the words of Roger Fisher, "to weave international obligations into the domestic law of each country, so that by and large each government enforces the obligation against itself." Fisher discussed it in relation to disarmament commitments; but it may apply to the use of force as well as to the renunciation of it. A Norwegian directive (*Kgl res 10 Juni 1949*) stipulates that, in event of armed attack, military officers are to mobilize whether or not the government issues the order, that orders for discontinuance issued in the name of the government shall be assumed false, and that resistance is to continue irrespective of enemy threats of retaliatory bombing. Similarly a Swiss order of April 1940, distributed to every soldier in his *livret de service*, declared that in event of attack the Swiss would fight and that any order or indication to the contrary, from any source, was to be considered enemy propaganda. The purposes appear to have been internal discipline and morale; but the possible contribution of such internal arrangements to deterrence, to the credibility of resistance, is worth considering. Many governments have had constitutional or informal provisions for increasing the authority of the armed forces in time of emergency, thus possibly shifting government authority in the direction of individuals and organizations whose motives to resist were less doubtful. As mentioned in an earlier footnote, legal automaticity has sometimes been proposed for the French nuclear force. Internal public opinion can be similarly manipulated to make accommodation unpopular. All of these techniques, if appreciated by the enemy to be deterred, are relevant to the process of commitment. They can also, of course, be quite dangerous. Fisher's discussion is in his chapter, "Internal Enforcement of International Rules," *Disarmament: Its Politics and Economics*, Seymour Melman, ed. (Boston, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1962).

That kind of commitment is not to be had cheaply. If Congress passed such a resolution for every small piece of the world that it would like the Soviets to leave alone, it would cheapen the currency. A nation has limited resources, so to speak, in the things that it can get exceptionally concerned about. Political involvement within a country is not something that can be had for the price of a casual vote or a signature on a piece of paper.

Sometimes it comes about by a long process that may not even have been deliberately conceived. As far as I can tell, we had only the slightest commitment, if any, to assist India in case of attack by the Chinese or the Russians, if only because over the years the Indians did not let us incur a formal commitment. One of the lessons of November 1962 may be that, in the face of anything quite as adventuresome as an effort to take over a country the size of India, we may be virtually as committed as if we had a mutual assistance treaty. We cannot afford to let the Soviets or Communist Chinese learn by experience that they can grab large chunks of the earth and its population without a genuine risk of violent Western reaction.

Our commitment to Quemoy, which gave us concern in 1955 and especially in 1958, had not been deliberately conceived; and it appeared at the time to be a genuine embarrassment. For reasons that had nothing to do with American policy, Quemoy had been successfully defended by the Nationalists when Chiang Kai-shek evacuated the mainland, and it remained in Nationalist hands. By the time the United States assumed the commitment to Formosa, the island of Quemoy stood as a ragged edge about which our intentions were ambiguous. Secretary Dulles in 1958 expressed the official view that we could not afford to vacate Quemoy under duress. The implication seemed to be that we had no genuine desire to take risks for Quemoy and might have preferred it if Quemoy had fallen to the Communists in 1949; but our relations with Communist China were at stake once Quemoy became an issue. So we had a commitment that we might have preferred not to have. And in case that commitment did not appear firm enough, Chiang Kai-shek increased it

for us by moving enough of his best troops to that island, under conditions in which evacuation under attack would have been difficult, to make clear that *he* had to defend it or suffer military disaster, leaving it up to the United States to bail him out.

Some of our strongest commitments may be quite implicit, though ritual and diplomacy can enhance or erode them. Commitments can even exist when we deny them. There is a lot of conjecture about what would happen if the NATO treaty lapsed after its initial twenty years. There has recently been some conjecture whether the developing community of Western Europe might be inconsistent with the Atlantic Alliance. It is sometimes argued that the Soviet Union would like Europe so self-reliant that the United States could ease itself out of its commitments to the present NATO countries. I think there is something in this—our commitment to Europe probably diminishes somewhat if the NATO treaty legally goes out of force—but not much. Most of the commitment will still be there. We cannot afford to let the Soviets overrun West Germany or Greece, irrespective of our treaty commitments to Germany or to the rest of Western Europe.

I suspect that we might even recognize an implicit obligation to support Yugoslavia, perhaps Finland, in a military crisis. Any commitment we may have had toward Hungary was apparently not much. But Yugoslavia and Finland have not quite the status that Hungary had. (Conceivably we might cross the border first, under invitation, and leave it up to the Soviets to decide whether to incur the risk of engaging us.) I wonder whether the Kremlin thinks that, if it should get genuinely impatient with Tito or if there were some kind of crisis of succession upon Tito's death, the Red Army could simply invade Yugoslavia or the Kremlin present an ultimatum to the country without any danger of a counter-ultimatum from us or another preemptive landing of troops as in Lebanon. I can only wonder; these are all matters of interpretation, both as to what our commitments really would prove to be and what the Soviets would believe them to be.

Actually, our commitment is not so much a policy as a prediction. We cannot have a clear policy for every contingency; there are too many contingencies and not enough hours in the day to work them all out in advance. If one had asked in October 1962 what American policy was for the contingency of a Communist Chinese effort to destroy the Indian Army, the only answer could have been a *prediction* of what the American government *would* decide to do in a contingency that probably had not been "staffed out" in advance. Policy is usually not a prefabricated decision; it is the whole set of motives and constraints that make a government's actions somewhat predictable.

In the Indian case, it turns out that we had a latent or implicit policy. For all I know, Mr. Nehru anticipated it for ten years. It is conceivable—though I doubt it—that one of the reasons Nehru was so contemptuous of the kinds of treaties that the Thai and Pakistani signed with us was that he felt that his own involvement with the West in a real emergency might be about as strong without the treaty as with it. It is interesting that any "commitment" we had to keep India from being conquered or destroyed by Communist China was not mainly a commitment *to* the Indians or their government. We wanted to restrain Communist China generally; we wanted to give confidence to other governments in Asia; and we wanted to preserve confidence in our deterrent role all the way around the world to Europe. Military support to India would be a way of keeping an implicit pledge but the pledge was a general one, not a debt owed to the Indians. When a disciplinarian—police or other—intervenes to resist or punish someone's forbidden intrusion or assault, any benefit to the victim of the intrusion or assault may be incidental. He could even prefer not to be fought over; but if the issue is maintenance of discipline, he may not have much say in the matter.

This matter of prediction may have been crucial at the start of the Korean War. There has been a lot of discussion about whether we were or were not "committed" to the defense of South Korea. From what I have seen of the way the decision to

intervene was taken, first by participation of American military assistance forces, then by bombing, then with reinforcements, and finally with a major war effort, one could not confidently have guessed in May 1950 what the United States would do. One could only try to estimate the probable decision that the President would take, depending on what it looked like in Korea, who was advising him, and what else was going on in the world.

You will recall discussion about the importance of a particular speech by Secretary of State Acheson in suggesting to the Soviets that South Korea was outside our defense perimeter. (As far as I know, there is no decisive evidence that the Russians, Chinese, or Koreans were particularly motivated by that statement.) His stated position was essentially that we had a defense perimeter that excluded South Korea, that we had various other obligations, especially to the United Nations, that would cover a country like South Korea. Apparently the Soviets (or Chinese, or whoever made the decision) miscalculated; they may have thought we were damning our commitment with faint praise. They got into an expensive war and a risky one and one that might have been even more dangerous than it was. They may have miscalculated because the language of deterrence, and an understanding of the commitment process in the nuclear era, had not had much time to develop yet. They may interpret better now—although the missile adventure in Cuba shows that the Soviets could still misread the signals (or the Americans could still fail to transmit them clearly) a decade later.

And we seem to have misread the Chinese warnings during our advance toward the Yalu River. Allen Whiting has documented a serious Chinese Communist attempt to warn the Americans that they would engage us militarily rather than let us occupy all of North Korea.¹⁰ Whatever we might have done had we understood them, we manifestly did not understand. The one thing we would not have done, had we received their warnings correctly, was to extend our forces as vulnerably as we did. We either did not get their message, did not comprehend it, or

10. *China Crosses the Yalu* (New York, Macmillan, 1960).

did not find it credible, though the Chinese Communists may have been doing the best they could to get the message to us and to make it credible. When communication fails, it is not easy to decide whether the transmitter is too weak for the receiver or the receiver too weak for the transmitter, whether the sender speaks the receiver's language badly or the receiver misunderstands the sender's. Between the two of us, Americans and Communist China, we appear to have suffered at least one communication failure in each direction in 1950.¹¹

The Interdependence of Commitments

[The main reason why we are committed in many of these places is that our threats are interdependent. Essentially we tell the Soviets that we have to react here because, if we did not, they would not believe us when we say that we will react there.]

By now our commitment to Berlin has become so deep and diffuse that most of us do not often have to think about whom our commitment is to. The reason we got committed to the defense of Berlin, and stayed committed, is that if we let the Soviets scare us out of Berlin we would lose face with the Soviets themselves. The reputation that most matters to us is our reputation with the Soviet (and Communist Chinese) leaders. It would be bad enough to have Europeans, Latin Americans, or Asians think that we are immoral or cowardly. It would be far worse to lose our reputation with the Soviets. When we talk about the loss of face that would occur if we backed out of For-

11. It is not easy to explain why the Chinese entered North Korea so secretly and so suddenly. Had they wanted to stop the United Nations Forces at the level, say, of Pyongyang, to protect their own border and territory, a conspicuous early entry in force might have found the U.N. Command content with its accomplishment and in no mood to fight a second war, against Chinese armies, for the remainder of North Korea. They chose instead to launch a surprise attack, with stunning tactical advantages but no prospect of deterrence. It may have been a hard choice with the decision, finally, a pessimistic one; if so, it was probably a mistake. It may have been based on an overriding interest in the territorial integrity of a Communist North Korea; if so, accommodation was probably impossible anyhow. Or it may have been just a military obsession with tactical surprise, at the expense of all deterrence and diplomacy.

mosa under duress, or out of Berlin, the loss of face that matters most is the loss of Soviet belief that we will do, elsewhere and subsequently, what we insist we will do here and now. Our deterrence rests on Soviet expectations.

This, I suppose, is the ultimate reason why we have to defend California—aside from whether or not Easterners want to. There is no way to let California go to the Soviets and make them believe nevertheless that Oregon and Washington, Florida and Maine, and eventually Chevy Chase and Cambridge cannot be had under the same principle. There is no way to persuade them that if we do not stop them in California we will stop them at the Mississippi (though the Mississippi is a degree less implausible than any other line between that river and, say, the continental divide). Once they cross a line into a new class of aggression, into a set of areas or assets that we always claimed we would protect, we may even deceive *them* if we do not react vigorously. Suppose we let the Soviets have California, and when they reach for Texas we attack them in full force. They could sue for breach of promise. We virtually told them they could have Texas when we let them into California; the fault is ours, for communicating badly, for not recognizing what we were conceding.

California is a bit of fantasy here; but it helps to remind us that the effectiveness of deterrence often depends on attaching to particular areas some of the status of California. The principle is at work all over the world; and the principle is not wholly under our own control. I doubt whether we can identify ourselves with Pakistan in quite the way we can identify ourselves with Great Britain, no matter how many treaties we sign during the next ten years.

“To identify” is a complex process. It means getting the Soviets or the Communist Chinese to identify us with, say, Pakistan in such a way that *they* would lose respect for our commitments elsewhere if we failed to support Pakistan and *we* know they would lose that respect, so that we would have to support Pakistan and *they* know we would. In a way, it is the Soviets who confer this identification; but they do it through the

medium of their expectations about us and our understanding of their expectations. Neither they nor we can exercise full control over their expectations.

There is an interesting geographical difference in the Soviet and American homelands; it is hard to imagine a war so located that it could spill over by hot pursuit, by interdiction bombing, by inadvertent border violation, by local reprisal bombing, or even by deliberate but limited ground encroachment into American territory. Our oceans may not protect us from big wars but they protect us from little ones. A local war could not impinge on California, involving it peripherally or incidentally through geographical continuity, the way the Korean War could impinge on Manchuria and Siberia, or the way Soviet territory could be impinged on by war in Iran, Yugoslavia, or Central Europe. One can argue about how far back toward Moscow an “interdiction campaign” of bombing might have to reach, or might safely reach, in case of a limited war in Central Europe; and there is no geographical feature—and few economic features—to present a sudden discontinuity at the Soviet border. A comparable question hardly arises for American participation in the same war; there is one discontinuity leading to submarine warfare on the high seas, and another, a great one, in going inland to the railroad tracks that carry the freight to the Baltimore docks. The vehicles or vessels that would have to carry out the intrusion would furthermore be different in character from those involved in the “theater war.”

Possibilities of limited, marginal, homeland engagement that might be logically pertinent for California or Massachusetts are just geographically inapplicable. This gives the American homeland a more distinctive character—a more unambiguous “homeland” separateness—than the Soviet homeland can have. The nearest thing to “local involvement” one can imagine might be Florida bases in case of an air war with Cuba; that would be a possible exception to the rule, while for the Soviet Union most of the hypothetical wars that they must have to make plans about raise the problem of peripheral homeland involvement of some sort (including intrusive reconnaissance and other air-

space violations even if no dirt is disturbed on their territory).

The California principle actually can apply not only to territories but to weapons. One of the arguments that has been made, and taken seriously, against having all of our strategic weapons at sea or in outer space or even emplaced abroad, is that the enemy might be able to attack them without fearing the kind of response that would be triggered by an attack on our homeland. If all missiles were on ships at sea, the argument runs, an attack on a ship would not be quite the same as an attack on California or Massachusetts; and an enemy might consider doing it in circumstances when he would not consider attacking weapons located on our soil. (An extreme form of the argument, not put forward quite so seriously, was that we ought to locate our weapons in the middle of population centers, so that the enemy could never attack them without arousing the massive response that he could take for granted if he struck our cities.)

There is something to the argument. If in an Asian war we flew bombers from aircraft carriers or from bases in an allied country, and an enemy attacked our ships at sea or our overseas bases, we would almost certainly not consider it the same as if we had flown the bombers from bases in Hawaii or California and he had attacked the bases in those states. If the Soviets had put nuclear weapons in orbit and we shot at them with rockets the results might be serious, but not the same as if the Soviets had put missiles on home territory and we shot at those missiles on their home grounds. Missiles in Cuba, though owned and manned by Russians, were less "nationalized" as a target than missiles in the U.S.S.R. itself. (One of the arguments made against the use of surface ships in a European Multilateral Force armed with long-range missiles was that they could be picked off by an enemy, possibly during a limited war in which the Multilateral Force was not engaged, possibly without the use of nuclear weapons by an enemy, in a way that would not quite provoke reprisal, and thus would be vulnerable in a way that homeland-based missiles would not be.)

The argument can go either way. This can be a reason for de-

liberately putting weapons outside our boundary, so that their military involvement would not tempt an attack on our homeland, or for keeping them within our boundaries so that an attack on them would appear the more risky. The point here is just that there is a difference. [Quemoy cannot be made part of California by moving it there, but weapons can.]

[Actually the all-or-nothing character of the homeland is not so complete. Secretary McNamara's suggestion that even a general war might be somewhat confined to military installations, and that a furious attack on enemy population centers might be the proper response only to an attack on ours, implies that we do distinguish or might distinguish different parts of our territory by the degree of warfare involved.] And I have heard it argued that the Soviets, if they fear for the deterrent security of their retaliatory forces in a purely "military" war that the Americans might initiate, may actually prefer a close proximity of their missiles to their cities to make the prospect of a "clean" strategic war, one without massive attacks on cities, less promising—to demonstrate that there would remain little to lose, after an attack on their weapons, and little motive to confine their response to military targets. The policy would be a dangerous one if there were much likelihood that war would occur, but its logic has merit.

Discrediting an Adversary's Commitments

The Soviets have the same deterrence problem beyond their borders that we have. In some ways the West has helped them to solve it. All kinds of people, responsible and irresponsible, intelligent and unenlightened, European and American, have raised questions about whether the United States really would use its full military force to protect Western Europe or to retaliate for the loss of Western Europe. Much more rarely did I hear anyone question—at least before about 1963—whether the Soviets would do likewise if we were provoked to an attack against the homeland of Communist China.

The Soviets seem to have accomplished—and we helped

them—what we find difficult, namely, to persuade the world that the entire area of their alliance is part of an integral bloc. In the West we talked for a decade—until the Sino-Soviet schism became undeniable—about the Sino-Soviet bloc as though every satellite were part of the Soviet system, and as though Soviet determination to keep those areas under their control was so intense that they could not afford to lose any of it. We often acted as though every part of their sphere of influence was a “California.” In the West we seemed to concede to the Soviets, with respect to China, what not everybody concedes us with respect to Europe.

If we always treat China as though it is a Soviet California, we tend to make it so. If we imply to the Soviets that we consider Communist China or Czechoslovakia the virtual equivalent of Siberia, then in the event of any military action in or against those areas we have informed the Soviets that we are going to interpret their response as though we had landed troops in Vladivostok or Archangel or launched them across the Soviet-Polish border. We thus *oblige* them to react in China, or in North Vietnam or wherever it may be, and in effect give them precisely the commitment that is worth so much to them in deterring the West. If we make it clear that we believe they are obliged to react to an intrusion in Hungary as though we were in the streets of Moscow, then they *are* obliged.

Cuba will continue to be an interesting borderline case. The Soviets will find it difficult politically and psychologically to get universal acquiescence that a country can be genuinely within the Soviet bloc if it is not contiguous to them. The Soviet problem was to try to get Cuba into the status of a Soviet “California.” It is interesting to speculate on whether we could add states to the Union, like the Philippines, Greece, or Formosa, and let that settle the question of where they belong and how obliged we are to defend them. Hawaii, yes, and by now Puerto Rico; but if we reached out beyond the areas that “belong” in the United States we could probably just not manage to confer a genuinely plausible “statehood” that would be universally recognized and taken for granted.

And Cuba does not quite “belong” in the Soviet bloc—it is topologically separate and does not enjoy the territorial integrity with the Soviet bloc that nations traditionally enjoy. India could take Goa for what are basically esthetic reasons: a conventional belief that maps ought to have certain geometrical qualities, that an enclave is geographically abnormal, that an island in the ocean can belong to anyone but an island surrounded by the territory of a large nation somehow ought to belong to it. (Algeria would, for the same reason, have been harder to disengage from metropolitan France had it not been geographically separated by the Mediterranean; keeping the coastal cities in “France” while dividing off the hinterland would similarly have gone somewhat against cartographic psychology.) There are many other things, of course, that make Cuba different from Hungary, including the fact that the United States can surround it, harass it, or blockade it without encroaching on Soviet territory. But even without that it would be an uphill struggle for the Soviets to achieve a credible togetherness with the remote island of Cuba.

Additional “Cubas” would cost the Soviets something. That does not mean we should like them; still, we should recognize what happens to their deterrence problem. It becomes more like ours. They used to have an almost integral bloc, a geographical unit, with a single Iron Curtain separating their side from the rest of the world. One could almost draw a closed curved line on a globe with everything inside it Soviet bloc and everything outside it not. Yugoslavia was the only ambiguity. It in turn made little Albania an anomaly—only a small one, but its political detachment in the early 1960s confirms the point. Cuba has been the same problem magnified. “Blocness” no longer means what it did. In a geographically tight bloc, satellites can have degrees of affiliation with the U.S.S.R. without necessarily spoiling the definition of the “bloc.” Distant satellites, though, not only can be more independent because of Soviet difficulty in imposing its will by violence but they further disturb the geographical neatness of the bloc. “Blocness” ceases to be all-or-none; it becomes a matter of degree.

This process can then infect the territories contiguous with the U.S.S.R. And if the Soviet Union tempers its deterrent threats, hedging on the distant countries or on countries not fully integrated, it invites examination of the credibility of its threats everywhere. Certain things like honor and outrage are not meant to be matters of degree. One can say that his homeland is inviolate only if he knows exactly what he means by "homeland" and it is not cluttered up with full-fledged states, protectorates, territories, and gradations of citizenship that make some places more "homeland" than others. Like virginity, the homeland wants an absolute definition. This character the Soviet bloc has been losing and may lose even more if it acquires a graduated structure like the old British Empire.

We credited the Soviets with effective deterrence and in doing so genuinely gave them some. We came at last to treat the Sino-Soviet split as a real one; but it would have been wiser not to have acknowledged their fusion in the first place. In our efforts to dramatize and magnify the Soviet threat, we sometimes present the Soviet Union with a deterrent asset of a kind that we find hard to create for ourselves. We should relieve the Soviets as much as we can of any obligation to respond to an American engagement with China as to an engagement with Soviet Russia itself. If we relieve the Soviets of the obligation, we somewhat undo their commitment. We should be trying to make North Vietnam seem much more remote from the Soviet bloc than Puerto Rico is from the United States, to keep China out of the category of Alaska, and not to concede to bloc countries a sense of immunity. Events may oblige us—some of these very countries may oblige us—to initiate some kind of military engagement in the future;¹² and we would be wise to decouple those areas, as much as we can, from Soviet military forces in advance.¹³

12. Events evidently caught up with this sentence!

13. Possibly the single greatest consequence of the nuclear test ban—and I see no evidence that it was intended in the West, or that it motivated the final negotiations—was to exacerbate the Sino-Soviet dispute on security policy and bring its military implications into the open. What a diplomatic coup it would have been, had it been contrived that way!

Escaping Commitments

Sometimes a country wants to get out of a commitment—to decouple itself. It is not easy. We may have regretted our commitment to Quemoy in 1958, but there was no graceful way to undo it at that time. The Berlin wall was a genuine embarrassment. We apparently had not enough of a commitment to feel obliged to use violence against the Berlin wall. We had undeniably some commitment; there was some expectation that we might take action and some belief that we ought to. We did not, and it cost us something. If nobody had ever expected us to do anything about the wall—if we had never appeared to have any obligation to prevent things like the wall, and if we had never made any claims about East Berlin that seemed inconsistent with the wall—the wall would have embarrassed us less. Some people on our side were disappointed when we let the wall go up. The United States government would undoubtedly have preferred not to incur that disappointment. Diplomatic statements about the character of our rights and obligations in East Berlin were an effort to dismantle any commitment we might previously have had. The statements were not fully persuasive. Had the United States government known all along that something like the wall might go up, and had it planned all along not to oppose it, diplomatic preparation might have made the wall less of an embarrassment. In this case there appeared to be some residual commitment that we had not honored, and we had to argue retroactively that our essential rights had not been violated and that nothing rightfully ours had been taken from us.

The Soviets had a similar problem over Cuba. Less than six weeks before the President's missile crisis address of October 22, 1962, the Soviet government had issued a formal statement about Cuba. "We have said and do repeat that if war is unleashed, if the aggressor makes an attack on one state or another and this state asks for assistance, the Soviet Union has the possibility from its own territory to render assistance to any peace-loving state and not only to Cuba. And let no one doubt that the Soviet Union will render such assistance." And further,

"The Soviet government would like to draw attention to the fact that one cannot now attack Cuba and expect that the aggressor will be free from punishment for this attack. If this attack is made, this will be the beginning of the unleashing of war." It was a long, argumentative statement, however, and acknowledged that "only a madman can think now that a war started by him will be a calamity only for the people against which it is unleashed." And the most threatening language was not singled out for solemn treatment but went along as part of the argument. So there was at least a degree of ambiguity.

President Kennedy's television broadcast of October 22 was directly aimed at the Soviet Union. It was so directly aimed that one can infer only a conscious decision to make this not a Caribbean affair but an East-West affair. It concerned Soviet missiles and Soviet duplicity, a Soviet challenge; and the President even went out of his way to express concern for the Cubans, his desire that they not be hurt, and his regret for the "foreign domination" that was responsible for their predicament. The President did not say that we had a problem with Cuba and hoped the Soviets would keep out of it; he said we had an altercation with the Soviet Union and hoped Cubans would not be hurt.

The Soviet statement the following day, circulated to the Security Council of the United Nations, was evidently an effort to structure the situation a little differently. It accused the United States of piracy on the high seas and of "trying to dictate to Cuba what policy it must pursue." It said the United States government was "assuming the right to demand that states should account to it for the way in which they organize their defense, and should notify it of what their ships are carrying on the high seas. The Soviet government firmly repudiates such claims." The statement also said, "Today as never before, statesmen must show calm and prudence, and must not countenance the rattling of weapons." And indeed there was no rattling of weapons in the Soviet statement. The most they said was, "The presence of powerful weapons, including nuclear rocket weapons, in the Soviet Union is acknowledged by all the

peoples in the world to be the decisive factor in deterring the aggressive forces of imperialism from unleashing a world war of annihilation. This mission the Soviet Union will continue to discharge with all firmness and consistency." But "if the aggressors unleash war, the Soviet Union will inflict the most powerful blow in response." By implication, what the United States Navy was doing, or even might do, was piracy so far, and not war, and the "peace-loving states cannot but protest."¹⁴

The orientation was toward an American affront to Cuba, not a Soviet-American confrontation. The key American demand for the "prompt dismantling and withdrawal of all offensive weapons in Cuba" before the quarantine could be lifted—that is, the direct relation of President Kennedy's action to the Soviet missiles—was not directly addressed. The Soviets chose not to enhance their commitment to Cuba by construing the United States action as one obliging a firm Soviet response; they construed it as a Caribbean issue. Their language seemed designed to dismantle an incomplete commitment rather than to bolster it.

[But just as one cannot incur a genuine commitment by purely verbal means, one cannot get out of it with cheap words either. Secretary Dulles in 1958 could not have said, "Quemoy? Who cares about Quemoy? It's not worth fighting over, and our defense perimeter will be neater without it." The United States never did talk its way cleanly out of the Berlin wall business. Even if the letter of our obligations was never violated, there are bound to be some who think the spirit demanded more. We had little obligation to intervene in Hungary in 1956, and the Suez crisis confused and screened it. Nevertheless, there was a possibility that the West might do something and it did not. Maybe this was a convenience, clarifying an implicit understanding between East and West. But the cost was not zero.

[If commitments could be undone by declaration they would be worthless in the first place.] The whole purpose of verbal or

14. David L. Larson, ed., *The "Cuban Crisis" of 1962, Selected Documents and Chronology* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1963), pp. 7-17, 41-46, 50-54.

ritualistic commitments, of political and diplomatic commitments, of efforts to attach honor and reputation to a commitment, is to make the commitment manifestly hard to get out of on short notice. Even the commitments not deliberately incurred, and the commitments that embarrass one in unforeseen circumstances, cannot be undone cheaply. The cost is the discrediting of other commitments that one would still like to be credited.¹⁵

[If a country does want to get off the hook, to get out of a commitment deliberately incurred or one that grew up unintended, the opponent's cooperation can make a difference.] The Chinese Communists seemed not to be trying, from 1958 on, to make it easy for the United States to decouple itself from Quemoy. They maintained, and occasionally intensified, enough military pressure on the island to make graceful withdrawal difficult, to make withdrawal look like retreat under duress. It is hard to escape the judgment that they enjoyed American discomfort over Quemoy, their own ability to stir things up at will but to keep crises under their control, and their opportunity to aggravate American differences with Chiang Kai-shek.

Circumventing an Adversary's Commitments

["Salami tactics," we can be sure, were invented by a child; whoever first expounded the adult version had already understood the principle when he was small.] Tell a child not to go in the water and he'll sit on the bank and submerge his bare feet;

15. The most eloquent rebuff I have come across is the answer the Romans received from the Volciani in Spain, whom they tried to unite with other Spanish cities against Carthage shortly after Rome had declined to defend the allied Spanish town of Saguntum against Hannibal and it had been terribly destroyed. "Men of Rome," said the eldest among them, "it seems hardly decent to ask us to prefer your friendship to that of Carthage, considering the precedent of those who have been rash enough to do so. Was not your betrayal of your friends in Saguntum even more brutal than their destruction by their enemies the Carthaginians? I suggest you look for allies in some spot where what happened to Saguntum has never been heard of. The fall of that town will be a signal and melancholy warning to the peoples of Spain never to count upon Roman friendship nor to trust Rome's word." *The War With Hannibal*, Aubrey de Selincourt, transl. (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1965), p. 43.

he is not yet "in" the water. Acquiesce, and he'll stand up; no more of him is in the water than before. Think it over, and he'll start wading, not going any deeper; take a moment to decide whether this is different and he'll go a little deeper, arguing that since he goes back and forth it all averages out. Pretty soon we are calling to him not to swim out of sight, wondering whatever happened to all our discipline.

Most commitments are ultimately ambiguous in detail. Sometimes they are purposely so, as when President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles announced that an attack on Quemoy might or might not trigger an American response under the "Formosa Doctrine" according to whether or not it was interpreted as part of an assault, or prelude to an assault, on Formosa itself. Even more commitments are ambiguous because of the plain impossibility of defining them in exact detail. There are areas of doubt even in the most carefully drafted statutes and contracts; and even people who most jealously guard their rights and privileges have been known to settle out of court, to excuse an honest mistake, or to overlook a minor transgression because of the high cost of litigation. No matter how inviolate our commitment to some border, we are unlikely to start a war the first time a few drunken soldiers from the other side wander across the line and "invade" our territory. And there is always the possibility that some East German functionary on the Autobahn really did not get the word, or his vehicle really did break down in our lane of traffic. There is some threshold below which the commitment is just not operative, and even that threshold itself is usually unclear.

[From this arises the low-level incident or probe, and tactics of erosion.] One tests the seriousness of a commitment by probing it in a noncommittal way, pretending the trespass was inadvertent or unauthorized if one meets resistance, both to forestall the reaction and to avoid backing down. One stops a convoy or overflies a border, pretending the incident was accidental or unauthorized; but if there is no challenge, one continues or enlarges the operation, setting a precedent, establishing rights of thoroughfare or squatters' rights, pushing the

commitment back or raising the threshold. The use of "volunteers" by Soviet countries to intervene in trouble spots was usually an effort to sneak under the fence rather than climb over it, not quite invoking the commitment, but simultaneously making the commitment appear porous and infirm. And if there is no sharp qualitative division between a minor transgression and a major affront, but a continuous gradation of activity, one can begin his intrusion on a scale too small to provoke a reaction, and increase it by imperceptible degrees, never quite presenting a sudden, dramatic challenge that would invoke the committed response. Small violations of a truce agreement, for example, become larger and larger, and the day never comes when the camel's back breaks under a single straw.

The Soviets played this game in Cuba for a long time, apparently unaware that the camel's back in that case could stand only a finite weight (or hoping the camel would get stronger and stronger as he got used to the weight). The Korean War may have begun as a low-level incident that was hoped to be beneath the American threshold of response, and the initial American responses (before the introduction of ground troops) may have been misjudged. [Salami tactics do not always work. The uncertainty in a commitment often invites a low-level or noncommittal challenge; but uncertainty can work both ways. If the committed country has a reputation for sometimes, unpredictably, reacting where it need not, and not always collaborating to minimize embarrassment, loopholes may be less inviting.] If one cannot get a reputation for always honoring commitments in detail, because the details are ambiguous, it may help to get a reputation for being occasionally unreasonable. If one cannot buy clearly identifiable and fully reliable trip-wires, an occasional booby trap placed at random may serve somewhat the same purpose in the long run.

Landlords rarely evict tenants by strong-arm methods. They have learned that steady cumulative pressures work just as well, though more slowly, and avoid provoking a violent response. It is far better to turn off the water and the electricity, and let the tenant suffer the cumulative pressure of unflushed toilets and

candles at night and get out voluntarily, than to start manhandling his family and his household goods. Blockade works slowly; it puts the decision up to the other side. To invade Berlin or Cuba is a sudden identifiable action, of an intensity that demands response; but to cut off supplies does little the first day and not much more the second; nobody dies or gets hurt from the initial effects of a blockade. A blockade is comparatively passive; the eventual damage results as much from the obstinacy of the blockaded territory as from the persistence of the blockading power. And there is no well-defined moment before which the blockading power may quail, for fear of causing the ultimate collapse.

President Truman appreciated the value of this tactic in June 1945. French forces under de Gaulle's leadership had occupied a province in Northern Italy, contrary to Allied plans and American policy. They announced that any effort of their allies to dislodge them would be treated as a hostile act. The French intended to annex the area as a "minor frontier adjustment." It would have been extraordinarily disruptive of Allied unity, of course, to expel the French by force of arms; arguments got nowhere, so President Truman notified de Gaulle that no more supplies would be issued to the French army until it had withdrawn from the Aosta Valley. The French were absolutely dependent on American supplies and the message brought results. This was "nonhostile" pressure, not quite capable of provoking a militant response, therefore safe to use (and effective). [A given amount of coercive pressure exercised over an extended period of time, allowed to accumulate its own momentum, is a common and effective technique of bypassing somebody's commitment.] *

The Distinction Between Deterrence and "Compellence"

Blockade illustrates the typical difference between a threat intended to make an adversary do something and a threat intended to keep him from starting something. The distinction is in the timing and in the initiative, in who has to make the first move, in whose initiative is put to the test. To deter an enemy's

advance it may be enough to burn the escape bridges behind me, or to rig a trip-wire between us that automatically blows us both up when he advances. To *compel* an enemy's retreat, though, by some threat of engagement, I have to be committed to *move*. (This requires setting fire to the grass behind me as I face the enemy, with the wind blowing toward the enemy.) I can block your car by placing mine in the way; my *deterrent* threat is passive, the decision to collide is up to you. But if you find me in your way and threaten to collide unless I move, you enjoy no such advantage; the decision to collide is still yours, and I still enjoy deterrence. You have to arrange to *have* to collide unless I move, and that is a degree more complicated. You have to get up so much speed that you cannot stop in time and that only I can avert the collision; this may not be easy. If it takes more time to start a car than to stop one, you may be unable to give me the "last clear chance" to avoid collision by vacating the street.

* [The threat that compels rather than deters often requires that the punishment be administered *until* the other acts, rather than *if* he acts.] This is because often the only way to become committed to an action is to initiate it. This means, though, that the action initiated has to be tolerable to the initiator, and tolerable over whatever period of time is required for the pressure to work on the other side. For deterrence, the trip-wire can threaten to blow things up out of all proportion to what is being protected, because if the threat works the thing never goes off. But to hold a large bomb and threaten to throw it *unless* somebody moves cannot work so well; the threat is not believable until the bomb is actually thrown and by then the damage is done.¹⁶

There is, then, a difference between *deterrence* and what we

16. A nice illustration occurs in the movie version of *A High Wind in Jamaica*. The pirate captain, Chavez, wants his captive to tell where the money is hidden and puts his knife to the man's throat to make him talk. After a moment or two, during which the victim keeps his mouth shut, the mate laughs. "If you cut his throat he can't tell you. He knows it. And he knows you know it." Chavez puts his knife away and tries something else.

might, for want of a better word, call *compellence*. The dictionary's definition of "deter" corresponds to contemporary usage: to turn aside or discourage through fear; hence, to prevent from action by fear of consequences. A difficulty with our being an unaggressive nation, one whose announced aim has usually been to contain rather than to roll back, is that we have not settled on any conventional terminology for the more active kind of threat. We have come to use "defense" as a euphemism for "military," and have a Defense Department, a defense budget, a defense program, and a defense establishment; if we need the other word, though, the English language provides it easily. It is "offense." We have no such obvious counterpart to "deterrence." "Coercion" covers the meaning but unfortunately includes "deterrent" as well as "compellent" intentions. "Intimidation" is insufficiently focused on the particular behavior desired. "Compulsion" is all right but its adjective is "compulsive," and that has come to carry quite a different meaning. "Compellence" is the best I can do.¹⁷

Deterrence and compellence differ in a number of respects, most of them corresponding to something like the difference between statics and dynamics. Deterrence involves setting the stage—by announcement, by rigging the trip-wire, by incurring the obligation—and *waiting*. The overt act is up to the opponent. The stage-setting can often be nonintrusive, nonhostile,

17. J. David Singer has used a nice pair of nouns, "persuasion" and "dissuasion," to make the same distinction. It is the adjectives that cause trouble; "persuasive" is bound to suggest the adequacy or credibility of a threat, not the character of its objective. Furthermore, "deterrent" is here to stay, at least in the English language. Singer's breakdown goes beyond these two words and is a useful one; he distinguishes whether the subject is desired to *act* or *abstain*, whether or not he is *presently* acting or abstaining, and whether he is likely (in the absence of threats and offers) to *go on* acting or abstaining. (If he is behaving, and is likely—but not certain—to go on behaving, there can still be reason to "reinforce" his motivation to behave.) Singer distinguishes also "rewards" and "penalties" as well as threats and offers; while the rewards and penalties can be the *consequences* of threats and offers, they can also be *gratuitous*, helping to communicate persuasively some new and continuing threat or offer. See his article, "Inter-Nation Influence: A Formal Model," *American Political Science Review*, 17 (1963), 420–30.

nonprovocative. The act that is intrusive, hostile, or provocative is usually the one to be deterred; [the deterrent threat only changes the consequences if the act in question—the one to be deterred—is then taken. Compellence, in contrast, usually involves *initiating* an action (or an irrevocable commitment to action) that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds. The overt act, the first step, is up to the side that makes the compellent threat.] To deter, one digs in, or lays a minefield, and waits—in the interest of inaction. To compel, one gets up enough momentum (figuratively, but sometimes literally) to make the other *act* to avoid collision.

Deterrence tends to be indefinite in its timing. “If you cross the line we shoot in self-defense, or the mines explode.” When? Whenever you cross the line—preferably never, but the timing is up to you. If *you* cross it, *then* is when the threat is fulfilled, either automatically, if we’ve rigged it so, or by obligation that immediately becomes due. But we can wait—preferably forever; that’s our purpose.

Compellence has to be definite: We move, and you must get out of the way. By when? There has to be a deadline, otherwise tomorrow never comes. If the action carries no deadline it is only a posture, or a ceremony with no consequences. If the compellent advance is like Zeno’s tortoise that takes infinitely long to reach the border by traversing, with infinite patience, the infinitely small remaining distances that separate him from collision, it creates no inducement to vacate the border. Compellence, to be effective, can’t wait forever. Still, it has to wait a little; collision can’t be instantaneous. [The compellent threat has to be put in motion to be credible, and *then* the victim must yield.] Too little time, and compliance becomes impossible; too much time, and compliance becomes unnecessary. Thus [compellence involves timing in a way that deterrence typically does not.]

[In addition to the question of “when,” compellence usually involves questions of where, what, and how much.] “Do nothing” is simple, “Do something” ambiguous. “Stop where you are” is simple; “Go back” leads to “How far?” “Leave me

alone” is simple; “Cooperate” is inexact and open-ended. A deterrent position—a status quo, in territory or in more figurative terms—can often be surveyed and noted; a compellent advance has to be *projected* as to destination, and the destination can be unclear in intent as well as in momentum and braking power. In a deterrent threat, the objective is often communicated by the very preparations that make the threat credible; the trip-wire often demarcates the forbidden territory. There is usually an inherent connection between *what* is threatened and what it is threatened *about*. Compellent threats tend to communicate only the general direction of compliance, and are less likely to be self-limiting, less likely to communicate in the very design of the threat just what, or how much, is demanded. The garrison in West Berlin can hardly be misunderstood about what it is committed to resist; if it ever intruded into East Berlin, though, to induce Soviet or German Democratic Republic forces to give way, there would be no such obvious interpretation of where and how much to give way unless the adventure could be invested with some unmistakable goal or limitation—a possibility not easily realized.

The Quemoy escapade is again a good example: Chiang’s troops, once on the island, especially if evacuation under fire appeared infeasible, had the static clarity that goes with commitment to an indefinite status quo, while the commitment just to *send* troops to defend it (or air and naval support) according to whether a Communist attack there was or was not prelude to an attack on Formosa lacked that persuasive quality, reminding us that though deterrent threats tend to have the advantages mentioned above they do not always achieve them. (The ambiguous case of Quemoy actually displays the compellent ambiguity, seen in reverse: a “compellent” Communist move against Quemoy was to be accommodated, as long as its extent could be reliably projected to a terminus short of Formosa; if the Communists thought we meant it, it was up to them to design an action that visibly embodied that limitation.) An American or NATO action to relieve Budapest in 1956—without major engagement but in the hope the Soviets would give way rather

than fight—would have had the dynamic quality of “compellence” in contrast to Berlin: the stopping point would have been a variable, not a constant. Even “Budapest” would have needed a definition, and might have become all of Hungary—and after Hungary, what?—if the Soviets initially gave way. The enterprise might have been designed to embody its specific intent, but it would have taken a lot of designing backed up by verbal assurances.

[Actually, any coercive threat requires corresponding *assurances*; the object of a threat is to give somebody a choice. To say, “One more step and I shoot,” can be a deterrent threat only if accompanied by the implicit assurance, “And if you stop I won’t.” Giving notice of *unconditional* intent to shoot gives him no choice] (unless by behaving as we wish him to behave the opponent puts himself out of range, in which case the effective threat is, “Come closer and my fire will kill you, stay back and it won’t”). What was said above about deterrent threats being typically less ambiguous in intent can be restated: the corresponding assurances—the ones that, together with the threatened response, define the opponent’s choice—are clearer than those that can usually be embodied in a compellent action. (Ordinary blackmailers, not just nuclear, find the “assurances” troublesome when their threats are compellent.)¹⁸

They are, furthermore, confirmed and demonstrated over time; as long as he stays back, and we don’t shoot, we fulfill the assurances and confirm them. The assurances that accompany a compellent action—move back a mile and I won’t shoot (otherwise I shall) and I won’t then try again for a second mile—are

18. The critical role of “assurances” in completing the structure of a threat, in making the threatened consequences persuasively *conditional* on behavior so that the victim is offered a choice, shows up in the offers of amnesty, safe passage, or forgiveness that must often be made credible in inducing the surrender of rebels or the capitulation of strikers or protesters. Even libraries and internal revenue agencies depend on parallel offers of forgiveness when they embark on campaigns to coerce the return of books or payment of back taxes. In personal life I have sometimes relied, like King Lear, on the vague threat that my wrath will be aroused (with who knows what awful consequences) if good behavior is not forthcoming, making a tentative impression on one child, only to have the threat utterly nullified by another’s pointing out that “Daddy’s mad already.”

harder to demonstrate in advance, unless it be through a long past record of abiding by one’s own verbal assurances.

Because in the West we deal mainly in deterrence, not compellence, and deterrent threats tend to convey their assurances implicitly, we often forget that *both* sides of the choice, the threatened penalty and the proffered avoidance or reward, need to be credible. The need for assurances—not just verbal but fully credible—emerges clearly as part of “deterrence” in discussions of surprise attack and “preemptive war.” An enemy belief that we are about to attack anyway, not after he does but possibly before, merely raises his incentive to do what we wanted to deter and to do it even more quickly. When we do engage in compellence, as in the Cuban crisis or in punitive attacks on North Vietnam that are intended to make the North Vietnamese government act affirmatively, the assurances are a critical part of the definition of the compellent threat.

[One may deliberately choose to be unclear and to keep the enemy guessing either to keep his defenses less prepared or to enhance his anxiety. But if one wants not to leave him in doubt about what will satisfy us, we have to find credible ways of communicating, and communicating both what we want and what we do not want.] There is a tendency to emphasize the communication of what we shall *do* if he misbehaves and to give too little emphasis to communicating *what* behavior will satisfy us. Again, this is natural when deterrence is our business, because the prohibited misbehavior is often approximately defined in the threatened response; but when we must start something that then has to be stopped, as in compellent actions, it is both harder and more important to know our aims and to communicate. It is particularly hard because the mere initiation of an energetic coercive campaign, designed for compellence, disturbs the situation, leads to surprises, and provides opportunity and temptation to reexamine our aims and change them in mid course. Deterrence, if wholly successful, can often afford to concentrate on the initiating events—what happens *next* if he misbehaves. Compellence, to be successful, involves an action that must be brought to successful closure. The payoff comes at the end, as does the disaster if the project fails.

The compellent action will have a time schedule of its own, and unless it is carefully chosen it may not be reconcilable with the demands that are attached to it. We cannot usefully threaten to bomb Cuba next Thursday unless the Russians are out by next month, or conduct a six weeks' bombing campaign in North Vietnam and stop it when the Vietcong have been quiescent for six months. There will be limits, probably, to how long the compellent action can be sustained without costing or risking too much, or exhausting itself or the opponent so that he has nothing left to lose. If it cannot induce compliance within that time—and this depends on whether compliance is physically or administratively feasible within that time—it cannot accomplish anything (unless the objective was only an excuse for some act of conquest or punishment). The compellent action has to be one that can be stopped or reversed when the enemy complies, or else there is no inducement.

If the opponent's compliance necessarily takes time—if it is sustained good behavior, cessation of an activity that he must not resume, evacuation of a place he must not reenter, payment of tribute over an extended period, or some constructive activity that takes time to accomplish—the compellent threat requires some commitment, pledge, or guarantee, or some hostage, or else must be susceptible of being resumed or repeated itself. Particularly in a crisis, a Cuban crisis or a Vietnamese crisis, there is strong incentive to get compliance quickly to limit the risk or damage. Just finding conditions that can be met on the demanding time schedule of a dangerous crisis is not easy. The ultimate demands, the objectives that the compellent threat is really aimed at, may have to be achieved indirectly, by taking pledges or hostages that can be used to coerce compliance after the pressure has been relieved.¹⁹ Of course, if some kind of

19. Lord Portal's account of the coercive bombing of the villages of recalcitrant Arab tribesmen (after warning to permit evacuation) includes the terms that were demanded. Among them were hostages—literal hostages, people—as well as a fine; otherwise the demand was essentially cessation of the raids or other misbehavior that had brought on the bombing. The hostages were apparently partly to permit subsequent enforcement without repeated bombing, partly to symbolize, together with the fine, the tribe's intent to comply. See Portal, "Air Force Cooperation in Policing the Empire," pp. 343–58.

surrender statement or acknowledgement of submission, some symbolic knuckling under, will itself achieve the object, verbal compliance may be enough. It is inherent in an intense crisis that the conditions for bringing it to a close have to be of a kind that can be met quickly; that is what we mean by an "intense crisis," one that compresses risk, pain, or cost into a short span of time or that involves actions that cannot be sustained indefinitely. If we change our compellent threat from slow pressure to intense, we have to change our demands to make them fit the urgent timing of a crisis.

[Notice that to deter *continuance* of something the opponent is already doing—harassment, overflight, blockade, occupation of some island or territory, electronic disturbance, subversive activity, holding prisoners, or whatever it may be—has some of the character of a compellent threat.] This is especially so of the timing, of who has to take the initiative. In the more static case we want him to go on *not* doing something; in this more dynamic case we want him to *change* his behavior. The "when" problem arises in compelling him to stop, and the compellent action may have to be initiated, not held in waiting like the deterrent threat. The problems of "how much" may not arise if it is some discrete, well defined activity. "At all" may be the obvious answer. For U-2 flights or fishing within a twelve-mile limit, that may be the case; for subversive activity or support to insurgents, "at all" may itself be ambiguous because the activity is complex, ill defined, and hard to observe or attribute.

[Blockade, harassment, and "salami tactics" can be interpreted as ways of evading the dangers and difficulties of compellence.] Blockade in a cold war sets up a tactical "status quo" that is damaging in the long run but momentarily safe for both sides unless the victim tries to run the blockade. President Kennedy's overt act of sending the fleet to sea, in "quarantine" of Cuba in October 1962, had some of the quality of deterrent "stage setting"; the Soviet government then had about forty-eight hours to instruct its steamers whether or not to seek collision. Low-level intrusion, as discussed earlier, can be a way of letting the opponent turn his head and yield a little, or it can be a way of starting a compellent action in low gear, without the

conviction that goes with greater momentum but also without the greater risk. Instead of speeding out of control toward our car that blocks his way, risking our inability to see him and get our engines started in time to clear his path, he approaches slowly and nudges fenders, crushing a few lights and cracking some paint. If we yield he can keep it up, if not he can cut his losses. And if he makes it look accidental, or can blame it on an impetuous chauffeur, he may not even lose countenance in the unsuccessful try.

Defense and Deterrence, Offense and Compellence

The observation that deterrent threats are often passive, while compellent threats often have to be active, should not be pressed too far. Sometimes a deterrent threat cannot be made credible in advance, and the threat has to be made lively when the prohibited action is undertaken. This is where *defense* and *deterrence* may merge, forcible defense being undertaken in the hope, perhaps with the main purpose, of demonstrating by resistance that the conquest will be costly, even if successful, too costly to be worth while. The idea of "graduated deterrence" and much of the argument for a conventional warfare capability in Europe are based on the notion that if passive deterrence initially fails, the more active kind may yet work. If the enemy act to be deterred is a once-for-all action, incapable of withdrawal, rather than progressive over time, any failure of deterrence is complete and final; there is no second chance. But if the aggressive move takes time, if the adversary did not believe he would meet resistance or did not appreciate how costly it would be, one can still hope to demonstrate that the threat is in force, after he begins. If he expected no opposition, encountering some may cause him to change his mind.

There is still a distinction here between forcible defense and defensive action intended to deter. If the object, and the only hope, is to resist successfully, so that the enemy *cannot* succeed even if he tries, we can call it pure defense. If the object is to *induce* him not to proceed, by making his encroachment painful

or costly, we can call it a "coercive" or "deterrent" defense. The language is clumsy but the distinction is valid. Resistance that might otherwise seem futile can be worthwhile if, though incapable of blocking aggression, it can nevertheless threaten to make the cost too high. This is "active" or "dynamic" deterrence, deterrence in which the threat is communicated by progressive fulfillment. At the other extreme is forcible defense with good prospect of blocking the opponent but little promise of hurting; this would be purely defensive.

Defensive action may even be undertaken with no serious hope of repelling or deterring enemy action but with a view to making a "successful" conquest costly enough to deter repetition by the same opponent or anyone else. This is of course the rationale for reprisals after the fact; they cannot undo the deed but can make the books show a net loss and reduce the incentive next time. Defense can sometimes get the same point across, as the Swiss demonstrated in the fifteenth century by the manner in which they lost battles as well as by the way they sometimes won them. "The [Swiss] Confederates were able to reckon their reputation for obstinate and invincible courage as one of the chief causes which gave them political importance. . . . It was no light matter to engage with an enemy who would not retire before any superiority in numbers, who was always ready for a fight, who would neither give nor take quarter."²⁰ The Finns demonstrated five hundred years later that the principle still works. The value of local resistance is not measured solely by local success. This idea of what we might call "punitive resistance" could have been part of the rationale for the American commitment of forces in Vietnam.²¹

"Compellence" is more like "offense." *Forcible* offense is taking something, occupying a place, or disarming an enemy or a territory, by some direct action that the enemy is unable to block. "Compellence" is *inducing* his withdrawal, or his ac-

20. C. W. C. Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 96.

21. An alternative, but not inconsistent, treatment of some of these distinctions is in Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 5-7, 9-16, 24-40.

quiescence, or his collaboration by an action that threatens to hurt, often one that could not forcibly accomplish its aim but that, nevertheless, can hurt enough to induce compliance. The forcible and the coercive are both present in a campaign that could reach its goal against resistance, and would be worth the cost, but whose cost is nevertheless high enough so that one hopes to induce compliance, or to deter resistance, by making evident the intent to proceed. Forcible action, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is limited to what can be accomplished without enemy collaboration; compellent threats can try to induce more affirmative action, including the exercise of authority by an enemy to bring about the desired results.

[War itself, then, can have deterrent or compellent intent, just as it can have defensive or offensive aims.] A war in which both sides can hurt each other but neither can forcibly accomplish its purpose could be compellent on one side, deterrent on the other. Once an engagement starts, though, the difference between deterrence and compellence, like the difference between defense and offense, may disappear. There can be legal and moral reasons, as well as historical reasons, for recalling the status quo ante; but if territory is in dispute, the strategies for taking it, holding it, or recovering it may not much differ as between the side that originally possessed it and the side that coveted it, once the situation has become fluid. (In a local tactical sense, American forces were often on the "defensive" in North Korea and on the "offensive" in South Korea.) The coercive aspect of warfare may be equally compellent on both sides, the only difference perhaps being that the demands of the defender, the one who originally possessed what is in dispute, may be clearly defined by the original boundaries, whereas the aggressor's demands may have no such obvious definition.

The Cuban crisis is a good illustration of the fluidity that sets in once passive deterrence has failed. The United States made verbal threats against the installation of weapons in Cuba but apparently some part of the threat was unclear or lacked credibility and it was transgressed. The threat lacked the automaticity that would make it fully credible, and without some

automaticity it may not be clear to either side just where the threshold is. Nor was it physically easy to begin moderate resistance after the Russians had crossed the line, and to increase the resistance progressively to show that the United States meant it. By the time the President determined to resist, he was no longer in a deterrent position and had to embark on the more complicated business of compellence. The Russian missiles could sit waiting, and so could Cuban defense forces; the next overt act was up to the President. The problem was to prove to the Russians that a potentially dangerous action was forthcoming, without any confidence that verbal threats would be persuasive and without any desire to initiate some irreversible process just to prove, to everybody's grief, that the United States meant what it said.

The problem was to find some action that would communicate the threat, an action that would promise damage if the Russians did not comply but minimum damage if they complied quickly enough, and an action that involved enough momentum or commitment to put the next move clearly up to the Russians. Any overt act against a well-defended island would be abrupt and dramatic; various alternatives were apparently considered, and in the end an action was devised that had many of the virtues of static deterrence. A blockade was thrown around the island, a blockade that by itself could not make the missiles go away. The blockade did, however, threaten a minor military confrontation with major diplomatic stakes—an encounter between American naval vessels and Soviet merchant ships bound for Cuba. Once in place, the Navy was in a position to wait; it was up to the Russians to decide whether to continue. If Soviet ships had been beyond recall, the blockade would have been a preparation for inevitable engagement; with modern communications the ships were not beyond recall, and the Russians were given the last clear chance to turn aside. Physically the Navy could have avoided an encounter; diplomatically, the declaration of quarantine and the dispatch of the Navy meant that American evasion of the encounter was virtually out of the question. For the Russians, the diplomatic cost of turning

freighters around, or even letting one be examined, proved not to be prohibitive.

[Thus an initial deterrent threat failed, a compellent threat was called for, and by good fortune one could be found that had some of the static qualities of a deterrent threat.²²]

[There is another characteristic of compellent threats, arising in the need for affirmative action, that often distinguishes them from deterrent threats. It is that the very act of compliance—of doing what is demanded—is more conspicuously compliant, more recognizable as submission under duress, than when an act is merely withheld in the face of a deterrent threat.] Compliance is likely to be less casual, less capable of being rationalized as something that one was going to do anyhow. The Chinese did not need to acknowledge that they shied away from Quemoy or Formosa because of American threats, and the Russians need not have agreed that it was NATO that deterred them from conquering Western Europe, and no one can be sure. Indeed, if a deterrent threat is created before the proscribed act is even contemplated, there need never be an explicit decision *not* to transgress, just an absence of any temptation *to* do the thing prohibited. The Chinese still say they will take Quemoy in their own good time; and the Russians go on saying that their intentions against Western Europe were never aggressive.

The Russians cannot, though, claim that they were on the point of removing their missiles from Cuba anyway, and that the President's television broadcast, the naval quarantine and

22. Arnold Horelick agrees with this description. "As an initial response the quarantine was considerably less than a direct application of violence, but considerably more than a mere protest or verbal threat. The U.S. Navy placed itself physically between Cuba and Soviet ships bound for Cuban ports. Technically, it might still have been necessary for the United States to fire the first shot had Khrushchev chosen to defy the quarantine, though other means of preventing Soviet penetration might have been employed. But once the quarantine was effectively established—which was done with great speed—it was Khrushchev who had to make the next key decision: whether or not to risk releasing the trip-wire." "The Cuban Missile Crisis," *World Politics*, 16 (1964), 385. This article and the Adelphi Paper of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter mentioned in an earlier note are the best strategic evaluations of the Cuban affair that I have discovered.

threats of more violent action, had no effect.²³ If the North Vietnamese dramatically issue a call to the Vietcong to cease activity and to evacuate South Vietnam, it is a conspicuous act of submission. If the Americans had evacuated Guantanamo when Castro turned off the water, it would have been a conspicuous act of submission. If an earthquake or change in the weather had caused the water supply to dry up at Guantanamo, and if the Americans had found it wholly uneconomical to supply the base by tanker, they might have quit the place without seeming to submit to Castro's cleverness or seeming afraid to take reprisals against their ungracious host. Similarly, the mere act of bombing North Vietnam changed the status of any steps that the North Vietnamese might take to comply with American wishes. It can increase their desire, if the tactic is successful, to reduce support for the Vietcong; but it also increases the cost of doing so. Secretary Dulles used to say that while we had no vital interest in Quemoy we could not afford to evacuate under duress; intensified Chinese pressure always led to intensified determination to resist it.²⁴

If the object is actually to impose humiliation, to force a showdown and to get an acknowledgement of submission, then the "challenge" that is often embodied in an active compellent threat is something to be exploited. President Kennedy undoubtedly wanted some conspicuous compliance by the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis, if only to make clear to the Russians themselves that there were risks in testing how much the American Government would absorb such ventures. In Vietnam the problem appeared the opposite; what was most ur-

23. The tendency for affirmative action to appear compliant is vividly illustrated by the widespread suspicion—one that could not be effectively dispelled—that the U.S. missiles removed from Turkey in the wake of the Cuban crisis were part of a bargain, tacit if not explicit.

24. Almost everyone in America, surely including the President and the Secretary of State, would have been relieved in the late 1950s if an earthquake or volcanic action had caused Quemoy to sink slowly beneath the surface of the sea. Evacuation would then not have been retreat, and an unsought commitment that had proved peculiarly susceptible to Communist China's manipulation would have been disposed of. Such is the intrinsic value of some territories that have to be defended!

gently desired was to reduce the support for the Vietcong from the North, and any tendency for the compellent pressure of bombing to produce a corresponding resistance would have been deprecated. But it cannot always be avoided, and if it cannot, the compellent threat defeats itself.

Skill is required to devise a compellent action that does not have this self-defeating quality. There is an argument here for sometimes not being too explicit or too open about precisely what is demanded, if the demands can be communicated more privately and noncommittally. President Johnson was widely criticized in the press, shortly after the bombing attacks began in early 1965, for not having made his objectives entirely clear. How could the North Vietnamese comply if they did not know exactly what was wanted? Whatever the reason for the American Administration's being somewhat inexplicit—whether it chose to be inexplicit, did not know how to be explicit, or in fact was explicit but only privately—an important possibility is that vague demands, though hard to understand, can be less embarrassing to comply with. If the President had to be so explicit that any European journalist knew exactly what he demanded, and if the demands were concrete enough to make compliance recognizable when it occurred, any compliance by the North Vietnamese regime would necessarily have been fully public, perhaps quite embarrassingly so. The action could not be hidden nor the motive so well disguised as if the demands were more privately communicated or left to inference by the North Vietnamese.

Another serious possibility is suggested by the North Vietnamese case: that the initiator of a compellent campaign is not himself altogether sure of what action he wants, or how the result that he wants can be brought about. In the Cuban missile case it was perfectly clear what the United States government wanted, clear that the Soviets had the ability to comply, fairly clear how quickly it could be done, and reasonably clear how compliance might be monitored and verified, though in the end there might be some dispute about whether the Russians had left behind things they were supposed to remove. In the Vietnamese case,

we can suppose that the United States government did not know in detail just how much control or influence the North Vietnamese regime had over the Vietcong; and we can even suppose that the North Vietnamese regime itself might not have been altogether sure how much influence it would have in commanding a withdrawal or in sabotaging the movement that had received its moral and material support. The United States government may not have been altogether clear on which kinds of North Vietnamese help—logistical help, training facilities, sanctuary for the wounded, sanctuary for intelligence and planning activities, communications relay facilities, technical assistance, advisors and combat leaders in the field, political and doctrinal assistance, propaganda, moral support or anything else—were most effective and essential, or most able to be withdrawn on short notice with decisive effects. And possibly the North Vietnamese did not know. The American government may have been in the position of demanding *results* not specific *actions*, leaving it to the North Vietnamese through overt acts, or merely through reduced support and enthusiasm, to weaken the Vietcong or to let it lose strength. Not enough is known publicly to permit us to judge this Vietnamese instance; but it points up the important possibility that a compellent threat may have to be focused on results rather than contributory deeds, like the father's demand that his son's school grades be improved, or the extortionist's demand, "Get me money. I don't care how you get it, just get it." A difficulty, of course, is that results are more a matter of interpretations than deeds usually are. Whenever a recipient of foreign aid, for example, is told that it must eliminate domestic corruption, improve its balance of payments, or raise the quality of its civil service, the results tend to be uncertain, protracted, and hard to attribute. The country may try to comply and fail; with luck it may succeed without trying; it may have indifferent success that is hard to judge; in any case compliance is usually arguable and often visible only in retrospect.

Even more than deterrence, compellence requires that we recognize the difference between an individual and a government. To coerce an individual it may be enough to persuade

him to change his mind; to coerce a government it may not be necessary, but it also may not be sufficient, to cause individuals to change their minds. What may be required is some change in the complexion of the government itself, in the authority, prestige, or bargaining power of particular individuals or factions or parties, some shift in executive or legislative leadership. The Japanese surrender of 1945 was marked as much by changes in the structure of authority and influence within the government as by changes in attitude on the part of individuals. The victims of coercion, or the individuals most sensitive to coercive threats, may not be directly in authority; or they may be hopelessly committed to non-compliant policies. They may have to bring bureaucratic skill or political pressure to bear on individuals who do exercise authority, or go through processes that shift authority or blame to others. In the extreme case governing authorities may be wholly unsusceptible to coercion—may, as a party or as individuals, have everything to lose and little to save by yielding to coercive threats—and actual revolt may be essential to the process of compliance, or sabotage or assassination. Hitler was uncoercible; some of his generals were not, but they lacked organization and skill and failed in their plot. [For working out the incentive structure of a threat, its communication requirements and its mechanism, analogies with individuals are helpful; but they are counterproductive if they make us forget that a government does not reach a decision in the same way as an individual in a government. Collective decision depends on the internal politics and bureaucracy of government, on the chain of command and on lines of communication, on party structures and pressure groups, as well as on individual values and careers. This affects the speed of decision, too.]

"Connectedness" in Compellent Threats

As mentioned earlier, a deterrent threat usually enjoys some *connectedness* between the proscribed action and the threatened response. The connection is sometimes a physical one, as when troops are put in Berlin to defend Berlin. Compellent actions often have a less well-defined connectedness; and the question

arises whether they ought to be connected at all. If the object is to harass, to blockade, to scare or to inflict pain or damage until an adversary complies, why cannot the connection be made verbally? If the Russians want Pan-American Airways to stop using the air corridor to Berlin, why can they not harass the airline on its Pacific routes, announcing that harassment will continue until the airline stops flying to Berlin? When the Russians put missiles in Cuba, why cannot the President quarantine Vladivostok, stopping Soviet ships outside, say, a twelve-mile limit, or perhaps denying them access to the Suez or Panama Canal? And if the Russians had wanted to counter the President's quarantine of Cuba, why could they not blockade Norway? ²⁵

A hasty answer may be that it just is not done, or is not "justified," as though connectedness implied justice, or as though justice were required for effectiveness. Surely that is part of the answer; there is a legalistic or diplomatic, perhaps a casuistic, propensity to keep things connected, to keep the threat and the demand in the same currency, to do what seems reasonable. But why be reasonable, if results are what one

25. It has often been said that American tactical superiority and ease of access in the Caribbean (coupled with superiority in strategic weaponry) account for the success in inducing evacuation of the Soviet missiles. Surely that was crucial; but equally significant was the universal tendency—a psychological phenomenon, a tradition or convention shared by Russians and Americans—to *define* the conflict in Caribbean terms, not as a contest, say, in the blockade of each other's island allies, not as a counterpart of their position in Berlin, not as a war of harassment against strategic weapons outside national borders. The countermeasures and counterpressures available to the Russians might have looked very different to the "Russian" side if this had been a game on an abstract board rather than an event in historical time in a particular part of the real world. The Russians tried (as did some unhelpful Americans) to find a connection between Soviet missiles in Cuba and American missiles in Turkey, but the connection was evidently not persuasive enough for the Russians to be confident that, if the dispute led to military action or pressure against Turkey, *that* definition would hold and things would go no further. The Caribbean definition had more coherence or integrity than a Cuban-Turkish definition would have had, or, in terms of reciprocal blockade, a Cuban-United Kingdom definition would have had. The risk of further metastasis must have inhibited any urge to let the crisis break out of its original Caribbean definition.

wants? Habit, tradition, or some psychological compulsion may explain this connectedness, but it has to be asked whether they make it wise.

There are undoubtedly some good reasons for designing a compellent campaign that is connected with the compliance desired. One is that it helps to communicate the threat itself; it creates less uncertainty about what is demanded, what pressure will be kept up until the demands are complied with and then relaxed once they are. Actions not only speak louder than words on many occasions, but like words they can speak clearly or confusingly. To the extent that actions speak, it helps if they reinforce the message rather than confuse it.

Second, if the object is to induce compliance and not to start a spiral of reprisals and counteractions, it is helpful to show the limits to what one is demanding, and this can often be best shown by designing a campaign that distinguishes what is demanded from all the other objectives that one might have been seeking but is not. To harass aircraft in the Berlin air corridor communicates that polar flights are not at issue; to harass polar flights while saying that it is punishment for flying in the Berlin corridor does not so persuasively communicate that the harassment will stop when the Berlin flights stop, or that the Russians will not think of a few other favors they would like from the airline before they call off their campaign. Most of the problems of defining the threat and the demands that go with it, of offering assurance about what is not demanded and of promising cessation once compliance is forthcoming, are aggravated if there is no connection between the compellent action (or the threat of it) and the issue being bargained over.

The same question can arise with deterrent threats; sometimes they lack connectedness. To threaten the Chinese mainland in the event of an overland attack on India has a minimum of connectedness. If the threatened response is massive enough, though, it may seem to comprise or to include the local area and not merely to depart from it. But it often lacks some of the credibility, through automatic involvement, that can be achieved by connecting the response physically to the provocation itself. Contingent actions—not actions *initiated* to induce compliance,

but actions *threatened* against potential provocation—often need the credibility that connectedness can give them.

Connectedness in fact provides something of a scheme for classifying compellent threats and actions. The ideal compellent action would be one that, once initiated, causes minimal harm if compliance is forthcoming and great harm if compliance is not forthcoming, is consistent with the time schedule of feasible compliance, is beyond recall once initiated, and cannot be stopped by the party that started it but *automatically* stops upon compliance, with all this fully understood by the adversary. Only *he* can avert the consequences; he can do it only by complying; and compliance automatically precludes them. His is then the “last clear chance” to avert the harm or catastrophe; and it would not even matter which of the two most feared the consequences as long as the adversary knew that only he, by complying, could avert them. (Of course, whatever is demanded of him must be less unattractive to him than the threatened consequences, and the manner of threatened compliance must not entail costs in prestige, reputation, or self-respect that outweigh the threat.)

It is hard to find significant international events that have this perfectionist quality. There are situations, among cars on highways or in bureaucratic bargaining or domestic politics, where one comes across such ideal compellent threats; but they usually involve physical constraints or legal arrangements that tie the hand of the initiator in a way that is usually not possible in international relations. Still, if we include actions that the initiator can physically recall but not without intolerable cost, so that it is evident he would not go back even if it is equally clear that he could, we can find some instances. An armed convoy on a Berlin Autobahn may sometimes come close to having this quality.

A degree less satisfactory is the compellent action of which the consequences can be averted by *either* side, by the initiator's changing his mind just in time or by his adversary's compliance. Because he can stop before the consequences mount up, this type of compellent action may be less risky for the party that starts it; there is a means of escape, though it may become a test of nerves, or a test of endurance, each side hoping the other will

back down, both sides possibly waiting too long. The escape hatch is an asset if one discovers along the way that the compellent attempt was a mistake after all—one misjudged the adversary, or formulated an impossible demand, or failed to communicate what he was doing and what he was after. The escape hatch is an embarrassment, though, if the adversary knows it is there; he can suppose, or hope, that the initiator will turn aside before the risk or pain mounts up.

Still another type is the action that, though beyond recall by the initiator, does not automatically stop upon the victim's compliance. Compliance is a *necessary* condition for stopping the damage but not *sufficient*, and if the damage falls mainly on the adversary, he has to consider what other demands will attach to the same compellent action once he has complied with the initial demands. The initiator may have to promise persuasively that he will stop on compliance, but stoppage is not automatic. Once the missiles are gone from Cuba we may have afterthoughts about anti-aircraft batteries and want them removed too before we call off the quarantine or stop the flights.

Finally, there is the action that only the initiator can stop, but can stop any time with or without compliance, a quite "unconnected" action.

In all of these cases the facts may be misperceived by one party or both, with the danger that each may think the other can in fact avert the consequences, or one may fail to do so in the mistaken belief that the other has the last clear chance to avert collision. These different compellent mechanisms, which of course are more blurred and complex in any actual case, usually depend on what the connection is between the threat and the demand—a connection that can be physical, territorial, legal, symbolic, electronic, political, or psychological.

Compellence and Brinkmanship

Another important distinction is between compellent actions that inflict steady pressure over time, with cumulative pain or damage to the adversary (and perhaps to oneself), and actions

that impose risk rather than damage. Turning off the water supply at Guantanamo creates a finite rate of privation over time. Buzzing an airplane in the Berlin corridor does no harm unless the planes collide; they probably will not collide but they *may* and if they do the result is sudden, dramatic, irreversible, and grave enough to make even a small probability a serious one.

The creation of risk—usually a shared risk—is the technique of compellence that probably best deserves the name of "brinkmanship." It is a competition in risk-taking. It involves setting afoot an activity that may get out of hand, initiating a process that carries some risk of unintended disaster. The risk is intended, but not the disaster. One cannot initiate *certain* disaster as a profitable way of putting compellent pressure on someone, but one can initiate a moderate *risk* of mutual disaster if the other party's compliance is feasible within a short enough period to keep the cumulative risk within tolerable bounds. "Rocking the boat" is a good example. If I say, "Row, or I'll tip the boat over and drown us both," you'll not believe me. I cannot actually tip the boat over to make you row. But if I start rocking the boat so that it *may* tip over—not because I want it to but because I do not completely control things once I start rocking the boat—you'll be more impressed. I have to be willing to take the risk; then I still have to win the war of nerves, unless I can arrange it so that only you can steady the boat by rowing where I want you to. But it does lend itself to compellence, because one may be able to create a coercive risk of grave consequences where he could not profitably take a deliberate step to bring about those consequences, or even credibly threaten that he would. This phenomenon is the subject of the chapter that follows.