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*THE MANIPULATION
OF RISK*

If all threats were fully believable (except for the ones that were completely unbelievable) we might live in a strange world — perhaps a safe one, with many of the marks of a world based on enforceable law. Countries would hasten to set up their threats; and if the violence that would accompany infraction were confidently expected, and sufficiently dreadful to outweigh the fruits of transgression, the world might get frozen into a set of laws enforced by what we could figuratively call the Wrath of God. If we could threaten world inundation for any encroachment on the Berlin corridor, and everyone believed it and understood precisely what crime would bring about the deluge, it might not matter whether the whole thing were arranged by human or supernatural powers. If there were no uncertainty about what would and would not set off the violence, and if everyone could avoid accidentally overstepping the bounds, and if we and the Soviets (and everybody else) could avoid making simultaneous and incompatible threats, every nation would have to live within the rules set up by its adversary. And if all the threats depended on some kind of physical positioning of territorial claims, trip-wires, troop barriers, automatic alarm systems, and other such arrangements, and all were completely infallible and fully credible, we might have something like an old fashioned western land rush, at the end of which—as long as nobody tripped on his neighbor's electric fence and set the whole thing off—the world would be carved up into a tightly bound status quo. The world would be full of literal and figurative frontiers and thresholds that nobody in his right mind would cross.

But uncertainty exists. Not everybody is always in his right mind. Not all the frontiers and thresholds are precisely defined, fully reliable, and known to be so beyond the least temptation to test them out, to explore for loopholes, or to take a chance that they may be disconnected this time. Violence, especially war, is a confused and uncertain activity, highly unpredictable, depending on decisions made by fallible human beings organized into imperfect governments, depending on fallible communications and warning systems and on the untested performance of people and equipment. It is furthermore a hotheaded activity, in which commitments and reputations can develop a momentum of their own.

This last is particularly true, because what one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow. A government never knows just how committed it is to action until the occasion when its commitment is challenged. Nations, like people, are continually engaged in demonstrations of resolve, tests of nerve, and explorations for understandings and misunderstandings.

One never quite knows in the course of a diplomatic confrontation how opinion will converge on signs of weakness. One never quite knows what exits will begin to look cowardly to oneself or to the bystanders or to one's adversary. It would be possible to get into a situation in which either side felt that to yield now would create such an asymmetrical situation, would be such a gratuitous act of surrender, that whoever backed down could not persuade anybody that he wouldn't yield again tomorrow and the day after.

This is why there is a genuine risk of major war not from "accidents" in the military machine but through a diplomatic process of commitment that is itself unpredictable. The unpredictability is not due solely to what a destroyer commander might do at midnight when he comes across a Soviet (or American) freighter at sea, but to the psychological process by which particular things become identified with courage or appeasement or how particular things get included in or left out of a diplomatic package. Whether the removal of their missiles from

Cuba while leaving behind 15,000 troops is a "defeat" for the Soviets or a "defeat" for the United States depends more on how it is construed than on the military significance of the troops, and the construction placed on the outcome is not easily foreseeable.

The resulting international relations often have the character of a competition in risk taking, characterized not so much by tests of force as by tests of nerve. Particularly in the relations between major adversaries—between East and West—issues are decided not by who *can* bring the most force to bear in a locality, or on a particular issue, but by who is eventually *willing* to bring more force to bear or able to make it appear that more is forthcoming.

There are few clear choices—since the close of World War II there have been but a few clear choices—between war and peace. The actual decisions to engage in war—whether the Korean War that did occur or a war at Berlin or Quemoy or Lebanon that did not—were decisions to engage in a war of uncertain size, uncertain as to adversary, as to the weapons involved, even as to the issues that might be brought into it and the possible outcomes that might result. They were decisions to embark on a risky engagement, one that could develop a momentum of its own and get out of hand. Whether it is better to be red than dead is hardly worth arguing about; it is not a choice that has arisen for us or has seemed about to arise in the nuclear era. The questions that do arise involve *degrees of risk*—what risk is worth taking, and how to evaluate the risk involved in a course of action. The perils that countries face are not as straightforward as suicide, but more like Russian roulette. The fact of uncertainty—the sheer unpredictability of dangerous events—not only blurs things, it changes their character. It adds an entire dimension to military relations: the manipulation of risk.

There is just no foreseeable route by which the United States and the Soviet Union could become engaged in a major nuclear war. This does not mean that a major nuclear war cannot occur. It only means that if it occurs it will result from a process that is

not entirely foreseen, from reactions that are not fully predictable, from decisions that are not wholly deliberate, from events that are not fully under control. War has always involved uncertainty, especially as to its outcome; but with the technology and the geography and the politics of today, it is hard to see how a major war could get started except in the presence of uncertainty. Some kind of error or inadvertence, some miscalculations of enemy reactions or misreading of enemy intent, some steps taken without knowledge of steps taken by the other side, some random event or false alarm, or some decisive action to hedge against the unforeseeable would have to be involved in the process on one side or both.'

This does not mean that there is nothing the United States would fight a major war to defend, but that these are things that the Soviet Union would not fight a major war to obtain. And there are undoubtedly things the Soviet Union would fight a major war to defend, but these are not things the United States would fight a major war to obtain. Both sides may get into a position in which compromise is impossible, in which the only visible outcomes would entail a loss to one side or the other so great that both would choose to fight a major nuclear war. But neither side wants to get into such a position; and there is nothing presently at issue between East and West that would get both sides into that position deliberately.

The Cuban crisis illustrates the point. Nearly everybody appeared to feel that there was some danger of a general nuclear war. Whether the danger was large or small, hardly anyone seems to have considered it negligible. To my knowledge, though, no one has ever supposed that the United States or the

1. A superb example of this process, one involving local incidents, accidents of darkness and morning mist, overzealous commanders, troops in panic, erroneous assessment of damage, public opinion, and possibly a little "catalytic action" by warmongers, all conjoining to get governments more nearly committed to a war that might not have been inevitable, occurred within drum-call of my own home. See the detailed account in Arthur B. Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord* (New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1963). It is chastening to consider that the "shot heard round the world" may have been fired in the mistaken belief that a column of smoke meant Concord was on fire.

Soviet Union had any desire to engage in a major war, or that there was anything at issue that, on its merits, could not be settled without general war. If there was danger it seems to have been that each side might have taken a series of steps, actions and reactions and countermeasures, piling up its threats and its commitments, generating a sense of showdown, demonstrating a willingness to carry the thing as far as necessary, until one side or the other began to believe that war had already started, or was so inevitable that it should be started quickly, or that so much was now at stake that general war was preferable to accommodation.

The process would have had to be unforeseeable and unpredictable. If there were some clearly recognizable final critical steps that converted the situation from one in which war was unnecessary to one in which war was inevitable, the step would not have been taken. Alternatives would have been found. Any transition from peace to war would have had to traverse a region of uncertainty — of misunderstandings or miscalculations or misinterpretations, or actions with unforeseen consequences, in which things got out of hand.

There was nothing about the blockade of Cuba by American naval vessels that could have led straightforwardly into general war. Any *foreseeable* course of events would have involved steps that the Soviets or the Americans — realizing that they would lead straightforwardly to general war — would not have taken. But the Soviets could be expected to take steps that, though not leading directly to war, could further compound risk; they might incur some risk of war rather than back down completely. The Cuban crisis was a contest in risk taking, involving steps that would have made no sense if they led predictably and ineluctably to a major war, yet would also have made no sense if they were completely without danger. Neither side needed to believe the other side would deliberately and knowingly take the step that would raise the possibility to a certainty.

What deters such crises and makes them infrequent is that they are genuinely dangerous. Whatever happens to the danger of deliberate premeditated war in such a crisis, the danger of in-

advertent war appears to go up. This is why they are called “crises.” The essence of the crisis is its unpredictability. The “crisis” that is confidently believed to involve no danger of things getting out of hand is no crisis; no matter how energetic the activity, as long as things are believed safe there is no crisis. And a “crisis” that is known to entail disaster or large losses, or great changes of some sort that are completely foreseeable, is also no crisis; it is over as soon as it begins, there is no suspense. It is the essence of a crisis that the participants are not fully in control of events; they take steps and make decisions that raise or lower the danger, but in a realm of risk and uncertainty.

Deterrence has to be understood in relation to this uncertainty. We often talk as though a “deterrent threat” was a credible threat to launch a disastrous war coolly and deliberately in response to some enemy transgression. People who voice doubts, for example, about American willingness to launch war on the Soviet Union in case of Soviet aggression against some ally, and people who defend American resolve against those doubts, both often tend to argue in terms of a once-for-all decision. The picture is drawn of a Soviet attack, say, on Greece or Turkey or West Germany, and the question is raised, would the United States then launch a retaliatory blow against the Soviet Union? Some answer a disdainful no, some answer a proud yes, but neither seems to be answering the pertinent question. The choice is unlikely to be one between everything and nothing. The question is really: is the United States likely to do something that is fraught with the danger of war, something that could lead — through a compounding of actions and reactions, of calculations and miscalculations, of alarms and false alarms, of commitments and challenges — to a major war?

This is why deterrent threats are often so credible. They do not need to depend on a willingness to commit anything like suicide in the face of a challenge. A response that carries some risk of war can be plausible, even reasonable, at a time when a final, ultimate decision to *have* a general war would be implausible or unreasonable. A country can threaten to stumble into a

war even if it cannot credibly threaten to invite one. In fact, though a country may not be able with absolute credibility to threaten general war, it may be equally unable with absolute credibility to forestall a major war. The Russians would have been out of their minds at the time of the Cuban crisis to incur deliberately a major nuclear war with the United States; their missile threats were far from credible, there was nothing that the United States wanted out of the Cuban crisis that the Russians could have rationally denied at the cost of general war. Yet their implicit threat to behave in a way that might—that just might, in spite of all their care and all our care—lead up to the brink and over it in a general war, had some substance. If we were anywhere near the brink of war on that occasion, it was a war that neither side wanted but that both sides might have been unable to forestall.

The idea, expressed by some writers, that such deterrence depends on a “credible first strike capability,” and that a country cannot plausibly threaten to engage in a general war over anything but a mortal assault on itself unless it has an appreciable capacity to blunt the other side’s attack, seems to depend on the clean-cut notion that war results—or is expected to result—only from a deliberate yes–no decision. But if war tends to result from a process, a dynamic process in which both sides get more and more deeply involved, more and more expectant, more and more concerned not to be a slow second in case the war starts, it is not a “credible first strike” that one threatens, but just plain war. The Soviet Union can indeed threaten us with war: they can even threaten us with a war that we eventually start, by threatening to get involved with us in a process that blows up into war. And some of the arguments about “superiority” and “inferiority” seem to imply that one of the two sides, being weaker, must absolutely fear war and concede while the other, being stronger, may confidently expect the other to yield. There is undoubtedly a good deal to the notion that the country with the less impressive military capability may be less feared, and the other may run the riskier course in a crisis; other things being equal, one anticipates that the strategically

“superior” country has some advantage. But this is a far cry from the notion that the two sides just measure up to each other and one bows before the other’s superiority and acknowledges that he was only bluffing. Any situation that scares one side will scare both sides with the danger of a war that neither wants, and both will have to pick their way carefully through the crisis, never quite sure that the other knows how to avoid stumbling over the brink.

Brinkmanship: The Manipulation of Risk

If “brinkmanship” means anything, it means *manipulating the shaved risk of war*. It means exploiting the danger that somebody may inadvertently go over the brink, dragging the other with him. If two climbers are tied together, and one wants to intimidate the other by seeming about to fall over the edge, there has to be some uncertainty or anticipated irrationality or it won’t work. If the brink is clearly marked and provides a firm footing, no loose pebbles underfoot and no gusts of wind to catch one off guard, if each climber is in full control of himself and never gets dizzy, neither can pose any risk to the other by approaching the brink. There is no danger in approaching it; and while either can deliberately jump off, he cannot credibly pretend that he is about to. Any attempt to intimidate or to deter the other climber depends on the threat of slipping or stumbling. With loose ground, gusty winds, and a propensity toward dizziness, there is some danger when a climber approaches the edge; one can credibly threaten to fall off *accidentally* by standing near the brink.

Without uncertainty, deterrent threats of war would take the form of trip-wires. To incur commitment is to lay a trip-wire, one that is plainly visible, that cannot be stumbled on, and that is manifestly connected up to the machinery of war. And if effective, it works much like a physical barrier. The trip-wire will not be crossed as long as it has not been placed in an intolerable location, and it will not be placed in an intolerable location as long as there is no uncertainty about each other’s

motives and nothing at issue that is worth a war to both sides. Either side can stick its neck out, confident that the other will not chop it off. As long as the process is a series of discrete steps, taken deliberately, without any uncertainty as to the consequences, this process of military commitment and maneuver would not lead to war. Imminent war — possible war — would be continually threatened, but the threats would work. They would work unless one side were pushed too far; but if the pushing side knows how far that is, it will not push that far.

The resulting world — the world without uncertainty — would discriminate in favor of passivity against initiative. It is easier to *deter* than to *compel*. Among a group of arthritics moving delicately and slowly at a cocktail party, no one can be dislodged from his position near the bar, or ousted from his favorite chair; bodily contact is equally painful to his assailant. By standing in the doorway, one can prevent the entrance or exit of another ailing guest who is unwilling to push his way painfully through.

In fact, without uncertainty all the military threats and maneuvers would be like diplomacy with rigid rules and can be illustrated with a modified game of chess. A chess game can end in win, lose, or draw. Let's change the game by adding a fourth outcome called "disaster." If "disaster" occurs, a heavy fine is levied on both players, so that each is worse off than if he had simply lost the game. And the rules specify what causes disaster: specifically, if either player has moved his knight across the center line and the other player has moved his queen across the center line, the game terminates at once and both players are scored with a disaster. If a white knight is already on the black side of the board when the black queen moves across to the white side, the black queen's move terminates the game in disaster; if the queen was already across when White moved his knight across the center line, the knight's move terminates the game in disaster for both players. And the same applies for the white queen and the black knight.

What does this new rule do to the way a game is played? If a game is played well, and both players play for the best score they can get, we can state two observations. First, a game will

never end in disaster. It could only terminate in disaster if one of the players made a deliberate move that he knew would cause disaster, and he would not. Second, the possibility of disaster will be reflected in the players' tactics. White can effectively keep Black's queen on her own side of the board by getting a knight across first; or he can keep both Black's knights on their own side by getting his queen across first. This ability to block or to deter certain moves of the adversary will be an important part of the game; the threat of disaster will be effective, so effective that the disaster never occurs.

In fact, the result is no different from a rule that says no queen can cross a center line if an opponent's knight has already crossed it, and no knight can cross the center line if an opponent's queen has already crossed it. *Prohibitive* penalties imposed on *deliberate* actions are equivalent to ordinary rules.

The characteristic that this chess game shares with the tripwire diplomacy, and that accounts for its peculiar safety, is the absence of uncertainty. There is always some moment, or some final step, in which one side or the other has the last clear chance to turn the course of events away from war (or from disaster in our game of chess) or to turn it away from a political situation that would induce the other to take the final step toward war. The skillful chess player will keep the knight across the center line or near enough to cross before his opponent's queen can get across, with due allowance for the cost of having to devote resources to the purpose. Skillful diplomacy, in the absence of uncertainty, consists in arranging things so that it is one's opponent who is embarrassed by having the "last clear chance" to avert disaster by turning aside or abstaining from what he wanted to do.

But off the chess board the last chance to avert disaster is not always clear. One does not always know what moves of his own would lead to disaster, one cannot always perceive the moves that the other side has already taken or has set afoot, or what interpretation will be put on one's own actions; one does not always understand clearly what situations the other side would not, at some moment, accept in preference to war. When we

add uncertainty to this artificial chess game we are not so sure that disaster will be avoided. More important, the risk of disaster becomes a manipulative element in the situation. It can be exploited to intimidate.

To see this, make one more change in the rules. Let us not have disaster occur automatically when queen and knight of opposite color have crossed the center line. Instead, when that occurs, the referee rolls a die. If an ace comes up the game is over and both players are scored with disaster, but if any other number appears the play goes on. If after the next move the queen and knight are still across the center line the dice are rolled again, and so on.

This is a very different game. And not just because disaster may or may not occur when queen and knight get into those positions, instead of occurring with certainty. The difference is that now queen and knight may actually be moved into those positions. One can deliberately move his knight across the line in an attempt to make the queen retreat, if one thinks his adversary is less willing to incur a continuing risk of disaster, or thinks his adversary can be persuaded that oneself will not retreat, and if the momentary risk of disaster is not prohibitive. In fact, getting one's knight across and blocking its return with one's own pieces, so that it clearly takes several moves to retreat, may persuade the adversary that only he, by withdrawing his queen, can reduce the risk within a tolerable time.

If the black queen cannot retreat—if her exit is blocked against timely retreat—the white knight's tactic to force her withdrawal is ineffectual and gratuitously risky. But it can possibly serve another end (another risky one), namely, to enforce "negotiation." By crossing over, once the queen has crossed and cannot readily return, the knight can threaten disaster; White can propose Black's surrender, or a stalemate, or the removal of a bishop or the sacrifice of a pawn. What he gets out of this is wide open; but what began as a chess game has been converted into a bargaining game. Both sides are under similar pressure to settle the game or at least to get the white knight out of mischief. The outcome, it should be noticed, will not necessarily be

in White's favor; he created the pressure, but both are subject to the same risk. White's advantage is that he can back out more quickly, as we have set up the game in this example; even he cannot retreat, though, until Black has made his next move, and for the moment both have the same incentive to come to terms. (White's ability to retreat, and Black's inability, may seem more of an advantage to White than it actually is; his ability to retreat is an ability to save both players, equally, from disaster. If no bargain is reached, the white knight has to return, because he is the only one who can. If Black can avoid entering any negotiation—can absent himself from the room or turn off his hearing aid—White's sole remaining objective will be to get his own knight back before he blows things up.) If "disaster" is only somewhat worse, not drastically worse, than losing the chess game, the side that is losing may have more incentive to threaten disaster, or more immunity to the other's threat, and perhaps in consequence a stronger bargaining position. Note, in particular, that all of this has nothing to do with whether a knight is more or less potent than a queen in the chess game; queen and knight can be interchanged in the analysis of this paragraph. If the clash of a squad with a division can lead to unintended war, or of a protest marcher with an armed policeman to an unwanted riot, their potencies are equal in respect of the threats that count.

In this way uncertainty imports tactics of intimidation into the game. One can incur a moderate probability of disaster, sharing it with his adversary, as a deterrent or compellent device, where one could not take, or persuasively threaten to take, a deliberate last clear step into certain disaster.²

2. To clarify the theoretical point it may be worth observing that the uncertainty and unpredictability need not arise from a genuine random mechanism like the dice. It is unpredictability, not "chance," that makes the difference; it could as well arise in the clumsiness of the players, some uncertainty about the rules of the game or the scoring system, bad visibility or moves made in secret, the need to commit certain moves invisibly in advance, meddling by a third party, or errors made by the referee. Dice are merely a convenient way to introduce unpredictability into an artificial example.

The route by which major war might actually be reached would have the same kind of unpredictability. Either side can take steps — engaging in a limited war would usually be such a step — that genuinely raise the probability of a blow-up. This would be the case with intrusions, blockades, occupations of third areas, border incidents, enlargement of some small war, or any incident that involves a challenge and entails a response that may in turn have to be risky. Many of these actions and threats designed to pressure and intimidate would be nothing but noise, if it were reliably known that the situation could not get out of hand. They would neither impose risk nor demonstrate willingness to incur risk. And if they definitely would lead to major war, they would not be taken. (If war were desired, it would be started directly.) What makes them significant and usable is that they create a genuine risk — a danger that can be appreciated — that the thing will blow up for reasons not fully under control.³

It has often been said, and correctly, that a general nuclear war would not liberate Berlin and that local military action in the neighborhood of Berlin could be overcome by Soviet military forces. But that is not all there is to say. What local military forces can do, even against very superior forces, is to initiate this uncertain process of escalation. One does not have to be able to win a local military engagement to make the threat of it effective. Being able to lose a local war in a dangerous and provocative manner may make the risk — not the sure consequences, but the possibility of this act — outweigh the apparent

3. The purest real-life example I can think of in international affairs is “buzzing” an airplane, as in the Berlin air corridor or when a reconnaissance plane intrudes. The *only* danger is that of an *unintended* collision. The pilot who buzzes obviously wants no collision. (If he did, he could proceed to do it straightforwardly.) The danger is that he may not avoid accident, through mishandling his aircraft, or misjudging distance, or failure to anticipate the movements of his victim. He has to fly close enough, or recklessly enough, to create an appreciated risk that he may — probably won’t, but nevertheless may — fail in his mission and actually collide, to everyone’s chagrin including his own.

gains to the other side. The white knight is as potent as the black queen in creating a shared risk of disaster.⁴

Limited War as a Generator of Risk

Limited war, as a deterrent to continued aggression or as a compelling means of intimidation, often seems to require interpretation along these lines, as an action that enhances the risk of a greater war. The danger of major war is almost certainly increased by the occurrence of a limited war; it is almost certainly increased by any enlargement in the scope or violence of a limited war that has already taken place. This being so, the threat to engage in limited war has two parts. One is the threat to inflict costs directly on the other side, in casualties, expenditures, loss of territory, loss of face, or anything else. The second is the threat to expose the other party, together with oneself, to a heightened risk of a larger war.

Just how the major war would occur — just where the fault, initiative, or misunderstanding may occur — is not predictable. Whatever it is that makes limited war between great powers a risky thing, the risk is a genuine one that neither side can altogether dispel even if it wants to. To engage in limited war is to start rocking the boat, to set in motion a process that is not al-

4. It may be worth pointing out that, though all attempts to deter or to compel by threat of violence may carry some risk, it is not a necessary character of deterrent threats that they be risky if they are, or try to be, of the full-commitment or tripwire variety discussed in the preceding chapter. What can make them risky is that they may not work as hoped: they are risky because they may fail. Ideally they would carry no risk. It is part of the logical structure of the threats discussed in this chapter that they entail risk — the risk of being fulfilled — even though they work (or were about to work) as intended. One is risky the way driving a car is always risky: genuine accidents can always occur, no matter how well the car is designed or how carefully it is driven; risk is a fact of life. The other is risky the way certain forms of road-hogging are risky: a genuine risk is incurred, or created, or enhanced, for the purpose of intimidation, a risk that may not be altogether avoided if intimidation is successfully achieved because it may have to operate for a finite period before compliance brings relief. This risk is part of the *price* of intimidation.

together in one's control. (In the metaphorical language of our chess game, it is to move a queen or a knight across the center line when the other knight or queen is already across, establishing a situation in which factors outside the players' control can determine whether or not the thing blows up.) The risk has to be recognized, because limited war probably does raise the risk of a larger war whether it is intended to or not. It is a consequence of limited war that that risk goes up; since it is a consequence, it can also be a purpose.

If we give this interpretation to limited war, we can give a corresponding interpretation to enlargements, or threats of enlargement, of the war. The threat to introduce new weapons, perhaps nuclear weapons, into a limited war is not, according to this argument, to be judged solely according to the immediate military or political advantage, but also according to the deliberate risk of still larger war that it poses. And we are led in this way to a new interpretation of the trip-wire. The analogy for limited war forces in Europe, or a blockade about Cuba, or troops for the defense of Quemoy, according to this argument, is not a trip-wire that certainly detonates all-out war if it is in working order and fails altogether if it is not. We have something more like a minefield, with explosives hidden at random; a mine may or may not blow up if somebody starts to traverse the field. The critical feature of the analogy, it should be emphasized, is that whether or not one of the mines goes off is at least to some extent outside the control of both parties to the engagement.

This argument is pertinent to the question not only of whether, but of how, to cross the boundaries in some limited war. If one can gently erode a boundary, easing across it without creating some new challenge or a dramatic bid for enemy reprisal, and if one finds the current bounds intolerable, that may be the way to do it if one wants the tactical advantages of relaxing a rule. But if the tactical advantages are unimpressive, one's purpose in enlarging some limited war may be to confront the enemy with a heightened risk, to bring into question the possibility of finding new limits once a few have been

breached. One may then try not to maximize the stability of new limits as one passes certain thresholds, but to pass them in a way that dramatizes and emphasizes that the engagement is a dangerous one and that the other side should be eager to call a halt. Deliberately raising the risk of all-out war is thus a tactic that may fit the context of limited war, particularly for the side most discontent with the progress of the war. Introduction of nuclear weapons undoubtedly needs to be evaluated in these terms.

Discussions of troop requirements and weaponry for NATO have been much concerned with the battlefield consequences of different troop strengths and nuclear doctrines. But the battlefield criterion is only one criterion, and when nuclear weapons are introduced it is secondary. The idea that European armament should be designed for resisting Soviet invasion, and is to be judged solely by its ability to contain an attack, is based on the notion that limited war is a tactical operation. It is not.

What that notion overlooks is that a main consequence of limited war, and potentially a main purpose for engaging in it, is to raise the risk of larger war. Limited war does this whether it is intended to or not.

This point is fundamental to deterrence of anything other than all-out attack on ourselves. And it is fundamental to the strategy of limited war. The danger of sudden large war—of unpremeditated war—would be a real danger and would obsess the strategic commands on both sides. This danger is enhanced in a crisis, particularly one involving military activity. It is enhanced partly because of the sheer preoccupation with it. And it is enhanced because alarms and incidents will be more frequent, and those who interpret alarms will be readier to act on them.

This is also, to a large extent, the *purpose* of being prepared to fight a local war in Western Europe. The Soviet anticipation of the risks involved in a large-scale attack must include the danger that general war will result. If they underestimate the scale and duration of resistance and do attack, a purpose of resisting is to confront them, day after day, with an appreciation

that life is risky, and that pursuit of the original objective is not worth the risk.

This is distantly—but only distantly—related to the notion that we deter an attack limited to Europe by the announced threat of all-out war. It is different because the danger of war does not depend solely on whether the United States would coolly resolve to launch general war in response to a limited attack in Europe. The credibility of a massive American response is often depreciated: even in the event of the threatened loss of Europe the United States would not, it is sometimes said, respond to the *fait accompli* of a Soviet attack on Europe with anything as “suicidal” as general war. But that is a simple-minded notion of what makes general war credible. What can make it exceedingly credible to the Russians—and perhaps to the Chinese in the Far East—is that the triggering of general war can occur whether we intend it or not.

General war does not depend on our coolly deciding to retaliate punitively for the invasion of Western Europe after careful consideration of the material and spiritual arguments pro and con. General war could result because we or the Soviets launched it in the mistaken belief that it was already on, or in the mistaken or correct belief that, if we did not start it instantly, the other side would. It does not depend on fortitude: it can result from anticipation of the worse consequences of a war that, because of tardiness, the enemy initiates.

And the fear of war that deters the Soviet Union from an attack on Europe includes the fear of a general war that *they* initiate. Even if they were confident that they could act first, they would still have to consider the wisdom of an action that might, through forces substantially outside their control, oblige them to start general war.

If nuclear weapons are introduced, the sensed danger of general war will rise strikingly. Both sides will be conscious of this increased danger. This is partly a matter of sheer expectation; everybody is going to be more tense, and for good reason, once nuclear weapons are introduced. And national leaders will know that they are close to general war if only because nuclear

weapons signal and dramatize this very danger—a danger that is self-aggravating in that the more the danger is recognized, the more likely are the decisions that cause war to occur. This argument is neither for nor against the use of nuclear weapons, but for recognizing that this consequence of their use equals in importance—and could far transcend—their tactical battlefield accomplishments.

It is worth noting that this interpretation suggests that the threat of limited war may be potent even when there is little expectation that one could win it.

It is our sheer inability to predict the consequences of our actions and to keep things under control, and the enemy’s similar inability, that can intimidate the enemy (and, of course, us too). If we were in complete control of the consequences and knew what would and what would not precipitate war—a war that we started or a war that the enemy started—we could make no threat that did not depend on our ultimate willingness to choose general war.

This is not an argument that “our side” can always win a war of nerves. (The same analysis applies to “their side” too.) It is a reminder that between the alternatives of unsuccessful local resistance on the one extreme, and the fruitless, terrifying, and probably unacceptable and incredible threat of general thermo-nuclear war on the other, there is a strategy of risky behavior, of deliberately creating a risk that we share with the enemy, a risk that is credible precisely because its consequences are not entirely within our own and the Soviets’ control.

Nuclear Weapons and the Enhancement of Risk

The introduction of nuclear weapons raises two issues here. One is the actual danger of general war; the other is the role of this danger in our strategy. On the danger itself, one has to guess how likely it is that a sizable nuclear war in Europe can persist, and for how long, without triggering general war. The danger appears great enough to make it unrealistic to expect a tactical nuclear war to “run its course.” Either the nuclear weapons wholly change the bargaining environment, the appreciation of

risks, and the immediate objectives, and bring about some termination, truce, tranquilization, withdrawal, or pause; or else the local war very likely becomes swamped in a much bigger war. If these are the likely alternatives, we should not take too seriously a nuclear local war plan that goes to great lengths to carry the thing to its bitter end. There is a high probability that the war either will go down by an order of magnitude or go up by an order of magnitude, rather than run the tactical nuclear course that was planned for it.

More important is how we control, utilize, and react to a sudden increase in the sensed danger of general war. It will be so important to manage this risk properly that the battlefield consequences of nuclear weapons may be of minor importance. The hour-by-hour tactical course of the war may not even be worth the attention of the top strategic leadership.

One can question whether we ought to use nuclear weapons deliberately to raise the risk of general war. But unless we are willing to do this, we should not introduce nuclear weapons against an adversary who has nuclear weapons on his side. This raising of risk is so much of the consequence of nuclear weapons that to focus our planning attention on the battlefield may be to ignore what should be getting our main attention (and what would, in the event, get it). Once nuclear weapons are introduced, it is not the same war any longer. The tactical objectives and considerations that governed the original war are no longer controlling. It is now a war of nuclear bargaining and demonstration.

In a nuclear exchange, even if it nominally involves only the use of "tactical" weapons against tactically important targets, there will be a conscious negotiating process between two very threatening enemies who are worried that the war will get out of hand. The life expectancy of the local war may be so short that neither side is primarily concerned with what happens on the ground within the next day or two. What each side is doing with its strategic forces would be the main preoccupation. It is the strategic forces in the background that provide the risks and the sense of danger; it is they whose disposition will preoccupy

national leaders as much as anything that is going on in Europe itself. It is the strategic forces whose minute-by-minute behavior on each side will be the main intelligence preoccupation of the other side.⁵

Limited and localized nuclear war is not, therefore, a "tactical" war. However few the nuclears used, and however selectively they are used, their purpose should not be "tactical" because their consequences will not be tactical. With nuclears, it has become more than ever a war of risks and threats at the highest strategic level. It is a war of nuclear bargaining.

There are some inferences for NATO planning. First, nuclear weapons should not be evaluated mainly in terms of what they could do on the battlefield: the decision to introduce them, the way to use them, the targets to use them on, the scale on which to use them, the timing with which to use them, and the communications to accompany their use should not be determined (or not mainly determined) by how they affect the tactical course of the local war. Much more important is what they do to the expectation of general war, and what rules or patterns of expectations about local use are created. It is much more a war of dares and challenges, of nerve, of threats and brinkmanship, once the nuclear threshold is passed. This is because the danger of general war, and the awareness of that danger, is lifted an order of magnitude by the psychological and military consequences of nuclear explosion.

5. This is why one of the arguments for delegating nuclear authority to theater commanders—as presented in the election campaign of 1964—made little sense. That was the argument that communications between the theater and the American command structure might fail at the moment nuclear weapons were urgently needed. But if the weapons were that urgently needed, especially in the European theater, there would surely be appreciable danger of general war, and to proceed without communicating would guarantee the absence of crucial communication with the Strategic Air Command, the Defense Intelligence Agency, North American Air Defense Command, military forces everywhere, civil defense authorities, and, of course, our diplomatic establishment. It could preclude a choice of what kind of nuclear war to initiate; it could catch the Americans by surprise, and might merely give warning to the Russians.

Second, as a corollary we should not think that the value or likely success of NATO armed forces depends solely, or even mainly, on whether they can win a local war. Particularly if nuclears are introduced, the war may never run its course. Even without the introduction of nuclears, a main function of resistance forces is to create and prolong a genuine sense of danger, of the potentiality of general war. This is not a danger that we create for the Russians and avoid ourselves; it is a danger we share with them. But it is this deterrent and intimidation function that deserves at least as much attention as the tactical military potentialities of the troops.

Third, forces that might seem to be quite "inadequate" by ordinary tactical standards can serve a purpose, particularly if they can threaten to keep the situation in turmoil for some period of time. The important thing is to preclude a quick, clean Soviet victory that quiets things down in short order.

Fourth, the deployment and equipment of nuclear-armed NATO troops, including the questions of which nationalities have nuclear weapons and which services have them, are affected by the purpose and function and character of nuclear and local war. If what is required is a skillful and well-controlled bargaining use of nuclears in the event the decision is taken to go above that threshold, and if the main purpose of nuclears is not to help the troops on the battlefield, it is much less necessary to decentralize nuclear weapons and decisions to local commanders. The strategy will need tight centralized control; it may not require the kind of close battlefield support that is often taken to justify distribution of small nuclears to the troops; and nuclears probably could be reserved to some special nuclear forces.

Fifth, if the main consequence of nuclear weapons, and the purpose of introducing them, is to create and signal a heightened risk of general war, our plans should reflect that purpose. We should plan—in the event of resort to nuclear weapons—for a war of nerve, of demonstration, and of bargaining, not just target destruction for local tactical purposes. Destroying a target may be incidental to the message that the detonation con-

veys to the Soviet leadership. Targets should be picked with a view to what the Soviet leadership perceives about the character of the war and about our intent, not for tactical importance. A target near or inside the U.S.S.R., for example, is important because it is near or inside the U.S.S.R., not because of its tactical contribution to the European battlefield. A target in a city is important because a city is destroyed, not because it is a local supply or communication center. The difference between one weapon, a dozen, a hundred, or a thousand is not in the number of targets destroyed but in the Soviet (and American) perception of risks, intent, precedent, and implied "proposal" for the conduct or termination of war.

Extra targets destroyed by additional weapons are not a local military "bonus." They are noise that may drown the message. They are a "proposal" that must be responded to. And they are an added catalyst to general war. This is an argument for a selective and threatening use of nuclears rather than large-scale tactical use. (It is an argument for large-scale tactical use only if such use created the level of risk we wish to create.) Success in the use of nuclears will be measured not by the targets destroyed but by how well we manage the level of risk. The Soviets must be persuaded that the war is getting out of hand but is not yet beyond the point of no return.

Sixth, we have to expect the Soviets to pursue their own policy of exploiting the risk of war. We cannot expect the Soviets to acquiesce in our unilateral nuclear demonstration. We have to be prepared to interpret and to respond to a Soviet nuclear "counterproposal." Finding a way to terminate will be as important as choosing how to initiate such an exchange. (We should not take wholly for granted that the initiation would be ours.)

Finally, the emphasis here is that the use of nuclear weapons would create exceptional danger. This is not an argument in favor of their use; it is an argument for recognizing that danger is the central feature of their use.

In other words, nuclears would not only destroy targets but would signal something. Getting the right signal across would be

an important part of the policy. This could imply, for example, deliberate and restrained use earlier than might otherwise seem tactically warranted, in order to leave the Soviets under no illusion whether or not the engagement might become nuclear. The only question then would be, how nuclear. It is not necessarily prudent to wait until the last desperate moment in a losing engagement to introduce nuclear weapons as a last resort. By the time they are desperately needed to prevent a debacle, it may be too late to use them carefully, discriminatingly, with a view to the message that is communicated, and with the maintenance of adequate control. Whenever the tactical situation indicates a high likelihood of military necessity for nuclears in the near future, it may be prudent to introduce them deliberately while there is still opportunity to do so with care, selection, and a properly associated diplomacy. Waiting beyond that point may simply increase the likelihood of a tactical use, possibly an indiscriminate use, certainly a decentralized use, determined by the tactical necessities of the battlefield rather than the strategic necessities of deterrence.

In its extreme form the restrained, signaling, intimidating use of nuclears for brinkmanship has sometimes been called the "shot across the bow." There is always a danger — Churchill and others have warned against it — of making a bold demonstration on so small a scale that the contrary of boldness is demonstrated. There is no cheap, safe way of using nuclears that scares the wits out of the Russians without scaring us too. Nevertheless, *any* use of nuclears is going to change the pattern of expectations about the war. It is going to rip a tradition of inhibition on their use. It is going to change everyone's expectations about the future use of nuclears. Even those who have argued that nuclears ought to be considered just a more efficient kind of artillery will surely catch their breath when the first one goes off in anger. Something is destroyed, even if not enemy targets, if ever-so-few nuclears are used. Whatever a few nuclears prove, or fail to prove about their user, they will change the environment of expectations. And it is expectations more

than anything else that will determine the outcome of a limited East–West military engagement.

It is sometimes argued, quite correctly, that this tradition can be eroded, and the danger of "first use" reduced, by introducing nuclear weapons in some "safe" fashion, gradually getting the world used to nuclear weapons and dissipating the drama of nuclear explosions. Nuclear depth charges at sea, small nuclear warheads in air-to-air combat, or nuclear demolitions on defended soil may seem comparatively free of the danger of unlimited escalation, cause no more civil disruption than TNT, appear responsible, and set new traditions for actual use, including the tradition that nuclear weapons can be used without signaling all-out war. Obviously to exploit this idea one should not wait until nuclear weapons are desperately needed in a serious crisis, but deliberately initiate them in a carefully controlled fashion at a time and place chosen for the purpose. It might not be wise and might not be practical, but if the intent is to remove the curse from nuclear weapons, this may be the way to do it.

Among the several objections there is one that may be overlooked even by the proponents of nuclear "legitimization." That is the waste involved — the waste of what is potentially the most dramatic military event since Pearl Harbor. President Johnson, remember, referred to a nineteen-year tradition of non-use; the breaking of that tradition (which grows longer with each passing year) will probably be, especially if it is designed to be, a most stunning event. It will signal a watershed in military history, will instantly contradict war plans and military expectations, will generate suspense and apprehension, and will probably startle even those who make the decision. The first post-Nagasaki detonation in combat will probably be evidence of a complex and anguished decision, an embarkation on a journey into a new era of uncertainty. Even those who propose readier use of nuclear weapons must appreciate that this is so, because of the strong inhibitions they encounter during the dispute.

This is not an event to be squandered on an unworthy mili-

tary objective. The first nuclear detonation can convey a message of utmost seriousness; it may be a unique means of communication in a moment of unusual gravity. To degrade the signal in advance, to depreciate the currency, to erode gradually a tradition that might someday be shattered with diplomatic effect, to vulgarize weapons that have acquired a transcendent status, and to demote nuclear weapons to the status of merely efficient artillery, may be to waste an enormous asset of last resort. One can probably not, with effect, throw down a gauntlet if he is known to toss his gloves about on every provocation. One may reasonably choose to vulgarize nuclear weapons through a campaign to get people used to them; but to proceed to use them out of expediency, just because they would be tactically advantageous and without regard to whether they ought to be cheapened, would be shortsighted in the extreme.

Face, Nerve, and Expectations

Cold war politics have been likened, by Bertrand Russell and others, to the game of "chicken." This is described as a game in which two teen-age motorists head for each other on a highway — usually late at night, with their gangs and girlfriends looking on — to see which of the two will first swerve aside. The one who does is then called "chicken."

The better analogy is with the less frivolous contest of chicken that is played out regularly on streets and highways by people who want their share of the road, or more than their share, or who want to be first through an intersection or at least not kept waiting indefinitely.

"Chicken" is not just a game played by delinquent teen-agers with their hot-rods in southern California; it is a universal form of adversary engagement. It is played not only in the Berlin air corridor but by Negroes who want to get their children into schools and by whites who want to keep them out; by rivals at a meeting who both raise their voices, each hoping the other will yield the floor to avoid embarrassment; as well as by drivers of both sexes and all ages at all times of day. Children played it

before they were old enough to drive and before automobiles were invented. The earliest instance I have come across, in a race with horse-drawn vehicles, antedates the auto by some time:

The road here led through a gully, and in one part the winter flood had broken down part of the road and made a hol-low. Menelaos was driving in the middle of the road, hoping that no one would try to pass too close to his wheel, but Antilochos turned his horses out of the track and followed him a little to one side. This frightened Menelaos, and he shouted at him:

"What reckless driving Antilochos! Hold in your horses. This place is narrow, soon you will have more room to pass. You will foul my car and destroy us both!"

But Antilochos only plied the whip and drove faster than ever, as if he did not hear. They raced about as far as the cast of quoit . . . and then [Menelaos] fell behind: he let the horses go slow himself, for he was afraid that they might all collide in that narrow space and overturn the cars and fall in a struggling heap.

This game of chicken took place outside the gates of Troy three thousand years ago. Antilochos won, though Homer says — somewhat ungenerously — "by trick, not by merit."⁶

Even the game in its stylized teen-age automobile form is worth examining. Most noteworthy is that the game virtually disappears if there is no uncertainty, no unpredictability. If the two cars, instead of driving continuously, took turns advancing exactly fifty feet at a time toward each other, a point would be reached when the next move would surely result in collision. Whichever driver has that final turn will not, and need not, drive deliberately into the other. This is no game of nerve. The lady who pushes her child's stroller across an intersection in front of a car that has already come to a dead stop is in no particular danger as long as she sees the driver watching her: even

⁶ *The Iliad*, W H D Rouse, transl (Mentor Books, 1950), p 273

if the driver prefers not to give her the right of way she has the winning tactic and gets no score on nerve. The more instructive automobile form of the game is the one people play as they crowd each other on the highway, jockey their way through an intersection, or speed up to signal to a pedestrian that he'd better not cross yet. These are the cases in which, like Antiochos' chariot, things may get out of control; no one can trust with certainty that someone will have the "last clear chance" to avert tragedy and will pull back in time.

These various games of chicken—the genuine ones that involve some real unpredictability—have some characteristics that are worth noting. One is that, unlike those sociable games it takes two to play, with chicken it takes two *not* to play. If you are publicly invited to play chicken and say you would rather not, you have just played.

Second, what is in dispute is usually not the issue of the moment, but everyone's expectations about how a participant will behave in the future. To yield may be to signal that one can be expected to yield; to yield often or continually indicates acknowledgment that that is one's role. To yield repeatedly up to some limit and then to say "enough" may guarantee that the first show of obduracy loses the game for both sides. If you can get a reputation for being reckless, demanding, or unreliable—and apparently hot-rods, taxis, and cars with "driving school" license plates sometimes enjoy this advantage—you may find concessions made to you. (The driver of a wide American car on a narrow European street is at less of a disadvantage than a static calculation would indicate. The smaller cars squeeze over to give him room.) Between these extremes, one can get a reputation for being firm in demanding an appropriate share of the road but not aggressively challenging about the other's half. Unfortunately, in less stylized games than the highway version, it is often hard to know just where the central or fair or expected division should lie, or even whether there should be any recognition of one contestant's claim.⁷

7. Analytically there appear to be at least three different motivational structures in a contest of "chicken." One is the pure "test case," in which nothing is

Another important characteristic is that, though the two players are cast as adversaries, the game is somewhat collaborative. Even in the stylized version in which they straddle the white line, there is at least an advantage in understanding that, when a player does swerve, he will swerve to the right and not to the left! And the players may try to signal each other to try to coordinate on a tie; if each can swerve a little, indicating that he will swerve a little more if the other does too, and if their speeds are not too great to allow some bargaining, they may manage to turn at approximately the same time, neither being proved chicken.

They may also collaborate in declining to play the game. This is a little harder. When two rivals are coaxed by their friends to have it out in a fight, they may manage to shrug it off skillfully,

at stake but reputations, expectations, and precedents. That is, accommodation or obstinacy, boldness or surrender, merely establishes who is an accommodator, who is obstinate or bold, who tends to surrender or what order of precedence is to be observed. A second, not easily distinguished in practice, occurs when something is consciously *put* at stake (as in a gambling game or trial by ordeal) such as leadership, deference, popularity, some agreed tangible prize, or the outcome of certain issues in dispute. (The duel between David and Goliath, mentioned in the note on page 144, is an example of putting something at stake.) The third, which might be called the "real" in contrast to the "conventional," is the case in which yielding or withdrawing yields something that the dispute is about, as in road-hogging or military probes: that is, the gains and losses are part of the immediate structure of the contest, not attached by convention nor resulting entirely from expectations established for future events. The process of putting something at stake—if what is at stake involves third parties—may not be within the control of the participants; nor, in the second and third cases, can future expectations be disassociated (unless, as in momentary road-hogging, the participants are anonymous). So most actual instances are likely to be mixtures. (The same distinctions can be made for tests of *endurance* rather than risk: wealthy San Franciscans were reported to settle disputes by a "duel" that involved throwing gold coins into the hay, one after the other, until one was ready to quit: and the "potlatch" in both its primitive and its contemporary forms is a contest for status and reputation.) A fourth and a fifth case may also deserve recognition: the case of sheer play for excitement, which is probably not confined to teen-agers, and the case of "joint ordeal" in which the contest, though nominally between two (or among more than two) contestants, involves no adversary relation between them, and each undergoes a unilateral test or defends his honor independently of the other's.

but only if neither comes away looking exclusively responsible for turning down the opportunity. Both players can appreciate a rule that forbids play; if the cops break up the game before it starts, so that nobody plays and nobody is proved chicken, many and perhaps all of the players will consider it a great night, especially if their ultimate willingness to play was not doubted.

In fact, one of the great advantages of international law and custom, or an acknowledged code of ethics, is that a country may be obliged *not* to engage in some dangerous rivalry when it would actually prefer not to but might otherwise feel obliged to for the sake of its bargaining reputation. The boy who wears glasses and can't see without them cannot fight if he wants to; but if he wants to avoid the fight it is not so obviously for lack of nerve. (Equally good, if he'd prefer not to fight but might feel obliged to, is to have an adversary who wears glasses. Both can hope that at least one of them is honorably precluded from joining the issue.) One of the values of laws, conventions, or traditions that restrain participation in games of nerve is that they provide a graceful way out. If one's motive for declining is manifestly not lack of nerve, there are no enduring costs in refusing to compete.

Since these tests of nerve involve both antagonism and cooperation, an important question is how these two elements should be emphasized. Should we describe the game as one in which the players are adversaries, with a modest admixture of common interest? Or should we describe the players as partners, with some temptation toward doublecross?

This question arises in real crises, not just games. Is a Berlin crisis—or a Cuban crisis, a Quemoy crisis, a Hungarian crisis, or a crisis in the Gulf of Tonkin—mainly bilateral competition in which each side should be motivated mainly toward winning over the other? Or is it a shared danger—a case of both being pushed to the brink of war—in which statesmanlike forbearance, collaborative withdrawal, and prudent negotiation should dominate?

It is a matter of emphasis, not alternatives, but in distributing

emphasis between the antagonistic and the collaborative motives, a distinction should be made. The distinction is between a game of chicken to which one has been deliberately challenged by an adversary, with a view to proving his superior nerve, and a game of chicken that events, or the activities of bystanders, have compelled one into along with one's adversary. If one is repeatedly challenged, or expected to be, by an *opponent* who wishes to impose dominance or to cause one's allies to abandon him in disgust, the choice is between an appreciable loss and a fairly aggressive response. If one is repeatedly forced by *events* into a test of nerve along with an opponent, there is a strong case for developing techniques and understandings for minimizing the mutual risk.

In the live world of international relations it is hard to be sure which kind of crisis it is. The Cuban crisis of October 1962 was about as direct a challenge as one could expect, yet much of the subsequent language of diplomacy and journalism referred to Premier Khrushchev's and President Kennedy's having found themselves together on the brink and in need of statesmanship to withdraw together.⁸ The Budapest uprising of 1956 was as near to the opposite pole as one could expect, neither East nor West having deliberately created the situation as a test of nerve, and the Soviet response not appearing as a direct test of Western resolve to intervene. Yet expectations about later American or allied behavior were affected by our declining to acknowledge that events had forced us into a test. This appears to have been a case in which the United States had a good ex-

8. "Brinkmanship" has few friends, "chicken" even fewer, and I can see why most people are uneasy about what, in an earlier book, I called "the threat that leaves something to chance." There is, though, at least one good word *to* be said for threats that intentionally involve some loss of control or some generation of "crisis." It is that this kind of threat may be more impersonal, more "external" to the participants; the threat becomes part of the environment rather than a test of will between two adversaries. The adversary may find it easier—less costly in prestige or self-respect—to back away from a risky situation, even if we created the situation, than from a threat that is backed exclusively by our resolve and determination. He can even, in backing away, blame us for irresponsibility, or take credit for saving us both from the consequences. Khrushchev was able to claim, after the Cuban crisis, that he had pulled back

cuse to remain outside, and chose even to take that position officially.

The Berlin wall is an ambiguous case. The migration of East Germans can be adduced as the impelling event, not a deliberate Soviet decision to challenge the allied powers. Yet there was something of a dare both in the way it was done and in its being done at all. The Berlin wall illustrates that someone forced into a game of chicken against his better judgment may, if all goes well, profit nevertheless. The U-2 incident of 1960 is interesting in the wealth of interpretations that can be placed on it; a U.S. challenge to Soviet resolve, a Soviet challenge to U.S. resolve, or an autonomous incident creating embarrassment for both sides.

A good illustration of two parties collaborating to avoid being thrust into a test of nerve was the Soviet and American response to the Chinese-Indian crisis of late 1962. It probably helped both sides that they had ready excuses, even good reasons, for keeping their coats on. For anyone who does not want to be obliged into a gratuitous contest, just to preserve his reputation and expectations about future behavior, a good excuse is a great help.

It may seem paradoxical that with today's weapons of speedy destruction brinkmanship would be so common. Engaging in well-isolated small wars or comparatively safe forms of harassment ought to be less unattractive than wrestling on the brink of a big war. But the reason why most contests, military or not, will be contests of nerve is simply that brinkmanship is unavoidable

from the brink of war, not that he had backed away from President Kennedy. It is prudent to pull out of a risky situation—especially one that threatens everyone—where it might appear weak to pull away from the threatening opponent. If war could have arisen only out of a deliberate decision by President Kennedy, one based on cool resolve, Khrushchev would have been backing away from a resolved American President; but because the risk seemed inherent in the situation, the element of personal challenge was somewhat diluted. In the same way a rally or a protest march carries the threat of an unintended riot; officials may yield in the interest of law and order, finding it easier to submit to the danger of accident or incident than to submit directly to a threat of deliberate violence.

and potent. It would be hard to design a war, involving the forces of East and West on any scale, in which the risk of its getting out of control were not of commensurate importance with the other costs and dangers involved. Limited war, as remarked earlier, is like fighting in a canoe. A blow hard enough to hurt is in some danger of overturning the canoe. One may stand up to strike a better blow, but if the other yields it may not have been the harder blow that worried him.

How does one get out of playing chicken if he considers it dangerous, degrading, or unprofitable? How would the United States and the Soviet Union, if they both wished to, stop feeling obliged to react to every challenge as if their reputations were continually at stake? How can they stop competing to see who will back down first in a risky encounter?

First, as remarked before, it takes at least two not to play this kind of game. (At least two, because there may be more than two participants and because bystanders have so much influence.) Second, there is no way in the short run that, by turning over a new leaf, one can cease measuring his adversary by how he reacts to danger, or cease signaling to an adversary one's own intentions and values by how one reacts to danger. Confidence has to be developed. Some conventions or traditions must be allowed to grow. Confidence and tradition take time. Stable expectations have to be constructed out of successful experience, not all at once out of intentions.

It would help if each decided not to dare the other again but only to react to challenges. But this will not turn the trick. The definition of who did the challenging will not be the same on both sides. At what point a sequence of actions becomes a deliberate affront is a matter of judgment. Challenges thrust on East and West will never be wholly unambiguous as to whether they were created by one side to test the other or to gain at the other's expense. If all challenges were clear as to origin and could only arise by deliberate intent of the adversary, a conditional cessation would quiet things once for all. But not all crises are so clear in interpretation. And there is too much at stake for either to sit back and be unresponsive for a period

long enough to persuade the other that it can safely relax too.

What is at stake is not only the risk of being exploited by one's partner. There is also the risk that the other will genuinely misinterpret how far he is invited to go. If one side yields on a series of issues, when the matters at stake are not critical, it may be difficult to communicate to the other just when a vital issue has been reached. It might be hard to persuade the Soviets, if the United States yielded on Cuba and then on Puerto Rico, that it would go to war over Key West. No service is done to the other side by behaving in a way that undermines its belief in one's ultimate firmness. It may be safer in a long run to hew to the center of the road than to yield six inches on successive nights, if one really intends to stop yielding before he is pushed onto the shoulder. It may save both parties a collision.

It is often argued that "face" is a frivolous asset to preserve, and that it is a sign of immaturity that a government can't swallow its pride and lose face. It is undoubtedly true that false pride often tempts a government's officials to take irrational risks or to do undignified things—to bully some small country that insults them, for example. But there is also the more serious kind of "face," the kind that in modern jargon is known as a country's "image," consisting of other countries' beliefs (their leaders' beliefs, that is) about how the country can be expected to behave. It relates not to a country's "worth" or "status" or even "honor," but to its reputation for action. If the question is raised whether this kind of "face" is worth fighting over, the answer is that this kind of face is one of the few things worth fighting over. Few parts of the world are intrinsically worth the risk of serious war by themselves, especially when taken slice by slice, but defending them or running risks to protect them may preserve one's commitments to action in other parts of the world and at later times. "Face" is merely the interdependence of a country's commitments; it is a country's reputation for action, the expectations other countries have about its behavior. We lost thirty thousand dead in Korea to save face for the United States and the United Nations, not to save South Korea for the South Koreans, and it was undoubtedly worth it. Soviet

expectations about the behavior of the United States are one of the most valuable assets we possess in world affairs.

Still, the value of "face" is not absolute. That preserving face—maintaining others' expectations about one's own behavior—can be worth some cost and risk does not mean that in every instance it is worth the cost or risk of that occasion. In particular, "face" should not be allowed to attach itself to an unworthy enterprise if a clash is inevitable. Like any threat, the commitment of face is costly when it fails. Equally important is to help to decouple an adversary's prestige and reputation from a dispute; if we cannot afford to back down we must hope that he can and, if necessary, help him.

It would be foolish, though, to believe that no country has interests in conflict that are worth some risk of war. Some countries' leaders play chicken because they have to, some because of its efficacy. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." If the main participants wish to stop it, the game can probably be stopped, but not all at once, not without persistence, some luck, and recognition that it will take time. And, of course, there is no guarantee that the cars will not collide.