

Introduction to International Relations

Lecture 10: The Security Dilemma

Professor Branislav L. Slantchev

Department of Political Science, University of California - San Diego

May 11, 2005

Overview. We studied the use of force so carefully that one may believe that our recommendation would be that each actor must arm himself to the teeth. We now explore why this would be a rash conclusion indeed by looking at the Security Dilemma: the dynamics created by attempts to acquire security through competitive arms build-ups. We note that strategies designed to reassure potential opponents could be just as important as ones that seek to deter them. We examine how arms races could be triggered and then explore various ways of alleviating the problems created by the security dilemma.

OUTLINE OF LECTURE 10: SECURITY DILEMMA

1. Reassurance and other states
 - a) friendly satisfied powers (Europe, Canada)
 - b) implacable enemies (al Qaeda)
 - c) potential revisionists (USSR, China)
2. Anarchy and agreements
 - a) sovereignty and Great Powers
 - b) use of force, self-enforcement
 - c) provision for own defense
 - d) increased vulnerability of opponent
 - e) security dilemma
 - f) tension between deterrence and reassurance
 - g) non-deterrence situations (Canada, Britain)
3. Why not avoid the dilemma?
 - a) revisionism not certain, only potential
 - b) capabilities matter more than intentions
 - c) arms races (Anglo-German Naval Race, 1897-1914)
 - d) Prisoner's Dilemma
4. How to deal with the dilemma?
 - a) contributing factors
 - anarchy
 - lack of trust
 - misperception
 - offense-defense ambiguity
 - b) ameliorating factors
 - offense-defense role clear
 - defense dominance
 - demilitarized zones (Korea, Sinai, Rhineland)
 - buffer zones (cordon sanitaire, Eastern Europe)
 - arms control (nuclear, biological/chemical, conventional)
 - collective security (League of Nations, U.N.)

We have now looked at general ideas about how to use threats and perhaps limited application of force in deterrence and compellence situations. We discussed strategies for manipulating the calculations of a revisionist actor, and ways of enhancing the credibility of the various commitments of the defending one. The general tone of the discussion was pitched around bargaining power, especially the idea that insufficient strength invites challenges and attempts to revise the status quo. In short, weakness invites conflict, and strength either deters it or, if that fails, helps settle it. It may almost appear that the best policy recommendation would be to arm oneself to the teeth and appear easily provokable, must like the strategic command study said. However, this would be a rash conclusion.

Although we did discuss increasing the net value of the status quo to potential revisionists as a strategy that might help with deterrence (and, alternatively, strategies that promote better situation in a post-compellent stage as conducive to conflict resolution), the main thrust was toward threats, not reassurances. However, while threats are clearly quite important, it would be a mistake not to consider **reassurance strategies**, that is, strategies that reduce the potential revisionist's incentives for challenging the status quo.

Without sufficient reassurance of a "place in the sun," a potentially dissatisfied actor may turn actively belligerent despite the defender's best efforts to ensure the credibility of the deterrent posture. What's worse, a satisfied status quo actor may be provoked into conflict because of the rising power of a potentially dissatisfied one who is unable to reassure it sufficiently about its future intentions. (Recall the time inconsistency problem as a cause of preventive war.)

We should distinguish between three types of actors one might face in the international arena. First, the **friendly satisfied powers**. These are actors whose general interests are so aligned with one's own that they present no military threat and do not perceive one as threatening in turn. These actors need not be deterred or reassured. For example, the U.S. has strategic friends in Canada, Britain, Japan, Western and much of Eastern Europe. These actors may find many occasions to disagree with U.S. policy, they may oppose, often vehemently, some of its manifestations, but they do not seek to challenge America militarily. They do not feel threatened by growing American power, and hence do not need constant reassurance that it would not be used against them.¹

The second group of **implacable enemies** includes actors who cannot be satisfied with concessions, and who cannot be deterred. This group would include entities like al-Qaeda, whose political goals are so irreconcilably opposed to those of the U.S. that there is nothing we can offer them that would be acceptable to a degree that would cause them to abandon their attempts at revisionism. Reassuring such actors is not only unlikely to work, but may do more harm than good because it is usually interpreted as a sign of weakness. Hence, when

¹Even the most vocal critics of growing American power, the French, are not afraid that the U.S. would use its might against France. They are more concerned with being relegated to the sidelines of international affairs in an environment where they lack sufficient capability to be taken seriously in military sense.

the U.S. holds back in its retaliation against al Qaeda strikes, Osama bin Laden sees this as a sign of impotence, which encourages him to arrange further attacks. As for bin Laden himself, it is highly unlikely that the U.S. could make a credible promise not to kill him. There is nothing strategic coercion can really do to such actors, and the solution is brute force: one must eliminate them.

The third, and perhaps most interesting, group comprises the **potential revisionists**. These are actors who are dissatisfied with the status quo but that could be deterred from challenging it with a combination of coercive strategies and reassurance. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was one such actor. Perhaps it had to be deterred from exporting its revolutionary communism through force (the Korean War put an end to that). But it also had to be reassured that the U.S. would not infringe on its legitimate concerns, especially the security problem that necessitated turning Eastern Europe into a buffer zone controlled by Moscow. It should be noted that the U.S. scrupulously observed this tacit non-interference agreement despite many occasions where it could have meddled, probably with disastrous consequences, in Soviet affairs there (e.g. the Hungarian Revolt in 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, and the Polish crackdown in the early 1980s).

Potential revisionists may be willing to fight for some gain (or to avoid some loss), but are hardly eager to do so. Therefore, a proper peace-preserving strategy would balance deterrence with reassurance. That is, one would simultaneously threaten them with punishment for attempting to overturn the status quo, and make their life with the status quo more comfortable. The problem arises when the demands of the two components of this strategy contradict each other. That is, when enhancing the deterrent threat causes escalating fears, called **defensive panic**, that might provoke conflict; or when overzealous reassurance undermines the credibility of the deterrent posture. Let's now explore how attempts to improve one's deterrent posture may actually provoke conflict rather than forestall it. The worst thing one may have on his hands is an opponent who is revisionist and scared.

1 The Security Dilemma

The principle of sovereignty that underlies the contemporary international system may be seen as a major source of instability. Consider the idea of external sovereignty in particular: no entity can dictate to a state what it should do. Although, as we noted already, this principle does not extend equally to all actors because some states are more equal than others, one can usefully restrict the notion to the Great Powers. Almost by definition, a state is a Great Power if it is able to protect its external sovereignty from encroachments by other great powers. As we saw, this invariably means maintaining capabilities to fight a major war. Why is this the case?

Even in a hierarchical system, there will be a set of states near the pinnacle of the power pyramid, and these states will have approximately equal capabilities (periods of clear hegemony are not all that common). Among these states, there

is no higher authority that could regulate their relationships. In other words, even in a hierarchical world, the condition among great powers is perhaps best approximated by anarchy. As you should recall, anarchy involves two features that make up the self-help system: (a) no authority to enforce agreements, and (b) possible recourse to force by actors.

Since there exists no legal authority to enforce contracts, this means that all agreements must be **self-enforcing**, or, using our traditional jargon, they must be based upon credible commitments. If an agreement involves promises that are incredible, then it is bound to fall apart because when the time comes for the actor to fulfill such promises, he will renege on his commitment. Because everyone knows this, no such contract would be agreed to, and hence the possibility for cooperation appears fairly limited. This is in sharp contrast to a non-anarchical situation (e.g. our everyday lives), where we can promise things that would not be in our interest to deliver if called upon: both parties to such an agreement know that if one fails to uphold its end, the other has recourse to higher authority that could punish non-compliance.

Now, the lack of enforcing authority implies two problems each state must face, one with respect to opponents, and another with respect to friends. No actor can be sure that a potentially dissatisfied state would not break the “rules” and seek a revision through violence. Under conditions of anarchy, the use of force is always a distinct possibility. This means that each actor must ensure that he has enough capabilities to meet such possible threats. He could seek the assistance of allies or friends, but there is no guarantee that they would, in fact, help if called upon because apart from their narrow self-interest, there is nothing to compel them to uphold any promises they may have made.

In such a system, self-help means that each actor must provide for his own defense. Hence, each actor would seek to acquire the means to maintain enough power for such purposes. What can the source of such power be? One could build defensive fortifications. However, by themselves these cannot be very helpful, and so one must make additional provisions for soldiers and weapons. A defensively-minded state then acquires military capabilities. But such capabilities can usually be used for offense as well as defense: after all, even if you cannot move a bunker, you can move artillery pieces, soldiers, ships, and planes.

Suddenly, by seeking to protect itself, this actor has become militarily stronger than its opponent, and, because of the inability to credibly commit not to use this preponderance to extract concessions, he scares the opponent into building up his own defenses. But once the opponent begins matching the capabilities, the security of the defense-minded actor is again reduced, so he is scared into building up his forces again in an effort to improve that. But this now reduces his opponent’s security, and so on... As the actors continually try to match each other’s forces, both end up no more secure but with far less resources. And that’s if this spiral does not explode along the way in war, which can happen should one of the actors feel that it cannot match the growth of the other, and there is therefore a brief **window of opportunity** to attack before becoming

permanently overshadowed.

This “vicious circle of security and power accumulation” is called the **security dilemma**, and it means that in a self-help system one cannot simultaneously improve one’s own security without reducing that of others. That’s because the extent of one’s security is always the extent of the insecurity of one’s opponent. This dilemma characterizes the tension between deterrence and reassurance: If an actor seeks to enhance the credibility of his deterrent threat, he will generally improve his military capabilities and engage in actions that, by definition, would greatly reduce the security of his opponent, which in turn destroys the reassurance measures and frightens the opponent into actions designed to counteract his deteriorating security position.

It is important to note that the security dilemma does not operate everywhere and at all times. With respect to friends, arming does not trigger a corresponding counter-arming. This has a lot to do with the amount of trust between the two actors, especially when they share common culture and values because these improve communications and reduce the chances of misperception. Take, for example, Canada and the United States: there is no security dilemma between them. It’s not that the Americans did not contemplate the conquest of their Northern neighbor once (early 1800s), and it’s not that they did not attempt it (during the War of 1812). But it seems that Canada is not busy building defenses against an American invasion, and the Americans do not lose much sleep over what their vaguely socialist neighbors to the North are up to. Although it is perhaps safe to say that satisfaction with the status quo is one reason for not turning Canada into the 51st state, it is more important to realize that such conquest is not even contemplated. That is, it’s not like every year the U.S. war council gathers to decide whether to spare the Canadians for twelve more months. Use of force does not appear to be a conscious possibility in the relations between the two countries. This is crucial, and it also happens to be a feature of transatlantic relations with countries like Britain that only recently (by historical standards) were enemies. We shall return to this phenomenon when we discuss the *democratic peace*.

Before we consider ways in which potential opponents can cope with the security dilemma, it is worth asking an important question: If everyone knows about the dilemma, then why do states still build arms? Are leaders such morons that they cannot see how their individual behavior is causing the very problems they are trying to overcome? If two actors both want peace and security, why do they engage in actions that make escalate tensions and make war a distinct possibility?

You should note that nowhere in the preceding paragraphs did we assume that either actor was bent on expansion or revisionism. We only assumed that because no one can credibly promise never to attempt to change the status quo, there is a certain amount of uncertainty about the intentions of the other actors. They may or may not be revisionist. But on the slight chance that they are, one has to take measures to guard against such an eventuality. The moment

one does that, however, the spiral ensues and suddenly both non-revisionist actors find themselves having spent billions, bristling with arms, and as (or perhaps even less) secure than before. In other words, our exposition of the logic did not depend on the existence of an actual challenger, only on potential threats. The logic of anarchy forces each actor to *focus not on intentions but on capabilities*, and because *it is almost impossible to distinguish between defensive and offensive weapons*, each improvement in capabilities will be construed as a threat, triggering reciprocal action.

This is bad news (we seem to be having more of these than good ones, I am afraid) because it means that eliminating obviously threatening actors may still not help reduce tensions, arms races, and possibilities for conflict. Let's see how the security dilemma can trigger an arms race.

2 Arms Races

The security dilemma often results in an **arms race**: a rapid competitive increase in military power by rival states during peacetime. Consider one of the most-famous arms races, the Anglo-German Naval Race of the early 20th century. After the unification and creation of a German state in 1871, Otto von Bismarck carefully constructed a system of alliances that would make his country appear less threatening to its neighbors. However, as soon as he was out of office, the German government embarked on an expansionist program of world power. Germany had to acquire true Great Power status, and at the time that meant possession of colonies. The problem was that to get access to overseas territories, one had to deal with the Royal Navy. Britain controlled the seas and vigorously maintained its own "Two-Power" standard adopted in 1889 — her fleet was to be larger than the fleets of the next two great powers combined.

Kaiser Wilhelm II supported Admiral Tirpitz who convinced the German parliament to fund a program of naval expansion. The Germans knew that they did not have to match the British fleet, after all, the Royal Navy had an entire world to patrol. All it had to do was provide enough forces to gain control of the North Sea which would ensure that Germany would not be blockaded during war (which is exactly what happened in the Great War that followed). And so, in 1897, the construction of a modern German navy began.

The British were caught off guard. There was some speculation about Germany invading Britain, but the more realistic view was that Britain had to maintain its lead or risk losing its vast overseas empire. Despite the enormous costs involved, the British resolved to embark on their own modernization and expansion to protect their strategic superiority. Once Winston Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, the arms race accelerated in earnest with competitive build up of dreadnoughts, the new powerful heavily armed battleships.

On March 29, 1909, Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, argued the case of the naval build up before Parliament. The following excerpts from his speech illustrate just about every point of the security dilemma we discussed:

... the situation is grave... (and) is created by the German program... The German view of their program is that it is made for their own needs, and has no reference to ours, and that if we build fifty or a hundred Dreadnoughts they will not build more, but if we cease building altogether they will not build one less. We have no difficulty in hearing that view without reproach, and just as little difficulty in saying quite frankly that our own view of our naval needs is that our expenditure is, and must be, dependent upon the German, although the German is not dependent upon ours. It is essential to us that we should not fall into a position of inferiority; it is essential that we should keep a position of superiority as regards our navy... But public opinion in Germany and in the world at large increasingly measures the probable relations of England and Germany by their respective naval expenditure. An increase of naval expenditure on both sides is undoubtedly viewed by public opinion with apprehension. On the other hand, a decrease of naval expenditure will immediately produce a feeling of increased security and peace. If I was asked to name the one thing that would mostly reassure the world - or reassure Europe - with regard to the prospects of peace, I think it would be that the naval expenditure in Germany would be diminished, and that ours was following suit and being diminished also...

Is it possible, is there any conceivable method by which this might be brought about? Of course, various arrangements are conceivable. An agreement - a general agreement - to limit or reduce naval expenditure, a comparison of naval estimates year by year in advance, to see whether the modification of the one might not lead to the modification of the other; or even if those responsible, the two admiralties, might exchange information as to the figures of their naval expenditure and the progress of their building. All that is unprecedented, possibly, but so is the expenditure... Remember, in Germany there is apprehension with regard to our intentions. I am constantly told... that one of the reasons why German public opinion is apprehensive is the fear that we may be preparing an attack upon them - a most wild apprehension. But see how an increase of naval expenditure, how debates of this kind... must foster these ideas in the mind of the public... It is, in my opinion, no ground for complaint or reproach against the German government, that they do not enter into any arrangement [to limit naval buildup]... On what basis would any arrangement have to be proposed? Not the basis of equality. It would have to be the basis of a superiority of the British navy. No German, as far as I know, disputes that that is a natural point of view for us. But it is another thing to ask the German government to expose itself before its own public opinion to a charge of having cooperated to make the attainment of our views easier. That is the difficulty which it is only fair to state... if the German navy were superior to ours, they maintaining the army which they do, for us it would not be a question of defeat. Our independence, our very existence would be at stake... for us the navy is what the army is to them...

The great countries of Europe are raising enormous revenues, and something like half of them is being spent on naval and military preparations... on what is, after all, preparations to kill each other. Surely the extent to which this expenditure has grown really becomes a satire, and a reflection

on civilization. Not in our generation, perhaps, but if it goes on at the rate at which it has recently increased, sooner or later, I believe, it will submerge that civilization.

... the whole of Europe is in the presence of a great danger. But, sir, no country alone can save that. If we alone, among the great powers, gave up the competition and sank into a position of inferiority, what good should we do? None whatever- no good to ourselves, because we cannot realize great ideals of social reform at home when we are holding our existence at the mercy, at the caprice, if you like, of another nation. That is not feasible. If we fall into a position of inferiority, our self-respect is gone... We should cease to count for anything among the nations of Europe, and we should be fortunate if our liberty was left, and we did not become the conscript appendage of some stronger power. That is a brutal way of stating the case, but it is the truth. It is disagreeable that it should be so, but in matters like this I know of no safe way except to look at what is disagreeable frankly in the face, and to state it, if necessary, in its crudest form... Deeply as I feel... the great evil of increased naval and military expenditure not only here but in Europe, ... we must be prepared to defend our national existence.

Let us analyze this situation in a somewhat simplified abstract context. Now, dreadnoughts are extremely expensive ships. Consider a world in which Britain dominated the seas without feeling threatened by Germany, and in which Germany enjoyed its status of preeminent European economic power. Let's say, for the sake of simplicity, that each state could enjoy a *cooperative* payoff of \$10 billion each. These payoffs are listed in Figure 1 in the cell that corresponds to the "don't build" decision for each actor. The first number is Germany's payoff, and the second number is Britain's.

Suppose the fleets cost \$3 billion each, and that if both build them, neither is able to extract any advantage. That is, if both build the navies, then the world situation does not change, but each suffers the cost. The net result is that each now only has \$7 billion left to enjoy. These payoffs are listed in the cell corresponding to the "build" decision for each actor.

		Britain	
		<i>Build</i>	<i>Don't Build</i>
Germany	<i>Build</i>	7, 7	12, 5
	<i>Don't Build</i>	5, 12	10, 10

Figure 1: The Anglo-German Naval Race, 1897-1914.

Consider now what would happen if Britain does not react to the German naval program. After the Germans succeed in expanding their fleet, they can challenge the Royal Navy in the sense that Germany would be able to obtain concessions from the British who, having suffered a reduction in their capability, would be obliged to agree to. This does not mean that the two countries would go to war, it just means that once the Germans could feel more secure with their new navy, they could demand a better "place under the sun." Let's say that

it would be able to extract \$5 billion in concessions from the British. For the Germans, the payoff of building a navy unopposed results in $10 + 5 - 3 = \$12$ billion. That is, it yields a net improvement of \$2 billion over the status quo without armaments. For the British, the result is $10 - 5 = \$5$, a \$5 billion loss in concessions (and this is without going to war at all). These payoffs are listed in Figure 1, in the cell corresponding to the decisions “build” for Germany and “don’t build” for Britain.

Finally, consider what would happen if Britain modernized its fleet of dreadnoughts without Germany improving its navy. This would cost the British the \$3 billion, but it would enable them to enjoy an even better position with respect to Germany, perhaps even threatening to blockade the North Sea if need be. Further, given its worse inferiority, Germany could not hope to be able to resist should the British demand some concessions of their own. Suppose the Germans thought that they would have to part with \$5 billion worth of concessions if the now immensely powerful Britons demanded it. The net result would be $10 - 3 + 5 = \$12$ billion for the British, and $10 - 5 = \$5$ billion for the Germans. These payoffs are listed in the cell corresponding to the “don’t build” decision for Germany, and the “build” decision for Britain.

This completes our table. What would you do if you were Germany? You would ask yourself what your best course of action would be given what the British are likely to do. If Britain builds its navy, you would get \$7 billion if you build as well, and you would be left with only \$5 billion if you don’t. Hence, your best choice would be to build as well. If, on the other hand, Britain does not build its navy, then you would obtain \$10 billion if you do not build as well. However, you would get \$12 billion if you do, and so your best choice would be to build the navy. In other words, Germany’s best choice is to build her navy no matter what British response might be.

What about the British? We go through a similar exercise: what is the best response to German armament? Building yields \$7 and not building only \$5, and hence the optimal choice would be to expand the Royal Navy too. What if the Germans don’t build anything? Then, building yields \$12, and not building results in the status quo with \$10. Hence, building is optimal as well. In other words, Britain’s best choice is to build her navy no matter what German response might be.

We conclude that when each actor pursues his optimal strategy, the result is an arms race: both build their navies and end up paying the costs without reaping any of the benefits of having a superior fleet. Even though *both* would have preferred to live with the status quo without the built-up navies and enjoy \$10 billion each, they end up with a worse situation where they have spent \$3 billion each with nothing to show for it.² The situation described here is

²And what happened in the naval arms race? The Germans could not keep up because there was strong domestic opposition to raising taxes further. Moreover, as tensions escalated in 1913-14, pressure mounted to shift spending toward the Army. Even though the naval arms race did not cause the First World War, it did contribute to poisoning the relations between the two Great Powers, perhaps creating a situation that was more flammable than it otherwise

famously known as the **Prisoner's Dilemma**, and we shall see its applicability across a wide spectrum of issues, including economic ones.

3 Escaping the Dilemma

It is important to emphasize some of the factors fueling the Security Dilemma (all of them mentioned by Sir Grey in his speech). First, **anarchy**—each state must fend for itself and has only itself to depend on for its survival. For Britain, it was paramount to ensure that her navy reigned supreme, for Germany it was the army. Second, the **lack of trust**—one could not depend on the benevolence of a rival. Sir Grey even argued that the Germans could not, in good faith, depend on the British even though he knew that the idea that Britain would attack Germany was preposterous. Third, **misperception**—capabilities matter more than intentions, and increasing capabilities produces apprehension in the opponent, as Sir Grey noted with respect to the German reaction to British naval expansion. Fourth, **offense/defense ambiguity**—forces that can be used for defense can also be used for offense. Even if the German navy were being built for strictly defensive purposes, Britain could not sit back and rely on the good intentions of its rival: what if the Germans turned around and decided to use the navy for offensive ones?

The factors that exacerbate the security dilemma also suggest some methods for alleviating it. For example, if weapons have strictly defensive or offensive purpose, then it may be possible to distinguish between an actor building up arms to attack from one preparing for defense. Fortifications are usually purely defensive, but they must be manned by soldiers who could easily be ordered on the offensive as necessary. Some types of artillery could be dug in, but most are currently quite movable. So it's hard to imagine purely defensive weapons. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine purely offensive ones: tanks, nukes. Even though, as we have seen, it is not impossible to provide a reasoned argument that ascribes a defensive role (through their impact on deterrence) for these as well.

Another way would be to rely purely on the relative ease of defense. This is called the **offense-defense balance**: when offense is dominant, it means that it is easier to attack and conquer than to defend. This can be due to technology (e.g. tanks with air support versus WWI-style trench warfare) or doctrine (e.g. the *cult of the offensive* that dominates most militaries according to whom the best defense is a good offense). The French, along with most everyone else, subscribed to this particular cult before WWI, which is perhaps among the reasons why they hurled masses of soldiers into the German meat-grinder.

Traditionally, defense dominated for centuries. From the invention of the first fortifications thousands of years ago until the advent of canon, it was much easier to defend a city than to take it. Siege warfare was very static, and mostly depended on starving the besieged into surrender. Very few sieges ended suc-

would have been.

cessfully with the attackers storming the city, scaling the walls, and getting in. Most ended either with the withdrawal of the besieging army or the fall of the city due to either starvation or treachery. This is one of the factors, by the way, that explains why feudalism took so long for kings to overcome: Once the local lord built his stronghold, it was virtually impossible to dislodge him. This also explains why one of the first things that kings did when they laid their hands on good siege equipment was to destroy the castles of their vassals, thereby concentrating all military power in their own hands. Defense seemed to dominate offense during the First World War too, but new technology and tactics gave advantages to offense that the Germans made good use of in the Second.

In addition to technology, geography can help alleviate some of the security dilemma. Belligerents can establish **demilitarized zones** — strips of land that are declared free of hostile armies (and sometimes patrolled by a third-party, like the United Nations). The idea is to separate the opponents, reduce the risks of surprise attack that each faces, and decrease the chances of incidents that might trigger reprisals and large-scale conflict. Such a demilitarized zone (DMZ) separates North Korea from South Korea today. Another DMZ was established after the 1956 Suez War between Israel and Egypt when the Sinai peninsula was demilitarized and patrolled by U.N. forces right until Nasser asked them to leave on the eve of the Six Day War. Similarly, the Rhineland (the industrial heartland of Germany) was demilitarized after the First World War. Hitler's first bold foreign policy stroke was to remilitarize it in 1936, six years after the withdrawal of the Allied occupation forces. When this went unopposed, he broadened his sights with results we all know well.

Somewhat larger-scale geo-political formations with a similar role are the **buffer zones**. Like DMZs, these are areas that separate hostile forces but they need not be demilitarized. Very often, entire states provide buffer zones between potential belligerents. For example, when Napoleon was finally defeated by the Fourth Coalition in 1815, France was encircled with the *cordon sanitaire*, a collection of buffer states designed to box-in the restless country. It ran from Belgium in the North, through a chain of German states, and down to Italy. The architects of the Concert system who designed it at the Congress of Vienna were quite explicit about the role these states would play in containing future aggression by France. Along similar lines, Stalin demanded a buffer zone that would separate the Soviet Union from Germany in 1945. The Germans had invaded the country twice in the first half of the 20th century, and it was understandable that the Russians would be quite apprehensive about a possible repeat. Stalin wanted a barrier composed of neutral or pro-Russian states. The problem was that a non-communist East European state would quickly turn pro-Western and thus become less than neutral. It was not surprising, therefore, that Stalin began arranging for communist governments to take over in these countries. This is something Roosevelt seems to have understood far better than Truman did at the time.

Another possibility is **arms control**. That is, an agreement to limit the arma-

ments, perhaps even reduce them to less dangerous (and costly levels). While it is impossible to completely abolish weapons, it is not quite that far-fetched to believe that they can be limited in some useful way. This topic is enormous, extremely complicated, and quite important (which is why discussion sections are dedicating special time for it). For our purposes, it suffices to say that there are some notable successes in this area: namely the various anti-nuclear agreements — test ban, non-proliferation, nuclear-free zones, arms reductions — biological and chemical weapons conventions, and even conventional force reduction ones. On the other hand, these agreements are hampered by inability to monitor compliance, and the generally voluntary nature of becoming party to them. As we have seen, North Korea violated the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which it was a signatory. Israel never ratified the NPT and is widely believed to have nuclear capability.

Another mechanism that is great when it works but that fails all too often to be honestly relied upon, is **collective security**. The idea is to form a coalition of states under the principle that an attack against one is an attack against all, requiring a collective response to the aggressor. The coalition member also agree to abstain from attacking each other. The idea is that such a system would enhance the security of its members much better than the self-help anarchical one where each actor must rely solely on his own resources for defense. Further, unlike deterrence that relies on threats and may exacerbate the security dilemma, collective security systems encourage cooperation instead of competition, reducing the risk of war.

It is easy to label such views as naively unrealistic and misguided. After all, where was the League of Nations when Italy gobbled up Abyssinia or Japan conquered Manchuria? It proved impotent to stop such brazen challenges to its core principles: although everyone seemed to agree that aggression was bad, few were willing to risk their own well-being to protect Ethiopians and Chinese. The pathetic figure of Abyssinia's emperor Haile Selassie vainly begging the League to help only revealed how hollow such commitments were. How can it ever be more credible to threaten with a vigorous response by many who may have conflicting interests than by one whose interests are directly injured? Proponents of collective security who claim that it is more credible than unilateral defense have the logic exactly backwards.

On the other hand, the architects of the United Nations were able to address some of the shortcomings of the League of Nations. In particular, they did not blithely assume that every state should get equal voting rights. After all, Trinidad and Tobago are not quite as important to the world as Britain. The U.N. system therefore incorporates the Security Council that comprises the five victors of the Second World War — U.S., U.K., Russia, China, and France — as permanent members, each of whom can veto any resolution of the Council. However, the power of the Five is a bit limited because while each has the ability to block a decision, the five together cannot make one: they need the votes of several other, non-permanent members who serve on the UNSC on a rotating

basis.

The U.N. system was hampered quite a bit by the Cold War rivalry between the US and the USSR, but it has not been invigorated by the end of that conflict. While the jury is still out on its future, the U.N. has proven its usefulness on a great number of occasions: its interventions are by and large successful (the problem is that it does not seem to do nearly as many as it should), and its humanitarian efforts deserve a lot of credit. The only time the U.N. fails miserably is when some members attempt to use the organization for something it was never designed to do: Compel a major power to go against its national interests. Every permanent member of the UNSC has disregarded the "will" of the UN on many occasions. Even though the U.S. is currently everyone's favorite anti-UN power, the others have not generally fared that much better. It is inconceivable that an organization that depends entirely on the goodwill of the great powers could be used against one of them. It should therefore come as a small surprise to us that it would fail when it tries. What is more astounding is that some insist on using it this way even though its repeated failure can only undermine its legitimacy in the long run. After all, what use is a collective security organization that gets systematically ignored? Because ignored it will be on such crucial occasions, perhaps a wiser course of action would be to skirt over them. This would also tend to reduce its credibility as an impartial arbiter, but since when anything in international politics must be impartial? This is a world that deals with varying degrees of bias.