

CHAPTER 8

Theoretical and Policy Implications

Before discussing the major implications of this study for deterrence theory and policy, it might be helpful to start with a brief summary of the key issues addressed in previous chapters. The book's main concern with major power behavior echoes the belief that "the theory, like the story, of international politics is written in terms of the great powers of an era" (Waltz 1979, 72). There is a substantial amount of empirical and theoretical research on major power behavior, but, surprisingly, only a few attempts provide clear conceptual and operational criteria for identifying major powers, most relying on the conventional wisdom of diplomatic histories.¹ It was appropriate, therefore, to take on the challenge of specifying the operational requirements for a state to be identified as a major power (appendix B). These operational specifications then guided a historical reconstruction of which countries qualified as "major powers" or "global contenders," and during what period, since the end of the nineteenth century (see chap. 2).

Furthermore, one of the central questions addressed in this book concerns the conflictual aspect of major power relations. As discussed in the introduction, the development of research on the causes of wars independent from the strategic studies of deterrence is unwarranted since conflict avoidance is, for the most part, logically and empirically inseparable from deterrence stability. The question of why and when deterrence is likely to fail is analogous to the question of why some crises escalate to wars while others do not.² In the analysis of possible explanations for deterrence failure and conflict escalation between major powers, I have thus merged insights from both research areas.

I also raise a number of methodological issues concerning the testability of deterrence theory (see chap. 3). In this respect, my analysis reveals logical flaws and empirical limitations in the widespread approach to deterrence outcomes in terms of success or failure. Most studies have considered only two outcomes, either success or failure, differentiated mainly by the use of force. To consider deterrence outcomes with greater precision, I introduce four outcomes instead—

Challenger's acquiescence, Defender's acquiescence, compromise, war—three of which are all peaceful but entail very different *political* implications for either side. This expanded view of deterrence outcomes reveals two forms of deterrence failure, one violent and the other peaceful, and it also includes compromise, which allows for a mixture of gains and losses to both sides. This differentiation of four outcomes can therefore uncover patterns that are obscured by a simple dichotomy of deterrence outcomes. Based on these and other conceptual refinements of deterrence, as presented in chapter 3, a new data set of deterrence cases for the 1895–1985 period was developed. Brief historical summaries of the cases of extended-immediate deterrence (EID) are provided in appendix A, along with the historical sources consulted for all three types of deterrence cases—general deterrence failures that did not escalate into EID crises, EID crises, and direct deterrence between major powers.

Theoretical Implications for the Study of Deterrence and Conflict

After delineating the key actors and clarifying deterrence phenomenon conceptually and empirically, I presented several factors generally considered essential for understanding foreign conflict behavior, such as relative power (chap. 4) and domestic regime type (chap. 6). The issue of deterrence credibility, however, has been suggested as central to any such analysis. The presented analysis provides some novel insights in this respect, facilitated by my expansion of the notion of inherent credibility by linking it to the traditional geopolitical concerns of major powers (chap. 5).

In a nutshell, unlike other states, whose national security primarily rests on rather limited goals of self-defense or subregional security, major powers' security concerns are much more expansive, reaching beyond their borders and immediate surroundings. Major power relations are largely shaped by their involvement regarding third nations, geographically either distant or close, that is, in situations known as *extended deterrence*. I argue that regional stakes are a major source of inherent credibility for this type of deterrence. Although regional stakes have been ignored in deterrence studies, this study shows that they are powerful predictors of major power behavior. Moreover, they provide a better means for explaining the onset and outcomes of deterrence than does the examination of other individual factors such as rel-

ative power or costly signaling strategies. The results of the empirical tests conducted here strongly support this argument, demonstrating that extended-immediate deterrence is likely to be attempted by a major power with strong interests in the region of conflict. A deterrer with strong regional stakes is also less likely to acquiesce to another power's demands, while war is more likely to result if both sides have equally strong and competing interests in the Protégé's region. The latter finding is consistent with the conventional wisdom of historical and geopolitical literature on the precarious role of gray areas in major power relations (for more details, see Cohen 1973). The empirical evidence supporting the pivotal role of geopolitics and regional stakes for understanding the dynamics of major power behavior is quite robust. The results are almost identical in their high statistical and substantive significance both when the regional salience variable is examined individually (chap. 5) and when it is included with other factors in combined models (chap. 7).

The regional interests of major powers are an observable category, and if (as is argued here) these interests are indicative of the inherent credibility of extended deterrence threats, then the findings about their importance for predicting both the onset and outcomes of extended-immediate deterrence between major powers have several theoretical and policy implications.

Power Capability

Under the influence of realism, the impact of power on world politics has become one of the hallmarks of international relations research and of conflict theories in particular. Almost parallel to this trend in the scholarly literature, the advent of nuclear weapons placed the issue of adequate levels and type of military capabilities at the core of strategic studies concerned primarily with the precarious nature of deterrence between nuclear superpowers. The findings presented in chapter 4, however, challenge the validity of an exclusive focus on power relations to explain international conflicts and deterrence. Regardless of the power measure employed (i.e., COW Index of National Capabilities or GDP), the findings about the impact of relative power on deterrence outcomes are fairly intuitive *and* significant only for less complicated situations. The single conclusion we can draw from examining the power factor alone is that a weaker Challenger is likely to acquiesce to the demands of a more powerful Defender—hardly a novel theoretical insight.

Even when combined with other factors, such as regional salience or domestic regime type (see chap. 7), it is difficult to establish whether power balance or preponderance provides a more stable condition. The results indicate that, unlike the situation of equal regional stakes between two sides, power parity situations are more likely to lead to a compromise than to war. Still, the coefficients are not statistically significant at the conventionally acceptable levels for the odds between the probability of war and the likelihood of either side's acquiescence under the same power parity conditions (see Model 2 in table 7.2). This means that the results for the impact of power balances on the probability of war as a violent form of deterrence failure are at best inconclusive. It all depends on whether the alternative choice to war is a peaceful unilateral concession or a compromise.

Interestingly, the findings provide some new insights into the correlation between balance of power or balance of interests on the one hand, and deterrence outcomes, on the other hand. For instance, as already mentioned, the results are not consistent with the power shift argument that wars are likely to result from an uncertainty of power parity (see discussion in chap. 4). On the other hand, if power balancing is reinterpreted in terms of the influence of major powers in world regions (Morgenthau 1948) rather than in terms of sheer size of national capabilities, then the equal presence or influence of competing major powers in the same region can lead to major clashes. In other words, it is important to differentiate between balance of power and balance of interests, as they can have reverse effects on deterrence outcomes. In this context, my results do not support the argument advanced in the literature (Betts 1987, 20 et seq.) that balance of power is a stronger predictor of reactions to threats (i.e., EID outcomes), while the balance-of-interest approach is more valid for predicting the decision to issue threats. This analysis instead indicates that regional interests are important factors for predicting both the onset and outcomes of deterrence.

Credibility and Resolve

If the capability requirement of deterrence is not sufficient to explain conflict dynamics, then theoretical focus needs to be shifted toward a better understanding of the second essential requirement for deterrent threats, that is, their credibility. In particular, what constitutes the credibility of a threat? Under what conditions do credible threats deter attacks and prevent wars? Does the threat credibility provide a more

effective deterrent than the capability to carry out threats? Or, if some combination of both requirements provides a more robust deterrent effect, what constitutes such a combination? Before answering the last question, which will be more thoroughly addressed in the concluding discussion of main policy implications, the other questions will be first addressed in the context of three alternative factors regarding the credibility issue: (1) domestic constraints or opportunities, or alternatively, the domestic costs for failing to stand firm abroad, (2) international reputation for strong resolve, which is the focal point of the influential commitment theory, and (3) intrinsic interests in the issue at stake, generally identified with the notion of inherent credibility, and defined here in terms of the regional stakes in the context of major power relations.

Resolve and Domestic Costs

It is an old idea to consider the credibility of external threats as a function of domestic constraints or, alternatively, of domestic costs for foreign policy failures (e.g., Kaufmann 1956). But it is only recently that this idea has received closer scholarly attention, handled with more rigor and subject to both formal-theoretic and empirical analyses. The magnitude of domestic constraints or costs has usually been considered as a function of a nation's domestic regime type. Democratic governments are assumed to be more constrained than their authoritarian counterparts in making foreign policy decisions, particularly those that involve the use of force. It has been further suggested that the domestic costs for major foreign policy failures are higher in democratic than nondemocratic regimes, as domestic audiences in democracies have greater leverage to punish their leaders for policy failures.

Whether the impact of the domestic regime variable on deterrence is examined separately or in combination with other factors (see chaps. 6 and 7), the findings in this study are almost identical. The domestic factor is particularly relevant for explaining the dynamics of deterrence between similar regimes, where unilateral peaceful acquiescence to the other side's demands is a likely outcome. This variable is, however, less helpful in understanding the dynamics of behavior between dissimilar regimes such as that between the United States and USSR during the Cold War period. Its explanatory range is also limited in terms of types of outcomes, better explaining the probability of either side's peaceful acquiescence than the likelihood of compromise or war.

There are two important patterns, however, that validate theoretical expectations about threat credibility as a function of domestic

costs. First, democratic Defenders are less likely to back down once an EID crisis has started, regardless of the Challenger's regime type. Second, there was not a single case of war between democratic states in this analysis. Since war is less likely between authoritarian states as well, and given the high significance of the domestic variable for explaining the behavior between similar regimes, these findings point to the need for further research on the impact of political similarity, regardless of regime type, on foreign behavior. As for the evidence showing the low probability of democratic Defenders backing down, it appears that threat credibility can be considered to be a function of domestic audience costs but *only if* these costs are expected to be high. The puzzle remains why a deterrer with low domestic audience costs (i.e., a nondemocratic Defender) is also unwilling to yield to the opponent under certain circumstances (e.g., if it faces a democratic Challenger). In its current stage, domestic audience costs theory does not yet provide a clue to solving this puzzle.

Reputational or Intrinsic Interests?

Besides the recently revived interest in the linkage between foreign threat credibility and domestic audience costs, strategic studies have been mostly centered on two main approaches to the issue of credibility and resolve: commitment theory and the theory of inherent credibility. Which approach proves to be more valid? According to the presented empirical findings, inherent credibility is the key to understanding deterrence, which leads us to the next, most critical, conclusion.

One of the most important findings of this study is that the insufficient attention paid to less manipulable factors, such as the intrinsic interests upon which credibility depends, is unjustified. My analysis substantiates the importance of intrinsic interests for understanding the dynamics of deterrence as advocated by third-wave deterrence theorists (Maxwell 1968; Jervis 1970; George and Smoke 1974; Snyder and Diesing 1977) and subsequently suggested in the empirical research of issues at stake (Huth 1988, 1994; Huth and Russett 1984, 1988, 1990). This book demonstrates that, if these interests or issues at stake are interpreted in terms of the ties between a major power and the Protégé's region, their effects on deterrence attempts and outcomes are very strong. In this respect, the findings are largely, though not entirely, consistent with previous results about the effects of individual ties between a Defender and its Protégé on deterrence outcomes.³ At the least, the evidence for regional salience in deterrence relations

clearly supports the general argument from quantitative deterrence literature, holding that the issues at stake matter (Huth and Russett 1984).

On the other hand, this empirical analysis does not generally support an alternative argument that considers credibility to be a function of an effective signaling of strong resolve. As presented in the introduction, this argument is based on the idea of interdependent commitments (events viewed as tightly coupled spatially and across time). In fact, the findings here support only a restricted version of the commitment theory. In general, the consistency of resolute responses over time is not confirmed for the behavior of most major powers, and certainly not during the prenuclear age. Still, a Defender's past behavior is likely to influence a Challenger's decision whether to acquiesce or compromise. Furthermore, it is a significant predictor of deterrence outcomes if the Defender's resolve is inferred only from its past behavior in the *same* region. Therefore, the overall findings are mixed and certainly point to the need for future refinements that would restrict the notion of interdependent commitments to *intra*-regional affairs.

As for the deterrer's behavior as a costly signal or cheap talk, the analysis shows that this variable does not account for the probability of most deterrence outcomes and certainly cannot predict escalation to war. This result is consistent with the prediction of a formal-theoretic refinement of deterrence analysis that "demonstrates that in core areas where both players have inherently credible threats, increasing the costs of conflict past a certain point does little to enhance deterrence stability" (Zagare 1990, 259). It also lends justification to the policy prescriptions of third-wave deterrence studies, mostly employing the inductive approach of comparative case studies. "Instead of . . . emphasizing the critical importance of credibility and signaling to deterrence strategy, theorists would do better to caution that sophisticated opponents will judge credibility on the basis of a more fundamental analysis of the defender's interests" (George and Smoke 1974, 560). Despite methodological differences, my quantitative analysis confirms and further refines these conclusions.

It is worth remembering that the theoretical focus on reputation and costly signals originated from concerns about the irrationality of nuclear threats. The advent of nuclear weapons made the willingness to carry out such threats questionable, as it is difficult to envision anyone being willing to accept nuclear annihilation even for the sake of preventing an attack on an ally. The value of any target, save for one's own home territory, can hardly be worth a nuclear exchange. Yet, from

the U.S. strategic viewpoint, the Soviets had to believe that the United States was prepared to launch a nuclear attack for the sake of protecting West Berlin, or any other ally for that matter. In the superpower context of the nuclear dilemma, a target's inherent value to a deterrer's national interests was not at issue since the Soviets had the second-strike capability to retaliate with the same degree of annihilation.

For this reason, estimates of a target's value to a deterrer's national interests were replaced by the issue of convincing a potential aggressor of the real possibility of mutual annihilation, despite its irrationality. "We are back again at the commitment. How can one commit himself in advance to an act that he would in fact prefer not to carry out in the event, in order that his commitment may deter the other party? . . . One may try to stake his reputation on fulfilment, in a manner that impresses the threatened person" (Schelling 1960, 36). As a result, a state's reputation for resolve itself became the interest at stake, ultimately leading to an apolitical approach to deterrence (see also Maxwell 1968, 18–19; George and Smoke 1974, 556; Morgan 1985, 130). As George and Smoke observed, this view "has given the theory . . . a somewhat narrow, mechanistic, and technical character" (1974, 65). Moreover, if not placed in the right context, the consideration of deterrence as simply a manipulative strategy led to the effective signaling of strong resolve itself becoming the interest at stake (George and Smoke 1974; Morgan 1985). Consequently, insufficient attention was given to the less manipulable factors, such as intrinsic interests upon which credibility depends.

On the other hand, as Jervis noted, "the bulk of major international actions are nonmanipulable indices since they involve actions inextricably linked to the pursuit of important goals. . . . actors have only limited leeway to project images on the cheap" (1970, 65). Commitment theory tends to neglect the initial value that the Challenger attaches to action, or restraint from action, irrespective of the deterrer's signals of its intention. It also neglects the relevance of the value that the deterrer inherently holds toward the issue at stake. Simply put, "the technique is no substitute for having the national interest at stake" (Morgan 1985, 130). Since both the Challenger's and Defender's inherent stakes are the key ingredients of their vital national interests, they should be brought back into deterrence studies.

I address this problem by identifying what constitutes the national interests of major powers, apart from the protection of homeland territory. These factors are essentially identical to so-called intrinsic interests or inherent credibility of threats that set limits to the believability

of costly signals. In the 1970s, third-wave deterrence theorists pointed to the need to separate reputational from intrinsic interests. In the 1980s, quantitative deterrence studies approached this notion in terms of the individual ties between a deterrer and its protégé in extended deterrence. Likewise, the puzzle of whether the influence of international reputation for strong resolve outweighs that of intrinsic interests in the issue of dispute was subject to formal stylizations. Nevertheless, commitment theory, concerned primarily with reputational rather than intrinsic interests (including its policy version in the form of the “domino theory”), continued to be paradigmatic for both theory and policy of deterrence. It was apparent that both scholars and policy-makers were not yet paying sufficient attention to the relevance of intrinsic national interests in extended deterrence. Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s, it was pointed out that

it appears that the domino theory exaggerates the role of reputational interests in determining the outcomes of confrontations . . . and commensurately underestimates the importance of intrinsic interests. This topic is large and difficult; only tentative conclusions are possible. Quantitative studies tap these dimensions only approximately and have yielded ambiguous results. (Jervis 1991, 42)

The purpose of this book was to address these research problems by conceptually identifying national interests with the inherent credibility of threats, defining their essential aspects in major power extended deterrence in terms of the geopolitics of regional stakes, and providing robust findings about their strong impact on major power behavior. It remains to evaluate these research advances in the context of their policy implications for the post–Cold War international setting.

Policy Implications for the Post–Cold War Era

Continuing major power involvement in regional conflicts in the post–Cold War age further justifies the attempt to better understand what constitutes their vital national interests in different parts of the world. The recurrent threats and subsequent direct military interventions of U.S. and NATO troops in the Balkan wars put the refreshingly cooperative U.S.-Russian relationship on a temporary hold, while U.S.-Chinese tensions over Taiwan and North Korea have not abated,

despite the end of the Cold War. To what extent did these post-Cold War superpower tensions result from clashing interests over issues vital to both sides? Alternatively, to what extent did they result from one or the other side's concern with its own reputation for toughness in areas of lesser importance in order to deter similar developments in areas of vital interests? To what extent are current policies the residual of the Cold War concern with domino effects, and how much are they still based on the logic of nuclear deterrence that retaliation is irrational and thus credibility is weak? These are questions that still require clear answers from both strategic thinkers and practitioners if the continuing tensions between major powers are to become at least manageable or, if at all possible, avoidable.

Still Dominoes? Reputational Interests and "Threat Inflation"

Critics who characterize the 1990s as the decade of interventionism point to the continuation of policy driven by the domino metaphor leading to "threat exaggeration"⁴ as well to the ad hoc or "case-by-caseism" policy (Haas 1995) caused by the absence of a well-developed grand strategy for the post-Cold War world. The U.S. foreign policy record in the immediate decade after the Cold War seems to suggest that conceptual and strategic residuals from the Cold War era remain, seen in the prevailing concern with reputational interests based on the idea of interdependent commitments and "falling dominoes."⁵ As this concern is also at the core of commitment theory in strategic studies, it appears that the importance of inherent credibility is still overshadowed by other considerations, particularly those related to developing a reputation for strong resolve.

Traditional Cold War policy aimed at maintaining a reputation for standing firm can be interpreted as having influenced U.S. decisions in a number of post-Cold War crises, including the military interventions in the post-Persian Gulf Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. The official rationale for the intervention in Haiti, giving importance to sending strong signals to other parts of the world about strong U.S. resolve, was already cited in the introductory chapter. The military interventions in the former Yugoslavia are frequently interpreted (e.g., Art 1998/99, 108–9) and officially acknowledged (e.g., Holbrooke 1998) to reflect, at least in part, the Clinton administration's concern about NATO's credibility. Even the U.S. show of force

in the 1996 Taiwanese crisis was reportedly interpreted as bluff, designed only to demonstrate its strong resolve to the world (Blechman and Wittes 1999, 24; see also Layne 1997, 108). The bombing of Iraq in December 1998 was justified on similar grounds: "The U.N.'s credibility is on the line, and I think U.S. credibility as well."⁶

However, as critics point out, "crises are usually discrete happenings—not tightly linked events" (Layne and Schwarz 1993, 16). It is unconvincing, for example, to argue that leaders in the Balkans were deterred by U.S. intervention in Haiti, or that the Haitian government was learning "lessons" from a series of U.S.-Chinese crises of mutual probing of each other's resolve over Taiwan. Furthermore, states are likely to separate their rival's peripheral and vital interests. In his comparative historical study of Soviet reactions in some key Cold War crises, Hopf (1991b, 146) concludes that "American policymakers have grossly exaggerated the effects on Soviet thinking of American defeats in the periphery, and hence greatly overestimated the stakes involved in any conflict." Despite major structural changes in which the zero-sum aspect of Cold War bipolarity has abated, critics point to the continuation of "America's fixation with credibility" (McMahon 1991, 456). Once again, as was the case with Soviet reactions, states do not seem to draw inferences about each other's resolve from resolute behavior on low-stakes issues. Thus, one of the major conclusions from the analysis of U.S. policy in the post-Cold War era astoundingly resembles Hopf's remarks about U.S. misconceptions concerning Soviet inferences: "When the United States fails to intervene in peripheral areas, others will not draw adverse inferences about its willingness to defend vital, core interests" (Layne 1997, 115).

Nonetheless, the Munich analogy and domino theory—policy metaphors for the idea that events are interdependent and consequently require displays of strong commitment to act, even in peripheral areas, in order to contain instabilities in central areas—were often invoked to justify post-Cold War interventions.⁷ If official foreign policy visions are seen through domino metaphor lenses, frequent interventions are likely to ensue. "The post-Cold War domino theory, like the Cold War domino theory, will doom America to a string of military interventions in strategically peripheral regions" (Layne and Schwarz 1993, 17). The resulting criticism of such "uninhibited interventionism" largely reflected concerns about military overstretch in areas of dubious interests for U.S. national security. If these areas are categorized into a hierarchy of threats, descending from "A" to "C" lists in

their gravity, it has become “striking,” according to the critics, “how the ‘C list’ has come to dominate today’s foreign policy agenda” (Nye 1999, 27). Instead of the predominant focus on reputation and credibility for its own sake, this literature suggests the need for a “grand strategy” based on “selective engagements.” This alternative view puts forth the notion that national interests should be at the core of any potential intervention, thus corresponding closely to the notions of inherent credibility and intrinsic interests found in deterrence studies.

The Need for a Grand Strategy

Formulating a grand strategy involves several steps. According to Posen and Ross (1997, 100) and Layne (1997, 88), a grand strategy specifies vital national security interests, the threats to those interests, and the appropriate means to meet them. Art (1998/99, 79) specifies the process of formulating a grand strategy by identifying two major decisions: selecting basic goals, which consists of identifying a state’s national interests, and choosing appropriate means, particularly military power, to protect these interests. Based on different answers to these questions, scholars have developed several models of possible grand strategies for the post–Cold War context. Posen and Ross (1997), for instance, identify five paradigms, each competing for selection as a new U.S. grand strategy: neoisolationism, selective engagement, collective security, containment, and primacy. Haas (1995) reviews five general views of U.S. priorities in the post–Cold War world: Wilsonianism, economism, realism, humanitarianism, and minimalism. Art (1998/99) compares the strategy of selective engagement to six alternative grand strategies: dominion, global collective security, regional collective security, cooperative security, containment, and isolationism.

Extracting the most essential elements in these different classifications generates four major options: (1) the strategy of global preponderance advocating U.S. leadership in the system (though there are wide variations within this paradigm in interpreting major global threats and the means to meet them); (2) the strategy of collective security advocating, among the other elements of liberalism upon which it is based, multilateralism and actions through international institutions; (3) neoisolationism, proposing, at best, only minimal use of force abroad; (4) the strategy of selective engagements, a new model for U.S. foreign policy that restricts U.S. globalism to those regional areas or issues that bear vital importance for its national interests.⁸

A Geopolitical Version of the Selective Engagement Strategy

This study clearly suggests the grand strategy of “selective engagements” as the most appropriate option for post–Cold War policy. First, the national interests of major powers transcend their borders, and I view them accordingly in terms of the stakes that these states have in different parts of the world. Hence, the vital national interests of major powers, consisting of homeland security and the protection of interests in critical regions, are the first issue that needs to be clarified in formulating any grand strategy. Note that regional salience is interpreted in this analysis exclusively in terms of tangible elements, such as the ties developed between a major power and regional states through alliances and trade.

This approach may thus be viewed as a “hard” version of the strategy of selective engagements since it omits intangibles, such as the protection of human rights and the spread of democracy, from issues deserving U.S. exercise of military deterrence and eventual use of force.⁹ While humanitarian crises might in some cases necessitate military interventions, they are in themselves qualitatively different from the type of military crises explored in this book. As such, they arguably require very different criteria for intervention. Moreover, despite the strong sense of moral reasons for humanitarian interventions, unless indiscriminately applied, these interventions risk the charge of “double standards” (e.g., see Johnson 1994, 234) or the essential immorality of “selective humanitarianism.” As an illustration, though the human toll was much more tragic in Angola or Sudan, calls to “do something” were negligible, and the force was instead used in other cases such as Bosnia or Haiti.

Hence, there are two basic problems with a “soft” version of the strategy of selective engagements that includes humanitarian issues among vital national interests, worthy of military interventions. First, since selectivity of military involvements is an essential aspect of this strategy, it has to provide a “clear strategic guide to which interventions are worth doing and which not” (Posen and Ross 1997, 109). It requires, therefore, at least some tangible strategic reason for the use of force, which, in turn, makes it ultimately indistinguishable from the “hard” version of this strategy. Otherwise, it runs the risk of arbitrariness or double standards. Second, interventions on purely humanitarian grounds require moral consistency across all cases; otherwise their moral credibility is undermined. In other words, a policy that includes

humanitarian issues among vital national interests and thus considers them as worthy of the use of force *must* be universalist, not selective.

The major problem of any universalist strategy, however, whether it is in the form of *realpolitik* global containment or liberal Wilsonianism, consists of “commitment creep”—the exact problem that the strategy of selective engagement is supposed to avoid. This does not mean that the humanitarian problems—such as the tragedy of ethnic and other wars, famine, and violations of human rights—need to be ignored. Rather, the question is whether they should provide a criterion for the use of force. It is in the essence of the strategy of selective engagement to suggest that nonmilitary means need be fully exploited to address the important moral questions that humanitarian disasters raise. If the use of force is chosen as an acceptable means to combat such problems, and if the moralism is genuine, hence requiring consistency in all cases, then this strategy would transform into its opposite—“indiscriminate globalism.”

Since humanitarian issues were not examined in this study, policy implications can only be drawn from the presented analysis that confines national interests to tangibles. To be precise, this book identifies the magnitude of regional stakes as a strategic guide for exercising military deterrent policy or even, if necessary, actual use of force. The findings suggest the necessity of distinguishing several types of regions: (1) an area of competing interests; (2) an area of unilateral predominance; and (3) an area of low stakes for either side.

The most precarious situations arise in the areas where at least one other power has strong stakes. My findings show an exceptionally high probability of war only if two or more major powers have equally strong stakes in the same region (see table 5.5). The probability of war somewhat decreases in the situations of conflicting regional interests only if the Challenger is a democratic and stronger power (see table 7.5). The likelihood of serious militarized escalation still remains relatively high, raising the question of how such historical trends can be reversed and conflicts in the areas of competing interests prevented. The recently suggested “Bismarckian” model for U.S. grand strategy seems to provide a reasonably acceptable option. It propounds that “the key issue for the United States is not balancing against rivals real or latent but bandwagoning with them . . . to keep them from ‘balancing’ and ultimately coalescing against the United States” (Joffe 1995, 110, 113).

In the contemporary context, Europe and East Asia fit this description of a situation where more than one major power has strong

regional stakes.¹⁰ The proponents of discriminate internationalism (i.e., “selective engagements”) consider either Russia or Germany or both as major powers that could challenge U.S. primacy in European affairs. In East Asia, another area where U.S. national interests continue to be strong, China and Japan are regarded as potential or actual rivals to U.S. interests.¹¹ Since neither of these powers, with some exception for China, poses a serious security threat to the United States, a grand strategy for such contending regions based on the Bismarckian bandwagoning model becomes even more feasible.

However, in a case with only two major contenders in an area of potential conflict, the potentially zero-sum nature of bipolarity would require different strategies for conflict avoidance. One possibility for avoiding serious military conflicts is to acknowledge a rival’s legitimate role in regional affairs, while demanding a reciprocal response. This policy is, of course, predicated on a state’s preference for compromise over war. My research findings indicate that, if war does not occur, then the Defender’s acquiescence is ten times more likely than either of the other two peaceful outcomes—Challenger’s acquiescence or compromise. Therefore, if a Defender prefers peace over war, it is essential to avoid the failure of general deterrence in the area through attempts of positive inducements and achieve at least an exchange of concessions, thus dissuading the other power from challenging the status quo.

If the regional area is of primary concern only to the Challenger, then it is unlikely that the Challenger’s use of force in the region would trigger military reactions by other powers, although this finding was not significant at conventionally accepted levels (table 5.3). Even if another power therefore decides to react, as a protector of the third nation, in such a conflict involving only the Challenger’s vital national interests, it is likely to quickly back down. This suggests that it is better for a potential Defender to stay away from areas if its interests are only peripheral, whereas at least another power has strong stakes. Even if deterrence is exercised by the Defender, say for the sake of “saving face” as in the globalist scenario of interdependent commitments, it is likely to fail, thus ultimately eroding the Defender’s prestige and exactly reversing the desired effects.

In regions of the Defender’s predominance, such as the Western Hemisphere or Middle East for the U.S. position after the Cold War, challenge by another power is very unlikely (table 5.3). Military interventions by the Defender in regional disputes, designed only to send signals elsewhere and essentially contain other major powers from encroaching on its area of influence, are thus almost entirely

superfluous and unnecessarily costly. This does not mean that a challenge cannot occur. Though an unlikely scenario, if it nevertheless occurs, the outcome is likely to depend on each side's domestic costs for backing down. The Defender's acquiescence is the least likely outcome if the regional stakes are examined apart from other factors (table 5.5). However, if the interplay between domestic and international factors is taken into account, then the Defender's acquiescence becomes highly probable if both powers are not democracies, that is, their government's domestic costs are lower for their failures in foreign conflicts. This pattern certainly warrants further theoretical research, as it hardly fits any current theoretical expectations, although it does not have a significant bearing for the United States or any other democratic power's foreign policy.¹²

The question of what to do in peripheral areas where neither power has strong stakes is not thoroughly examined in the literature and was only tangentially covered in this analysis. My results suggest that a major power crisis in such a region, if it arises at all, would lead to a compromise or the Challenger's acquiescence. In order to better see how the key aspects of each variable might have an interactive effect on deterrence outcomes, the symmetry of low stakes (the situation of lesser importance for the probability of major power conflict) was not examined within any combined models (chap. 7). Only one firm conclusion can therefore be inferred: that the United States should not initiate interventions in the major power periphery for reputational reasons. Such action can be perceived as an offensive strategy of extension and expansion of influence, which can, in turn, trigger responses by other powers. This finding provides some additional insights to the existing, albeit scarce, literature on the dynamics of conflict in areas of peripheral interest to either power. The prescriptions advanced by the selective engagement proponents, for example, range from multilateralism to doing nothing (Art 1990/91, 49–50), or even skepticism regarding the ability of this strategy to provide proper guidance for action in the Third World and other areas of low stakes for either power (Johnson 1994, 149; Posen and Ross 1997, 110). While there is nothing intrinsic to the strategy itself to make it unfit for explaining major power behavior in areas of mutually low stakes, it requires further conceptual and theoretical refinements to explain patterns such as those found in this research.

The advantage of a selective engagement strategy based on regional stakes over its major alternative, the preponderance or primacy paradigm, is at least twofold. First, currently from the U.S.

angle, "those who possess the weights (China, Japan, Russia, Europe) are not really challengers, whereas those who are challengers (e.g., Iraq, Iran) do not have the weight" (Joffe 1995, 116). While proponents of a U.S. global primacy strategy would undoubtedly disagree with this interpretation of world trends, it is nevertheless obvious that the United States finds itself more at odds with those who aspire to regional hegemony than it does with the states reaching for a position of global hegemony. The regional challengers may well be minor powers, as indicated in the preceding citation, but, at some future point, any major power can also contest U.S. influence in particular regions. However, the key aspect here is not who is likely to become a challenger, but the fact that these challenges are limited to regional rather than global levels. As an illustration, even if some proponents of primacy are correct in predicting that China has the greatest potential to become a major challenger to U.S. international standing (e.g., Khalizad 1995)—a prediction on which not even all proponents of this strategy agree¹³—this challenge is unlikely to occur at the global level, but rather take place in regions of vital interest to China (such as Far East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia).

In other words, the fact that China, Japan, Germany, or Russia may become a potential challenger does not require U.S. global involvement, as these threats are likely to be confined to specific regions, those (if any) of vital interest to the challenger. A policy that is based on keeping global commitments strong in order to deter regional challenges is simply unnecessarily costly. This brings up the second advantage of the geopolitical version of selective engagements over the global primacy argument—it requires less resources to defend and promote U.S. national interests. That is, not only is it a less expensive strategy than that requiring indiscriminate globalism, but it also provides more robust guidance for strategic decisions related to peace and war.

The concern with power relations and signaling techniques of strong commitments has dominated both the theory and policy of deterrence. The focus on these two factors has come at the expense of understanding the inherent issues at stake, particularly those related to regional interests. It can potentially obscure, therefore, the important question of what constitutes vital national interests in extended deterrence. As shown in this analysis, it is better for the question of national interests to be clarified, rather than to have misleading signals sent to the other side.

My empirical test has shown that the power factor alone is insufficient to explain the dynamics of deterrence and conflict behav-

ior. Also, preoccupation with a reputation for standing firm—before making a thorough evaluation of what is at stake—does not generally constitute an adequate response to the precarious nature of major power deterrence. Moreover, it could even have the opposite effect, inadvertently prompting escalatory behavior. If statesmen believe they need to act for the sake of action, then there is a heightened tendency toward a self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g., Jervis 1991, 25; Johnson 1994, 143). Standing firm, regardless of one's actual interests at stake, can backfire, prompting an opponent to trigger the cycle of escalation. Once begun, this process can lead both sides to conflict over an issue that perhaps was not inherently vital to the deterrer in the first place. In terms of policy implications for U.S. post-Cold War diplomacy, the analysis indicates that crisis management of particular foreign policy issues needs to be conducted within the framework of a grand strategy of selective engagement. The empirical evidence presented in this book suggests that this kind of strategy would require, among other things, the differentiation of national interests across regions, thus adjusting the Cold War policy of “unrestricted globalism” to regional realities.