

enough (much less how much is too much), or what weapons to buy, or when deterrence has been fulfilled. Just about anything can be read into it. This is why we constantly hear of the need to “strengthen our deterrent,” for since it is impossible to know for sure if the “minds of Soviet leaders” are fully deterred, then there is always a case for playing safe and, by means of further military deployments, insuring that our resolve will not be doubted. If deterrence is the basis of our security, it is not clear, according to this mode of thinking, how we could have too much of it. But this, of course, is exclusively “our” angle of vision. From the Soviet point of view our strengthened deterrent (greater numbers and/or more sophisticated weaponry) is simply a heightened threat to their security, to which they normally respond by strengthening their deterrent—that is, by increasing their lethal threats against the West. This reciprocal process of threat and counter-threat and counter-counter-threat persists unabated and shows no sign of diminished vigour in the immediate future.

- (6) In reply to such skeptical dissections of nuclear strategy, it is often pointed out that there has been no major war between the great powers since 1945; and this remarkable period of peace—now almost two generations old—is often judged to be a positive product of the presence of nuclear weapons. Surely these weapons have imposed a salutary restraint of terror on great power relations? Perhaps it might even be said that they have prevented the outbreak of a major war, particularly the sort of war that would result from Soviet aggression? As the conventional formulation has it, *deterrence works*, or, alternatively, *deterrence has kept the peace*.

There can be little doubt that nuclear weapons have induced statesmen to act with special caution. In a world of two massive nuclear arsenals, Washington is certain to think more than twice about challenging vital Soviet interests, however hostile it might be to these interests, and Moscow exercises similar prudence in its challenges to American interests. Both realize the importance of avoiding the kind of confrontation that might lead to armed conflict. But there is a danger of complacency in this line of thought, and the following considerations must be kept actively in mind:

- (a) The proposition that nuclear weapons “have kept the peace” is unproven and unprovable; indeed, it is no more than an article of faith.

The non-occurrence of something could have been for many different reasons, including, in this case, the possibility that neither side had any urge to start a war.

- (b) While it is commonly thought that US nuclear weapons have deterred Soviet aggression against the West, it must be said that we are dealing here, not with documented Soviet intention, but with Western suspicion and presumption. In fact, there is no evidence of Soviet plans to invade western Europe in the postwar years and much evidence to the contrary. If nuclear weapons have significantly restrained Soviet expansionism, the evidence to support this view has yet to be publicly revealed.<sup>13</sup>
- (c) While the fear associated with nuclear weapons has inhibited their actual use, this fear has done nothing to discourage their mass production. Whatever deterrence may or may not have done (and these discussions are largely speculative), it has certainly not restrained the massive preparations for war that we have witnessed since 1945. Indeed, it has aided, justified, and fuelled these nuclear buildups. The intense nuclearization of security policy has been done in the name of deterrence, which is constantly said to need strengthening.
- (d) Deterrence, unlike all previous approaches to security, assumes permanent success; and permanence, unlike the period since 1945, is a very long time. No policies—and no technologies—can be expected to work perfectly, and yet deterrence depends on such error-free conduct, indefinitely observed. Few things are permanent in relations between sovereign states: to expect a permanent stand-off in a highly militarized relationship between two great powers is to ask for a lot. Moreover, we know from consulting history that large stockpiles of weapons almost always get used, sooner or later. As Bernard Brodie once remarked about modern deterrence, we are “expecting the system to be constantly perfected”—that is, weaponry is constantly refined—“while going permanently unused. Surely we must concede that there is something unreal about it all.”<sup>14</sup>
- (7) Whatever doubts there might be about some of the dogmas of deterrence, there can be no doubt that modern science has presented humanity with a new existential reality with which we will always have to live. Whatever might happen to the world’s nuclear arsenals in the future, and even if they are dramatically reduced, the scientific knowledge that underlies this weap-