

#### IV.

### BEHAVIOUR IN CRISES: ACTING TO REDUCE THE RISK

Speakers on the fourth day of the conference examined the various strategies used by national actors in conflict and crisis situations, and attempted to assess which of these were most likely to lead to war, whether by inadvertence or miscalculation. A major focus of discussion was the extent to which the problem of accidental nuclear war could be meaningfully distinguished from the problem of war in general. There were presentations by Dr. Russell Leng, Dr. Martin Hellman, and Dr. Johan Niezing; the commentators were Dr. John Barrett and Mr. John Lamb.

Russell Leng's paper summarized a series of five studies on bargaining strategies between states in times of crisis. The way leaders behave in a crisis is salient to any discussion of accidental nuclear war, since many experts have postulated that accidental war would most likely occur during a crisis. These studies suggest that *realpolitik* considerations, or more simply, concern for power, prestige and a national reputation for resolve, seem to be the chief factors motivating leaders during crises. The findings also indicate that when national leaders take these *realpolitik* considerations to their logical extreme, and ignore similar motivation on the part of their adversaries, this may result in the undesired outcome, war. Leng was disturbed by the finding that leaders may respond more to the realist prescription to show resolve than to the equally important prescription to act with prudence.

Leng was both encouraged and concerned by how the superpowers had behaved in past crises. Both sides had been able to exercise prudence and restraint during the two Berlin crises. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States at first employed a purely coercive bargaining strategy against the Soviets and then later precipitated the end of the crisis by applying a carrot-and-stick strategy. Soviet responses to the initial coercive tactics revealed the danger of utilising brinkmanship in crisis. Leng added that coercive tactics had become even riskier because of the shrinking gap between US and Soviet capabilities and in light of the finding that the loser in one dispute is likely to behave more belligerently in the next dispute with the same opponent. The findings suggested that world leaders are motivated both by a rational calculation of strategy and by factors such as pride and personal status. These latter considerations may explain why statesmen react strongly to overt threats from states of comparable power and why a loser endeavours to regain face.

Two observations combine to give cause for alarm, especially in confrontations between nuclear powers: first, leaders tend to show resolve rather than prudence; second, such an unrestrained demonstration of resolve can result in escalation of a crisis. In conflicts between nuclear powers both sides are somewhat restrained by their awareness of the dangers of brinkmanship but, paradoxically, each side is also aware of the restraints that the nuclear reality imposes upon the other. Thus, nuclear