

Any assessment of the impact of American deterrence in the transformation of Soviet foreign policy raises the larger conceptual problem of deterrence as a strategy that can be practised simultaneously by both parties to a conflict. A mutual attempt at deterrence is likely to occur when each perceives its adversary as the challenger and itself as defender. When these perceptions are accurate, the conflict is symmetrical: each adversary is simultaneously a defender and a challenger. Deterrence theory does not recognize this possibility and provides no analytical framework for assessing the long-term consequences of mutual deterrence. This omission is peculiar because the fundamental premise of most studies of nuclear strategy is that each superpower is practicing deterrence against the other.<sup>161</sup>

To assess the contribution of deterrence to the amelioration or resolution of conflict, its impact must be disentangled from other processes and events that influence the evolution of a conflict. Examination of particular cases illustrates the difficulty of assessing the impact of deterrence on conflict resolution. If Soviet foreign policy continues to evolve along the lines developed by Brezhnev's successors, especially Mikhail Gorbachev, the puzzle for analysts is explaining the change. Is it due to American military capability and resolve; the steep and unacceptable cost of the arms race; Soviet failures in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Third World; a crumbling domestic economy; a new leader with a very different set of priorities; or the synergistic interaction of all of these developments?

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<sup>161</sup> Some analysts have recognized that two adversaries can simultaneously practise deterrence but have not dealt with the theoretical implications of this phenomenon. Organski and Kugler identify four cases of nuclear deterrence as instances of "mutual deterrence": the Berlin Wall, 1961; Cuba, 1962; the Czech Coup in 1968; and the China-Vietnam War of 1979. It is instructive to note that two of these four cases lie outside the scope of deterrence: in 1968, the United States did not attempt to deter the Soviet Union and in 1979, China practised unsuccessful compellence, not deterrence, against Vietnam. In the remaining two cases, Organski and Kugler do not discuss the theoretical difficulties in conceiving a deterrence relationship as one of adversaries with overlapping roles.