

*Limited or Local Wars*

38. Proceeding further with the examination of the main assumptions of this paper that under the conditions of mutual nuclear deterrence, the aim of Canada and its allies should be to avoid war except in defence of vital interests, it is particularly important to consider the problem of preventing local and limited wars becoming global and nuclear ones. Against minor aggressions by the Soviet Union, Communist China or another Communist proxy, the free world would be faced with the choice of: (a) prompt and united collective action on the Korean model using conventional methods of warfare only; (b) reaction led initially by the U.S. involving the probable use of nuclear weapons at least locally and tactically; and (c) inaction to minimize the risk of hostilities spreading.

39. There is evidence that the United States is prepared to use nuclear weapons in local and limited wars, both to deter local Communist military aggression and as an alternative to committing United States ground forces to shore up the various weak spots of strategic importance in the defences of the free world. The position taken by the United States Government in regard to the fulfilment of its commitments under the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty presents an important current illustration of this strategy.

40. Mr. Dulles, in his speech on the results of the Bangkok meeting of the Manila Treaty Powers on March 8, included a warning that the nuclear retaliatory power of the United States may be used to deter Communist China from further military encroachments in Asia. He said: "For military defence we shall rely largely upon mobile allied power which can strike an aggressor wherever the case may demand. That capacity will, we believe, deter aggression. We shall not need to build up large static forces at all points and the United States contribution will be primarily in terms of sea and air power." Then he went on to say: "The Allied nations possess together plenty of power in the area. The United States in particular has sea and air forces now equipped with new and powerful weapons of precision, which can utterly destroy military targets without endangering unrelated civilian centers."

41. Mr. Dulles' warning to Communist China implied not only the threat of the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent; it also implied the risk of spreading the war. On this aspect of the deterrent, Mr. Dulles said: "I pointed out at Bangkok that, for military purposes, the Chinese Communist front should be regarded as an entirety because if the Chinese Communists engage in open armed aggression, this would probably mean that they have decided on general war in Asia. They would then have to take into account the mutual defence treaties of the United States with the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China and the forces maintained under them. Thus, general war would confront the Chinese Communists with tasks at the south, centre and north; tasks which would strain their inadequate means of transportation."

42. This kind of warning is undoubtedly calculated to make the undertaking of a local or limited attack by the Communists a risky business. But it also carries a risk for the side that issues such a warning, in the event the deterrent fails to work. For even with the threat of "measured retaliation", there is the danger of a local or limited war becoming general and total. For while a distinction can be drawn between the tactical and strategic uses of nuclear weapons at the commencement of hostilities, there are justifiable doubts as to whether this distinction would be maintained once the dictates of military necessity came into play. Military commanders are likely to use the amount of force necessary to accomplish their objective, and once they are permitted to use nuclear weapons of a lower range of power it would be difficult to know exactly where to draw the line in the upper ranges, especially if their use was thought to make the difference between victory or defeat. Any-