

They argued that it could be rational to threaten an irrational act, and explored the ways in which threats of nuclear retaliation might be made credible.²

Deterrence theory had its greatest impact on policy during the Kennedy administration when deterrence theorists and their students entered the government or influenced important policymakers.³ Although subsequent administrations have rejected some of the specific strategies derived from theories of deterrence, such as mutual assured destruction, they have continued to frame their policies in terms of the fundamental propositions of deterrence theory. These propositions have also influenced, if not shaped, the nuclear policies of Britain, the Soviet Union, France, China, and Israel.⁴ Strategies to prevent conventional war have also been deeply affected by the logic of deterrence theory.

Deterrence theory has gained widespread acceptance for intellectual, political, and psychological reasons. Its elegance and simplicity appeared to offer scholars a powerful and widely applicable instrument to analyze and predict strategic behaviour. It has appealed to policymakers as an instrument to exploit a weapon that cannot itself be used to achieve political goals. On a deeper level, it has served as a psychological bulwark against the fear of nuclear war. Deterrence theory argues that there are strategies that would make war initiation by either side an irrational act. We believe that this is the fundamental but unspoken reason why deterrence theory has been so influential and why there has been so little effort to test its propositions.

² Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); William W. Kaufmann, *The Requirements of Deterrence* (Princeton: Center for International Studies, 1954); Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

³ Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

⁴ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988); On China, see John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), and Chong-Pin Lin, *China's Nuclear Weapon's Strategy: Tradition Within Evolution* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988). The latter book argues unconvincingly that China's nuclear strategy is based on traditional Chinese approaches to strategy and is not in any way derived from Western notions of deterrence.