

dow of vulnerability"). Now, with major advances in missile accuracy, there are growing fears of "decapitation" strikes—that is, strikes against the nuclear possessor's command and control centres (the "brains" of each system). And there is always enough evidence, given the worst-case assumptions that infuse the thinking on both sides, to permit the military planners to speak anxiously and draw alarming conclusions.

Consider one example. The American deployment of Pershing II missiles in West Germany was justified publicly as a response to the Soviet deployment of SS-20s, but it is clear that these new and highly accurate US missiles were especially valued because of their potential for striking Soviet command centres. As a specialized journal with good links to the Pentagon reported in 1983, "With a range allowing strikes on Moscow from Germany, the removal of C² capability [i.e., command and control] by a comparatively small number of Pershings would render much of the Soviet ICBM first strike *and retaliatory* forces impotent. One high-up Reagan Administration official attested to the efficiency of using Pershing IIs to knock out Soviet C² installations . . ." ²¹ Moscow reacted to these deployments by installing new missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, which put further pressure on NATO forces. All this deployment of new hardware was done, of course, in the name of deterrence.

Deterrent threats are designed, theoretically, to dissuade "potential aggressors," but there are compelling grounds for thinking that the most serious risks of war are now posed, not by deliberate aggression, but by an international crisis that spirals out of control. The principal danger is unintentional war: war as a result of miscalculation, or diplomatic bungling, or panic and confusion, or hasty and ill-considered action under pressure. Crises are likely to emerge out of increasing political tensions, and these tensions and suspicions and distrust make a crisis even harder to manage. As a distinguished military historian, B.H. Liddell Hart, once observed, "When relations are strained, an ill-judged step on one side may all too easily lead to a precipitate step on the other side, and to neither drawing back for fear of losing face, at home and abroad. That is the way wars break out, more often than by deliberate intention." ²² The fear of aggression, and clumsy efforts to forestall a feared aggression, are much more likely to cause war than is aggression itself.

The prospect of stumbling into war is, in the nuclear age, by no means remote. Modern technologies have dramatically reduced the time for political decision-making in a crisis—indeed, the time for exercising prudent judgement has been virtually liquidated. As one writer has said, "the very

decisions which should be made with the greatest deliberation, because of their potentially awesome consequences, may have to be made under the most urgent pressure of time." ²³ These time-pressures increase the likelihood that nuclear forces will be put on early alerts as the military commanders on both sides insist on maximum readiness. Such interacting and escalating levels of alert would be tough to control, especially when nuclear weapons are on the front line and primed for early use (as they are in Europe). ²⁴

These dangers deserve urgent attention, for some such crisis is probably inevitable. A retired American admiral has given a realistic forewarning of what to expect. "Sooner or later," writes Admiral John M. Lee, "in one crisis or another, through some misjudgment or misunderstanding or stupidity, or some unlimited dedication to some principle or purpose, absolute peace will fail. On that day, we must not be relying on nuclearized forces, armed and indoctrinated to use nuclear weapons when conventional elements get into trouble, at the highest pitch of nuclear readiness, pressing against their nuclear controls, and with no stopping point once nuclear war starts." ²⁵ The dependency on nuclear weapons that strategists call "extended deterrence"—the dependency that George Kennan warned against in 1950—injects an all-or-nothing component into the handling of crises. Our policy, as Admiral Lee asserts, "counts on the nuclear weapon, the suicide threat, to deter all East-West hostilities at any significant level, and to deter them forever. And it promises only unimaginable disaster if that threat fails." ²⁶ It's hard to conceive that we can't do better than this.

CONCLUSION

We can return to where we started: to the insights of George Kennan. Weapons of mass destruction, Kennan argued, "reach backward beyond the frontiers of western civilization, to the concepts of warfare which were once familiar to the Asiatic hordes. They cannot really be reconciled with a political purpose directed to shaping, rather than destroying, the lives of the adversary. They fail to take account of the ultimate responsibility of men for one another, and even for each other's errors and mistakes." ²⁷ Kennan's perspective was not only humanistic, unlike that of most nuclear theorists, it was also very much in the realist tradition of appreciating the workings of power and the human purposes that power serves. The nuclear revolution has transformed the underpinnings of world politics, though not, as yet, political thought or international conduct.