Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use

Robert A. Levine
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Supported by the Carnegie Corporation

Project on Avoiding Nuclear War: Managing Conflict in the Nuclear Age
This report is one of several that comprise the final output of the RAND project on "Avoiding Nuclear War: Managing Conflict in the Nuclear Age," sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Carnegie Corporation made the original grant in 1985, when the issue of avoiding nuclear war was still very much in the context of the Cold War. The grant supported a wide range of reports, Ph.D. dissertations, conferences, and "crisis games" in that context, but when the Warsaw Pact crumbled in 1990 and the Soviet Union itself collapsed in 1991, it was decided to use the remaining funds to explore the new issues facing a world without a Cold War but still with nuclear weapons.

This study introduces and discusses a proposal for a United States-led policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use, intended to preserve the nuclear "firebreak" in the post-Cold War world. It should be of interest to government officials concerned with nuclear deterrence and nuclear proliferation, as well as the broad, informed public.

The other reports in the series cover other aspects of controlling nuclear proliferation and the potential use of nuclear weapons.
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This report proposes and presents an initial discussion of the possibility of a United States-led international policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use—UD for short. The purpose of such a policy would be to preserve the "firebreak" between nuclear and all other types of weapons, which since 1945 has been a key to preventing nuclear combat. The report is based on the axiom that protecting the firebreak—avoiding any use of any nuclear weapons by anyone—should be at the top of the list of U.S. and world priorities. Rejection of that axiom, e.g., in order to retain the U.S. option for first use in extreme cases, implies a rejection of UD. The discussion remains relevant, then, only for those who agree with the absolute anti-first use priority.

The report draws on the extensive discussions of deterrence during the Cold War. Many aspects have changed with the demise of the Soviet Union—the concern with "first-strike stability" and the conflict between that stability and "extended deterrence," the threat that the United States would use nuclear weapons to counter a conventional attack on its NATO allies—but deterrence as such has not become obsolete. It continues with the potential for a major contribution to what former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara has termed the only valid function for nuclear weapons, which is "to deter one's opponent from using them."

**Policies and Ambiguities**

A worldwide policy to deter first use of nuclear weapons might be spelled out as follows:
It is the policy of the signatories to this statement that any state using nuclear weapons in warfare for any purpose other than responding to nuclear use, or sponsoring or knowingly harboring groups using such weapons, will be punished by appropriate military action.

This wording is as specific as possible, particularly in threatening that punishment "will be" a result of first use, but in reality, "will be" can mean no more than "will probably be." Lacking a "doomsday machine" (Herman Kahn's notional construct of an inexorable device that will destroy the world under certain conditions) nuclear decisionmakers can change their minds up until the very last minute.

More generally, deterrence—in the Cold War and now—is based on a chain of uncertainties. Indeed, if the intention is to make the fact of punishment as certain as possible, the type of punishment is left deliberately ambiguous, so that the deterree will be concerned both with the relative certainty of low-level conventional punishment and the dreadful results if punishment becomes nuclear. In a sense this parallels the ambiguity of NATO's "Flexible Response" doctrine, designed to deter Soviet aggression in Europe.

The Pre-Crisis Steady State

Because the questions of whether and how to punish come at the end of this chain of uncertainties—and, it is hoped, will never come at all—the primary focus of Uniform Deterrence is not on the end game, but rather on the steady-state period before any occurrence of a nuclear crisis that might invoke the implementation of UD sanctions. The what-ifs of nuclear crisis and potential punishment must be considered, but the purpose of UD is to maintain a stable steady state in which crises with nuclear potential will not occur.

Other Policies

Steady-state Uniform Deterrence would not exist in a vacuum; it would and should relate to other existing and potential policies. In particular, UD as such is intended to deter nuclear use, not nuclear proliferation: The firebreak that blocks the use of nuclear weapons is clear and has not been crossed since 1945, but distinctions about
possession of nuclear weapons are far more fuzzy and far less firm. Nuclear use, in itself and as the first step in open-ended escalation, is a danger of an unprecedented magnitude. Nonetheless, UD and anti-proliferation policies should be closely related. For one thing, effective anti-proliferation efforts would make UD easier, simply by limiting the number of potential first users. And in the other direction, UD should reinforce anti-proliferation programs; by making first use of nuclear weapons more dangerous and thus less likely, it would reduce the incentives to obtain such weapons. True, some states might still want to acquire weapons for deterrence of conventional or nuclear attack on themselves, as did Britain and France in spite of U.S. guarantees to NATO. Nonetheless, by changing the balance of incentives to obtain nuclear weapons, UD should provide a reinforcement, perhaps a powerful one, to an anti-proliferation regime.

In addition, one other set of potential policies could reinforce UD: extension of security guarantees to states that might otherwise try to guarantee their own security by preparing to defeat conventional aggression by nuclear means. If states with nuclear weapons were to believe that major military powers would aid in their conventional defense against conventional aggression, it would strengthen the anti-first use policy; if such security guarantees were to weigh in the balance against nonnuclear states becoming nuclear, it could aid anti-proliferation efforts also. Such security guarantees might be general—extended by the major powers to all states under the threat of aggression—but that would make them so broad, and would add so little to words already in the United Nations Charter, that the guarantees would be relatively meaningless. More powerful would be specific guarantees from specific military powers to specific states that felt threatened—e.g., from the United States to Israel and perhaps South Korea and Japan.

What if UD Were Invoked?

The central argument set forth throughout this report is that UD will decrease the likelihood of nuclear confrontations, and perhaps preclude them completely—the stable steady state. Nonetheless, the two final questions must be faced:
Summary

- What if an explicit or implicit threat of nuclear first use were to occur? How might UD operate to prevent the threat from turning into actual first use?

- What if UD failed and a first use of nuclear weapons were to take place? How might the deterrers implement the punishment threatened by UD?

Unless nuclear use were imminent and pre-emptive military action to destroy nuclear delivery capabilities seemed called for, the first response to a nuclear threat would be words: counterthreats, United Nations resolutions, perhaps even declarations of war. Threats might be general or they might be specific: "Nuclear first use will be countered by the destruction of the following list of targets." Such threats not only might work, they sometimes have, as they did in getting Saddam Hussein to back off interference with attempts to enforce United Nations resolutions aimed at destroying weapons systems after his Gulf War retreat.

Words might not suffice, however, or a perceived need for pre-emption might overtake the words. In that case, possible military actions would range up the theoretical escalation ladder of the nuclear age—from conventional attack on nuclear delivery systems and targeting of guilty decisionmakers were that possible, through conventional attack on other military facilities, to nuclear attack on enemy forces, to the ultimate sanction, nuclear attack on economic and population targets. The steps would not have to be taken in that order; they would be tailored to the particular situation, and the final nuclear punishment would be likely only in response to egregious and continued nuclear warfare by the initial first user, or to attempted retaliation by the first user against the implementers of UD. Indeed, such steps might not be taken at all; intentions are a lot easier than final decisions of this nature. Similar possibilities for final massive nuclear attacks existed during the Cold War; it was by no means clear then that they would have been invoked, even in extremis.

In any case, such punitive actions, whether considered or actually taken, should be evaluated by their power to deter additional use by the offender, and by their effectiveness in deterring possible next first users. But it should be stressed again that these ultimate nuclear steps would come only at the end of the chain going from steady-state
deterrence, through actual nuclear threats and crises, and finally to first use. Multiplied together, the probabilities of each step succeeding, and thus precluding the need for the next, would mean that coming to the final steps would be very improbable indeed.

Some Scenarios

Because no nuclear weapons have been used in combat since 1945, discussions of nuclear war have had an abstract, even theological, quality. A few hypothetical scenarios may help illustrate the workings (and limitations) of UD in plausible crises of the future:

• A war between India and Pakistan. UD might help prevent Pakistan, the weaker conventional power, from trying to avoid defeat by initiating nuclear attack, which could in turn invoke Indian nuclear response. Even if the Pakistanis did use nuclear weapons, world conventional punishment under UD might substitute for Indian nuclear response.

• A Chinese conventional attack on India which, in spite of Chinese preponderance, fails because of the Himalayan barrier and thus tempts China to go nuclear. How or whether UD might work against a large nuclear nation like China is not clear.

• An Iraqi nuclear attack on a U.S. base in Saudi Arabia. The implementation of UD by the United States alone or in combination with allies should be able to punish any act that it had not deterred. UD would add some world moral sanction to the U.S. response.

• A Syrian nuclear attack on Israeli troops. UD plus U.S. security guarantees to Israel might prevent massive Israeli nuclear response while inflicting heavy nonnuclear punishment on Syria for its first use.

• An Israeli response to Arab conventional aggression that seemed likely to succeed. If implementation of the security guarantee to Israel seemed likely to turn the tide, then that plus a UD threat against an Israeli nuclear response might prevent such a response. If Israel had acted quickly without waiting for conventional assistance, however, then the U.S. would be faced with the question of whether and how to punish its erstwhile ally for first
use. And if Israel were about to be pushed into the sea, it seems unlikely that UD or anything else would prevent a final nuclear retaliation.

- A nuclear attack on the United States, perhaps in retaliation for implementation of UD punishment by the United States. It seems likely that such an attack would be punished severely and brutally—which is why it would probably not take place.

The scenarios make the point that UD is likely to be most effective against small states with dreams of using nuclear threats to achieve political objectives. It would be least effective against large nuclear powers and against states with nothing else left to lose. Even in the latter cases, however, UD might have a marginal effect in preventing nuclear first use.

The last scenario, however—retaliation for an attack on U.S. territory—brings out one moral and one political issue inherent not only in UD, but in any threat or possibility of nuclear deterrence. The brutality of overwhelming retaliation is and always has been the ultimate sanction deterring nuclear use. Whether such brutal response would ever be invoked is quite unsure; whether it should be—or whether any nuclear threat should ever be implemented—is a question debated since the start of the Cold War. The inherent moral paradox of nuclear deterrence is that ideally, deterrent threats should always be believed but never be executed. But if they are believed enough, the paradox may never have to be faced; it has not yet been.

The second issue is whether the people of the United States would accept the risks that might stem from UD, no matter how remote these might be. We have maintained deterrence for our own safety, and we did so for our European allies; but we might not now repeat the risks even for Europe, let alone Israel, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, or Japan. This report contends that the long-run danger to U.S. security from breaches in the firebreak will exceed the possible short-run risks, but the choice by the American people of a discount rate that would validate such a choice is by no means certain.

In the final analysis, the proposal set forth here will depend on acceptance of McNamara's axiom that the only proper remaining use for nuclear weapons is to deter their use.
Important comments on an earlier draft of this report were received from my RAND colleagues Arnold L. Horelick, Roger C. Molander, and David A. Ochmanek, and from McGeorge Bundy, Yehezkel Dror, Morton H. Halperin, and Thomas Schelling. Many, but not all, were incorporated.
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: DETERRENCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

... nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatever. They are totally useless—except to deter one’s opponent from using them.

—Robert McNamara (1983)\(^1\)

We may well be unable to afford to be the world’s policeman, but neither can we afford to fail to live up to the responsibilities that the accidents of a bountiful land and a beneficent fate have placed upon us.

—Gen. William Westmoreland (1976)\(^2\)

Our focus is not just the former Soviet Union but any potentially hostile country that has or is seeking weapons of mass destruction... I’m convinced having nuclear weapons still matters.

—Gen. Lee Butler, Commander, U.S. Strategic Command (1993)\(^3\)

This report proposes, and presents an initial discussion of, a United States-led international policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use—Uniform Deterrence or UD, for short. Such a policy would attempt to deter first use by threatening severe punishment of


\(^3\)Quoted in the *New York Times*, January 15, 1993.
any state (hence “Uniform”) that uses nuclear weapons in war for any purpose other than response to nuclear attack. Punishment would be nonnuclear if possible, but nuclear punishment by the United States and other great nuclear powers would be available if called for as an ultimate sanction.

The primary purpose of nuclear deterrence would be to place at the top of the list of U.S. and world security priorities preservation of the “firebreak,” which since 1945 has separated nuclear war from all other forms, and has been a key to preventing nuclear war and possible escalation to full-scale nuclear holocaust. Together with two complementary policies—reinvigorated enforcement of nuclear non-proliferation, and selective security guarantees to states that might otherwise use nuclear weapons to assure their own security—UD is intended to maintain continued nuclear stability in the turbulence of the multiple rivalries of the post-Cold War era.

If non-proliferation efforts had worked to limit nuclear possession to the five major nuclear powers, UD might not be necessary. They have not worked that well, however, and they seem unlikely now to roll back possession or perhaps even to limit further spread. UD and non-proliferation efforts can be mutually reinforcing, but they should not be confused with one another. UD is intended specifically to deter use of nuclear weapons; that may help indirectly to deter possession of the weapons, but proliferation is not the direct target. Similarly, security guarantees may strengthen UD or be strengthened by it, but they remain ancillary to the UD proposal discussed here.

These statements of policy and purpose encompass a wealth of issues, ambiguities, and crucial details. That is what this report is about. It attempts to bring forward the concepts of nuclear deterrence, and the policy applications developed over the years of the Cold War, into this new age when the Cold War no longer exists but nuclear weapons and the potential horrors of nuclear warfare still do. The report advocates the policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use, but it does so in the knowledge that good arguments can be made against, as well as in favor. The object here is to initiate discussion.
The quotations at the head of this chapter introduce two broad questions needed to set the stage:

- What do we mean by deterrence?
- What are the implications of the United States asserting the role of "world policeman," or, since what is suggested here is an international policy led by the United States, "world sheriff," organizing posses to enforce world law?

These lead to the central policy issue:

- Should the United States risk taking the lead toward a policy of Uniform Deterrence? How likely are the American people and the world community to accept such a U.S.-led international policy?

The remainder of this introductory chapter discusses the two underlying questions. Chapter Two describes an exemplary UD proposal in more detail and takes up the many ambiguities and the choices that must be made, or be left deliberately unmade in order to preserve useful ambiguities.

Chapter Three then examines how and how well UD might work in different cases, particularly how it might work together with strong enforcement of non-proliferation rules and with security guarantees. The chapter examines a number of hypothetical scenarios and concludes that although UD can provide no absolute guarantees (and in some politically difficult cases it might be ineffective or even collapse), in other cases, which may otherwise present the greatest threats of nuclear escalation, it could work very well.

The last chapter then examines the final issue: Should the United States agree to take the lead role in Uniform Deterrence—What are the arguments pro and con? How likely is acceptance by the American people and the rest of the world?

THE CHANGING FACE OF DETERRENCE

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "deter" as "To discourage and turn aside or restrain by fear." With some minor and early exceptions having to do with China, U.S. nuclear deterrence during the
Cold War was directed at the Soviet Union alone, because only the Soviet Union had the capability to threaten our truly vital interests including our own national existence. Our nuclear threats were intended to "discourage and turn aside or restrain by fear" the Soviets: first from a nuclear attack on ourselves; second from a nuclear attack on our allies; third and most controversial, from massive conventional aggression on our European NATO partners. Because our opponent was as well armed as we were, and because his deterrence of us and ours of him complemented each other, deterrence became a most complicated task indeed.

Now there is no Soviet Union. Does that mean that deterrence of nuclear attack has become either obsolete or simple? The answer is no. With or without the Soviet Union, strong reasons still exist "to discourage and turn aside or restrain by fear" a growing variety of lesser nuclear threats.

For one thing, Russia has inherited all or almost all of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. (The world would be safer if it had the entire arsenal, but for some time to come at least, significant numbers of weapons seem likely to remain under the control of other former Soviet republics.) Unhampered and uninhibited, some future warlord might again threaten to use this vast capability; "classical" deterrence at some level remains necessary. Further into the future is the possible rebirth of a serious Soviet nuclear threat in the Cold War style or, some day, the rise of a new nuclear superpower able to threaten our existence and interests as we believed the Soviets once did. These possibilities must be considered in designing an overall U.S. nuclear force posture, but they are not the subject of this report.

Rather, the case made here is that because of the chance that the crossing of the nuclear firebreak by a lesser nuclear state could open an era in which nuclear weapons would become unfortunate but accepted tools of war, the world's interest and our interest in avoiding the use of such weapons justify a strong deterrent policy, one that might even in itself invoke the potential use of nuclear weapons in response. Secretary McNamara's oft-quoted assertion that nuclear weapons should be used only to deter the use of nuclear weapons is the axiom upon which Uniform Deterrence is based. UD would imply that the United States would finally embrace No First Use of nuclear weapons by ourselves as well as others.
Axioms are by definition not subject to reasoned argument; they are to be accepted or rejected as first principles. Rejection of the McNamara axiom because of a belief in the continued need for potential first use by the United States in order to deter conventional aggression or use of other "weapons of mass destruction" necessarily implies rejection of Uniform Deterrence. For those who may believe in the continued importance of a range of nonnuclear as well as nuclear objectives for nuclear deterrence, the analysis can thus end here; there seems little point in debating the efficacy of a No First Use policy that would be undesirable if it did work. Many others, however, feel that even if nuclear deterrence against nonnuclear aggression made some sense in the Europe of the Cold War, it no longer does. If this is combined with the belief that nuclear weapons are significantly more dangerous than chemical or biological weapons, then the central questions concern the application of the McNamara axiom in the new era.

The new deterrence will be very different from the old in a number of ways, ranging from deterrent theology to hardware requirements. Central to U.S. and western Cold War theorizing, force posture, and negotiating positions on nuclear arms controls were two partially inconsistent objectives, both now substantially diminished as considerations for U.S. policy. The two were:

- **First-Strike Stability**: Avoiding the temptation for either side to attack the other first with nuclear weapons, in the belief that such a strike could substantially reduce the damage inflicted by the opponent. This was particularly important for pre-emption, a first strike based on the belief that such a strike would be necessary to prevent the opponent's own crippling first strike. The presumption, subject to many qualifications in different time periods, was that although no strike was preferable to first strike, first strike was preferable to second under many conditions, and if first/second seemed the available choice, both sides might rush to be first. To achieve first-strike stability, then, it was necessary to create conditions, by agreement or unilaterally, that would make it safe—or perhaps even preferable—for each side to wait without striking first.

- **Extended Deterrence**: Deterrence of a Soviet/Warsaw Pact conventional attack on Western Europe by a U.S./NATO threat to
use nuclear weapons if such an attack seemed about to succeed. (Conjecturally, extended deterrence might have been extended to a few other cases of Soviet aggression.) In principle, the nuclear weapons were intended to stop the attack in Europe militarily, but that principle was overshadowed by the deterrent effect stemming from the possibility that even such a tactical response would initiate a process of escalation to very large nuclear war. Because extended deterrence implied the first use of nuclear weapons by the West, however, it conflicted with the objective of stability against first strikes. With the disappearance of the Soviet conventional threat in Europe and elsewhere, it is contended here that the need for Extended Deterrence has also disappeared; this is what makes possible a U.S. declaration of its own No First Use policy.

The theoretical debates about nuclear deterrence in the Cold War raged around these issues, quickly turning theological because none of the participants could bring real evidence to bear without actually running a nuclear war. One American sect favored targeting enemy forces rather than economic and population centers for a number of reasons. First, if nuclear war did break out, destroying those forces would limit the damage that they could do to the United States. Second, such a "counterforce" doctrine made extended deterrence seem serious. Third, they believed that the Soviets valued their military forces at least as highly as their people; and lastly, striking military forces was considered more moral than targeting populations. The members of this school came to term their doctrine "discriminate deterrence."4 An opposing denomination joined by McNamara late in his tenure as Secretary of Defense favored "existential deterrence,"5 arguing that the mere existence of nuclear capabilities and the "Pandora's Box" unknowns about their use sufficed to deter both a nuclear first strike and Soviet aggression in Europe; that some varieties of counterforce were destabilizing be-


cause they might imply a first strike against enemy forces; and that the weapons needed for these intricate counterforce strategies cost too much. Learned European clerics stressed the confidence brought about by siting American weapons of nuclear deterrence nearby, on the soil of the old continent. An alternative church looked for the solution in abolishing nuclear weapons, but was not very clear on how.

Beginning in 1962, during McNamara's tenure as Defense Secretary, the actual U.S. nuclear force posture tended in the directions suggested by the counterforce advocates, but it did not go as far as they wanted. Although McNamara himself had moved from the discriminate position he held in his early years to the strong version of existentialism indicated by his quoted statement, by the time he left office, discrimination remained the official doctrine through the 1980s until the end of the Cold War.

In their original forms, in any case, all of these doctrines were based in the Cold War: Each and every one of the theologies, and the weapons that went with them, was predicated upon nuclear deterrence and nuclear war against an enemy who could hurt us as much as we could hurt him; could perhaps destroy us. Now, Russia has inherited much of the Soviet capability, but it is diminished in real delivery capabilities. Arms control and reduction agreements have made deterrence of first strikes easier yet, while extended deterrence of a conventional attack from the East (by whom?) on Western Europe has become obsolete. And thus much of the thinking about deterrence that dominated the Cold War has become obsolete as well.

But not all. Even without the Cold War, the invention of nuclear weapons would have provided a fundamental reason for the sharp discontinuity from previous centuries of strategic thinking. The new nuclear logic stemming from the unprecedented destructive power of the weapons was different from what had gone before, and it remains relevant to what will come next. In particular, the possibility

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7The author of this report has tended toward existentialist doctrines somewhat milder than McNamara's, a fact that necessarily colors the views expressed here.
that open-ended nuclear escalation could destroy world civilization makes this military revolution different from gunpowder, the machine gun, aerial bombardment, the tank, and poison gas.

The firebreak concept stems directly from nuclear logic and continues beyond the end of the Cold War. That nuclear weapons are different from all other weapons is a convention that can be clouded with ambiguities at the lower end of the scale: Why is a hundredth of a kiloton different from the ten tons of TNT that define it? The answer lies at the top of the scale: A megaton—the equivalent of a million tons of TNT—can only be nuclear. The firebreak is based on the fear that once even the smallest nuclear weapon is used for the most limited tactical objective, no other obvious or mutually agreed upon point of pause exists on the way to all-out exchange of the largest weapons. As put by Thomas Schelling in his 1960 book *The Strategy of Conflict*, which was, if not the Bible, at least the Talmud for most of the theologies discussed here:

What makes atomic weapons different is a powerful tradition that they *are* different. The reason . . . why we do not ban bows and arrows on the grounds that they too, like nuclear weapons, kill and maim people, is that there is a tradition for the use of bows and arrows, a jointly recognized expectation that they will be used if it is expedient to use them. There is no such tradition for the use of atomic weapons. There is instead a tradition for their nonuse. . . .

Schelling wrote confidently of the nonuse tradition only 15 years after the dropping of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For the twice as many years since, that tradition has been honored and strengthened by states in their policies as well as theorists in their writings, through wars costing tens of thousands of combat deaths to the superpowers and millions around the world. It has continued through crises as tense as those in Berlin, Cuba, and the Sinai. The contention of this report is that so long as nuclear weapons continue to exist, maintaining the firebreak should remain the highest priority of all states, particularly those of the West. The proposal for Uniform Deterrence is intended first and foremost to preserve the “tradition for their nonuse.” Secondarily, if nuclear

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weapons are used and the deterrent threats must be implemented, the implementation should be such as to deprive the “victor” of any advantage that might have been gained by crossing the firebreak, and thus to deter the next prospective first user after that.

Schelling’s rich book analyzed and codified many other aspects of deterrence. Most of them were generalizable beyond nuclear warfare (many were generalized from observation of his family and other daily life), but they became acute in the nuclear context. In particular, he analyzed the ambiguities and uncertainties that were not only inherent in the imperfect communication of intentions and “resolve” but that could sometimes be used to strengthen deterrence, e.g., “The Threat That Leaves Something to Chance.”9 Chapter Two of this report takes up these ambiguities in detail, as they apply to Uniform Deterrence.

Throughout this report, analogies are drawn from the Cold War, because that is the context within which most thinking about nuclear deterrence, nuclear crises, and possible nuclear use has taken place. Although Cold War decisionmaking differed from that postulated for UD in the crucial aspect mentioned earlier—the two sides knew that each was capable of destroying the other—analogies that allow for that difference can still be very useful. They help illuminate such issues as the firebreak, the inevitable uncertainties about whether threats will actually be implemented, and the morality of attacking “innocents”—drawing upon a half-century of thinking and planning, rather than starting from scratch with first principles. The end of the Cold War introduces a new phase of the nuclear age—but not a new age.

THE WORLD SHERIFF’S LOT IS NOT AN ‘APPY ONE

The fact is that nuclear deterrence is still relevant; the contention is that it should be used to prevent first use of nuclear weapons. But that still leaves the second question: Why us? Why should we take on the costs and risks, at best of organizing and leading the world anti-first use posse, at worst of perhaps enforcing UD ourselves? As General Westmoreland’s reflections on the Vietnam War indicate,

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9Ibid., Chapter 8.
the question, "Should the United States be the world's policeman?" is hardly a new one. Like any one-line rendition of a complex issue, the catchphrase is oversimplified, but a reasonable interpretation would be "Should the United States be granted by the world (or take upon itself) the duty and responsibility for enforcing commonly agreed laws, standards, or morals?" Such a responsibility might be as the single cop on the block, but in this case the better metaphor is that of the sheriff trying to organize a posse.

The author has suggested elsewhere that the key problem for the United States is that:

As the only superpower, we face the dilemma of whether or not to use our troops or treasure to defend interests that are at the same time the joint interests of all relatively well-off nations. If we do, some developed nations will contribute; some will not, but they will nevertheless benefit from our expenditures and risks. If we do not act, however, nobody will, because nobody else can, and our own interests will suffer.10

U.S. decisions must thus balance our interests, our capabilities, and our costs and risks (and compare them to the same variables for other states on an ad hoc basis) in order to determine whether and to what extent any specific case is ours. In the early 1990s, our interest in preventing a dictator from putting his hand on the oil valve, plus our substantial capability to project conventional military power, gave us the lead in the Gulf War; our allies' similar interests plus their lesser but significant capabilities put several at our side and led others to help share the costs. In the Yugoslav civil war, however, our interests were seen as being less than those of our European allies so that even though our capabilities remained greater, we were initially reluctant to assert the police/sheriff role. Ultimately, we tried to organize that posse too, because nobody else would.

Each case is different, and indeed, the problem with generalization is well illustrated by the controversy following the publication by the New York Times in March 1992 of what was said to be a draft of the annual Defense Planning Guidance to be promulgated by the

Department of Defense. The draft asserted for the United States the self-anointed policeman role around the globe:

First, the U.S. must show the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests. Second, in the non-defense areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order. Finally, we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.11

The strong negative reaction from the Congress, the media, and the public produced an immediate disavowal and backpedaling in the Department of Defense. Apparently nobody had written the draft, nobody had transmitted it for coordination, and nobody had read it. The final version was substantially toned down:

The United States remains a nation with global interests, but we must re-examine in the light of the new defense strategy whether and to what extent particular challenges engage our interests.12

In sorting out the areas where “particular challenges” that “engage our interests” may cause us to seek the police/sheriff role—or force it upon us—the nuclear realm must rank high, for two reasons:

• With the demise of the Soviet Union and the consequent doubts about the ability of the successor states to use their nuclear and other forces as effective instruments under the direction of national decisionmakers, the United States has become the clearly dominant nuclear superpower as well as the world’s major projector of conventional military power.

• Our national interest is great, not only as part of the world interest in avoiding nuclear war but also in precluding the specific

threat to our own security that could arise from a crossing of the nuclear firebreak, anywhere by anyone.

The first of these—U.S. military singularity in today’s world—is obvious; the second needs further specification. What are the dangers to the security of the United States that can justify our taking the leadership toward a world policy of Uniform Deterrence?

Although the central threat of all-out combat between the United States and the Soviet Union has essentially disappeared, the end of the Cold War cuts two ways with regard to smaller nuclear conflicts. On the one hand, whatever discipline was exerted by the Soviets on their then-dependents is gone; it is argued, for example that Iraq never would have invaded Kuwait had Saddam Hussein still been a Soviet client in 1990. On the other hand, the knowledge on the part of such former clients that they no longer have a big brother to turn to has seemed to inhibit disruptive behavior by some others—Syria if not Iraq.

Most probably, small nuclear wars have become more likely, if for no other reason than that it is unclear who has control over the nuclear weapons, the nuclear materials, and the nuclear experts of the former Soviet Union, and it is likely to remain unclear for many years. For this and other reasons, the number of independent nuclear decision centers is increasing. In addition to the five announced nuclear states of 1989—the United States, the USSR-become-Russia, Britain, France, and China—the list of current or potential future separate centers includes Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Israel, India, and Pakistan; with Iran, Iraq, and Libya in line; and others, including Germany and Japan, possessing what is sometimes called a “virtual” nuclear capability—the ability to begin production of deliverable weapons in very short periods of time.

At best, this diffusion of control over nuclear weapons is statistically dangerous; the larger the number of centers that can decide to use a nuclear weapon, the greater the probability that a weapon will be used. Beyond the simple statistics, however, some hypothetical cases can illustrate the ways in which nuclear proliferation can lead to nuclear war and to real threats to the security and the vital interests of the United States. None of the scenarios seems in itself to be of high probability, but each is plausible, and multiplying the prob-
abilities together leads to an increase in the potential for future nuclear use.

- If a U.S. ally—Israel, South Korea, or perhaps Japan—were to be threatened by a nuclear state, many of the issues of extended deterrence formulated in the European context would be reraised. Would we or should we use or threaten to use our nuclear might against the enemy of our ally? What if Israel initiated nuclear war against an overwhelming Arab conventional or chemical attack?

- A threat to a U.S. vital interest, e.g., access to oil supplies by a nuclear-armed Iraq or Iran, could escalate from a local nuclear confrontation to an explicit or implicit threat to attack U.S. troops or even an American city. Reflecting on the Iraqi attack on Kuwait, *The Economist* magazine stated that: "[It] is plain that Mr. Hussein might have gotten away with his invasion had he been able to threaten, credibly, to go nuclear." It is, in fact, less plain than stated, but it could happen. Iraqi nuclear weapons may deter Saudi Arabia if not the United States.

- Terrorist states or groups could use nuclear weapons, either for blackmail or for the less specific purposes exemplified by the 1993 bombing of New York’s World Trade Center Towers.

- Leaving aside the future possibility of China developing into a nuclear superpower approaching the Soviet Union during the Cold War, even now the Chinese have the ability to target the United States with a few long-range and submarine-based missiles. The Chinese nuclear force is probably smaller than the French force intended as the final measure to deter Soviet attack during the Cold War, but unlike France, China’s size could lead its leaders to believe that something might survive the near-inevitable overwhelming retaliation (as was contended by Mao Tse-Tung in the 1960s). Such a suicidal Chinese attack seems quite unlikely, but the existence of the weapons, combined with continued Chinese external hostility and internal instability, makes it at least possible.

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None of these presents a probable direct threat to the physical security of the U.S. homeland. Several threaten what we consider vital interests, however, and the combined probabilities should not leave us comfortable even about our own territory and people. Further, these are scenarios for the relatively near future. Over a longer period of time, new scenarios will multiply, increasing the overall probabilities. One militarily or politically successful nuclear use is likely to lead to another and another—and more proliferation and more use. The United States will be unable to stand aside. *A world in which nuclear warfare has become an extension of politics by other means will be a very dangerous world for the United States.*

That is why it is argued here that the nuclear firebreak remains vitally important to the United States as well as the rest of the world. Since the world has no other state capable of enforcing it, the United States must perform the sheriff’s role of organizing and leading, if anybody is to do it. The next chapter describes this role in promulgating the policy of Uniform Deterrence, and begins to explore its implications.
Policy... A course of action adopted and pursued by a government, party, ruler, statesman, etc.

—Oxford English Dictionary

To bust the young man on the jaw... was not, in George's eyes, a practical policy. Excellent deterrent as such a proposal might be, its actual accomplishment was not to be thought of.

—P. G. Wodehouse, A Damsel in Distress

APROCLAMATION

A world policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use might be proclaimed in language like this:

It is the policy of the signatories to this statement that any state using nuclear weapons in warfare for any purpose other than responding to nuclear use, or sponsoring or knowingly harboring groups using such weapons, will be punished by appropriate military action.

As with any statement of this nature, the wording has been precisely chosen, but is not precise (nor, of course, does UD stand or fall on this specific wording). The suggested proclamation contains almost

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as many ambiguities as words. Some of the ambiguities are necessary, some are useful, some are deliberately substituted for achievable precision; as every student of deterrence theory knows, too much precision is not always optimal. The object here is to be as unambiguous as is possible about the intent to punish and the acts to be punished, given that substantial uncertainty will necessarily remain between current intent and actual implementation if and when the time comes, but to remain deliberately ambiguous about what the punishment would be.

Explaining all this is a major purpose of this chapter. The next part goes through the proclamation word by word and phrase by phrase, to analyze the potential policy and begin examining its implications. The following part discusses some of the broader ambiguities of deterrence, particularly the implications of the uncertainty stemming from the fact that no deterrent threat short of Herman Kahn’s “doomsday machine”2 can have a 100-percent probability of being executed. Wodehouse’s George is not the only decisionmaker prudent enough to distinguish between an “excellent deterrent” and “its actual accomplishment.”

EXEGESIS OF THE PROCLAMATION

This part goes through the wording of the proclamation by repeating the proclamation and highlighting the specific words to be examined. The discussions are brief; such key issues as the minimum necessary participation in promulgating and enforcing UD, and the morality of different types of punishment, are taken up in detail in the next chapter on how UD might actually work.

It is the policy of the signatories to this statement that any state using nuclear weapons in warfare for any purpose other than responding to nuclear use, or sponsoring or knowingly harboring

2The “doomsday machine” was a notional nuclear device programmed to destroy the world, with no possible human intervention, if certain conditions were violated. Kahn used the construct, and the obvious impossibility of anyone taking it seriously as a policy, to dramatize the actual uncertainties of deterrence in the real world. See Herman Kahn, On Thermonuclear War, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1961, pp. 145ff.
groups using such weapons, will be punished by appropriate military action.

The classical dictionary definition of “policy” was quoted at the beginning of this chapter. What is intended here is a deliberate “course of action adopted and pursued” by its subscribers. Alternatively, deterrence can be looked upon as an inherent condition based on fear of undesirable consequences (e.g., open-ended escalation stemming from nuclear first use), whether or not it has been set forth as a policy. Proclaiming a deliberate policy would reinforce the condition of deterrence by enhancing the likelihood of the undesirable consequences. And when the undesirable consequences might include the first user itself becoming the target of nuclear weapons, the deterrent condition will be additionally strengthened.

It is the policy of the signatories to this statement that any state using nuclear weapons in warfare for any purpose other than responding to nuclear use, or sponsoring or knowingly harboring groups using such weapons, will be punished by appropriate military action.

The signatories to the proclamation and policy are those who are willing to sign it. The crucial ones are the five permanent members of the Security Council, which are currently also the five announced possessors of nuclear weapons.

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These two words open several issues.

Starting with the noun; in the first instance, the objects of the policy should be states, as they were for Cold War deterrence. The concept of punishing whole states may be morally troublesome, both because it seems to imply punishing populations for the sins of their decisionmakers, and because in cases of terrorists operating from the soil of states, even the decisionmakers may lack control. But this is not a new dilemma. The Soviet state was the object of U.S. Cold War
deterrence and vice versa—and that was also troublesome. The troubles were meliorated not only by the counterforce doctrine of attacking military forces rather than populations, but also, to some extent, by the possibility of holding at direct risk the lives of civil and military decisionmakers.

All this seemed difficult and uncertain in the Cold War, but a potential threat that the small-state leaders who have used nuclear weapons will be hunted down and tried for war crimes, for example, may be more compelling for UD. It has been suggested that capture and pursuit of the responsible individuals might be possible within a small state, particularly one whose inhabitants feared the alternative of collective punishment. (A bounty on the capture and turning over of such individuals might also help.) The difficulties in the early 1990s of applying individual punishment for war crimes to the Serbian leaders accused of atrocities, however, suggest that this would not be a simple matter. The time pressures of UD deterrence and punishment would make it even more difficult.

Possibilities for modifying the purely national concept in practice are discussed later in the analyses of "punishment" and "sponsoring or harboring groups," but as with Cold War nuclear deterrence, "states" seem the only possible objects of the broad policy embodied in the proclamation as such.

"Any state" is intended to mean just that, including the major nuclear powers signing the statement. True, were one of the five powers to make first use of nuclear weapons, what seems to be precision in the words of the proclamation could quickly devolve into ambiguity because of the implications of a war between major nuclear powers. Such a major power use seems very improbable on the face of it, however. Among other reasons, so long as the United States remains the dominant nuclear superpower, it would be capable of enforcing the no first-use policy even against the others, albeit at risks to itself only somewhat scaled down from the nuclear risks of the Cold War.

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3The idea of punishing leadership was set forth by Schelling and Yehezel Dror, in comments on an earlier version of this report. The bounty is Schelling’s suggestion. The companion piece to this report, by RAND colleagues Roger Molander and Peter Wilson, *The Nuclear Asymptote: On Containing Nuclear Entropy*, (RAND, Santa Monica, California, MR-214-CC, 1993) discusses punishment of leadership in the case of illegal proliferation.
Indeed, as has been noted, one implication of “any” is that in signing the proclamation, the United States would finally subscribe to its own no first use.

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Two possible ambiguities should be cleared up by this simple word. “Using” does not mean “possessing”; it does not mean “threatening the use of.”

For three reasons, UD is intended to focus on use rather than proliferating possession of nuclear weapons.

- The list of actual and probable possessors of nuclear weapons is already too long to enforce the kind of firm punishment policy put forth here. Non-proliferation is a world policy that has been tried, but has succeeded at best in part. It may be reinvigorated—reinforcement by Uniform Deterrence of First Use should help—but as an additional stated objective of UD, it would be unenforceable and would dilute the no first-use focus.

- “Possession” of nuclear weapons has no clear definition. What about those states that in a literal sense have no nuclear warheads, assembled or disassembled, but have the “virtual” standby capability to manufacture them in a short period of time, not to mention the smaller Soviet successor states that still have weapons but may be unable to launch or even detonate them?

- States have possessed the weapons since 1945, and decade by decade, possession has proliferated. There is no longer any agreed firebreak there.

The specific promise of punishment for use, however, does not preclude punishment for possession. Were the world, the nuclear powers, or the United States to believe that acquisition or even existing possession of nuclear weapons by a state threatened security or stability—North Korea has been coming close—then nothing in the
policy of Uniform Deterrence of First Use would prevent attempts to use force in order to compel divestiture. In saying that we will punish first use, UD does not imply that we will not punish lesser threats. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, to the extent that UD makes clear that possessors of nuclear weapons cannot use them for any national purpose, it can create incentives that can reinforce more traditional methods of preventing proliferation: Why go to the trouble of getting them if you cannot use them without incurring risks of serious damage?

Threats of nuclear attack might conceivably be covered under “use,” but that is not intended, nor would strict definition of “use” include threats. The reasons are similar to those for distinguishing between use and possession. First, a “threat” is ambiguous. Without even admitting its possession of nuclear weapons, for example, Israel has made clear the likelihood that at least in extremis it would use the weapons against Arab aggressors. Would such an unstated threat be punishable? Second, any firebreak between nuclear and other threats has long since been crossed, at least by U.S. extended deterrence, additionally by Khrushchev and Brezhnev in their more bellicose moments.

As in the case of use and possession, nothing in UD would preclude punishment for brandishing nuclear threats, but the promise of punishment would be reserved for actual use.

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Here again, it is important to avoid ambiguities. In this proposal, “nuclear weapons” do not include other “weapons of mass destruction,” nor do they encompass delivery systems as such.

One reason for separating out nuclear from other mass destruction weapons is that, as deadly and ghastly as chemical and biological weapons are, neither type appears to have the potential for destroy-

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4See Molander and Wilson.
ing whole nations; indeed, chemical weapons, at least, have been tried and have not been decisive in war. Nuclear weapons have both the record of being decisive and the potential for ultimate destruction.

Perhaps more important, however, is that chemical weapons have been tried, all too frequently, and thus no firebreak has been established. Schelling’s illustration of the special nature of the nuclear firebreak, quoted in the Introduction, was that “there is a tradition for use of bows and arrows. . . . There is no such tradition for the use of atomic weapons.” Unfortunately, there is a “tradition” for the use of chemical weapons. They were used by both sides in World War I, not on two discrete occasions as with the use of nuclear weapons in World War II, but many times; they were used by the Italians in Ethiopia in the 1930s; they were certainly used by Iraq against the Kurds, and probably used by both sides in the Iran-Iraq war. Again, this is not to say that the use of such weapons should not be punished; rather that it should not be allowed to cloud an anti-nuclear-first-use policy by coming under the same promise of punishment.

The situation is similar with delivery systems. One of the world’s current worries has to do with the proliferation of missile delivery systems of all ranges. They have proliferated and they have been used, most recently by both sides in the Gulf War. We would prefer that they not be acquired by potential enemies of ourselves or of our allies, but we have on occasion sold them to our friends. No firebreak exists, nor can one be created, e.g., by designating allowable ranges of delivery systems. In the rigorous European atmosphere of agreed verification of known missiles in the INF treaty, that was possible; in the murky air of “who’s selling what to whom, and what is it capable of doing?” it is not.

Thus, nuclear weapons are nuclear weapons are nuclear weapons.

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These words are intended to straightforwardly distinguish military use of nuclear weapons from other uses, e.g., to test the weapons
themselves, so long as that is not forbidden by treaty, or to dig large holes or divert asteroids. Such other uses may violate other policies or treaties, but not this one. One ambiguity may exist here, however. What about an air burst so high that nothing on the ground is disturbed, except perhaps much later by global fallout? The answer must be that unless such a burst is clearly intended as fireworks to celebrate a national holiday, it is a use in warfare.

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Second strike remains legitimate and is the only legitimate use. This may vitiate somewhat the reinforcement supplied by UD to the non-proliferation regime; even if a state were thoroughly deterred by UD from first use, it might want to acquire nuclear weapons to deter an enemy nuclear strike. Thus might run an Arab argument for possession of purportedly second-strike weapons against Israel, for example. Non-proliferation can be re-enhanced to the extent that second-strike states trust UD to carry out the necessary deterrence for them. In the years of NATO, France did not trust American deterrence of conventional or nuclear attack on its own soil; Germany did, albeit in large measure because it had to.

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This phrase is loaded with ambiguities, not deliberately but unavoidably. It is intended to at least attempt to include nuclear terrorism among the phenomena to be deterred by UD.

What “sponsoring or harboring” terrorists consists of, and what constitutes sufficient proof for action, are uncomfortable questions even for existing “conventional” forms of terrorism. It would be neater and cleaner to deter and punish terrorist groups directly and the states harboring them only incidentally, but that has been very
difficult. The United States has struggled with these issues and has been able to punish terrorists only in the unusual cases of the capture or extradition of individuals here or abroad. U.S. policy also has arrived at designations of states harboring terrorists that suffice for the determination of U.S. policy. With one exception (the allegedly Libyan-sponsored attack on the Berlin night club), the United States has eschewed major punitive action against sponsoring or "harboring" states.

Moreover, the response in the Libyan case illustrates the difficulties. Of America's allies, only Britain supported the punitive air raid of 1986. A few years later, however, the painstaking detective work on the bombing of Pan Am flight 103, and the subsequent strong U.S./British/French-sponsored UN response in trying to force Libya to give up the alleged perpetrators, may indicate change. And in the nuclear realm, the possibility of ultimate discovery of evidence of "sponsoring or harboring," plus the weight of the threatened punishment, discussed later, may deter sponsoring, harboring—or permitting—nuclear terrorist groups by states that might otherwise do so.

All this may be less than perfect—even less perfect than other deterrence—but as with most deterrence, it may be far better than no deterrence at all.

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This is intended to be unambiguous: If the conditions are transgressed, punishment will be forthcoming. As we will see, however, the core of deterrence uncertainties is that short of a doomsday machine no response can be that inexorable. "Will" is the best we can do, and we really mean it that way—now—but when the time comes, backing off is always possible, as it was for Britain and France a number of times in the 1930s. No matter how loud it is shouted, the most that can be conveyed by "will" is "will probably."
It is the policy of the signatories to this statement that any state using nuclear weapons in warfare for any purpose other than responding to nuclear use, or sponsoring or knowingly harboring groups using such weapons, will be punished by appropriate military action.

It may perhaps appear odd, but the words "punish" and "punishment" seldom appear in the deterrence literature. Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict* has no index references to them: neither does Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War*. In his chapter on "Strategic Moves," Schelling uses as examples of such moves, "'threat,' 'promise,' 'destruction of communication,' 'delegation of decision,' and so forth," but not punishment.

Schelling's strategic moves were, in fact, appropriate for the Cold War when the deterrence problem was that of preventing an attack by an approximate equal. "Punishment" conveys something different, the strong doing something to the weak. A malefactor may be punished by the community, a child punished by a parent, or perhaps a virtuous weakening punished by a bully; punishment need not be just. The threat behind Uniform Deterrence is in fact a threat by the strong states to do something to a weaker offender, and punishment thus becomes the appropriate term.

Further, it is punishment as such that underlies deterrence—preventing an action by inducing fear in the potential actor that he will be hurt. This differs from preventing the action by destroying the physical capability to act. The two concepts overlap if, for example, the action is deterred by fear of losing the capability to act. However, it is the fear, not the cutting off the capabilities, that is the essence of deterrence. This will be discussed further in the final "what-if" chapter on actual implementation of UD punishment.

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5Schelling, p. 121.
“Military action” makes clear that in contrast to the history of trying to control nuclear proliferation with economic and political sanctions, such sanctions clearly will not suffice against actual first use of nuclear weapons. The vast ambiguity conveyed by applying the word “appropriate” to such actions is quite intentional, however. For a number of reasons, this ambiguity is both necessary and useful.

- It is necessary because what will deter a potential first user will vary by user and situation. The values, economic structure, and demography of Israel, India, and North Korea vary widely; a first use might be a small demonstration shot in a desert or an attack on a major troop concentration. To be most credible, deterrence must be tailored.

- The possibility of nuclear punishment is the ultimate deterrent, and the signing of the proclamation by the major nuclear powers conveys that possibility, as does the word “appropriate.” The proclamation might, of course, do away with ambiguity by specifying that all punishment would be nuclear, but (a) use of nuclear weapons with the inevitable strong possibility of collateral death and damage to innocents, when lesser weapons would do, would be immoral, and (b) a purely nuclear threat would be less credible of implementation than a tailored response, and therefore perhaps less of a deterrent. As noted earlier, the best that “will” can mean is “will probably.”

- For the above reasons, if it were necessary to move from the deterrent phase to actual punitive action, initial nonnuclear punishment would ordinarily be easier to implement, politically and morally (and, as noted, if it were possible to quickly seek out the leadership of the offending state, that would be best of all). On the other hand, if the offense were repugnant enough (e.g., an initial attack on a population center), or if strong punishment were deemed necessary, among other reasons, to deter the next potential first user, initial nuclear punishment—presumably against military forces—is not foreseen.

The ambiguous word “appropriate” thus provides the double deterrence of both the possibility of nuclear punishment, initial or subsequent, and the greater credibility, for most situations, of an initial lesser response. It also provides the strong possibility of an escala-
tory chain between initial nonnuclear response and down-the-line nuclear action, if the offender responds to the first punishment inappropriately.

At the height of the debates over extended deterrence during the Cold War, American theologians contended that the possibility of U.S. nuclear response to Soviet conventional aggression against Western Europe would be more credible and therefore more likely to deter the initial Soviet attack if it came as the final step after a stalemated conventional defense that had not quite made it. They therefore recommended conventional capabilities strong enough to mount such a defense. Many Europeans, however, feared that conventional forces capable of maintaining a successful initial defense would weaken the U.S. will to go nuclear later if necessary, and would thus weaken the deterrent effect on the Soviets of a sure knowledge that any conventional attack would have to be met with nuclear weapons because they were the only ones with any chance of succeeding.

The argument was unresolvable, and the result was NATO's "Flexible Response" doctrine of 1967, which allowed for both conventional and nuclear (both tactical and strategic) response to Soviet aggression, and did not specify which would be used under what circumstances. The use of the word "appropriate" here attempts to convey a similar ambiguity for similar deterrent purposes.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF DETERRENCE

Crucial to any understanding of deterrence—classical superpower deterrence or the new deterrence of nuclear first use—are two inherent ambiguities:

- Deterrence depends on credibility, not certainty. Certainty is unachievable.
- Perfection is also unreachable. One reason is that certainty is unreachable; another is that deterrence depends on "rationality," and rationality is not an attribute required of decisionmakers. The ex ante measure of deterrence, however, is not whether it is guaranteed to prevent any instance of the act to be
deterred, but whether it will make such acts less likely. The ex post measure, of course, is whether the act took place.

Credibility and Certainty

As Schelling points out, a deterrent "threat has to be credible to be efficacious," and his book is devoted to examining the conditions for credibility. The reason credibility takes such examination is made clear in Kahn's discussion of his doomsday machine. Two of the "desirable characteristics of a deterrent" he lists are that it be "inexorable" and "controllable." But these two adjectives are mutually inconsistent. A doomsday machine is by definition inexorable. Yet as Kahn points out, it is unanimously rejected, conceptually as well as pragmatically, by all planners and analysts, precisely because it is not controllable; nobody is willing to permit such final decisions to be made by anything other than human will. The implication is that human decisionmakers might decide, even in the last seconds, not to go; and leaving that possibility open is considered by all to be necessary.

Yet the very unanimity in dismissing doomsday machines means that credibility can never be promoted to certainty. Indeed, the game of deterrence is played with uncertainties. For Cold War superpower deterrence, that basic fact had many implications. Not all of them are relevant to the new world we are in, but some are, as has been discussed in the analysis of the proclamation. More generally:

- As noted, that an offender will be punished can never mean exactly that. The politicians who must decide whether to execute a deterrent threat are likely to be Wodehouse Georges, prudent enough to consider "accomplishment" of the deterrent threat a separate decision from the earlier and easier one of making the threat. And those to be deterred know it.

- On the other hand, even the weakest threat might be implemented. In his chapter on "The Threat That Leaves Something to Chance," Schelling, after pointing out that "As a rule, one must

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6Schelling, p. 6.
7Kahn, p. 146.
threaten that he *will* act, not that he *may* act, if the threat fails, "8 discusses the implications of the fact that to one degree or another, "will" always means "may." The other side of the ambiguity is that:

> Underlying this threat that one "may" retaliate or precipitate war—the decision being somewhat beyond his control—is the notion that some of the most momentous decisions of government are taken by a process that is not entirely predictable, not fully "under control," not altogether deliberate. 9

Thus, just as, short of a doomsday machine, a strong deterrent threat does not mean a perfect deterrent threat, a weak-seeming deterrent threat does not mean a zero deterrent threat. Indeed, as has been noted, deterrence may exist as a state of the world even if it is never embodied in an explicit policy. And for many deterrent purposes, a weak threat, or even an existential condition, could suffice. That is particularly likely to be the case if the weak (in terms of probability of implementation) threat is a nuclear one. In his history of the nuclear age, Bundy contended that neither explicit nuclear threats nor deliberate implicit ones played any important role in the political pushing and shoving of the Cold War. Nonetheless, what he called "the bomb in the background," the possibility that confrontation might turn nuclear, was an important conditioning factor throughout the years of conflict and competition. 10

As in these writings from the earlier era, Uniform Deterrence can neither be perfectly certain nor certainly dismissed. The questions in the future, as in the past, will be: How credible will a threat have to be to achieve its anti-first use aim? How can such credibility be provided? And, given that uncertainty is an immutable fact, how can the uncertainty itself be exploited to improve the deterrence? The sum-

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8Schelling, p. 187.
9Ibid., p. 201.
ary question is: How much might explicit Uniform Deterrence strengthen the threat implicit in a world that still contains nuclear weapons?

Answers to these questions will have to be built on specifics, as discussed in the next chapter, not on impossible absolutes or pure logic. The inherent uncertainties have several general implications for UD, however.

- The question frequently asked about any deterrent threat—"but what will you do if your bluff is called?"—need not and indeed should not be answered, certainly not publicly, nor even as a set of specific plans, until the first use appears likely and its nature can be initially divined. The deterring powers must, of course, have the means for a response, but in a world where the assumed five primary signatories maintain both conventional and nuclear weapons, the existential capability is likely to suffice. The deter-

- The question of whether UD should be conventional or nuclear should thus be thought about, but it cannot be answered in general, and should not be answered in advance for specific cases.

- A different kind of uncertainty lies in the question: Who will do it? As has been stated, the intention is to have as broad a range of signatories as possible. But suppose in a specific case that even though all the major nuclear powers have signed on in principle, not all will join a particular posse. In that case, the remaining few—perhaps the United States alone—will have to decide the specific actions to be taken, for deterrence and for execution of the threat if necessary.

In principle, the United States could drop out and another state could lead, e.g., France, if a Francophone African country either threatens or is threatened by nuclear use. That seems unlikely, however. In almost all foreseeable instances, the United States will be the essential player, the only one that can deter and execute on its own.
Although the contention is not made here that it should, that possibility will always be inherent. In any case, with active U.S. opposition, deterrence would be implausible and execution impossible. U.S. neutrality—the equivalent of abstaining but not vetoing in the Security Council—would allow the game to go forward. Again, the analogy of Flexible Response seems apposite. The doctrine was NATO's, but U.S. nuclear capabilities provided the essential deterrent, sufficient and in most cases necessary for the strategy to work.

The power and credibility of Uniform Deterrence thus depend ultimately on the nuclear capabilities of the United States, but that statement does not mean that punishment is certain, that it will be nuclear, or that the United States should or must go it alone.

**Perfection and Imperfection; Rationality and Irrationality**

Even full certainty that a deterrent threat will be implemented would not necessarily mean that the deterrent would work. For one thing, the potential deterree might feel that the gain from his first use will be greater than the loss from the punishment. If a renewed fanatical Iranian leadership akin to that which cleared Iraqi minefields by walking soldiers through them, for example, really believed in its bestiary of Satans, then nuclear destruction of the devils might be worth even inevitable martyrdom at the hands of Western conventional or nuclear forces.

In Western eyes, at least, acceptance of such punishment might seem to be "irrational," and deterrence depends on what Schelling calls a "rational, conscious, artful kind of behavior."

But in fact, as he points out, rationality is not a go/no-go attribute. It is not only an issue of degree, it is multidimensional as well:

Decisionmakers are not simply distributed along a one-dimensional scale that stretches from complete rationality at one end to complete irrationality at the other. Rationality is a collection of attributes, and departures from complete rationality may be in many directions. Irrationality can imply a disorderly and inconsistent value system, faulty calculation, an inability to receive messages or

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11Schelling, p. 3.
to communicate efficiently; it can imply random or haphazard influences... it sometimes merely reflects the collective nature of a decision among individuals who do not have identical value systems and whose organizational arrangements and communications systems do not cause them to act like a single entity.\textsuperscript{12}

All of this implies at least that the "rationality" of the deterrer and that of the deterree may not be identical; perhaps that the deterree will be far from the rational calculus upon which the deterrence effort is predicated. Further, most of the potential deterrees of the future will come from systems very different from that of the West, the Ayatollah’s Iran being a prime example. In the early 1970s, Yehezkel Dror described "crazy states,"\textsuperscript{13} and Iran later in the decade seemed to fit the definition. In contrast, despite the ideological polarity of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States were modern industrialized states, and even Marx, Lenin, and Stalin grew out of Western Judeo-Christian value systems (as, indeed, did Hitler).

"Irrationality" among potential future nuclear aggressors should not be exaggerated. Polar rationality and irrationality are not very interesting cases; the real world is characterized more by Schelling's differences in degree and direction of rationality. Most states are not crazy; Saddam Hussein used gas against his helpless Iraqi Kurds but not against his opponents in the Gulf War, who were capable of overwhelming retaliation. Nonetheless, failure of credibility, "irrationality," or other causes may still lead to the failure of Uniform Deterrence. It may fail to deter states; it particularly may fail to deter terrorist groups. It will not be perfect; no more than any other kind of deterrence does it come with a perpetual warranty.

Rather, the contention here, based on theory, logic, and historical analogy, is that UD could decrease significantly the probability of a state or group crossing the firebreak with a first use of nuclear weapons, and that is all that can be reasonably expected. Whether such a decrease will be worth the unavoidable costs and risks, how

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 16.

ever, depends not directly on theory or history but on an assessment of how it might work in the real world of the future. That is the next chapter.
Chapter Three

HOW WILL IT WORK?

Lost men suspect your tale untrue,
Keep probability in view.
—John Gay

This chapter examines four sets of issues:

• The process of promulgating an international policy of Uniform Deterrence of Nuclear First Use; and the question of how it meshes with other policies, particularly those intended to limit nuclear proliferation and to provide security guarantees to states that might otherwise acquire and use nuclear weapons in their own defense.

• The steady-state pre-crisis effects on the likelihood of first use, on international relations, on military posture and costs, and on planning.

• The operation of the policy in a potentially nuclear crisis.

• The implementation of punitive response, if and when first use by someone calls for its implementation.

The ordering of the four issues—from the first step of promulgation, through the issues of UD-in-being, down to the much more contingent problems of implementing UD if and when a crisis or an actual first use calls for implementation—emphasizes a central theme of

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1Eighteenth-century author of The Beggars' Opera.
the report: The major aim of UD is to decrease the likelihood of first use by preventing the crises in which such use might seem a realistic alternative. That key objective lies in the second category above, the steady-state effects of UD. The last two categories, nuclear crisis and implementation in case of first use, are important in themselves and important for their effects on steady-state deterrence, but the “what-if” questions they ask need not and cannot be fully answered in advance. Indeed, to the extent that UD works, they might never have to be answered at all.

In particular, if certainty that UD will succeed is not necessary for its adoption as a policy, neither is certainty of punitive implementation necessary for deterrence to be effective. Implementation of the punishment set forth in the policy statement would come only at the end of a long stream of failed attempts to defuse the crisis and/or to deter the first use. Avoidance and deterrence should therefore be the central issues; the precision of plans for implementation should not assume the prominence it did in the debate between the discriminate deterriers and the existential deterriers of the Cold War. (Indeed, it can be argued that implementation issues were overstressed even then. That was the view of the existentialists at the time; its extension here may be laid in part to the author’s existentialist background.) In any case, as has been pointed out above, the shape of potential execution of UD must be tailored to specific cases, and can be examined *ex ante* only on a hypothetical and exemplary basis. The potential crisis and implementation phases are illustrated here by several such scenarios.

If certainties are neither necessary nor achievable, however, probability remains important, lest the potential first user suspect the Uniform Deterrence “tale untrue,” as in John Gay’s verse. Punishment ought to be at least probable enough to instill fear in the deterree; the scenarios illuminate conditions for greater and lesser credibility.
PROMULGATING AN INTERNATIONAL POLICY OF UNIFORM DETERRENCE

Assuming that the policy itself will be that embodied in the paragraph set forth in the last chapter, two questions should be asked about the process of establishing it:

- Who should promulgate it?
- What other policies go with it?

Who Should Promulgate It?

The United States, as the dominant military power in the world, would have to take the initiative in leading a larger group of states to establish the Uniform Deterrence policy. As noted, such leadership should, and almost necessarily would, include U.S. adoption of its own no first-use policy. Given such U.S. leadership, the policy itself should be as broadly endorsed as possible, although the decision to enforce and implement it would have to be much narrower, and the actual execution narrower still, on a case-by-case basis.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this formulation suggests an existing UN mechanism, the Security Council being crucial. Not every member need favor UD. Although active opposition by a permanent member of the Council would make it difficult, abstention of the sort used by Russia and China in various votes on Persian Gulf and Yugoslav resolutions in the early 1990s would still leave initial adoption possible. Even if one or the other of those countries opposed UD, it might be promulgated on an ad hoc basis by its proponents, but that would be very difficult.

Initial promulgation may be the toughest question. It may be that the time is not yet ripe for endorsement of UD by the world or the Security Council or, indeed, the U.S. electorate. This report is intended to open it up as a possibility for eventual adoption, and these issues are discussed further in the concluding chapter.
What Other Policies Go With It?

Two other sets of policies should be closely related to UD:

- Anti-proliferation policies.
- Selective security guarantees to states that might feel threatened enough to build, threaten to use, and perhaps even use, nuclear weapons.

*Anti-proliferation* policies are becoming the subject of a major literature of their own. This segment will not even attempt to summarize it, but will rather discuss briefly how it relates to UD.

The history of proliferation, and the literature, indicate how difficult limitation of such proliferation has been and is likely to continue to be. This is not to say that these efforts, notably the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 and the institutions built around it, have had no effect in impeding proliferation. Nor is it to say that future efforts and amendments cannot significantly strengthen constraints on proliferation. It does suggest, however, that the nuclear proliferation already upon us, and potential future proliferation, make "success" an ambiguous matter of degree, at best. If there ever was a "firebreak" constraining nuclear proliferation, it was crossed in the 1950s when Britain and France decided to build their independent deterrents. For that reason, any attempt to construct an organic combination of Uniform Deterrence of nuclear use and continuing attempts to constrain proliferation would erode the firebreak of the former without significantly strengthening the latter.

On the other hand, the two separate efforts can complement one another. Insofar as anti-proliferation efforts reduce possession of the weapons to below what it might have been without such efforts, the tasks of Uniform Deterrence and potential punishment will be made

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3 The hope of avoiding additional crossings, even by other NATO members, was the reason for Wohlstetter's agonized article in opposition to further proliferation, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1981.
easier by reducing the number of foci. The effects in the reverse direction—of UD on proliferation—would be more complex, however. The net effect should be one of reinforcement of anti-proliferation efforts. To the extent that UD can convince potential possessors of nuclear weapons that they will never be able to use them, militarily or politically, that belief, plus the costs and risks of nuclear acquisition, ought to provide a substantial disincentive to proliferation.

This basic reinforcement of non-proliferation by UD, however, should be subjected to several qualifications:

- As has been suggested, even though a state may be deterred from first use, it may still want its own second-strike capability to deter nuclear attack by others, as did France in the 1950s, rather than depending completely on external deterrence.

- The inherent lack of certainty for UD may lead a state to obtain a first-use capability in spite of the deterrent. Uncertainty cuts in all directions. Just as the efficacy of UD in inhibiting first use does not depend on the certainty of punishment, the utility of having a first-use capability does not depend on the certainty of being willing to use it. Even though a potential victim of conventional aggression may believe that security guarantees of the sort discussed later will deter the putative aggressor, the victim cannot be sure, and that will affect its decisionmakers’ political and military calculus. Being able to exert such an effect may make it worthwhile for a state to obtain a nuclear capability.

In addition, two potential proliferation-related arguments against UD should also be mentioned:

- **UD might lead to proliferation of nonnuclear weapons of mass destruction.** States with an aggressive bent, realizing that UD makes both military and political uses of nuclear weapons more difficult, may turn instead to increased efforts to develop and deploy chemical and biological weapons. As has been argued, such weapons are of a lesser order of danger than nuclear weapons. In any case, however, their spread is not an inevitable consequence of UD. The counterargument is that vices tend to

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4These issues were raised by Yehezkel Dror, the author of *Crazy States*, op. cit.
cluster rather than substitute for one another. What evidence there is, largely from the Iraqi sample of one, seems to favor the counterargument: Iraq apparently tried to develop every system of destruction and delivery simultaneously. Even if substitution of other devices for nuclear weapons were to predominate, however, deterrence against crossing the nuclear firebreak seems more important than prevention of marginal increases in other less potent weapons already stockpiled in many places.

- **Uniform deterrence led by the United States might induce states or terrorist groups to develop nuclear capabilities for attacks on the United States.** In particular, they might attempt to develop delivery systems capable of placing weapons inside the continental United States. Such possibilities certainly exist. A growing literature exists about the high-tech end of the spectrum: acquisition of ICBMs by small nuclear powers, counterdevelopment of ABMs by the United States and other potential targets, and so forth. Rather than evaluate the possibilities here, however, we can merely note that if high-tech fails, low-tech is still available. The suitcase or car bomb, the smuggling of components, even the small airplane or boat forming part of the pattern of narcotics traffic, seem real possibilities. The February 1993 bomb in New York's World Trade Center Towers, which might be looked upon as a cautionary example, may be somewhat misleading in this regard. Assembling a nuclear weapon is of an order of magnitude different from putting together fertilizer and other high-explosive ingredients. Nonetheless, developing simple delivery systems looks easy enough that any state that has developed nuclear weapons seems likely to go ahead with such systems, in addition to or instead of high-tech. Thus, the real questions for the United States and other powers concern not whether UD might encourage terrorist developments, but rather the potential uses of such weapons and delivery systems in a nuclear crisis, and UD punishment in response to that sort of nuclear first use.

Nonetheless, effective and convincing deterrence of first use should, on balance, provide a powerful boost to anti-proliferation efforts.

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5See Molander and Wilson.
Acquisition of nuclear weapons would be neither easy for a small state nor cheap, and it could be politically dangerous. Doubts about ever being able to use them should reinforce all the other negatives, perhaps finally tipping the scales against.

Security guarantees to states that might otherwise turn to nuclear weapons to reinforce their own security may provide a third leg to the stool. Neither sanctions against proliferation nor deterrence against first use may work to deter proliferation or use by a state that sees a nuclear capability as the alternative to national destruction, even nonnuclear destruction. Further reinforcement to both anti-proliferation attempts and Uniform Deterrence, however, may be provided by guarantees to potential victims that outside power will be made available to help defend them.

Guarantees might be general—as uniform as UD—but such generality would add little to what already exists. The United Nations Charter already expresses as that organization’s first purpose:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace.6

To that end the UN Charter devotes its Chapter VII to “Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.” True, the guarantee aspect depends on deliberate response by the Security Council to any specific aggression, but so would any new general guarantee under UD.

More realistically, support for UD can be provided by specific guarantees to assist in defense against aggression, made to specific states, for which guarantees would appear both plausible and meaningful beyond those in the UN Charter. Such guarantees are already extended by the United States to other NATO members, including Britain and France, which on that account have been able to keep their own nuclear weapons on less than hair-trigger alert. Such a U.S. security guarantee to Israel, intended to decrease the likelihood that that nation would use its nuclear weapons in

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response to aggression—or at least to delay any decision to use
them—is one clear future possibility. Similar guarantees to South
Korea and Japan may help prevent proliferation as well. Such
guarantees will be less than complete or perfect, but together with
NPT and UD they can help further limit proliferation and further
decrease the likelihood of first use by these states at risk.

STEADY-STATE EFFECTS OF UNIFORM DETERRENCE

Promulgation of a policy of Uniform Deterrence will change world-
wide military and political processes and probabilities even if no cri-
sis or call for implementation ever arises. Indeed, that is the inten-
tion. Steady-state stability is the primary objective of the policy: to
decrease the likelihood of use of nuclear weapons and thus the chances
of nuclear crises.

The continuing effects of UD on the pre-crisis/non-crisis mili-
tary/political steady state of the world can be divided into three cate-
gories:

- Deterrence of nuclear crises, threats, and first use.
- Effects on other aspects of international relations.
- U.S. nuclear posture and fiscal costs.

In addition, the question should be asked:

- What, if anything, should the signatories to Uniform Deterrence
  be doing during the steady state to prepare for crises that might
  occur, and for potential implementation of deterrent punish-
  ment?

Steady-State Deterrence of Nuclear Crises, Threats, and First
Use

The question asked here is not how Uniform Deterrence could op-
erate once a nuclear threat is made or nuclear weapons have been
used; those are the issues taken up in the final portions of this
chapter. Rather, it is: What would be the steady-state effect of UD
on the probability of such a crisis occurring at all, and, if a crisis has begun, on the probability of use of nuclear weapons?

The answer presented here will be brief, not because it is unimportant or easy. Quite the contrary, as has been noted, these are the central issues for this report, and this analysis in its entirety is intended to address them.

The essential purpose of UD is to prevent the first use of nuclear weapons; to the extent that first use is perceived to be made unattractive by UD, nuclear crises will become unlikely. The contention here is that UD will have such effects—that deterrence will work as has been argued, not to make first use and nuclear crisis impossible, but to significantly decrease their likelihood.

In other words, if UD assists in maintaining the steady state as a state of nuclear stability, it will have succeeded.

Effects on Other Aspects of International Relations

Assuming that UD has favorable effects in deterring first use and helping discourage proliferation, are there other, unfavorable, effects that should not be overlooked? Two possibilities are:

• World polarization between nuclear haves and have-nots, and, as a special case, increased hostility against the United States as the instigator of the policy.

• Increased numbers of conventional conflicts due to the fading of nuclear deterrence.

For both, it is contended here that such possibilities exist, but on the margin, and are limited in their extent.

Polarization and hostility would depend primarily on the effects of UD on the various states. If UD were to be adopted by the Security Council, the rest of the world would be likely to follow the traditional post-World War II pattern—dividing itself among applauders, grumblers, and covert accepters. If the real grumblers were confined to those whose plans for nuclear capabilities and threats were disrupted by UD, the offended amour-propre of others would be likely to fade, and the new policy to cause few new international tensions.
(The accession of the United States to the no first-use policy already proclaimed by Russia and China might help in the "court of world public opinion.") In any case, however, the overwhelming criterion dividing the "haves" of the world from the "have-nots" is economic, not military, and economics will not be affected by Uniform Deterrence.

Similarly, to some degree UD might increase the likelihood of conventional conflict, but the question is: How much? The question may be best posed in terms of specific examples:

- India and Pakistan have each been building nuclear weapons (it is believed), each in some measure to deter attack by the other. Before they had such weapons, they did in fact wage full-scale war once, in 1971; before and since then, low-level border clashes continued. If UD were to decrease the likelihood of escalation in a subcontinent war, would that then mean a major nonnuclear war would become more likely? Perhaps if UD were to weaken Pakistan's nuclear equalizer, India's dominant conventional power would tempt it to attack, just as in NATO's Cold War nightmares, weakening of the U.S. nuclear deterrent would tempt Soviet conventional attack. In fact, however, India first demonstrated its own capability with a nuclear explosion in 1974 and Pakistan has not yet demonstrated its own capability; yet even India's conventional-plus-nuclear dominance over almost two decades has not brought about an attack on Pakistan. UD might logically increase the chance of nonnuclear war, but other factors for stability are clearly dominant.

- Stability between Israel and its Arab neighbors is less clear, but no war has taken place between Israel and an Arab state since 1973. One element reinforcing military stability has been the deterrent effect of Israel's perceived major nuclear capability. Were UD to erode this, would an Arab attack on Israel become more likely? Probably yes. But, (a) Israel has not signed NPT and it is doubtful that UD would cause Israel to give up its unadmitted arsenal, so that at least the existential deterrent threat would remain in any case; (b) the U.S. security guarantee suggested earlier as a complement to UD would contribute an additional deterrent against Arab attack; and (c) Israel and its neighbors are gradually inching down the road toward political accommoda-
tion, which will be much the best guarantor of military stability in any case.

Other examples are possible, but these are the strongest, and they suggest that increased likelihood of conventional war should not be a strong consideration against UD.

U.S. Nuclear Posture and Fiscal Costs

U.S. posture is likely to be driven not by UD but by the residual need to continue a balanced posture vis-à-vis Russia. A 3000–3500 weapons ceiling was agreed to informally by Presidents Bush and Yeltsin, to which should be added, however, perhaps 1500 tactical warheads. Some advocates of reducing numbers of nuclear weapons by turning toward a "virtual" nuclear capability—the ability to rapidly rebuild nuclear arsenals—suggest that the United States might safely go down below 1000, toward the 100 level, although below that, they see danger.7

UD would probably preclude the lower end of this range, but against a state with 5, 10, or 20 weapons, 100–500 U.S. warheads with a surge capability to rebuild, plus the weapons of our partners in deterrence, seem quite sufficient to enforce UD. Similarly, whatever the need for variety of delivery systems and prudently mixed posture (e.g., triad, dead, fixed missiles, mobile missiles) to deter and counter the Soviet-successor threat, should also suffice for UD. And, as a result, the marginal fiscal costs to the United States of UD should be close to zero.

Preparations During the Steady State

The discussion of U.S. posture leads to the question: What, if anything, should the United States and its UD allies be doing during the steady state to prepare for a nuclear crisis that might possibly invoke specific deterrent threats or even their implementation?

To some extent, NATO Cold War nuclear planning may provide a model. Even though NATO’s three nuclear powers retained full na-

7Molander and Wilson.
tional control over their own nuclear forces, including the ability to withhold them, the United States and Britain planned together; and so did France, as was revealed many years after the inception of the planning. The three nuclear powers knew what they would do under a variety of options, were they to do it at all, which was always hypothetical.

The NATO model is not completely applicable to UD planning, because NATO's Soviet targets could be specified, whereas not even the UD opponent will be known in advance, but whatever military planning can be done for UD—thinking in advance about types of weapons and delivery systems, for example—will not only facilitate the mission if and when the necessity arises, but will also make more credible the multinational deterrent itself.

**Uniform Deterrence in the Steady State: Conclusion**

The net effects of Uniform Deterrence in the steady state after its promulgation—its contributions to inhibiting proliferation and deterring nuclear crises, threats, and wars—provide the strongest argument for adopting such a policy. These effects, however, depend in the final analysis on perceptions by deterriers and potential deterrees that UD can perform in a crisis, and be implemented if called upon after an actual nuclear first use. As discussed, such performance need not be certain or perfect, but it must be credible. Crisis performance and implementation are the subjects of the final two sections of this chapter.

**UNIFORM DETERRENCE IN A NUCLEAR CRISIS**

A nuclear crisis is defined here as an occasion when the use of nuclear weapons seems a significant probability within a relatively short period of time. Neither the probability nor the time period can be expressed precisely, but they can be examined in two dimensions:

- A crisis might begin with an explicit nuclear threat, given which the fact that it is a crisis would be quite clearcut. It might, how-

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8This was first revealed publicly by Richard H. Ullman in "The Covert French Connection," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1989.
ever, be more existential, based on rising tensions between states at least one of which possesses nuclear weapons and is believed willing to use them. The boundary between a nuclear crisis of this existential nature and lesser tensions in the steady state is inherently fuzzy.

- The use of nuclear weapons might be considered imminent—say, within hours—or it might be on a slower fuse, within days or weeks. If nuclear threats were made by a belligerent during an ongoing war, then imminence could be presumed; most other occasions would have to be judged on an *ad hoc* basis.

For the United States and its partners in Uniform Deterrence (or the United States and the partners willing to join the posse), the basic choice of response to a nuclear crisis would be between words and deeds. Ordinarily, except for imminent threats, the initial response would be verbal. There would certainly be a Security Council resolution, as well as proclamations, speeches, resolutions, leaks, and flurries of diplomatic activity over participation and phraseology. These might be reinforced by revival of a device that has fallen into disuse in recent decades—national Declarations of War by the United States and other countries. The very quaintness of such enactments might emphasize the seriousness of the deterrent resolve.⁹

The words to be used by UD enforcers in a nuclear crisis cannot be prescribed in advance—they clearly must be tailored to the occasion, with due attention to the countervailing considerations of credibility versus seriousness of consequences (i.e., somewhere between a very plausible slap on the wrist and an unlikely invocation of holocaust). For a specific crisis, the words might convey a specific threat, such as, “Any use of nuclear weapons will result in the destruction of the following facilities/forces/dams/plants/whatever.” Such words might have the desired effect; they sometimes have in recent history, e.g., the many times that Saddam Hussein backed off in the face of threatened enforcement of UN resolutions aimed at destroying his weapon systems after his Gulf War retreat.

If nuclear first use appeared imminent, however, the enforcers of UD might consider pre-emption, without waiting for words. Pre-emp-

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⁹This is another Schelling suggestion.
tion was defined in the Introduction, in a Cold War context, as "either side [attacking] the other first with nuclear weapons in the belief that such a strike would be necessary to prevent the opponent's own crippling first strike." UD pre-emption would relax that definition somewhat, both because, under the rules of no first-use, initial pre-emption by the enforcers would be nonnuclear, as now seems militarily feasible in many cases;\(^{10}\) and because the threatened nuclear first use could hardly cripple the nuclear capabilities of the United States and its partners, so that the several-minute hair-trigger of the Cold War would be unnecessary. Further, UD pre-emption might in some cases call for an attack by the UD enforcers against a state that is already the victim of aggression and is contemplating first use of nuclear weapons as its own last resort; and such pre-emption seems quite unlikely. Nonetheless, the essential element of pre-emption—an attack before the threatened nuclear use, in order to cripple that use—must be considered a possibility in UD as in the Cold War.\(^{11}\)

In any case, the first divide is that between words and deeds. Whether to go beyond words—whether to pre-empt if that seemed called for, or to execute punitive action if words failed to have the desired effect—would be a decision about whether to cross the divide. Pre-emption and punishment might be implemented somewhat differently, because the essence of pre-emption would be to decrease the putative first user's capability to attack, whereas punishment is definitionally post-first use, but the similarity between the two—the need to make the final decision about actual military action against first use—eclipses the difference. It is that final decision and

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\(^{10}\)See, for example, Albert L. Latter, Ernest A. Martinelli, and Roger D. Speed, Conventional Strategic Deterrence, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory UCRL-ID 111265, Livermore, California, August 1992.

\(^{11}\)To confuse these terminological matters even further, "pre-emption" has taken on a somewhat different definition recently. Les Aspin, before he became Secretary of Defense, used the word to describe the possibility that the United States might want to attack a dangerous proliferator, even without an immediate threat of the use of the proliferated weapons. (Les Aspin, Thinking Through the New Nuclear Threat, speech before the Mondale Policy Forum, the Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, June 22, 1991.) Such a U.S. attack against a proliferator, while certainly not excluded as a possibility here, lies outside of UD for reasons that have been discussed; and lacking the need for immediacy against an imminent threat, Aspin's use of "pre-emption" is more like "preventive war" in Cold War deterrence theory.
its requirements and implications to which the final section of this chapter is devoted.

One additional crisis question, however, serves to link the discussion of UD in a crisis to that of final implementation. What if, in response to a UD threat to punish first nuclear use, the putative first user were to make the spy-thriller announcement: "We have a 10-kiloton weapon in downtown Manhattan (or London or Shanghai). Your move." The statement need not be true; it need just be made. The implications can be illustrated by several questions and short answers, in something of a reverse chronological order:

- What if it were true, and the weapon were exploded?
  Possible responses are taken up in the discussion of actual military action in the next section, but the summary answer lies among the potential retaliatory responses on an escalation ladder similar to that analyzed and discussed, but never invoked, during the Cold War.

- What is the textbook response to the threat itself?
  The answer is a counterthreat further up the escalation ladder, and it is dire.

- What might be the actual response to the threat?
  Possibly execution of the textbook counterthreat, possibly backing down, most likely waffling, searching, and attempted calming of the populations at risk. The spy thrillers may have something to contribute here.

- What would be the popular response to the threat?
  Outside of the target areas in the deterring states, the strongest pressure would probably be to hang tough. If these possibilities begin to move beyond the fiction category, however, someone ought to think about the responses of the potential victims.

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12This discussion uses the example of the smuggled weapon rather than the ICBM because, as noted earlier, it represents the least common denominator of possibility. Rather than diverting to the dialogue of high-tech measures and countermeasures, the important point here is that a plausible terror threat is likely to be available to a small nuclear state in any case.
What should be the implication of this possibility for the initial adoption of UD?

The easy answer here is that the possibilities are so small that they should not enter into consideration. That may be too easy, but it is difficult to see how the remote possibility of such an unprecedented terror threat can be factored in at this point. We are entering the realm of Cold War movie and television scenarios, from On the Beach of the 1960s to The Day After of the mid-1980s, which experts contended were so farfetched that they should have no effect on strategic deterrence. They probably did not, but they did affect public opinion, and without the Cold War, such public opinion pressures could have a greater impact on a debate over adopting UD.

These issues are discussed further in Chapter Four. The next part of this chapter continues this theme of mixed strategy and imagination about eventualities at the very unlikely end of a long chain—but what if they really did come to pass?

IMPLEMENTING A PUNITIVE RESPONSE

What follows is divided into three parts: a preamble that once more emphasizes the conditionality of implementation; an examination of the strategy of implementation; and a discussion of several hypothetical scenarios.

Implementation, Probability, and Morality

The first thing to be said about this last set of considerations is that it is, in fact, a last set. It is important to remember that, although firm decisions cannot be made in advance, they must be thought through. The decisions to be made would be terrible and traumatic, but they would come at the end of a long chain of other considerations, intended to decrease to a very low level the probability that these decisions will ever have to be made. In that, these considerations resemble those of Cold War deterrence: the strategic Single Integrated Operating Plan (SIOP) designated alternative sets of Soviet targets and the nuclear weapons to be used on them, but every piece of the
U.S. strategic posture and of the conventional posture in Europe was designed to avoid having to implement that targeting.

Indeed, it was never certain that, if matters had reached the point of decision during the Cold War, the United States would have implemented the SIOP or any other nuclear plan. For deterrence to be effective, all sides had to believe that implementation was possible—perhaps likely—but once again, certainty was neither necessary nor achievable. The dilemma is expressed in Wohlstetter's interpretation of the views of Father Brian Hehir, the director of the committee that had drafted the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1983 position on nuclear war,\textsuperscript{13} that "to deter nuclear attack, we must convince other nations that our 'determination to use nuclear weapons is beyond question' [but] we should never intend to use nuclear weapons."\textsuperscript{14} That is not necessarily a correct interpretation of Hehir's position, but even if it were, inconsistent as it may have seemed, it was not logically impossible. Nobody, including nuclear decisionmakers themselves, could have been sure whether the "button" really would have been pushed.

Bundy quotes Dean Acheson as having advised President Kennedy to "reach his own clear conclusion in advance as to what he would do, and . . . tell no one at all what that conclusion was."\textsuperscript{15} A president, however, no matter what he thinks in advance, can always make a last-minute change in an earlier conclusion. Since in any case, any prudent president would take Acheson's advice to tell no one, deterrence continued and continues even without certainty of use.

In addition to the Cold War fear of retaliatory destruction, these uncertainties about actual use were based to a greater or lesser extent on morality—the bishops' explicitly to a greater extent, and the strategists' and politicians' implicitly to a lesser extent. The central moral question was what the title of Wohlstetter's article called "the bombing of innocents." All parties to the strategic and moral debates


\textsuperscript{14}Albert Wohlstetter, "Bishops, Statesmen, and Other Strategists on the Bombing of Innocents," \textit{Commentary}, June 1983, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{15}Bundy, \textit{Danger and Survival}, p. 375. Bundy believed that Acheson, although notably hard-line about the Cold War, would not have advised using nuclear weapons.
agreed that implementation of deterrence should, insofar as possible, aim at military targets. If, even better, punishment could have been confined to culpable leaders, morality would not have been at great issue. World War II had proved, however, that conventional weapons alone put innocents at risk, and it has been clear since then that even the most counterforce of nuclear attacks would have a substantial chance of causing thousands to millions of "collateral" deaths.\textsuperscript{16} Further, the logic of the escalation ladder implied that if counterforce did not work, the next steps led up to deliberate counterforce attacks; the bishops explicitly rejected that, but few others did.

All of which provides a necessary preamble to the next discussion on alternative plans for implementing punishment if Uniform Deterrence fails. As in the Cold War, it is unlikely to fail. If it does fail, implementation of punishment is not inevitable, and if punishment is implemented, it should be aimed at the true sinners—the nuclear decisionmakers—which is not likely to work perfectly if at all. Yet, as in the Cold War, planning must consider the final what-if contingencies, and consider them as if they were to be seriously implemented.

The Strategy of Punishment: Initiation and Escalation

Suppose, after all, that a transgressor has used nuclear weapons and the decision to punish has been made, whether by the Security Council, a sub-constellation of nuclear powers, or the United States alone. The last is unlikely; even less likely, however, would be punishment by nuclear powers excluding the United States. As a reasonable assumption, then, the decision would be taken by the United States and others; execution of the punitive military action would be by the United States and others, including Russia if that were possible.

The specific first and subsequent punitive steps up the escalatory ladder to be taken by the executing powers would depend on the situation. The canonical order in which they might be considered, however, from first to ultimate steps—from least to most violent for

the most part, although that is not always easily definable—might run as follows:

a. Attack on nuclear delivery systems, preferably with conventional weapons. This is the defining first step of pre-emption; it is also the most likely initial punitive response to a first use that has already taken place. It may not be possible, however, because the targets cannot be well enough located, or it may not be possible with conventional weapons because of uncertain location and hardening of the targets. If nuclear weapons were deemed necessary for punishment, they would almost certainly be used, although their use for pre-emption would be a first use itself precluded by UD. For punishment, however, the conventional response might not be considered sufficient militarily, or to deter a further response, or to deter a next “first use” in a later case.

b. Attack on and/or capture or punishment of the offending leader or leadership. This is an obvious part of any sequence—surely it is best to punish the truly guilty—but, as noted, it may not be possible. One objective of subsequent threats and punitive acts, however, would be to coerce the offending state into surrendering the responsible leader(s).

c. Conventional attack on other military forces and installations. To be convincingly punitive, this would essentially have to wipe out the offending state’s ability to wage war.

d. Conventional attack on economic as well as military targets. Of particular importance would be crippling the enemy’s maneuver forces, thus depriving him of any military advantage that he might have gained from his first use.

e. Nuclear attack on forces and installations. These might be necessary to wipe out the offender’s war-making capability. As the first retaliatory nuclear step on the ladder, it also signals a serious move toward the ultimate measures of the next two steps. In any case, as with Cold War deterrence, a large number of “collateral” civilian casualties seems inevitable.

f. Nuclear attack on economic and population targets. The Catholic bishops argued during the Cold War that this could never be justified. Moral justification might be even more difficult for UD—large wealthy states murdering innocent civilians in
small poor ones. It was always present as a possibility during the Cold War; it continues to be present as a possibility after the Cold War, and not only as a part of UD. It was and is the most uncertain of the uncertainties. Whether it would actually have been implemented by the United States or the Soviet Union nobody will ever know; whether it would actually be implemented under UD, one hopes that nobody will ever know.

g. Nuclear attack intended to essentially wipe out the offending state as an entity. This may or may not have been possible during the Cold War; the sheer size of the United States and the Soviet Union may have meant that homicide equalled suicide. It would be more possible under UD. It is an obvious response to the weapon going off in downtown Manhattan; public opinion in the United States might demand it. Physically and politically—perhaps psychologically—this is within the realm of real-world possibilities. Nonetheless, it is at the spy-thriller—indeed the science fiction—end of a long string of uncertainties and improbabilities. In this, it does not differ from the Cold War nightmare of a U.S./Soviet holocaust.

The steps need not be taken in this order. The military requirements for pre-emption or for destroying the capability for an additional use might take temporary precedence over punishment as such. Even so, however, the essential questions will remain: What punitive response is likely to prevent any further use of nuclear weapons by the first user? What response is likely to prevent a next incident of a similar kind? Answers to these may dictate harsher measures than might be called for militarily or be justified by the size and quality of the first use. And in any case, a nuclear attack on U.S. or allied troops might call for a nuclear response; as noted, a nuclear weapon exploded on the soil of the United States or one of its partners would probably lead quickly to large-scale nuclear retaliation.

The essential problem, in any case, is what was termed in Cold War deterrence theorizing as escalation control—the possibility, every step of the way, of raising the level of violence one level above the opponent’s previous step, starting with his first step of first use. That is the importance of the last step, obliteration. Not that it necessarily would be or should be used, ever; rather, the fact that it could be used establishes the control over the escalatory sequence that is
likely to prevent it from beginning. And preventing it from beginning with a first use of nuclear weapons is the object of the game.

This is a bizarre sequence and a bizarre form of reasoning. It is, however, the same bizarre reasoning that has governed strategic thinking since the United States lost its nuclear monopoly in 1949. And it apparently has worked, from then until now.

Hypothetical Scenarios

A number of hypothetical examples can provide impressionistic illustrations to flesh out the still somewhat abstract discussion of how initiation of UD punishment, and escalation, might proceed. None of the scenarios set forth here is impossible; all are quite implausible. A plausible scenario leading to use of nuclear weapons is and always has been difficult to imagine. That is why the world never came to nuclear use during the Cold War.17 Conditions are now different, but most of the inhibitions on nuclear attack remain; UD is intended to reinforce them. The scenarios here illustrate the implausible possibilities, and the ways in which UD, having failed in its primary steady-state purpose of avoiding crises, may work to resolve them relatively satisfactorily. To anticipate the conclusions derived from the scenarios, UD may have some effect in all cases, with its greatest effect in the most dangerous ones.

- A war between India and Pakistan.
- A Chinese attack on India.
- Another Iraqi aggression on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, leading to an Iraqi nuclear attack on a U.S. air base.
- A Syrian nuclear attack on Israeli troops.
- An Israeli nuclear response to a massive Arab conventional attack.
- A nuclear explosion in downtown Manhattan.

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17It is believed by some that nuclear war was close during the Cuban missile crisis. In Danger and Survival, Bundy, who was involved in that crisis, contends that neither then nor at any other time was nuclear use close.
Several possible developments and outcomes within each scenario are examined, and for most of these cases, the “success” or “failure” of UD is evaluated. Success can be defined in three steps:

1. Best would be avoidance of any use.
2. Second best would be deterrence of any additional use after the first use.
3. Once nuclear weapons have been used, limited success might be considered punishment of the offending first user severe enough that he has failed to achieve his objectives and is substantially worse off for having tried, so that subsequent potential first users are thus discouraged from such use.

Other scenarios are possible of course, involving different parts of the world and different political casus belli. Most of the ways in which they might test UD, however, are represented in the following illustrations. Similarities to other potential scenarios will be mentioned at the end of this chapter.

**India versus Pakistan.** War breaks out over Kashmir and spreads to large-scale conventional combat along the border between India and Pakistan. India’s much larger conventional forces begin to break through. The UN Security Council appeals to both sides to declare a cease-fire, and also warns both against using nuclear weapons. Since the fear is that Pakistan, being defeated on the ground, might attempt first use, the United States makes a private demarche to India, requesting that if Pakistan does so India refrain from an immediate response in kind until it sees what UD can do. The next possibilities are:

- Pakistan does not use nuclear weapons. UD plus the deterrent effect of the Indian arsenal have worked.
- Pakistan delivers a nuclear weapon that kills several thousand Indian troops. UD has failed at the first level. India replies in kind with a large-scale nuclear attack.
- Pakistan goes nuclear, India refrains from immediate response. U.S. carrier-based air and missiles, and B-52s and allied air including Russian aircraft staged through India, suppress remaining Pakistani air defenses and begin systematic heavy
bombing of Pakistani troop concentrations and installations. Pakistan collapses, a new regime surrenders and hands over the leaders who directed the nuclear strike. The second round of UD has succeeded.

- The same scenario, except that instead of surrendering, Pakistan explodes another nuclear weapon, this time killing many Indian civilians. India now responds in kind. UD has failed.

Ukrainian nuclear response to Russian conventional attack would be similar, except in degree—Russia could end by fully obliterating Ukraine.

**China Attacks India.** It is difficult to generate a scenario in which a large nuclear power resorts to first use of nuclear weapons against a smaller one, since the larger is likely to defeat the smaller conventionally without such resort. This may provide a possibility as plausible as any, however. Should China, for whatever reason, attack India, the Himalayas may provide an equalizing obstacle to large conventional forces, as may the jungles of southeast Asia; the 1980s wars with Vietnam showed that, at least at that time, Chinese power was less than it seemed. If the cause of a conflict with India were substantial enough (e.g., suzerainty over the southeast Asian land mass or archipelago), China might try to win by going nuclear, likely attempting a disarming counterforce attack on Indian nuclear capabilities. UD would have definitionally failed at the first level.

- India, not fully disarmed, responds with a French-type suicide attack on whatever Chinese targets it can find. China fulfills the suicidal expectations by retaliating against Indian population centers.

- India cannot or does not respond to either the first or second Chinese attack. The United States and perhaps other enforcers of Uniform Deterrence fulfill their obligation by mounting a conventional or nuclear attack (whichever is needed) in an attempt to punish China and to disarm its intercontinental capabilities. The disarming may succeed or it may not, but the issues raised come close to those of superpower exchange. Since the United States can presumably maintain escalation control and ultimately “win,” UD will have “succeeded,” but possibly at a very high price.
The United States and the others back down. UD will have failed, perhaps as a credible device against other large nuclear powers, perhaps wholly.

This case might also represent failed Russian aggression against a still-nuclear Ukraine, but the conventional inequalities there make it seem even less plausible. The central issue raised—implementation of UD against a large nuclear power—would apply if China or Russia were to use nuclear weapons against a nonnuclear state, but it is difficult to think of such scenarios; under some circumstances, perhaps, China vs. Vietnam or Russia vs. Poland, but these seem to be of an even lesser order of plausibility. In any case, use of UD against a major nuclear state, were the occasion to occur, raises issues reminiscent of the Cold War.

**Iraq Uses Nuclear Weapons on a U.S. Base in Saudi Arabia.** A revived Iraqi military machine again attacks Kuwait and threatens Saudi Arabia. This time it announces the possession of nuclear weapons and threatens to use them if U.S. forces in the area oppose the attack. The United States responds quickly with suppression of Iraqi air defenses and attempts to destroy Iraqi nuclear capabilities, together with other attacks similar to the initial ones of Desert Storm.

• Iraq does not implement the threat. The war continues conventionally, with results similar to Desert Storm. UD has at least provided international sanction for what the United States could have achieved anyhow.

• Iraq uses a specially designed high-reliability missile to air burst a weapon over a U.S. air base, killing several thousand Americans. UD has failed initially.

• The United States and perhaps Britain or France deliver small nuclear weapons on all Iraqi installations known to be capable of launching missiles or aircraft. Collateral damage is significant. Iraq surrenders unconditionally. UD has "worked" on its second try, albeit at a cost, but the damage to Iraq and its quick surrender makes deterrence more credible for the next time.

• One or more concealed weapons survive, and rather than surrendering, Iraq uses a nuclear weapon to sink a U.S. aircraft carrier and a frigate escort. The United States, this time by itself,
responds with a nuclear attack on small Iraqi economic/population targets.

This sequence can continue up the escalation ladder, and it is difficult to see how the United States/United Nations can lose militarily. Iraq would not gain its objectives in these cases, and UD would be established at the third level against the next potential first use, but the cost would be high and the world order probably changed drastically. In particular, it is possible that America's erstwhile allies would drop off, leaving the United States as a sheriff without a posse, and one considered an outlaw by at least some of the world community. Another possibility, that Iraq would threaten and/or attempt to use nuclear weapons within the continental United States, is examined in the final hypothetical scenario.

An attack by North Korea against South Korea and the U.S. troops stationed there would have substantial similarities.

**Syria Attacks Israeli Troops With Nuclear Weapons.** Syria has obtained several nuclear warheads from Arab or former Soviet sources. Emboldened by this possession, Syria mounts a conventional attack on Israeli positions on the Golan Heights. Aided by rapid implementation of the U.S. security guarantee, Israel mounts a successful defense and Israeli, but not U.S., troops cross into Syria. Syria uses a nuclear weapon on Syrian soil to stop the Israeli advance. UD has not worked at the primary level.

This scenario combines characteristics of several previous ones. As in the India/Pakistan case, both of the primary belligerents have nuclear weapons; as in the Iraqi/Saudi example, nuclear first use takes place against a belligerent on whose side the United States is engaged in active conventional combat. Alternative next steps include:

- The United States appeals for Israeli nuclear forbearance, Israel agrees, and U.S. and Israeli aircraft commence heavy conventional bombing on every Syrian military target in Syria and Lebanon that can be located, not being too careful about Syrian population centers. Syria collapses, surrenders its leaders, etc. Second-round UD has worked.

- Israel refuses to hold back nuclearly, and extracts many eyes for one, aiming at military targets but not being too nice about col-
lateral damage. The United States, recognizing that this is a second use, complains to Israel in strong terms and breaks off its conventional cooperation, but does nothing else. Israel destroys a substantial portion of Syria, occupies coastal and western areas, and captures Syrian leaders and puts them on trial. In a sense, UD has "worked" at the second level; at the least, another first use has been made less likely.

- Syria explodes another nuclear weapon, this time on Tel Aviv. Israel essentially obliterates Syria.

This again invokes the escalation ladder with the United States and its allies continuing in escalation control. It might also lead to the possibility of an attack on the United States, and to potential major changes in the world order.

**Israel Uses Nuclear Weapons in Response to an Arab Conventional Attack.** This includes two sub-cases, both of which start with a heavy and coordinated Arab attack, for the first time since 1973. The first sub-case moves quickly to the initial failure of UD—an early Israeli use of nuclear weapons against a conventional attack. In the second, Israeli conventional defense has failed for the first time in history, and Israel is about to be pushed into the sea.

The reason for the rapid Israeli nuclear reaction in the first case might be a clear view of imminent defeat, or it could stem from a failure of nerve on the part of Israeli decisionmakers. The perceived impending disaster might be caused by a failure of the United States to implement its security commitment in a timely fashion, or it could be a failure of the Israeli/U.S. effort. No matter how it comes about, however, Israel has violated the proscription on first use, and the United States and its allies—but mostly the United States—are faced with decisions about UD punishment.

The following alternatives are listed as possibilities; they are neither predictive nor normative, and in particular they do not attempt to take account of U.S. politics. Any punitive measure likely to be

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18A pre-emptive attack on Arab nuclear capabilities might provide another sort of reason, but Israel would have strong motivation to carry out such pre-emption with conventional weapons. The pre-emption path is thus not explored in this already complex discussion of hypotheticals.
adoption should have been communicated to the Israelis in advance, in order to discourage them from going nuclear. Such a warning—plus UD—might well work, but the assumption for the first sub-case is that it has not, and Israel has gone nuclear.

- If the United States has lived up to the commitment, it now withdraws that commitment. This seems unlikely and unwise, because it would encourage Israel to continue nuclear use.

- Whether or not the United States has initially fulfilled the commitment, it now announces that it will assist in the defense of Israel only at its pre-1968 borders and will insist that, as a punishment for first use, Israel be pushed back within those borders in any final settlement. If Israel uses nuclear weapons again, even this defense of the pre-1968 borders will be withdrawn. UD may work at the second level, putting an end to Israeli nuclear use at this point; or Israel may use additional weapons until it is sure that the Arabs' capability to attack has been destroyed.

- It is possible but seems extremely unlikely that the United States would use military force against Israel. In the past, the Soviet Union might have attacked Israel under these circumstances, but Russia is unlikely to, which means that no direct military punishment of Israeli first use is likely, except by the Arab states themselves.

- Indeed, rounding out the possibilities, the United States as well as its UD partners may choose to do nothing in response to the Israeli first use, leading to a substantial failure of UD. Israel will go on using nuclear weapons out of its presumed to be substantial arsenal, and will defeat the Arab attack—which is why such an attack is unlikely to begin with. At this point in Israeli nuclear capabilities, the only plausible Arab aggression on Israel is one that both sides know is doomed to fail. Not even an Arab second-strike capability would be likely to increase greatly the likelihood of such an attack, although if the attack did come, it would raise the probability of mutual obliteration.

The second sub-case, Israel using a nuclear weapon as it was about to be pushed into the sea, seems less complex: It would be difficult
to implement UD punishment on a state that is about to disappear in any case.

In sum, the Israeli scenarios present major difficulties, but also possibilities, for UD (and for the United States). A small easy-to-overrun state with a large number of nuclear weapons and close ties to the world sheriff of Uniform Deterrence may simply be in a position to do what it feels it must in extreme circumstances. On the other hand, if the United States were to take a tough punitive political stand, e.g., insistence on Israeli retreat to its 1967 borders, and if Israel were to accede to this, then UD would have passed one of its toughest potential tests. What seems more likely, however, is that under the conditions that would raise the issues, Israel would use its nuclear weapons in its defense, and do so with relative impunity, which is why the conditions are unlikely to arise.

A Nuclear Weapon Is Exploded in Downtown Manhattan. This final scenario picks up where the discussion of nuclear crises left off. The threat to explode a 10-kiloton weapon in New York (or in another population center in the United States or elsewhere) has been carried out.

What happens next?

The question of how to handle a terrorist group was discussed earlier. Such a group could be undeterrable and unpunishable if it remained anonymous as in the case of the bombing of Pan Am 103, or as seems to have been intended at the World Trade Center Towers. Anonymity makes coercive terrorism difficult, however. It is still not clear what political objective the bombers of 103 and the Towers were trying to accomplish. Once anonymity has been shed so that the terrorist group could be identified, however, states “harboring” nuclear terrorists would be treated by the proclamation as first-order nuclear offenders. Problems and ambiguities would inevitably exist. Intelligence agencies generally know pretty well who is harboring whom, but is “pretty well” enough for nuclear retaliation? This must be counted as among the uncertainties that make UD less than perfect.

In any case, for the scenarios here in which the terror threat is part of an escalatory chain that has started with first use elsewhere, identifi-
cation would not be an issue. Rather, the central question remains: What is to be done after the weapon goes off in New York?

The answer is clear and brutal, and understanding the answer in advance should be an effective deterrent: The population centers of the offending state will be attacked with the weapons of a nuclear superpower and the destruction returned manyfold. The morality/immorality of such a response was discussed earlier. It is the same morality as in the hypothetical nuclear exchanges of Cold War theology. Counter-city was always the ultimate sanction. Nobody ever knew whether it would have been implemented; the theology and structure of deterrence helped prevent it from ever coming close.

**Summing Up the Scenarios**

It is clear from the scenarios that Uniform Deterrence would not work in the same ways, or equally well, in different kinds of crises. The eight scenarios can be divided into three groups, one of which has two subgroups.

- **Nuclear attacks by small nuclear states upon larger ones.** (Pakistan on India, small-state retaliation on a U.S. city, Iraq on U.S. installations.) These cases illustrate the nuclear weapon as "equalizer," and the scenarios suggest that the equalizing role may be overplayed. In each case, the larger power can crush the smaller, and lacking UD it seems likely that if the smaller state has the temerity to use nuclear weapons, crushing will be the outcome. True, the smaller one may still want to keep nuclear weapons as a suicidal deterrent, as France did through the Cold War even in the knowledge that it could have been obliterated by the Soviet Union in a final showdown. The deterrence potential even of such suicide may mean that small nations in this situation may want to have nuclear weapons, but does not mean that in the final analysis they will use them. *If Uniform Deterrence can prevent such use, or can punish it without a second use of nuclear weapons (e.g., as in the India/Pakistan case), UD will have made a major contribution. Otherwise, however, it can add little but moral sanction to the response potential of the larger powers that might be attacked with nuclear weapons.*
• **Nuclear attacks by larger states upon smaller ones.** (China on India.) This class of scenario may seem even more implausible than the others; why should a large power use nuclear weapons against a small one that presumably could be defeated conventionally? The answer is that the large power may be limited by geographical factors or may be hollow in terms of conventional force, and conventional defeat may be not only embarrassing but strategically dangerous. Because the large power may have a significant nuclear arsenal however (e.g., China, Russia), UD enforcement by the United States and its allies could run the danger of significant retaliation. *Uniform Deterrence could thus be dangerous if the punishment had to be implemented, but even the existential possibility that it would be implemented might serve to deter the already unlikely development of such events.*

• **Nuclear attacks by small states upon other small states.** This is the category to which UD is most applicable. The category is divided in two by a moral calculus that may be blurry or even unjust, but remains conventional and convenient, at least for purposes of explication.

  — **Defensive** use of nuclear weapons. (Israel against Arab invasion.) UD is least likely to succeed against small nuclear states in imminent danger of extinction. (Israel may be the only current case in point, but it is not the only possible one.) This example puts into the sharpest form the question of whether the enforcers of UD really want to give absolute priority to the objective of preserving the nuclear firebreak. Would the United States or another great power punish Israel or another state for using nuclear weapons as an absolute last resort? Probably not. One of the Israeli scenarios, however, suggested a less than final use of Israeli weapons; that may be more likely to be deterred by UD, and to be punished, at least to some degree, if undertaken. *Uniform Deterrence is least likely to succeed in these extreme cases, but even here it may be useful on the margin—decreasing somewhat the variety of events for which nuclear weapons might be used, and the speed with which the decision to use them would be taken.*

  — **Offensive** use of nuclear weapons. (Syria against Israel.) This is the category in which UD is most likely to succeed; it may
also be the most important category. UD cannot be perfect; it is not likely to deter irrationality. But for a leadership or a state with some substantial ability to achieve a rational calculus, the possibility of U.S. punishment, likely to exist anyhow for most of these cases, reinforced by the announced U.S. intention to do so and reinforced by international sanction, can play a powerful role in deterring what might otherwise take place. These cases are central to Uniform Deterrence.

What it comes to is that if ever the crisis state or the punishment stage is reached, Uniform Deterrence is not likely to be uniformly successful, or even uniformly applied. It should work best, however, for the cases that can be most dangerous because, lacking UD, they would be most probable—the use of nuclear threats and nuclear attacks by small (on a world scale) aggressors who might think that they could otherwise get away with it. It is least likely to work against states, like Israel, that see nuclear weapons as the only means of self-preservation.

In order to be uniform and acceptable, and to achieve its major purpose of avoiding crises, UD must be announced, planned, and contemplated uniformly—against an Israel about to be pushed into the sea as well as an Iraq or a North Korea trying to expand its power or ideology. The basis for such uniformity is the world’s prime interest in avoiding nuclear war. It may not be implemented in all cases, but the possibility that the policy may be less than perfect, or even less than equitable, if it fails to avoid crisis and must therefore be invoked, is not a telling argument against it.

That is the bottom line on implementation of UD punitive response: Nobody can know for sure. UD punishment is subject to the inherent paradox of nuclear deterrence, the one perhaps caricatured but nonetheless highlighted by Wohlstetter’s interpretation of Father Kehir’s view—that deterrent threats must be always believed but never executed. In Uniform Deterrence as in Cold War deterrence:

• Implementation of the ultimate form of the ultimate response must be taken seriously.
• Taking it seriously contributes to the strong likelihood that it will never be invoked.
• If invoked, the fact that it was taken seriously makes implementation possible.
• But, short of a doomsday machine, nobody knows for sure whether it will actually be implemented.
CONCLUSION: THE ACCEPTABILITY AND ADOPTABILITY OF UNIFORM DETERRENCE

We can deter for our own safety, and we do because we must. But do we have to run nuclear risks for Israelis, Indians, Russians, etc. . . . ? (The) question of American public support for UD is important, not open-and-shut . . . .

—McGeorge Bundy

Since this report is intended primarily to initiate consideration of Uniform Deterrence, the real answers as to its acceptability by the world and its adoptability by the United States will come in the discussion of the report, not the discussion in the report. This chapter is divided into three parts, concerning (1) doubts about UD because of disagreement on priorities of objectives, (2) potential doubts about UD in spite of agreement on objectives, and (3) the initial examination of how the issues raised may affect the acceptability and adoptability of the policy.

DISAGREEING WITH MCNAMARA

The basic axiom is that the nuclear firebreak remains of supreme importance to the United States as well as the rest of the world. It would then follow that, since the world has no other state capable of

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1 Private communication, December 1992.
monitoring and enforcing the break, the United States must perform
the sheriff’s role of organizing and leading, if anybody is to do it.

The most telling counter-contention is based on rejection of the ax-
ion. If one disagrees with McNamara—if the use of nuclear weapons
is legitimate for purposes other than deterring the use of nuclear
weapons—then first use by someone can be acceptable under some
conditions, and Uniform Deterrence will be unjustified. During the
Cold War, most U.S. policymakers and deterrence analysts accepted
that extended deterrence, with its threat to use nuclear weapons as a
last resort against Soviet aggression on Western Europe, was
necessary to the vital interests of the United States. Now that the
threat of such aggression no longer exists, many who previously saw
the necessity of extended deterrence (including this author) can find
no other threat to U.S. interests that would transcend the dangers of
any first use of nuclear weapons, by the United States or anyone else.

That is axiomatic rather than arguable, however. Other Americans
believe that the possibility of even a nonnuclear threat to our allies—
Israel or Japan or South Korea—justifies the continuation of ex-
tended deterrence. Some suggest that first nuclear use may be legit-
imate to deter or punish the use of other weapons of mass destruc-
tion. For these groups, the axiom must be rejected and so must be
Uniform Deterrence.

Indeed, outside the United States, the transcendent importance of
avoiding the use of nuclear weapons may be quite unclear to non-
superpower states that consider these weapons to be the last guaran-
tee of their national survival. Nuclear weapons may appear to them
as the great equalizer. France was once in that category, although
like the United States it may be difficult now to find any still-existing
threat that would justify nuclear use (which does not mean, for
France any more than the United States, that possession must now
be rejected). Israel still remains in a similar situation. Under the cur-
rent political situation in the Middle East, no attempt to proscribe,
deter, or punish first use of nuclear weapons is likely to be consid-
ered by most Israelis to be in their interest. That does not necessarily
mean that Israel’s U.S. allies should reject UD as being against their
own interest. It does mean that world acceptance of UD—and U.S.
acceptance as well—will not be a simple issue. It is discussed further
at the end of this chapter.
AGREEING WITH McNAMARA

Putting the avoidance of nuclear war at the very top of the list of priorities, however, hardly ends the argument. The two key questions remain: Will it work? Is it worth the risks? For neither can the answers be absolute. This report has stressed throughout that the world carries no absolute guarantees. Would UD forever prevent nuclear war? Of course not; the real question is whether it would reduce the probability and by how much. Similarly, the policy is not risk free, but how great would the risks be, and how would they balance off against the potential advantages? This chapter presents an initial list of the considerations on both sides.

In considering whether UD will work it is necessary first to be clear what working consists of. As discussed throughout the report, deterring the use of nuclear weapons in an international crisis can be defined as “working” only in a second-order sense; punishing their use if deterrence has failed is tertiary. Rather than these, the most important criterion is avoiding the crisis that might invoke the threat of nuclear use; if crisis-prevention works, the next steps do not count. That is why many of the potential arguments against UD—that if push comes to shove, it will not be invoked by the deterrers or will be ignored by the deterrees, possibilities that are illustrated by some of the scenarios of Chapter Three—may be substantially discounted. Both because in many cases it should work in crisis, and because existential uncertainties mean that nobody can be sure that it will not work even in the more difficult cases, UD may be a potent instrument for crisis avoidance. It is so argued here, but it cannot be proven. The possibility of UD failing to avoid crises cannot be set aside, nor can the fact that it is not likely to work for all cases if and when it is invoked in a crisis.

All this was discussed in more detail in Chapter Three; it is reiterated here that the working of UD is an open question, but one that must be defined correctly, with the stress on crisis avoidance rather than crisis utilization.

The risks of UD are even more difficult to evaluate. They will exist, and although the probable risks of UD and those of no UD can be examined relatively objectively, the balance of which risks to take is a matter for subjective consideration by the putative risk takers.
Specifically, were the United States to take the lead in proposing Uniform Deterrence, and were implementation ever called for, that would incur some risk, otherwise avoidable, of nuclear retaliation against U.S. soil or citizens. The risk seems from here to be miniscule. As discussed in Chapter Three, its probability would be the product of three already small components: the probability of reaching the tertiary stage of the deterring/punishing powers having to implement; the probability that the retaliator would be technically capable of attacking the United States with nuclear weapons (perhaps by clandestine means of delivery); and the probability that the retaliator would be willing to risk a potential multifold response by U.S. military might. This would not be the Cold War, where both sides had approximately equal capabilities and fears.

Even so, none of this reduces to zero the possibility of ultimate horror within the territory of the United States, or lesser risks that might be avoided by non-involvement—nuclear attack on U.S. troops or installations outside home territory, nonnuclear terrorism of all varieties, economic retaliation exemplified by the oil boycotts of the 1970s.

What is argued in favor of UD is not that these risks do not exist, but that non-involvement carries its own balancing risks. The last paragraph summarizes, not merely the arguments against Uniform Deterrence, but the classical arguments against any kind of international involvement. For the last half century, however, the United States has been involved, in the words of the Defense Planning Guidance, to the "extent particular challenges engage our interests." It is argued here that the long-run interest of the United States and the world in avoiding the crossing of the nuclear firebreak outweighs the shorter-run risk of retaliation. The contention is that, over the years, the possibility that nuclear warfare may come to be considered no worse than an extreme form of any other kind of war is more dangerous than the risk of a single small nuclear retaliation at the end of an unlikely chain of events. In fact, a nuclear attack on the United States may be more likely to stem from non-blackmail terrorism (e.g., the bombing of the World Trade Center Towers) at a time when nuclear weapons have become "normal," than from a specific response to UD.
None of this is measurable, however; it is all necessarily subjective. Indeed, the subjective viewpoints of states other than the United States may be quite different. For those like the United States that risk far more from nuclear warfare than any possible gain they might get (the five big nuclear powers that make up the UN Security Council plus other wealthy nations), the short-run/long-run calculus should be similar to that of the United States. Smaller states with no likelihood of obtaining nuclear weapons ought to strongly favor UD, since they might otherwise become victims of nuclear threats or acts. For those that have or may hope to obtain weapons, however—precisely those that UD would be intended to deter from using those weapons—the balance will be quite different. The weapons are obtained for a purpose, offensive or defensive, and deterrence of their use will defeat that purpose. In considering how and whether Uniform Deterrence might be adopted as a world policy, this purpose will be a necessary consideration. In considering its acceptability to the American people, the amorality of UD with regard to the virtue of those deterred—of a stated policy applied equally to Iraqi aggression and Israeli defense—may also be a consideration.

ACCEPTABILITY AND ADOPTABILITY

Much of the discussion of the acceptability and adoptability of Uniform Deterrence has been included, explicitly or implicitly, in the examination of the arguments pro and con. The contention here is that it should be accepted internationally and adopted by the U.S. electorate because the arguments for outweigh those against. But that formulation is far too simple, and would be, even if the balance of the arguments were overwhelming, which they are not.

Without repeating all the substantive points, what are the major factors likely to determine international acceptability and U.S. adoptability, over the long run? (There is no illusion that a UD policy could be set forth very quickly.)

International Acceptability

The central international factors have already been mentioned:
• For the other enforcing powers, the calculus will be much like that of the United States, discussed next—national and world benefits from stability and preservation of the nuclear firebreak, as against national risks of retaliation and perhaps subordination of other objectives.

• States that are nonnuclear and likely to remain so (more likely if UD becomes world policy) should favor UD, even though its inevitable coloration as an imposed great-power policy may cause some grumbling.

• Small nuclear states most likely to be the targets of UD deterrence and enforcement may be the most unhappy, although those that claim—and believe—that their nuclear weapons are for defense against aggression only may be more accepting. Israel, which may detect a wink and a nod in the threat to enforce against its defensive use, could be willing to go along, while still maintaining its unadmitted nuclear arsenal. By the same token, the Arab states, even the most pacific, may have doubts. The greatest doubts would be among those states that, whether they agree or not, know that the United States and the other powers will define their use of nuclear weapons as aggressive, deterring which is the central object of UD.

In any case, the political arena, if Uniform Deterrence is to be taken seriously and ultimately adopted, will be within the great enforcing powers. The issues in most other such bodies politic are likely to resemble those within the United States.

**Adoptability by the United States**

For the United States, the central issue might be characterized as a very subjective discount rate. That is:

• The mind’s eye picture of terrorist nuclear retaliation against U.S. cities or U.S. forces is a vivid and horrible one, far worse than anything else than has ever happened to this country.

• The combined probability of UD coming to a crisis and the state under potential punishment having the technical capability of carrying out such retaliation, and that state’s willingness to do so
under the threat of total or near obliteration, is vanishingly miniscule—but not zero.

- The risks to the United States of a breach in the nuclear firebreak are less vivid; and the possibility of a nuclear attack on the United States stemming from terrorism in a nuclear atmosphere is less concrete than retaliation against a specific UD action. The general risks are longer run than the specific ones, in the sense that a lot of nuclear activity would have to take place throughout the world, over a period of time, before it became a direct risk to U.S. security.

- The contention here is that, lacking the steady-state, crisis-avoiding effects of Uniform Deterrence, the long-run firebreak-threatening chain of risks is almost inevitable. Or, at least, it is far more likely than the probability that UD, having been adopted, will be invoked to the stage of the vivid dangers. That contention is quite unprovable, however.

What combination of subjective probabilities assigned to the alternative sets of risks, and what discount rate could then choose one over the other, is impossible to calculate, and never will be calculated. But that is the issue.

It may be that, even assuming the balance of probabilities assessed here, vividness will win out among the American electorate and representative institutions. One partial reason does exist for thinking otherwise, however. As mentioned earlier, vivid theater and television movies such as *On the Beach* and *The Day After* had an important effect on public opinion during the Cold War. Yet, Americans did go along with Cold War deterrence in spite of the exaggerated belief that they might all fry as the result of a political dispute between the White House and the Kremlin (or even worse, because of an unprovoked “bolt from the blue”). If then, why not now?

That question does have an answer: The times are different, in two ways. First, post-Cold War deterrence, uniform or otherwise, faces no political danger/moral evil evaluated as were Soviet hegemony and Communism. Second, and probably more important, the combination of that danger/evil with a nuclear capability roughly the equivalent of our own made plausible to a significant majority of Americans that deterrence was the most effective way of avoiding the
vivid dangers. In a straight choice between “Red” and “Dead,” Red may have won out as pure preference, but the case that deterrence was the best way to avoid both poles was convincing to most people.²

The argument for Uniform Deterrence is subtler, but similar in character. If the case can be made, not that UD is a risk we must take to combat wickedness, but that it is the best way to avoid an ultimate nuclear threat to the United States, adoption will be possible.

This risk calculus is likely to decide whether UD is a serious policy, ultimately to be adopted. Two other possible issues should be mentioned, however. One, the fiscal costs of such a posture are always likely to be a consideration, but as suggested above, the marginal costs of UD are apparently trivial.

The second is an argument of morality and objectives. A general version asks whether the United States is willing now to take the avoidance of nuclear war as an objective above all others. A more specific question is illustrated by some of the scenarios set forth earlier: Would the United States, in advance contemplation or in fact, be willing to punish a “good” ally like Israel or South Korea for using nuclear weapons in extremis against a “bad” aggressor?

These are serious issues, but the adoptability of Uniform Deterrence is still likely to depend most heavily on the balance of risks perceived by Americans.

CONCLUSION

This study began with two questions:

- What do we mean by deterrence?
- Why and when should the United States assert the role of “world sheriff”?

Most of the discussion attempted to answer the first question, describing in some detail the ramifications of a policy of Uniform Deterrence of First Use of Nuclear Weapons. It was argued that such a policy would reduce the likelihood that the nuclear firebreak would be crossed, with the possible consequent open-ended danger of nuclear holocaust. UD would thus significantly increase the steady-state security of the United States and the rest of the world.

But it was also pointed out that if nuclear weapons were used in war, the United States and other nations would be faced with terrifying decisions. As with Cold War deterrence of nuclear attack and extended deterrence of conventional attack on Europe, UD is intended to minimize the likelihood of arriving at that point, but no form of deterrence comes with an absolute guarantee. It was further agreed that UD cannot realistically apply—or apply equally well—to all situations. It is not likely to suffice for deterrence of a state in desperation for its own existence.

Nonetheless, the central argument remains, not that Uniform Deterrence can be a perfect preventer of first use, but rather that, as with Cold War deterrence, the dangers diminished by UD greatly exceed the dangers incurred. That is arguable, but neither it nor its converse is in any way demonstrable; we return again to theology.

The other question is easier to answer. If first use is to be deterred, the United States must take the lead because only the United States can take the lead. Events since the collapse of the Soviet Union have proven that, even in far less than nuclear cases, if there is to be any sort of military enforcement of world law, through the UN or any other organization, the United States must lead.

It does not follow that the United States is obliged to take the lead whenever the norms of international relations are transgressed or even when established international law is clearly violated. The touchstone must be U.S. interests.

The central argument of this report is that avoiding a first crossing of the nuclear firebreak is a chief one of those U.S. interests. We end where we began, with Secretary McNamara’s manifesto to the world:

... nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatever. They are totally useless—except to deter one’s opponent from using them.