In their classic work *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, Alexander George and Richard Smoke noted that deterrence, although inherently complex in application, was conceptually simple: “the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits.”¹ George and Smoke explored the historical evolution of deterrence theory from its origins in theories about the balance of military power among states and coalitions to the advent of strategic bombing, whose coercive power was great even before nuclear weapons.² They argued that the nuclear revolution ushered in an era fundamentally different from those preceding it because of the new capability “to hurt an enemy grievously before (or without) destroying his military capability. . . . With the opening up of this possibility, the threat to hurt him could be separated—in fact and therefore in theory—from the threat to engage his forces.” Thus, “Deterrence was conceived in its modern sense when it became possible to threaten vast damage and pain while leaving opposing military forces intact.”³

*Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* was published in 1974, when the military context of the Cold War was dominated by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, within a deterrence regime largely bounded by nuclear weapons. Thus, a political-

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²Ibid., pp. 11–34.
military reality evolved in which “fear of escalation to global nuclear war was an inhibiting factor for both superpowers” and rules existed that “placed limits on what either superpower could safely do in situations where the other had clear stakes.”

Since the end of the Cold War, and the demise of the Soviet Union, the threat of large-scale nuclear war has largely receded and the United States has become the sole remaining superpower. Richard Haass argues that “liberated from the danger that military action will lead to confrontation with a rival superpower, the United States is now more free to intervene.” Indeed, the United States now possesses unprecedented conventional military capacity to carry out deterrent strategies because it has the capacity to launch crippling conventional attacks with virtual impunity on an adversary’s homeland and his deployed military forces—or to threaten such attacks as a form of coercion.

The changes in the international security environment that characterize the post–Cold War era, however, have also added complexity to the strategic equations facing the United States. Haass identifies five characteristics of the current environment that increase the “potential for international challenges and crises”:

- Less political control and a diffusion of political authority as a result of the breakup of the Cold War blocs.
- Nationalism defined by ethnicity, rather than political ideology or territory, that raises the specter of cross-border aggression, internal conflicts, and refugee and humanitarian crises.
- The revival of traditional great power politics, wherein allies and former foes are willing to act in their own narrow self-interest rather than for or against U.S. positions.

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5Ibid., p. 8. This is not to suggest, however, that conventional deterrence is a post–Cold War development. Even at the height of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, conventional military capabilities and threats often loomed large, notwithstanding the shadow of nuclear escalation.

6Ibid., p. 3.
• The relative weakening of the nation-state as a result of the increasing influence of nonstate actors (e.g., regional organizations, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, nongovernmental organizations, transnational corporations) challenging governmental authority.

• The international diffusion of military power as a result of the proliferation of advanced conventional and unconventional weapons of mass destruction (WMD).7

Thus, the United States, despite its unrivalled political and military power, faces an international security environment inherently more ambiguous and potentially less stable than at any time since the end of World War II. Furthermore, because of the inherent complexity of the situation—coupled with the absence of the organizing intellectual construct for the uses of national power that guided the containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War—the United States has found itself largely in a reactive posture, forced to deal with each challenge on a case-by-case basis as it arises, and often on short notice.8

Many policy questions indicate that the security environment will become increasingly complex and that the challenges facing the United States will further multiply in the future.9 Several of these come readily to mind. How will the United States deter, manage, and react to attacks on the U.S. homeland? What will be the U.S. response to the threat or use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons by an adversary? How can international alliances function in the absence of a common threat and with diffuse national interests among potential allies? What indeed are “vital interests” in the

7Ibid., pp. 3–5. In addition to the points Haass raises, there may also be instances where states or coalitions of states act in the absence of the United States in the pursuit of their individual or collective interests—e.g., the European Union.

8Ibid., p. 7.

absence of a threat to national survival or an ideological imperative? What is the “interest threshold” at which the United States will use military power as a coercive instrument? Policy options to address these questions, and others, must be crafted within the constraints of limited political will and resources.

Political will is a critical factor. Although the United States is much freer to decide when and where it will become involved in the absence of superpower confrontation, it faces several constraints. Some of these are self-imposed. Because of the apparent marginality of the national interests involved and the controversial nature of many post–Cold War uses of military power (and their potential to unravel, as they did in Somalia), it is more difficult to forge political consensus to support deployments that are often open-ended. An assertive Congress and ubiquitous media scrutiny complicate decisionmaking and "policymakers have less latitude to pursue policies that are controversial, uncertain in outcome, and potentially expensive, as military interventions tend to be."\footnote{Haass, Intervention, p. 7.} Finally, although the American public is far more willing to suffer military casualties in pursuit of important causes that offer the prospect of success than is often suggested, military operations in defense of minor interests will lose public support if they become expensive to carry out.\footnote{Eric V. Larson, Casualties and Consensus (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-726-RC, 1996).}

Resources are also a concern. The discussions of military readiness during the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign—readiness diluted in the views of many by frequent deployments to conflicts of limited interest to the United States—highlighted sensitivities in this area.\footnote{See, for example, Michael R. Gordon, “Bush Would Stop U.S. Peacekeeping in Balkan Fights,” New York Times, October 21, 2000, and “From Social Security to Environment, the Candidates’ Positions,” New York Times, November 5, 2000. Although much has changed in the U.S. security environment since late 2000, the issues and beliefs raised in these arguments continue to face defense policymakers.} Perspectives differ about the appropriate use of U.S. military forces in the future. On one hand, some advocate military engagement and forward presence as shaping forces and hedges against future
conflict. On the other hand, some believe that the armed forces of the United States should be focused on deterring and fighting wars and that long-term peacekeeping should be handled by other nations. Both perspectives, however, acknowledge resource limits. As Richard Haass has noted, although the United States is the sole remaining superpower, “We can do anything, but not everything.”

**METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to provide an introduction to the coercive use of conventional military power for military and civilian professionals involved in the practical application of such power, focusing on the relationship between force structure and coercive effectiveness. Here we define conventional military coercion as the use or the threat of use of conventional military force to deter or compel an adversary into complying with U.S. demands or to punish an adversary for actions already taken. This report employed two approaches to assess which force capabilities and conditions are most likely to coerce a potential enemy or lead to his early defeat. First, we reviewed the literature on coercion to identify relevant theory, developed working definitions, and located conflict databases and assessed their utility. Although we provide definitions for coercion that apply to all the elements of national power (diplomatic, economic, informational, and military), we concentrate on the utility of military power as a coercive instrument in deterrence and compellence—and if coercion fails, unconditional conflict termination. Second, we selected and analyzed cases (both U.S. and

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foreign, including successes and failures) that would provide insights into the utility of military forces for conventional coercion in four categories across the spectrum of military operations: stability and support operations (SASO), smaller-scale contingencies (SSCs), major theater wars (MTWs), and strikes and raids. The case analyses focused on

- assessing what form(s) of coercion, if any, were involved;
- distilling insights about why the coercion was successful or unsuccessful;
- describing the military forces employed in each case and determining which of their capabilities were most effective; and
- deriving insights from the cases that should be relevant in the future.

The next chapter of this report examines the theory of coercion on several levels, ranging from basic definitions to more detailed exploration of factors that affect an enemy’s motivation to fight. It emphasizes the importance of combining assessments of an adversary’s military capabilities with an understanding of his will to prevail in a coercive confrontation instead of treating these as separate issues. Chapter Three discusses the case studies, describing how they were selected and what they reveal about the use of military force in coercion across the spectrum of operations. In keeping with the focus of this project, the case study analyses emphasize the impact of the types of military forces employed on the success or failure of coercion strategies. Chapter Four concludes the analysis by discussing the implications of these theoretical and historical conclusions for the use of U.S. conventional military forces in the future. Finally, the Appendix provides narrative descriptions of the cases examined in Chapter Three, including descriptions of the forces employed in them, to provide historical context for readers not familiar with some of the cases and to serve as a starting point for those who may wish to explore these cases in greater detail.