

ONE

Introduction

Expanding the Competitive Space

ACROSS THE LAND AND AROUND THE WORLD, a debate rages over Russia's return and China's rise.¹ These challenges require a multifaceted policy response to address problems ranging from theft of intellectual property and advanced technology, to election meddling and other attempted subversions of modern democracies, to the promotion of authoritarianism and mercantilism. A wide range of resolute Western responses is needed. Attempts at dialogue and cooperation and the development of ideas for new security architectures also merit consideration.² The challenges will, however, be longlasting and profound. The Trump administration has rightly highlighted such concerns in its 2017 *National Security Strategy* and 2018 *National Defense Strategy*.

But over what issues might war against Russia or China erupt? And if war were to occur, how might it be contained before it took the world to the brink of thermonuclear catastrophe? These are the concrete questions, set within the broader context of hegemonic change and great power competition, that this book attempts to answer.

Specifically, I examine how a localized crisis started or stoked by Moscow or Beijing could expand and escalate. It is my contention that, especially in this period of history, such conflicts pose the greatest risk to

great power stability and world peace. The signature case, which I have adopted for the title of the book, concerns the uninhabited and disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, claimed by both Japan and China. But the general problem has many possible manifestations.

That one of these potential adversaries would launch a bolt-from-the-blue, all-out attack against a U.S. ally seems much less likely than such limited aggression. It is hard to imagine a major Chinese invasion of the main islands of Japan or the metropolitan area of Seoul in South Korea, for example. And for all of Vladimir Putin's recent adventurism, the forcible annexation of an entire NATO country, even a small Baltic state, strikes most as implausible. Such attacks, even if initially successful, would and should risk massive responses by the United States and its allies.³ President Donald Trump's tepid support for NATO, and for U.S. alliances in general, may muddy the deterrence waters somewhat. But even under his presidency, U.S. alliance commitments remain formally in place and American troops remain forward deployed from Korea and Japan to the Baltics and Poland. It would amount to a huge roll of the dice for an aggressor to seek to conquer any one of these states. To be sure, U.S. defense policy should continue to display resoluteness and create capacities of the type needed to deter such large-scale attacks, not just wishfully assume them away. But on balance, deterrence failure on such a massive scale seems very unlikely. Strong American-led alliances, conventional and nuclear deterrence, and economic interdependence all militate strongly against any conscious decision by an adversary to initiate large-scale war.

However, smaller tests of U.S. and allied resolve by Beijing or Moscow and more patient, incremental challenges to the existing global order that do not threaten the lives or main territorial possessions of America's friends and allies are much easier to imagine in the modern world, as I argue in more detail in chapter 2.⁴ With China and Russia both flexing their muscles near countries that the United States is sworn to protect, and both seeking to challenge and to modify the U.S.-led regional and global security orders that prevail today, the risks are real. The possibility exists that Washington could be forced to choose between risking war and appeasing Chinese or Russian aggression in ways that could ultimately lead to much graver threats to international peace.⁵

In the event of a limited enemy assault, what should Washington do? How could the United States together with key allies avoid a profound dilemma: either allow a direct attack against an ally or close friend to go

unaddressed, and thereby potentially watch the world order that it has helped construct since 1945 gradually slip away, or risk nuclear war over stakes that seem too small to warrant such a cosmic roll of the dice? This is the “Senkaku paradox” to which my title alludes. In the event of limited enemy aggression, a large-scale U.S. and allied response could seem massively disproportionate—but a nonresponse would be unacceptable, and inconsistent with American treaty obligations as well. It seems that Washington could be faced with two equally senseless and unacceptable options.

Without suggesting that America or its allies formally renounce the possibility of a direct response to liberate allied territory, I propose that an asymmetric defense—for purposes of deterrence and, should deterrence fail, for purposes of response—would be more effective. It would combine military elements with economic warfare. The military components would feature strengthened forward defenses, and perhaps limited military options against Russian or Chinese assets in other theaters. The instruments of economic warfare would include offensive elements, notably various types of sanctions that might evolve and expand with time during a crisis and perhaps beyond.⁶ Such economic instruments would also have to include defensive measures to ensure the resilience of the United States and its allies against possible enemy reprisal.⁷

In recent years, the United States has taken some steps to improve deterrence in key regions. For example, President Obama’s European Reassurance Initiative and subsequently President Trump’s European Deterrence Initiative have been modest but prudent measures. Some new ideas in defense planning, such as the U.S. Army Operating Concept and the Defense Department’s “Third Offset” in the later Obama years, as well as then Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis’s *National Defense Strategy* more recently, have refocused the defense community on deterring great power conflict.⁸

Deterrence may still not be robust for certain crucial scenarios, however. Potential aggressors may doubt America’s will to risk war over inherently small stakes. Perhaps conflict might erupt in a city in the eastern part of a Baltic country—one like Narva, Estonia. Or perhaps it could happen in a much smaller town, which Russian “little green men”—troops in unmarked green uniforms—might seize on false pretenses. Or perhaps China might occupy an uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu island in the East China Sea on the pretext of rescuing marooned fishermen or the like.

Other contingencies are also easy to imagine. One might be a par-

tial Chinese blockade of Taiwan, a scenario considered at some length in this book. Another might begin with a Chinese military occupation of the disputed Scarborough Shoal, claimed by both the Philippines and China—especially germane if the U.S.-Philippines security partnership is repaired in coming years so that the bilateral treaty again clearly implicates the United States in the defense of the Philippines. Even more blatant and unambiguous might be a violent Chinese attack on Filipino fishermen seeking to fish in waters near the shoal or on Filipino naval vessels defending those fishermen.⁹ Yet another scenario might involve Russian hazing of a NATO ship that resulted in an accident and the inadvertent loss of dozens of NATO lives. These last two types of incidents might be especially problematic if Russia or China, rather than apologizing or attempting redress, threatened to attack any other ships entering the same waters in the future. Russia and the United States could wind up in a skirmish in Syria, perhaps, too. A more comprehensive Russian attack on Ukraine could create similar dilemmas. Although Ukraine is not a formal treaty ally, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum did commit Washington (along with London and Moscow, ironically) to help uphold Ukraine's defense. The commitment was not ironclad enough to persuade the United States to retaliate with its own military in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea or Russian aggression in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. But it might be seen as sufficiently binding that Washington would not watch the heartland of Ukraine invaded by Russia without attempting a strong response in reply.¹⁰

Today, it may seem less than essential that the Western alliance system counter any single limited act of aggression by Russia or China, insofar as no global expansionist ideology similar to communism animates their foreign policy. But precisely for that reason, Beijing or Moscow may compute that they could get away with seizing a small and seemingly unimportant piece of allied territory that the United States was sworn to defend. In general, the United States could not protect many such assets from an initial attack; its capabilities, and those of its allies, near the presumed areas of aggression are too limited.¹¹

Why are such scenarios worth worrying about? I do not mean to suggest they are necessarily imminent. But they are far from inconceivable. China or Russia could have many motives to consider such risky action. They might simply want to flex their muscles to boost national pride and assert prerogatives. They may hope to weaken American global leadership

together with U.S.-led alliance systems, and thereby enhance their own regional dominance near their respective borders. Even if they did not seek to overturn the existing order or threaten existentially a key American ally or interest, Washington could not be sure. It would have to worry about a worst-case scenario. Because the American proclivity toward activism and assertiveness in national security policy has become deeply ingrained in the nation's foreign affairs DNA since World War II, there would be a substantial chance of a very strong—possibly even excessive—U.S. response. A major war could develop out of an initially very small-scale aggression.

The state of technology, and expected trends in future innovation, compound the problem. Deployment of large U.S.-led military force packages into the lion's den of the western Pacific near China's coasts or into the Baltic region of Europe near Russia is becoming a harder and harder proposition to entertain. The spread of the type of precision technology that the United States once effectively monopolized accounts for much of the reason why. The problem is exacerbated by other technological realities or near-term weapons possibilities, such as miniaturized robotics that function as sensors or even weapons, individually or in swarms; small satellites that could function as clandestine space mines against larger satellites; homing antiship missiles, and various types of superfast hypersonic missiles in general; and threats to computer systems from both traditional human-generated hacking and artificial intelligence (AI)-generated algorithms. On balance, it will probably become increasingly difficult to project large military forces near another great power's territory. This is not quite the same thing as arguing that the "offensive-defensive balance" will tilt in favor of defense at all times and under all conditions, or even that there is a single offensive-defensive balance of general validity. But a plethora of relatively small, fast, precise, inexpensive, autonomous weapons could threaten large exposed objects such as ships, planes, ports, and rail lines—to say nothing of other fixed infrastructure, such as fiber-optic cables, electricity-generating equipment and transmission lines, bridges and tunnels, and other infrastructure of crucial importance to modern militaries on the move.

This book wrestles with the fundamental strategic dilemma of how to address small-scale enemy attacks with large strategic consequences in an era of rapid technological change. It attempts to look beyond current debates over matters such as trends in the U.S. defense budget, the size of the U.S. Navy, the enforcement of "red lines" from Syria to the South

China Sea, and other immediate issues in U.S. national security policy. Such issues are all important, to be sure.¹² But even if these matters trend favorably in America's direction, the conundrum of how to protect distant allies against limited attacks by regionally powerful adversaries will remain. The problems will also remain even if countries like the Baltic states and Taiwan expand their self-defense capabilities (as all of them should). China's rise, Russia's revanchism, the tyranny of geography, and trends in modern weaponry virtually ensure it.

Washington needs better, less escalatory, and thus more credible options for such limited but serious scenarios. They should not formally displace existing policy, under which there is a strong implication of prompt U.S.-led military action to liberate any allied territory that might be attacked or seized by an aggressor. This current policy may have deterrence benefits, as well as reassurance benefits for allies, so it should not be formally scrapped. Indeed, it is important to avoid comments like President Donald Trump's, after the July 2018 Helsinki summit, when he raised doubts about U.S. willingness to defend a NATO ally like Montenegro.¹³ But such commitments may well prove inadequate. They may not be fully credible, even with an American president less inclined to question publicly the wisdom of U.S. alliances. They also may not give U.S. and allied policymakers sufficiently flexible and smart options in the event of deterrence failure. Thus the new paradigm I propose here is intended to complement existing concepts and plans. Rather than supplant existing concepts for deterrence and warfighting, it seeks both to repair weaknesses in their credibility and to avoid unnecessary dangers that could result from their prompt implementation. Under the new paradigm, the United States and its allies would not be obliged to fire the first shot, or to quickly escalate after a hypothetical Russian or Chinese aggression. They would have indirect and asymmetric options.

By adopting a more complex and multidimensional approach to national security policy that made fuller use of economic instruments of national power, Washington would in a sense just be catching up with Beijing and Moscow.¹⁴ Russia has used economic punishment tactics against Ukraine in the energy and banking sectors, employed cyberattacks against a number of NATO countries, and interfered in Western elections through various methods of information warfare. China has used economic coercion against a number of its neighbors. It banned shipments of rare earth minerals to Japan for a time in 2010, froze imports of Norwegian salmon

after the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo won the Nobel Peace Prize that same year, restricted imports and tourists from the Philippines in a dispute over the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea in 2012, and punished South Korea economically after the deployment of a U.S. THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense) missile defense system to the latter in 2016–17.¹⁵ It has also stolen intellectual property from more advanced nations, not only to enhance its own economy but also to close the military-technological gap with the West. These countries realize that economics is often at the heart of security strategies. The United States itself has understood this same fact very well in the past, such as during the Cold War. Thus I am not proposing a radically new theory so much as suggesting we dust off, enhance, and expand old ideas for modern times.

This strategy would integrate the twin concepts of deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. Deterrence by punishment would center on economic reprisal after an initial enemy aggression, though it could include military forms of cost imposition, too. Deterrence by denial would emphasize military power. It would *not*, however, be based on the unrealistic expectation that all initial enemy aggressions could be stopped or quickly reversed. It would instead seek to prevent any further conquests after an initial attack, especially those of a more strategically significant scale. It would do so by rapidly repositioning forces, establishing clear trip wires, and then ultimately deploying strong forward defenses in locations near the initial adversarial aggression.

By pursuing a strategy that included deterrence by punishment, the United States and its allies would seek to convince would-be foes they had more to lose than to gain from the successful use of force. Ideally, Russia or China would suffer more than the U.S.-led coalition imposing the costs, even if it retaliated in kind, as would have to be expected. But it is not essential that they suffer more than America and its allies, provided that the threat to apply such punishment was credible and sustainable. The Western world is collectively so much stronger than Russia or even China—indeed, even the China of 2030 or 2040—that an effective sanctions-based policy need not literally hurt the other side more than it hurts the initiator. What is important is that the punishment be commensurate in scale with the magnitude of the initial aggression and have the potential to be intensified and broadened. In addition, it should be both politically and economically sustainable, thus credible, and thus effective as a deterrent. For such punishment to be politically sustainable,

the nature of the adversary's aggression must be widely recognized as serious, even if it is small in initial scope. The economic pain associated with a sanctions-first response also needs to be seen as preferable to the risk of war. And for sanctions to be economically sustainable, the United States and its allies need to understand vulnerabilities in their supply chains, financial dealings, and other economic relationships and develop strategies in advance to mitigate those vulnerabilities.

Deterrence by denial is also important. Even if modest initial aggressions cannot be reliably prevented in all cases, it is essential that the real spoils of conquest—major allied territory, control of the commons in large swaths of the western Pacific or the Baltic Sea or Black Sea—be denied to Russia or China. Otherwise, if its initial aggression were successful, Moscow or Beijing might find its territorial appetite whetted enough to be tempted to confiscate more strategically important territories. China in the South China Sea and Russia in Ukraine have recently demonstrated that they are willing to challenge norms of global behavior in pursuit of their ambitions. But in such cases to date, they have not directly attacked U.S. allies. They are probably reluctant to do so, fearing the consequences. However, they may still take risks if they believe the immediate stakes are small enough that a major American and allied response would seem disproportionate and thus would not ultimately happen. The strategy I propose would address this dilemma by making deterrence more credible through a response that was more proportionate and less escalatory than a prompt, large-scale military counteroffensive of some sort.

And while it would be judicious as well as proportionate, a sanctions-based strategy would not be weak. Indeed, it could be gradually amplified and broadened, once the stakes were recognized to merit the associated pain and cost. Such a strategy might ultimately even lead to a fundamentally different kind of economic relationship with China or Russia over the longer term. Especially if a crisis persisted, with no attempt at reversal of the aggression or resolution of the dispute by Moscow or Beijing, the Western world might raise the stakes. It could seek not only to punish the perpetrator for its specific action but to limit the future growth of one (or both) of those powers, out of recognition that its strategic aims had become fundamentally untrustworthy or hostile. Export controls and permanent sanctions could replace temporary punitive measures over time.

This overall strategy requires military counteroffensive capabilities, too.¹⁶ Indeed, the United States needs to improve and increase its capa-

bilities in areas such as long-range strike and stealth, hypersonic weapons, missile defense, general resilience to enemy attack, and a number of other key technology domains. But advantages in these areas do not necessarily need to be so great as to guarantee successful forward defense of all allied territory, or a quick reversal of any aggression close to China's or Russia's territories. That is probably not a realistic goal in the era of precision strike, cyber- and space attack, robotics, and AI.

Even if it were achievable, insisting on prompt liberation of the notional small Estonian town or uninhabited Senkaku island could, in effect, destroy the village to save it. Such a direct counterattack might also greatly increase the danger of escalation, including to nuclear war. A Russia or China that found itself decisively losing a conventional conflict might choose to create nuclear risks or even utilize nuclear weapons tactically, in the hope of changing the conflict's course. Historically, a country's ambitions often escalate during war. As Thucydides underscored, this can happen for reasons of fear, interest, or pride. For Russia, its motives could be influenced by a sense that it was gradually becoming weaker—that time was not on its side—combined with bitterness over the course of post-Cold War history. For China, the strategic calculus could be informed by a powerful nationalistic view that its previous “century of humiliation” must never be repeated.¹⁷ Indeed, China increasingly aspires to play a central role on the world stage in global affairs, at least on par with the role of the United States, as reflected in conclusions from 2017's Nineteenth Communist Party Congress.¹⁸

In addition to such human passions, technical and operational dynamics could raise the risks of escalation. Warning and communications systems can fail or be overwhelmed during war, thereby making it harder for one or multiple combatants to control the battlefield. These risks are heightened when conflict occurs close to the territories and the main military assets, including warning and command and control systems, of a major power.¹⁹

These arguments echo views prominent during the Cold War, when Washington and Moscow knew it would be foolish to fight each other directly. That said, during the Cold War, war-winning strategies were prevalent in the early years. They survived in one form or another in nuclear-warfighting plans even during more recent decades. The fact that a military strategy is illogical or risky does not mean it will be repaired. Bad ideas often endure.

Today's American military establishment and national security community tend to hew to the belief that being able to defeat China or Russia in combat wherever an ally might be attacked is a realistic and essential goal. This prevalent opinion requires rethinking in light of fundamental technological trends and the military resources available to Russia and especially China. Secretary Mattis was likely correct when he argued, in releasing the Trump administration's *National Defense Strategy* in January 2018, that America's competitive edge vis-à-vis other great powers had been eroding in recent years. However, Trump administration officials may be wrong if they believe that a 10 percent increase in the U.S. defense budget, along with modest reorderings of current military priorities, can in and of itself change that fact—or change it enough to restore U.S. military preeminence in all regions immediately adjacent to Russian and Chinese territory. Trends in technology, combined with Russian and Chinese strategic ambitions and geographic advantages, require a fuller reconceptualization of American grand strategy. Even some of the most creative ideas in defense thinking today, such as those emphasizing the need for more distributed, stealthy platforms involving mixes of manned and unmanned systems with improved weaponry and electronic warfare assets, seem more likely to mitigate the trends in warfare and technology than to reverse them.²⁰ Operating effectively near a major power's territory in wartime will remain very hard—much harder, for example, than was the case for the United States near China's coasts throughout the twentieth century.

Sustaining a healthy measure of military preeminence is a worthy and desirable goal for American military planning. But general preeminence is one thing; being able to guarantee rapid victory anywhere, anytime is another. Recognizing this distinction—global military preeminence, yes; decisive war-winning capacity for any and all scenarios, perhaps not—is crucial. The latter aspiration probably is not attainable even with a doubling of the defense budget.

Article 5 commitments within NATO and the U.S.-Japan alliance are typically interpreted as absolute and inflexible, especially within American defense and national security circles. Article 5, which commits all allies to action if any one of them is attacked, is the essence of NATO's mutual defense pledge. A somewhat similar Article 5 is the backbone of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as well, and a related kind of stipulation is found in Article 4 of the U.S.-Philippines military and defense accord. Specifically, NATO's Article 5 reads as follows: "The Parties agree that an armed

attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”²¹ The language in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States from 1960 reads: “Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.”²² The 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines states: “Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes.”²³ Any incursion onto any part of an ally’s territory is to be treated as a fundamental threat to that country’s security and to alliance credibility and cohesion. But none of these provisions automatically commits the United States to a specific type of counterattack. We have every right, and reason, to be creative and smart—and, as former Secretary Mattis underscores, unpredictable—in our chosen means of retaliation.

Today, U.S. military commands make little use of the economic instruments of warfare. Experts on economic warfare are rarely embedded within combatant commands and have limited sway within the DoD in general. The U.S. government is mostly stovepiped when it comes to combining economic, diplomatic, and military instruments of power in contingency planning.²⁴ Sanctions and related tools are generally seen as the policy domain of agencies such as the Treasury Department, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. However, these latter entities probably do not feel they have the prerogative to develop strategies for economic warfare. NATO is afflicted by similar limitations as the U.S. government; almost assuredly, so are virtually all other American allies. The result is a situation aptly described by former State Department official Edward Fishman when he wrote in 2018 that “U.S. officials almost never design sanctions

until crises are already under way.”²⁵ Nor is it likely that U.S. officials sufficiently contemplate the question of the potential vulnerability of the U.S. economy to adversarial actions that might take place during protracted economic warfare.

For some defense planners, it may seem inappropriate to think too much about economics. After all, that is the “turf” of other agencies in the U.S. government. What business do military experts have integrating economic matters into war plans? The reason that they must do so, in full and ongoing consultation with other parts of the government, is straightforward, however. Otherwise the U.S. government’s only strong and serious recourse to an enemy aggression might be an escalatory military response that would run the high risk of leading to all-out war. War planners will do their country no favor if that is the result of their polite efforts to avoid thinking hard about instruments of national power that seem outside their own bailiwick. As Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris rightly argue, “Despite having the most powerful economy on Earth, the United States too often reaches for the gun instead of the purse in its international conduct.”²⁶ There may also be situations, such as the kinds of scenarios considered in this book, in which both the gun *and* the purse should be employed by the United States and allies. Nonetheless, future presidents should not expect the DoD to run roughshod over other departments’ perceived prerogatives or territories. They should themselves instruct the whole of government to work together, requiring nonmilitary agencies also to contribute expertise and personnel to the kind of analysis and preparation that this strategy requires, both at DoD combatant commands and within their own home institutions.

Ignoring economics as a routine part of war planning is not only wrong-headed, it is dangerous. An example of what can then result is AirSea Battle, a popular concept in recent years. (Formally, it has since given way to a DoD idea known as the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons, but it is not clear what the latter does differently from the former.) AirSea Battle had some good aspects. But it was also strongly associated with several think tank proposals to attack targets on the Chinese mainland early in a possible conflict.²⁷ That approach could have been highly escalatory in a number of scenarios. Even if formal war plans do not currently incorporate such ideas, those war plans could be quickly changed by a secretary of defense or a president who had been influenced by more offensive theories of victory, just as the war plans for invading Iraq were

quickly and radically changed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld prior to the start of that war in 2003.²⁸

An indirect, asymmetric, nonkinetic approach to certain types of aggression may also elicit stronger allied support than an immediate resort to military force. The world's recent experience with applying sanctions against Iran, Russia, and North Korea gives some basis for hope in this regard. Pertinent here are the findings of a poll conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 2015, shortly after the Russian attacks on Ukraine, when moral outrage was still fresh in people's minds. Nonetheless, the survey revealed a deep ambivalence among many NATO citizens about whether a hypothetical Russian aggression against an eastern member state should lead to a NATO military response. Indeed, clear majorities in a number of countries expressed opposition to any such action.²⁹ (Yet strong sanctions were supported.) As the alliance has expanded eastward, farther from original NATO nations and closer to the Russian heartland, the uncertainty about when NATO would really be willing to fight to defend all its members has likely continued to grow. This may be particularly true for aggressions that are limited in geographic scope, duration, and lethality.

Basing a U.S. national security strategy on asymmetric response, without ensuring prompt liberation of occupied allied territory, may seem defeatist to some Americans and some allies. But that kind of approach effectively formed much of the basis of the containment strategy during the Cold War. Militarily, the West sought to prevent further Soviet conquests, after a number of them had already occurred. Tragically, that did not do much to ensure the independence and sovereignty of much of eastern Europe, which had to wait decades for its freedom. In broad foreign policy terms, however, this approach turned out to be an extremely successful long-term strategy for promoting democracy, prosperity, and peace. The military instruments provided a bulwark against further aggression well enough for the economic, diplomatic, political, and cultural instruments of America and its allies eventually to produce victory—and what became the most prosperous and stable international order the world had ever known. So playing good defense with military policy is a time-tested and sound philosophy that can allow the softer, quieter tools of power and influence, including economics, to shape the world in favorable ways. This is particularly the case when an enemy attacks territories or interests that are modest in scale, scope, strategic significance, and in their

direct bearing on the lives of citizens in allied nations. Economic sanctions do not typically compel changes in adversarial behavior quickly, and they sometimes do not produce such results at all. But when the stakes involve unoccupied territories or other very modest interests, a patient strategy can make sense. Moreover, the combination of additional forward military deployments and economic sanctions can signal resoluteness. It can also create military conditions that deter further aggression without unnecessarily risking war or escalation in the meantime. For Americans and America's allies, this should be seen as a preferred outcome compared with the alternatives.

Some might counter that today's global order is in such dire danger that to countenance any tolerance of any act of aggression against a U.S. ally or close security partner would be even more dangerous than in more normal times. They might also worry that to suggest anything less than full readiness to defend or liberate every inch of allied territory could raise questions in foreign capitals and lead some allies to doubt the commitment of the United States to their security. They might then seek their own recourse, such as the development of nuclear weapons arsenals.

I want to challenge such concerns on three fronts. First, a strategy involving asymmetric military and economic responses combined with reinforced forward defense would *not* be tantamount to tolerating the aggression. In fact, it could very well improve deterrence of adversaries—and thus reassure allies—by telegraphing a more credible Western response to possible aggression that discouraged the aggression in the first place. Moreover, in some cases such a strategy might constitute only the initial response, with more direct military action considered later if the initial aggression did not cease or even escalated. Again, this new strategy would not supplant existing policy, which implies a high probability of an immediate U.S. military response to aggressions against the territories or assets of allies and other close security partners. The United States should not telegraph in any detail which kinds of scenarios might ultimately lead to the use of military force—and, therefore, which other scenarios might not. My proposed paradigm is designed to increase available options, not foreclose them.

Taking this approach should also ease the challenge of persuading U.S. allies that adoption of the new strategy was not tantamount to weakening the American commitment to their defense. That said, concern for allies'

sensitivities should not be taken too far. If existing policy is not credible but is dangerous, *that* fact is the real problem, and the United States with its allies should seek to redress the problem together.

Some might claim that recent aggressions by China in the South China Sea or by Russia in Ukraine invalidate the plausibility of a sanctions-first deterrence strategy. After all, the argument might go, Russia is still present in Ukraine, and China continues to reinforce its military positions in the South China Sea after promising not to militarize the area several years ago. But these cases do not involve formal American alliances or clear mutual defense pledges. Moreover, it is not clear that deterrence against truly unacceptable actions by Russia or China has actually failed in the cases noted. Russia has not invaded a NATO ally (or overrun Ukraine's core populated areas and territories); China has not sought to impede other countries' access to the sea-lanes of the South China Sea, despite its "nine-dash-line" claim to the sea's waters. Most of all, it is important to understand that the kinds of American and allied responses employed in these cases have been mild compared with what is proposed in this book as part of a strategy of asymmetric defense. Were such a strategy adopted as part of official U.S. policy, it should improve further the likelihood that deterrence will work in the future in regard to key American allies and security partners.

Second, if it is militarily implausible that the United States and allies could ensure the prompt liberation of any and all allied territory that might be attacked, we cannot change that fact simply by denying it. Military balances have a reality and a meaning beyond our own preferences and perceptions. Reassurances to allies that ignore military realities are ultimately not meaningful reassurances at all, once it is understood that they cannot in fact be backed up. For certain scenarios, the stakes do not warrant the very high risks associated with a prompt military response, and some plausible military responses may not even be likely to produce victory for the United States and its allies.

Third, today's world, while under considerable stress, does not appear to be anywhere near the brink of strategic collapse. While we need to be resolute and vigilant, and aware of the need to shore up the global order, the United States and its allies also need to stay calm and respond proportionately to crises that may erupt, cognizant of their underlying assets and advantages.

Notably, although progress has plateaued of late, and been set back in places, democracies have become far more common than ever before. By Freedom House's definition, about 120 countries, or nearly two-thirds of the nations on the planet, qualified for the designation "electoral democracy" by the turn of the twenty-first century. Yes, there has been regression—but the net effect has been modest. In 2016, Freedom House assessed that 25 percent of all countries were not free, compared with 23 percent in 2006. This is an unfortunate development but not a catastrophic one; the world is not on the brink of a general democratic decline. Moreover, as Bruce Jones and I have underscored, if one considers the number of people living under a democratic form of government, rather than the number of democratic governments, there has been no setback at all. The fraction of people living in "free" countries rose modestly, from 44 percent to 45 percent, over the last dozen years. The fraction living in "not free" countries declined slightly over that period, from 37 percent to 36 percent. (The remainder live in countries evaluated as "partly free," and that figure has held steady.³⁰) Robert Kagan is surely right to warn that human progress to date is fragile, as cases such as Turkey and Hungary underscore, not to mention Russia.³¹ But we should remember the underlying strengths of the current global order, too.³²

In strategic terms, the United States leads a coalition or loose alliance of some sixty states that together account for some 70 percent of world military spending (and a similar fraction of total world GDP). This is extraordinary in the history of nations, especially by comparison with most European history of the last several centuries, when variable power balances and shifting alliances were the norm. Even in the absence of a single, clear threat, the NATO alliance, major bilateral East Asian alliances, major Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf security partnerships, and the Rio Pact have endured. Most of the countries in these alliances are democracies, moreover, and a well-accepted reality of international politics is that established, constitutional democracies rarely fight each other.³³ This fact may not provide much solace in handling the challenges posed today by Russia and China. But the underlying strength of much of today's global order should not be dismissed, nor should the strength of the U.S.-led community of democracies, which largely function together on key matters of war and peace, at least when the chips are truly down.

To be sure, this Western-led system is under stress economically and politically, and perhaps even in terms of self-confidence.³⁴ But it is worth

bearing in mind that this Western community of nations exists, with income levels far superior to those of China or Russia and with far more high-tech innovation than any other group of nations. Such a tilted distribution of global power is probably conducive to international stability as well.³⁵ Part of the reason for the Western community's longevity is surely that it operates in a way that allows individual nations to make their own choices, in real time, about when and how they will employ force in defense of the interests of the broader community of states as a whole.³⁶

The overall trajectory of the international community since World War II has been highly unusual by historical standards and highly beneficial to the planet. Because it is unusual, it should not be taken for granted. But it also has many strengths that improve the prospects of its durability.³⁷ Thus the case for a more patient strategy focused on economic punishment and forward defense, rather than on prompt military counteroffensives and the liberation of any seized territory, comports with the basic character of today's global order. It is under duress, yes. But it is also strong and resilient. It will remain stronger and more resilient if our military strategies play to our advantages, including on matters of military power, geography, and economics.³⁸ Indeed, many other countries may be more impressed by U.S. leadership if it is realistic, smart, and proportionate in handling potential threats to the global order rather than quickly seeing a Munich-like danger to the peace in any limited Chinese or Russian aggression and overreacting in a way that unnecessarily raises the risks of escalation to general war. Put differently, the United States may be more likely to lose partners and allies by overreacting, perhaps in unilateralist fashion, than by somehow being seen as purportedly leaving allies in the lurch after a limited attack.

To be sure, there are risks associated with the strategy I propose, beyond the fact that it could take time to achieve its goals. Economic warfare is itself dangerous and potentially escalatory. To take one prominent example: the wide-ranging and biting U.S. sanctions against Japan before World War II, however justified, were surely among the factors that convinced leaders in Tokyo to attack America at Pearl Harbor.³⁹ Sanctions need to be employed judiciously, with full awareness of their potential to worsen crises and a recognition of their limitations. But whatever their risks, economic instruments of warfare, even if combined with limited kinetic strikes, are inherently far less escalatory than major military campaigns conducted near or on the borders of major nuclear powers. Economic measures do not directly cause physical damage or bodily harm to

human beings; and to the extent they do so indirectly, the process generally takes time. As such, the potential for mistakes during confusing periods of crisis management is much reduced with a strategy relying more heavily on economics than on massive uses of military force near the national territories of other nuclear-weapons states. Moreover, most of the sanctions regimes proposed here will not quickly bring a large power like Russia or China to its knees. That is in many ways their chief limitation: there is generally no assurance, with the strategies proposed in this book, of a rapid reversal of the initial aggression. But by the same token, the sanctions regimes do not seem likely to raise the kinds of existential concerns for either Beijing or Moscow that could seem to require a military escalation or preclude the kinds of face-saving deals that could produce a negotiated end to the crisis. They would cause substantial pain; they might not achieve a strangulation-like effect. That is probably the right balance. The proposed strategies are designed to be proportionate to the scale of the initial attack and the magnitude of the resulting risks to the world order, neither underplaying nor overplaying their significance.

As for the final possible element of a strategy of asymmetric defense, namely, the limited use of American and allied military force, this choice would indeed be riskier than purely economic sanctions or nonlethal military deployments. That would be true even if such a strategy were employed in distant theaters and focused on achieving narrowly tailored objectives (and even if primarily nonlethal weapons were employed). Thus the use of military force would generally make sense only when the initial Russian or Chinese aggression had already drawn blood, crossing the threshold into significant violence, or continued over an indefinite period in a way that caused significant harm, as for example with a blockade of Taiwan.

The remainder of this book seeks to achieve two main purposes. First, in chapters 2 and 3, I analyze the difficulty and danger of scenarios in which China or Russia commits limited and local acts of aggression against American allies or close security partners. Chapter 2 examines the current world. Chapter 3, backed up by technical analyses presented in the appendixes, seeks to extrapolate the scenarios out to 2040, so that any new strategy will look far enough into the future to have durability. In chapters 4 and 5, I develop an alternative strategy of integrated defense and deterrence, combining military with economic elements, with a chapter on each main part of the overall approach. Chapter 6, the conclusion, summarizes my policy recommendations.