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INTERPOSITION

THE STRATEGY AND ITS USES

The strategy of interposition has increased relevance for the United States today in the light of recent growth in Soviet naval forces and strategic nuclear weaponry. The future may well see a confrontation between the two superpowers in which this strategy plays a vital role. Under these circumstances the theory of interposition and the capability of the Soviets to engage in it deserve careful attention

A research paper prepared

by

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INTRODUCTION

The true aim of a strategist "... is not so much to seek battle as to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce a decision, its continuation by a battle is sure to achieve this."

B.H. Liddell Hart

Prudent use of force in achieving an objective has always been recognized as one of the cardinal tenets of strategic theory. One strategy, here called interposition, optimizes the application of the economy of force principle and yet has received little historical research. Interposition is a means of denying an objective to an opponent without resorting to force by placing one's own forces between the opponent and the objective that he seeks. The act of

interposition thus increases the risk and cost of the objective to the opponent and requires him to reevaluate the expected gain in the light of the increased risk and cost. The impact of these two elements on the opponent hopefully deters him.

Alfred Thayer Mahan was the first to use the term in a strategic sense.¹ As a strategy, its use prior to World War II was limited. Since World War II, however, interposition—under a variety of names—has been successfully employed in crisis situations such as Formosa, Lebanon, and Kuwait. Interposition has proven particularly relevant where the objectives of both sides are limited and a large-scale commitment is undesirable. The strategy is not feasible where the opponent would consider the objective worthy of any level of risks or costs or where geographic factors make physical interposition impractical.

Although the strategy is applicable to crises on land, it has been undertaken more frequently in the maritime environment. This is due primarily to the mobility of naval forces and their ability to interpose without having to be physically present on the landmass of the third party. The fact that the majority of the underdeveloped nations of the world where "wars of national liberation" are likely to occur are on or near the coast makes it likely that most interposition engagements in the future will occur on or near the oceans.

The principle of economy of force is maximized in the strategy of interposition, as the strategy does not require a massive commitment of force. Furthermore, the main purpose of the strategy is to deny the objective to the opponent while avoiding the direct use of force.²

EXAMPLES OF INTERPOSITION

From 1719 to 1721 a series of land and naval engagements occurred between Russia and Sweden which were part of the conflict known as the Great Northern War. It then appeared that the Russians were on the point of gaining control of the Baltic and seriously reducing Sweden's power in the area. The British, concerned over the balance of power there, dispatched a fleet under Adm. Sir John Norris to the Baltic.

An analysis of the data available indicated that Admiral Norris' mission was to deny the Russians their objective but to achieve this, if possible, without the use of force. In a letter from the Earl of Stanhope to Admiral Norris, the initial peaceful intent of the mission was presented as follows:

You will, after sending a letter to the Czar by an officer, wait at Hanoc such a competent time as you may judge sufficient to receive an answer. If the answer be to your satisfaction, the King will obtain his end, in the manner he

likes best, of saving a brave people, without any loss of his own subjects. . . .³

These instructions were capably executed by Admiral Norris in 1719, and the Czar agreed to negotiate with the Swedes. However, when the British withdrew their force the following year, the Czar renewed hostilities. "The following year the interposition of England was repeated with greater effect . . ."⁴ before a treaty of peace was finally signed between Russia and Sweden. Mahan described the result of the interposition as follows: ". . . the Czar, recognizing the fixed purpose with which he had to deal, and knowing from personal observation and practical experience the efficiency of England's sea power, consented finally to peace."⁵

The Russians also were concerned over the possibility of escalation. In addition to the strong possibility that the British might have sent a greater force to the area, there was the added concern that the French would have entered on the side of Great Britain and Sweden, and that the Dutch, who had recently been forced by the British to agree to peace terms with Sweden, would have entered on the side of the Russians.

A more recent incident is the Chinese Communists' attempt during 1954-55, and again in 1958, to pressure the Chinese Nationalists over their presence in Formosa and the offshore islands. Threats were made by the Chinese Communists that they intended to "liberate" Formosa,⁶ and from time to time it appeared as if invasions of the Pescadores, Quemoy, and Matsu were imminent.

The United States, concerned over Chinese aggression in the Far East, interposed the 7th Fleet between the Chinese mainland and the Pescadores and Formosa. This interposition figured prominently in the evacuation of the Tachen Islands, in the defense of the

Quemoy-Matsu Islands, and in the forming of a defense perimeter around Formosa.⁷

The intent of the interposition was to deny the Chinese Communists their objective while avoiding the direct use of force.⁸ Avoidance of force was accomplished to some degree by the positioning of U.S. forces before the Communists were prepared to take decisive action. As E.B. Potter indicates, in the 1958 crisis, "... it is probable that the quick assembly of the U.S. Navy's Pacific power was the factor most responsible for averting a general war."⁹ A concerted effort was made, however, not to incite the Chinese Communists. U.S. forces refrained "... from any act that might be interpreted as 'aggression'—even to the extent of getting an agreement from the Chinese Nationalists not to bomb the mainland gun positions. . . ."¹⁰ The stated intent during all phases of the crises was to halt Communist aggression, not to seek out and destroy their forces. Yet the message was made clear to the Communists that if they attacked they would have to deal with the forces in place and with the possibility of escalation.¹¹

In addition to the U.S. forces in place, the U.S. commitment had been strongly supported by legislative acts and by Executive speeches. In 1955 Congress, by joint resolution, authorized the President to: "... employ the Armed Forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack. . . ."¹² The resolution was approved by the House of Representatives by a vote of 409 to 3 and by the Senate by a vote of 85 to 3. Through these actions and words, as Thomas Schelling notes, the United States was "... not merely communicating an intention or obligation we already had, but actually enhancing the obligation in the process."¹³ When the Communists again threatened the Nationalists in

1958, President Eisenhower made a strong speech in which he indicated that "... the United States cannot accept the results that the Communists seek."¹⁴

The positioning of the 7th Fleet in Formosan waters undoubtedly raised the ante for the Chinese Communists. The U.S. action has been labeled "brinkmanship."¹⁵ Regardless of the label, the interposition of the U.S. forces perhaps did deter the Communists from attempting an invasion of the Pescadores and Formosa. President Eisenhower, in his 1 September 1958 speech on the crisis, summarized the risk/gain calculation for the United States when he indicated: "There is not going to be any appeasement. I believe that there is not going to be any war."¹⁶

For the Communists, the risk outweighed the gains. John Beal sees the deterrence of the Communists as based on two factors: "... it was the knowledge that we had the capability to act coupled with the willingness to act that deterred the Communists."¹⁷

International interposition involves the use of an international force, such as the United Nations or the Organization of American States, backed not so much by threat as by strong moral suasion. The moral suasion provides the international organization with an effective deterrence through public opinion, goodwill, and, where necessary, condemnation. Several examples of international interposition are the positioning of U.N. forces between the Arabs and Jews over Palestine, between the Greek and Turkish communities over Cyprus, and between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir. International interposition requires the active, or at least passive, cooperation of both parties.

Protective interposition—the type being examined in this paper—includes such recent events as the interposition of British and Arab League troops in Kuwait and the interposition of U.S.

forces in Lebanon and possibly the Cuban missile crisis. Categorizing the Cuban missile crisis as interposition is tenuous, for although all of the basic ingredients are there, the events in the crisis allow for a wide range of divergent opinion and appear to be all things to all men. It is difficult to determine the deciding factor that forced the Russians to withdraw. Interposition does not require massive strength in place but is more dependent on the commutative threat aspects. If the Soviets withdrew because they were faced with a massive conventional force and that was the intention of the U.S. Government, then the incident is not a case of interposition. In contrast, if the Soviets withdrew because they were concerned about further escalation¹⁸ and realized that the onus of escalation was now on them, then the incident can be characterized as interposition.

Most of the cases of interposition have occurred since World War II.¹⁹ Analysis of the information available indicates that there are three reasons why this is true. Before modern transportation, distances were not so quickly or easily covered, and unless details of an impending attack were available well in advance, it was usually too late to interpose by the time the opponent's intention was disclosed.

The second reason for the paucity of interposition cases in the distant past is the tendency of historians to ignore pacific military action and, instead, concentrate on the military only when battles were fought. For example, the majority of British naval historians ignore the cited case of the British interposing between the Swedes and the Russians, even though this event probably had a significant impact on the balance of power in the Baltic. The avoidance of such pacific cases is perhaps also due to the tendency of early historians to record, not analyze, history. Thus the undramatic event was ignored, regardless of its impact.

Finally, some attempts at interposition may well have ended in total failure, and history has merely recorded the dramatic event of the battle which resulted.

The third reason interposition is of increased contemporary importance is directly related to the post-World War II period and the dilemma created by nuclear weapons in international affairs. The normal affinity of nation-states for establishing spheres of influence, manipulating the balance of power, and protecting their conceived international interests still exists. This normal affinity for competitive relations, however, is tempered by a fear of nuclear holocaust, and the perceived cost or risk involved in challenging interpositional forces has increased dramatically. Thus, although the objectives of international politics may be the same, the means are now more limited. Destruction of the enemy's forces to deny an objective to an opponent is often no longer feasible, at least for the superpowers, because the end may be mutual destruction. To the individual member of the nuclear arms club, the deterrent effect of interposition has been magnified by the possible consequences of escalation.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The two elements of interposition—the use of threat and the weighing of risk and gains—would appear to be simple concepts requiring no further clarification. A threat should be perceived as intended, and the risks and gains should be similarly weighed. The problem, however, is compounded by an almost universal tendency to faulty perceptions in crisis situations. It is for this reason that prior to undertaking an interpositional move, and before the first threat or move is made, the interposer must make a critical evaluation. He must determine that the opponent does not consider the objective worthy of a high level of risk or cost—so vital

that the opponent would, without hesitation, go to war. Interposition is only successful and applicable if the threat can influence the opponent, and this can be true only if the threatened action is potentially more painful to him than the loss of the objective would be.

The ability of the interposer to influence the opponent is predicated on two initial measures of commitment. These measures are:

the willingness to commit an interposing force, thus threatening military action, and

the positioning of that force quickly to gain the psychological advantage of time and readiness.

The willingness to give evidence of a threat through physical presence demonstrates that the interposer's commitment is credible. The "... object of a threat is to give somebody a choice,"²⁰ to continue after the objective and risk punishment or to disengage and collaborate with the interposer. There is a paradox in the risk propensity/risk aversion scenario: "A deterrence situation . . . is one where conflict is contained within a boundary of threats which are neither executed nor tested; if a threat is executed, it is no longer a threat, if it is tested and not executed, it is no longer a deterrent."²¹

The willingness to give evidence of a threat through a military presence while attempting to avoid the use of force may also seem to be a paradox. The threat, however, is intended to increase the cost of the objective to the opponent. The realization by the opponent that the desired objective will now cost more than he first thought hopefully acts as a "constraint influence"²² and if successful avoids the necessity for the direct use of force. The commitment of forces is evidence that the threat is serious.

For the strategy of interposition to work, the required forces must be in place before the opponent has time to act or to raise opposition. L.W. Martin,

in discussing the crises of Kuwait and Lebanon, notes that: "For action of this kind a prime requirement is speed of response to forestall the preventive measures of others, and to give as little time as possible for political opposition to be articulated and harden into attitudes from which retreat would be difficult."²³ Under the most favorable of circumstances, once the forces have been positioned, the peaceful solution to the issue comes about "... by merely inducing the aggressor to drop his attempt at conquest—by convincing him that 'the game is not worth the candle.'"²⁴ At the same time, the commitment must be readily understood, otherwise the threat may be perceived as no more than a bluff.

Although it is essential that the opponent fully understands the resolve behind the commitment, it is difficult to convey a threat in a manner that will modify the opponent's behavior in a desired fashion. The commitment can be communicated with clarity or vagueness, with massive strength or low profile, or with verbosity or deliberateness; the difficulty is to select the pattern which is appropriate for the particular crisis and the particular opponent.²⁵ The essential factors in the communication of commitment are

to make the opponent understand that the decision on escalation is now his, and that such escalation will be costly,

to enhance the threat by a process of commitment, and

to manage the crisis by containing the area of confrontation and commitment, thus decoupling this crisis from other dormant crises.

The act of placing forces between the opponent and his objective has the advantageous characteristic of placing the onus of escalation on the opponent. For it now the opponent who must calculate the risk and weigh the advantages of a hostile move. The commitment process of the interposer must

communicate the fact that the onus of escalation has shifted and that it will be costly, as "The strategic deterrent *qua* deterrent is not centrally concerned with blocking an undesirable action of his adversary but with punishing his adversary should the undesirable action be attempted."²⁶

To convey the commitment, every rudiment of the science of communication must be exercised: direct and indirect, spoken and unspoken, written and unwritten, raised eyebrow or "poker face." All the action of the interposing force and the parent government is significant to the success of the strategy. "In a crisis situation where deterrence policies meet, every manipulation of military forces is in part a signal to the adversary."²⁷ The communications to be effective must be well balanced and meaningful to the opponent. For example, G.H. Snyder points out that a negative message may be conveyed if the size of the force is misconstrued. "It might be argued that the greatest depreciatory effects on the punishment threat occur with either a very large or a very small denial force in or near an area—the former because it would provide a viable alternative; the latter because it would betray a low valuation."²⁸ Schelling also points out that in the attempt of coordinating behavior, the communications may be affected by many diverse elements. For they "... may depend on imagination more than logic; it may depend on analogy, precedent, accidental arrangement, symmetry, aesthetic or geometric configuration, casuistic reasoning, and who the parties are and what they know about each other."²⁹

It is essential, however, that the opponent understand what it is you are trying to tell him; namely, that pursuit of his objective will result in greatly increased risks and/or costs. The means of making him understand must be individually tailored to the crisis. During the Berlin blockade, General Clay's

verbosity was highly successful in communicating the commitment of the United States to Berlin and West Germany. In contrast, President Kennedy's restraint in the Cuban missile crisis gave strong evidence of U.S. sincerity. Overall, to exercise control, the art of commitment becomes a finely tuned attempt at a "... kind of bargaining in which the parties communicate, calculate, and balance propensities in risk taking."³⁰

To control the crisis, an attempt is made to separate this crisis from other dormant crises. Schelling notes, for example, that an attempt was made during the Cuban missile crisis "... to define the conflict...",³¹ in terms of the Caribbean and not enlarge it to Berlin or other problems. Martin, also commenting on the missile crisis, states that U.S. action was patterned as a "... local response directly fitted to thwarting a hostile effort being made by sea."³² To this degree, at least in the nuclear age, expressing the commitment and maintaining control over the crisis are exercises in deterrence.³³

At a minimum, the act of interposition involves a risk for two parties, the interposer and the opponent. For the interposer, the intent is to deter the opponent by threatening to take action against him. Behind the threat is a judgment that the opponent will behave as desired, and therefore no physical damage will befall the interposer. This, as Schelling points out, is a "... paradox of deterrence that in threatening to hurt somebody if he misbehaves, it need not make a critical difference how much it would hurt you too—if you can make him believe the threat."³⁴ It is, however, extremely difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of that threat as a deterrent until after the fact.

The evaluation process in interposition is a cognitive risk analysis consisting of a necessity
to weigh the risk and gains,

to determine if the option of last clear chance should be invoked, and

to prepare for the possibility of escalation.

Before the strategy is undertaken, an estimate of the opponent's calculation of risks and gains involved must be taken into consideration and should involve three factors: (1) a judgment of the opponent's estimate of gain from the objective, (2) a judgment of the opponent's estimate of cost if the objective is defended, and (3) a judgment of the opponent's estimate of the probability of success in the venture. Interposition, if perceived as the interposer intends, increases the cost and risk to the opponent by: (1) the potential threat of the interposer's forces in place, (2) the possibility that the confrontation may be enlarged, and (3) the fact that the onus of escalation now resides with him. Where the strategy is valid and is properly applied, the risk and cost to the opponent are increased and tend to constrain by increasing the "... disadvantages to the situation or the threat to do so."³⁵

The opponent may or may not perceive the threat as the interposer desires, or he may choose to ignore it. He will therefore react to the threat in one of three different ways: (1) he will turn aside, if he thinks the objective is no longer worth the cost, (2) he will continue, if he thinks the action of the interposer is a bluff, or (3) he will continue, if he thinks the objective is worth the increased cost under any circumstances.

The strategy is only successful if the opponent, believing that the increased costs exceed the expected gains, desists in his efforts. In the second instance, when the opponent believes that the action is a bluff, the forces in place might be challenged or limited hostilities might break out. Although it is risky to assume away the possibility of hostilities, it would appear—at least for the superpowers—that there is a re-

luctance to push an issue unless vital interests are involved. Now that the development of nuclear weapons has rendered many forms of total conflict unacceptable, there now appears to exist a desire "... to impose and to honor a much more restrictive ceiling of permissible tension than had hitherto been the case."³⁶ P.C. Fielder, commenting on the standoff symmetry notes that: "... both parties, although willing to take the initiative in provoking a crisis if it is deemed to be opportune, have seemed loath to take steps which would raise tensions beyond what is perceived as the maximum manageable level."³⁷

As to the third choice of the opponent—to ignore the threat, considering that the worth of the objective outweighs the increased risk and cost—interposition necessitates an evaluation on the part of the interposer that the objective being denied is not an interest over which the opponent would not hesitate to go to war. The initial evaluation by the interposer, of course, can be wrong, and as a consequence both parties could be in a worse position than if the objective had simply not been contested.

Just as the interposer must make an evaluation to determine whether the objective is vital to the opponent, he must also make a critical evaluation to determine whether the doctrine of "last clear chance"³⁸ should be invoked. In the Cuban missile crisis, for example, "... the declaration of quarantine and the dispatch of the Navy meant that American evasion of the encounter was virtually out of the question."³⁹ The onus of escalation had been completely shifted to the Russians, and the last clear chance to avoid a confrontation bided with them.⁴⁰ The decision to proceed with the missile carrying ships would have meant that the Soviets had decided to escalate.

If the commitment is clear, the last clear chance doctrine does not require

overwhelming force to deny the objective. Schelling notes that "If one commits a token force of troops that would be unable to escape, the commitment to full resistance is increased."⁴¹ The presence of the limited garrison in West Berlin and the troops in West Germany—characterized as "tripwire" and "plate glass"—exemplify Schelling's observation.

If the last clear chance doctrine is invoked and the strategy of interposition appears imminently successful, the opponent's withdrawal should be made as unembarrassing as possible. Some form of face-saving should be proffered for several good reasons. Concern over the loss of face might provide the adversary a reason for reversing himself or reacting more strongly the next time. In addition, the "collective face" of the nation constitutes its national and international commitment process, and the loss of face might create internal and external pressures that would precipitate another, and perhaps more serious, crisis situation.

Interposition can be viewed as either an act of pacification or as an act of provocation. The interposer views the act as pacification and has: "... an incentive to bind himself to fulfill the threat, if he thinks the threat may be successful, because the threat and not its fulfillment gains the end; and fulfillment is not required if the threat succeeds."⁴² To the opponent who has been denied a less costly access to the objective, the risk involved may not seem formidable because the interposition appears to be a bluff or the objective is still worth the increased cost. If hostilities break out, the efforts at interposition have failed, and either the interposer must withdraw or escalation may result. Martin, commenting on pacific actions of this nature, notes that: "It is therefore clearly, if paradoxically, necessary to approach such nonbelligerent nations in a posture capable of accepting combat if it breaks

out and with the full realization of what that eventuality would entail."⁴³

Theoretically, interposition offers its greatest danger where the superpowers become directly involved and the dangers of escalation exist. If control has been properly exercised so that vital interests are not at stake, "The risk of deliberate escalation may be small, if not infinitesimal, under these conditions; the risk of inadvertent escalation may be greater."⁴⁴ If there is a choice, interposition offers a level of risk; but a level of risk that may be acceptable. Liddell Hart points out that "It is wiser to run risk of war for the sake of preserving peace than to run risks of exhaustion in war for the sake of finishing with victory—a conclusion that runs counter to custom but is supported by experience."⁴⁵

A strategy is politically neutral and is limited only by geography, technology, and risk propensity. The frequent use of the interposition strategy over the past quarter of a century is a function of the technical factors of mobility and nuclear capability. The Soviet Union now possesses these factors, and if the intent is there it could engage in interposition in pursuit of its own national goals. Capabilities, however, do not necessarily equate with intentions, especially given the risk of nuclear confrontation.

THE SOVIET UNION AND INTERPOSITION

Within the confines of certain geographic areas, the Soviet Union currently has the means, possibly the incentives, and, in all likelihood, will be presented with opportunities to engage in interposition. The means and the incentives can be assessed through analysis, but these factors will not foretell whether the Soviets intend to engage in interposition. Hedging is preferable to augury, and no attempt will be made to analyze Soviet intentions for, as Lincoln Bloomfield notes,

When people ask what is going to happen, one is tempted to tell them. And yet predictive technology of the political analyst is really no better than that of his forebear who sat in the palace courtyard consulting the entrails of a chicken, or the Delphic priestess who got high on escaping earth gases.⁴⁶

In the strategy of interposition, it is not the forces in place that primarily deter the opponent. It is the commutative threat that goes with the forces, including moral suasion, the onus of escalation, and the threatened use of conventional and/or nuclear weapons.

The Soviet Union has not achieved fully mobile forces such as those deployed by the United States. However, the strategy of interposition does not require a massive commitment of forces, and Soviet lift and amphibious forces, although limited, could be utilized readily on the periphery of the Soviet Union in interposition.

As almost daily reports attest, Soviet naval forces have shown meaningful improvements in their hardware mix and capabilities. For example, Melvin Blixt makes the valid point that: "... the relatively recent naval construction program gives the Soviet Navy a possible new capacity of projecting power ashore by use of vertical envelopment backed by surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missile equipped fleet which might well restrict Western actions in 'crisis management' situations."⁴⁷ The command and control and logistics support capabilities that complement their hardware mix have likewise improved through increased deployment schedules and combined exercises such as Operation Sever and Oder-Neisse 69.

Without attempting a time-oriented numbers and disposition evaluation of Soviet forces, it is useful to note some of the recent speculation and concern

about the growth of the Soviet means over the past few years. In a recent study, for example, concern was expressed over the possible-interposition of Soviet ships in the Mediterranean: "The interposition of Soviet ships between Sixth fleet forces and an area of unrest could have a substantial inhibiting effect upon U.S. willingness to intervene."⁴⁸ Robert Conquest, in commenting on the ability of the Soviets to deploy conventional forces on a worldwide scale, takes particular note of the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean and how "... a couple of Soviet cruisers with a few hundred troops could play a decisive part in immediate crises."⁴⁹ Finally, a somewhat changed nuclear balance may provide the Soviets not only with increased capabilities, but a different outlook as well.⁵⁰

Whether the Soviets decide to use their newly found means and take advantage of the changed strategic balance depends to a large measure on whether the incentives exist for such acts. There appear to be three direct or indirect motives for the Soviets to engage in interposition. These are:

- (1) to protect the leadership position of the Soviet Union in the Communist world,
- (2) to protect "socialist gains" and client states, and
- (3) to imitate the successful use of limited war and intervention by the United States.

The Chinese Communists have frequently criticized Soviet leadership of the Communist world as providing less than wholehearted support of wars of national liberation. Marshall Shulman, in 1966, observed that Soviet militancy in the underdeveloped areas could be attributed to competition with the Chinese over leadership of "... the underdeveloped areas under the banner of 'anti-imperialism.'"⁵¹ A newly formed underdeveloped nation about to be placed under attack by an outside force might find itself, willingly or un-

willingly, under the protection of Soviet interposition. (It is well within the realm of possibility that the Soviets might even interpose between the Chinese and one of their objectives.) Such acts would be to protect their leadership position and to protect what the Soviets term socialist gains.

The Soviet journal, *International Affairs*, in defending the Brezhnev Doctrine, indicated the necessity of protecting socialist gains in that: "... any hesitation or indecision in defending socialist gains against attack by the forces of reaction and counter-revolution objectively play into the hands of the class enemy...."⁵² Although the article appears to limit "socialist gains" to the Warsaw Treaty nations, it does indirectly broaden the definition to almost any converted state. The article states:

... the sovereignty of the socialist state is an expression of the supreme right of the people to set up a new social system—socialism and communism—and to pursue a policy aimed at consolidating this new system and ensuring lasting world peace, relying on the class solidarity between the socialist countries and that of the proletariat and working people of the whole world, and on their readiness to come at once to the rescue whenever any people's sovereignty, and consequently—and this is important—their very socialist state is menaced.⁵³

There is also a possibility that the Soviets could use interposition to protect their nonsocialist client states as well. Thomas Wolfe notes that:

... a Soviet union advertised as the strategic equal of the United States and possessing an improved capacity to intervene in local situations would probably find

itself under new pressures to come to the help of clients in other continents, where previously Moscow was excused from becoming directly engaged because it obviously lacked the means to do so.⁵⁴

As a final note on incentives, Andro Gabelic, a Yugoslav writer, sees the growth of Soviet conventional forces as an attempt by them to emulate the utilization by the United States of its conventional forces under a nuclear umbrella; and Gabelic expects: "Unless all the logical assumptions deceive, this is an effort to counter the imperialist strategy of local and restricted wars with its own weapons, the weapons of that self-same local and restricted war."⁵⁵ With nuclear equality, the Soviets might now be willing to carry through with acts of interposition or limited war.

It is difficult, however, to assess the evidence at hand without any knowledge of intentions. Soviet risk-taking propensities in the past have not been high. For example, Triska in 1966 completed a statistical analysis of past crises and reported that: "Soviet crisis behavior was found to be conservative rather than radical, cautious rather than aggressive, deliberate rather than impulsive, and rational (not willing to lose) rather than nonrational."⁵⁶ Whether their new stature in the nuclear arena will increase or decrease their risk-taking propensities cannot be assessed. Thomas Wolfe contrasts the possible developments as:

On the one hand, the Soviet Union may be evolving in a direction that will find its leaders prepared to play a more responsible and stabilizing role in international politics. . . .

On the other hand, the Soviet Union may be moving in a

grimmer direction, backing into the future on the basis of old policies and habits more likely to promote global ferment and discord than world stability.^{5 7}

There would appear to be several important factors that would tend to militate against Soviet risk-taking at the present time, some of which are the economic priorities at home, the rising expectations of the Soviet populace, and their ability, as perceived by them, to achieve national goals without undertaking strategies that involve risks. Not to be overlooked is their continuing struggle with the Chinese Communists.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategy of interposition offers an economy of force option for managing some crisis situations. As attested to by historical incidents, the concept of the strategy is not new; hopefully, however, a consistent description of the properties of the strategy have been presented in this paper.

Successful interposition depends on psychological elements as well as a highly mobile force. For this reason, threat perception, commitment, communications, and control play an important part in the strategy. Equally important, the mobility factor allows the interposer to gain the advantage of time and readiness. The strategy is not risk free, and the risks must be weighed against expected gains.

Under conditions where forces are highly mobile and where a high degree of deterrence is obtained from nuclear weapons, interposition would appear to be most relevant. Now possessing the

required requisites, the Soviet Union would appear to be a possible user of the strategy if its intentions are so directed and if the gains outweigh the risks. If the Soviets undertook the strategy, areas of concern would not be restricted to the interests of the Western world, but would extend as well to the interests of the Chinese.

Interposition seeks solutions to problems through pacific means, recognizing that forces can be used to maintain a balance of power while acting as an instrument of peace. This concept of denial through threat superimposed on a countervailing tendency of the two nuclear powers to recognize the importance of avoiding mutually damaging or obliterating confrontations presents an apparent paradox whose study is beyond the scope of this paper. Further study into this paradox might prove productive in understanding competitive relations in the nuclear age.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Mr. Charles W. Walter holds a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University in business administration and a master's degree in statistics from the American University, where he has also

done considerable graduate work in the field of economics. His primary expertise is in the fields of economic and statistical research, and he has been working in these respective areas for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency from 1953 until 1969. Mr. Walter is currently a student of the Naval War College, School of Naval Warfare. This paper was written by Mr. Walter as a student in a Naval War College seminar in Naval Strategies.

FOOTNOTES

1. As far as can be determined, the use of the term "interposition" in a somewhat similar manner as it is used in this paper was in a 1606 translation of *Sueton* (Suetonius, circa A.D. 120)

by Philemon Holland. Suetonius describes the action of the previously captured and defiled Sabine women, who "... interposed themselves as *Mediatrices*, between the Romans and Sabines." As cited in Sir James A.N. Murray, ed., *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1933), v. V, p. 414.

2. Whether interposition, as described in this paper, is a tactic or a strategy is to some degree academic. It would appear, however, that it is a strategy if successful and an element of tactics if unsuccessful.

3. Philip H. Stanhope, *History of England*, 5th ed. (London: Murray, 1858), v. II, appendix, p. lxxxvi.

4. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), p. 212.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Tang Tsou, "Mao's Limited War in the Taiwan Strait," *Orbis*, October 1959, p. 336.

7. David J. Carrison, *The United States Navy* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 39-40.

8. Although there were two independent crises over the offshore islands, they are treated here as one example, inasmuch as the essence of both crises is the same.

9. Elmer B. Potter, ed., *Sea Power* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960), p. 881.

10. John R. Beal, *John Foster Dulles: 1888-1959* (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 337.

11. Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 250.

12. U.S. Dept. of State, "U.S. Policy on Defense of Formosa," *The Department of State Bulletin*, 7 February 1955, p. 213.

13. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 50.

14. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The Formosa Straits," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1 October 1958, p. 739.

15. In light of the massive retaliation connotation that has been associated with brinkmanship, it is worth reiteration that interposition does not require a large force in place. U.S. forces in West Germany are not adequate to defeat an attack by the Soviet Union, but they act as a tripwire and have successfully kept the Soviets from attempting such a move. Furthermore, under the best of circumstances, the threat can succeed through the psychological factors of the onus of escalation and moral suasion.

16. Eisenhower, p. 740.

17. Beal, p. 338.

18. Bernard Brodie, *Escalation and the Nuclear Option* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 52.

19. Based on a limited, but not cursory, survey of history.

20. Schelling, p. 74.

21. Roy E. Jones, *Nuclear Deterrence* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1968), p. 1.

22. William A. Gamson, "Evaluating Beliefs about International Conflict," Roger Fisher, ed., *International Conflict and Behavioral Science* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 30.

23. Laurence W. Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 145.

24. Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1954), p. 368.

25. In some cases the certainty of opposition may deter; in others it may be wise to leave an element of uncertainty.

26. Jones, p. 53.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

28. Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment* (Princeton: Princeton University, Center of International Studies, 1959), p. 15.

29. Thomas C. Schelling, "Bargaining, Communication, and Limited War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, March 1957, p. 21.

30. Jones, p. 91.

31. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 87.

32. Martin, p. 163.

33. Brodie, p. 88.

34. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 36.

35. Gamson, p. 30.

36. Charles O. Lerche, Jr., *The Cold War and After* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 113.

37. Peter C. Fielder, "The Pattern of Super-Power Crises," *International Relations*, April 1969, p. 498.

38. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 44.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
40. An example of not invoking the "last clear chance" would be the Berlin blockade where the Soviets allowed the West to supply Berlin by a "harassed" but open skyway.
41. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 37-38.
42. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 36.
43. Martin, p. 143.
44. Klaus Knorr, *On the Uses of Military Power in the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 90.
45. Liddell Hart, p. 370.
46. Lincoln P. Bloomfield, "Future Small Wars: Must the United States Intervene?" *Orbis*, Fall 1968, p. 669.
47. Melvin D. Blixt, "Soviet Objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Naval War College Review*, March 1969, p. 18-19.
48. Georgetown University, Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Soviet Sea Power* (Washington: 1969), p. 59.
49. Robert Conquest, "The Limits of Detente," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1968, p. 741.
50. There has been speculation that the Soviet naval buildup (60 to 65 ships) along the Syrian and Egyptian coasts during the Libyan coup of 1 September 1969 was juxtapositioned to deter any United States or British actions. It should be noted, however, that the buildup also could have been related to the normal deployment changeover of the Soviet fleet.
51. Marshall D. Shulman, *Beyond the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 69.
52. O. Selyaninov, "Proletarian Internationalism and the Socialist State," *International Affairs* (Moscow), November 1969, p. 14.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Thomas W. Wolfe, "Soviet Policy in the Setting of a Changing Power Balance," P-4055 (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, March 1969), p. 14.
55. Andro Gabelic, "New Accent in Soviet Strategy," *Survival*, February 1968 (originally printed in *Review of International Affairs*, 20 November 1967), p. 46.
56. Jan F. Triska, "Pattern and Level of Risk in Soviet Foreign Policy-Making, 1945-63," NOTS TP 3800 (China Lake, Calif.: U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, October 1966), p. 49.
57. Wolfe, p. 16-17.



When there is mutual fear, men think twice before they make aggression upon one another.

*Hermocrates of Syracuse: To the
Sicilian envoys at Gela, 424 B.C.*