Chapter 3
DEVELOPING RISK REDUCTION INSTITUTIONS AND PROCEDURES

On June 8, 1967, Israeli planes and gunboats attacked a U.S. communications ship, the Liberty, off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula. Washington soon learned of the attack, but as President Johnson recalled, "For seventy tense minutes we had no idea who was responsible." Both the United States and the USSR had sizable and vulnerable navies in the eastern Mediterranean. The Soviets' intentions were unclear. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara "thought the Liberty had been attacked by Soviet forces."  

Johnson ordered carrier-based aircraft to investigate and sent Moscow a message on the Direct Communications Link (otherwise known as the hot line) explaining this action and giving assurances that the United States was not about to intervene in the war. An hour later, when the Israelis discovered they had made a tragic mistake, their apology to Washington was also passed along on the hot line. McNamara later remarked, "Thank goodness our carrier commanders did not launch immediately against the Soviet ships who were operating in the Mediterranean."

I would like to acknowledge, in particular, my colleague Richard Smoke. Many of the ideas in this article derive originally from a report we co-authored for the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in March 1984, entitled Beyond the Hotline:—Controlling a Nuclear Crisis (Cambridge, Harvard Law School Nuclear Negotiation Project). For useful suggestions, I would like to thank my colleagues in the joint study as well as Richard Haass and Elizabeth Sherwood.

... The White House reaction to these events is not fully known, but reportedly General Andrew Goodpaster was afraid that the events "might trigger off all the NATO operations plan." At this time, the NATO operations plan called for all-out nuclear strikes on the Soviet Union.

As it turned out, the "jets" over Turkey were actually a flock of swans picked up on radar and incorrectly identified, and the 100 Soviet MiGs over Syria were really a much smaller routine escort returning the president of Syria from a state visit to Moscow. The British Canberra bomber was downed by mechanical difficulty, and the Soviet fleet was engaging in a long-scheduled exercise.

If this coincidence of events and miscalculations had been suggested as a "scenario," it would have been dismissed as too improbable to take seriously. Yet it actually occurred. This is not to suggest that such perilous interactions are probable, but simply that we do not know how likely they are.
DECISION MAKING IN CRISSES

Decision making in times of crisis appears to be qualitatively different from the normal flow of governmental decision making. The “warp,” or diminished rationality, that prevails during crisis decision making has been conceptualized in various ways. One somewhat simplified scheme emphasizes four main factors: there is little time for making crucial decisions; the stakes are high; critical information is often lacking, leading to dangerous uncertainty; and few usable options are available.

Little Time
However grave the issues at stake, an event is usually not considered a crisis if plenty of time is available to resolve the conflict. The 1973 Middle East war became an acute superpower crisis when the Israelis encircled the Egyptian Third Army and were on the verge of capturing it, which would have been a grave humiliation for Egypt and its Soviet patrons. Little available time is a defining characteristic of crises.

High Stakes
In the Berlin crises of 1958 and 1961, the credibility of the NATO alliance was perceived to be at stake. If the stakes are not high, decision makers may see themselves as “putting out fires” rather than dealing with a genuine crisis. An international, and especially a nuclear, crisis is distinguished from the normal flow of decision making (which often includes short deadlines and a feeling of urgency) by expectations of severe losses—in other words, high stakes.

High stakes result from an increase in either the magnitude of a potential loss or the probability of that loss (or both). After tens of thousands of U.S. troops had been committed to Vietnam, for example, Washington’s stakes became much higher. In the Berlin crises of 1958 and 1961, there was little change in what was at stake for the West—the credibility of NATO—but as the crisis intensified, the perceived probability of the threat to those stakes rose.

High Uncertainty
Decision makers often report a sense of great uncertainty at moments of crisis. Not enough clear information is available, and they feel that they are groping in a fog.

Three kinds of uncertainty in a crisis can be distinguished. The simplest is a lack of critical information about what is going on. To what degree are the other side’s forces mobilized? Where are they deployed? What exactly is occurring? Factual data generally are incomplete.

Almost always there is great uncertainty about the other side’s intentions. During the 1973 Middle East war, American intelligence discovered that the Soviets were shipping nuclear material through
the Bosporus. What did this suggest about Soviet intentions? Did it portend an escalatory move, a nuclear threat? (There was a lack of simple factual information too: were these weapons nuclear waste, reactor fuel rods, or what?)

The final kind of uncertainty has to do with the likely escalation sequences that might result from the current situation. In the Cuban missile crisis the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) worried that Khrushchev might suddenly move against Berlin or take other drastic action. The Western responses to such moves were uncertain as were, of course, the Soviet counter-responses, and the Western counter-counterresponses.

**Few Usable Options**

In a crisis, decision makers perceive there to be fewer realistic policy options than in normal times, and the ones available are likely to be more extreme. Generally, the more intense the sense of crisis, the more this will be so. In the first two days of the Cuban missile crisis, the only two options seriously examined by the United States were to do nothing but issue a diplomatic response, or to carry out an air strike on Cuba, which risked escalation toward war. In a crisis, the options often come, as it were, “sliced thick,” whereas more “fine-tuned” options can be developed in normal times.

In many crises, considerably more options are available than decision makers perceive to be usable. Many things could be done, but very few of them would simultaneously defend national interests and limit the risk of severe escalation to follow.

**The Intensification of Crises**

The combination of little time, high stakes, high uncertainty, and few usable options creates among decision makers a strongly felt need to act. As a crisis intensifies, decision makers typically sense that all four factors are becoming more serious. The press of time becomes more noticeable. The stakes may be rising. As actions of ambiguous import are taken, the uncertainties may also rise. As a crisis mounts, decision makers often feel they are rapidly approaching the point where they will have only a few and extreme options left. This sense of constricting possibilities is a psychologically distinctive feature of the crisis experience. In the various Berlin crises, Western decision makers sometimes found themselves only a couple of steps away from ordering major military action, which might have provoked a European war. At points in the 1973 Middle East crisis, U.S. officials felt they were only a few steps from an intense East-West confrontation.

**APPROACHES TO PREVENTING INADVERTENT WAR**

Besides nuclear weapons themselves and the doctrine for their use, four other factors contribute to the risk of inadvertent war. All were present in the Liberty incident. First, the political relationship that constituted the background for interpreting the incident was one of profound mistrust and fear.
Second, American and Soviet military forces were in proximity on opposite sides of a shooting war. Third, an unexpected incident occurred “out of the blue,” a possible trigger of U.S.–Soviet combat. Fourth, the incident was initially misread. These four factors—a tense relationship, a point of conflict, a trigger for combat, and a misinterpretation—together could create a situation that would spiral out of control despite the best intentions of leaders in Washington and Moscow.

The risk of inadvertent war springs from a deadly mix of inadvertent and “adventurist” factors. The tense relationship and the point of conflict are basically advertent, reflecting the underlying conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. The unexpected triggers and the misinterpretation, in contrast, are inadvertent, unwanted by either superpower.

Soviet scholars and policymakers have tended to focus on the first factor, stressing that the way to prevent inadvertent war is to create a “normal relationship.” With greater mutual confidence, unexpected triggers are less likely to be interpreted as indicative of hostile intent.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus chiefly on the second factor, discussing rules that constrain escalation as both powers carry on their conflict around the world. Such constraints, for instance, may have helped keep American and Soviet forces from engaging in actual hostilities, even against third parties, during the 1967 Mideast war.

Here we consider the other two factors: the unexpected triggers and the tendency toward misinterpretation of events. Joint institutions such as the hot line can be helpful in dealing with unexpected triggers like the attack on the Liberty and can correct hazardous misions, such as those on nonproliferation, are often suspended because of the hostile atmosphere. Unwanted incidents pick their own timing, however. Institutionalizing consultations on preventing inadvertent war would help ensure their continuation during tense times, when they might be most needed.

**Risks of Risk Reduction Mechanisms**

Risk reduction mechanisms, unfortunately, must be established in a context of deep-seated conflict between the superpowers. It is not easy to promote their shared interest in preventing inadvertent war while protecting vital national interests against perceived threats from the other side.

The very information, for instance, that one may wish both sides to know during a crisis, in order to defuse it, might, if known before the crisis, encourage one or both sides to believe that launching a crisis would be relatively safe. There is no escape from this basic paradox. However promising risk reduction mechanisms may become, a very large realm of uncertainty and risk will always remain.

Many possible measures are vulnerable to misuse. New channels such as risk reduction centers, for instance, could be used for gathering intelligence or for sending false information at a critical time. Safeguards can and should be carefully designed. Moreover, since U.S.–Soviet risk reduction measures could be misinterpreted as evidence of superpower condominium, it is important to consult carefully with friends and allies before negotiating any agreements.
IMPROVING AND ADDING RISK REDUCTION MEASURES

Five classes of measures could help reduce nuclear risks. The sketches offered here are intended to stimulate discussion and to elicit criticism and improvements, not to be used as blueprints. Although each has its own merits (and risks), what matters most is the establishment of a systematic approach for preventing and defusing dangerous incidents.

Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers in Washington and Moscow
The agreement signed in September 1987 mandates the creation of two nuclear risk reduction centers, in Washington and Moscow, to be staffed around the clock and linked by telecommunications. This is a significant first step toward realizing the proposal advanced by many political leaders and academics, including Senators Sam Nunn and John Warner.27

Initially the functions of the centers will be limited to transmitting notifications of launches, military exercises, and inspection visits specified in bilateral arms control treaties. As the use of the centers for verifying the implementation of the INF treaty demonstrates, the mandate is flexible. The centers can be used for whatever confidence-building communication functions both governments assign them.28 The agreement provides for annual meetings between governmental experts of each side to consider subjects of mutual concern.

Over time, as the centers are integrated into the existing infrastructures of both governments, they could serve as a place where working groups drawn from agencies of each government could meet to discuss their concerns about the various inadvertent triggers, jointly analyze past incidents or future hypothetical ones, and share their thinking. For example, participants might focus on events that could lead to the acquisition of nuclear weapons, materials, or equipment by unauthorized parties. Or the centers might facilitate exchange of information about the problem of detonations of unknown origin. American and Soviet officers might consider, for instance, the hypothetical scenario of a nuclear weapon suddenly exploding on national soil. In such a case, the nation “attacked” would naturally suspect the other. The center staff might discuss observable actions (and the absence of actions) that could make a denial of responsibility credible.

Working groups might also design contingency procedures for consultation and/or action in the event of particular incidents. Occasionally these contingency procedures might become embodied in a common understanding such as the one reached in June 1985 concerning the use of the hot line during a nuclear terrorist incident.29 More often, these procedures would simply remain informal “scripts” that could, if appropriate, be followed or adopted on a case-by-case basis before, during, or in the wake of dangerous incidents.
procedures have reduced considerably the number of risky naval incidents. 31

This is an excellent example of how joint Soviet-American operating procedures can reduce the likelihood of a crisis. Such procedures operate preventively: routine mechanisms operate at working levels, defusing any incident well before it even is defined as a crisis or requires attention from top political leaders.

The annual review conducted under the Incidents at Sea Agreement has functioned in a relatively nonpolitical way, with few exceptions.32 Because both sides find the routinized procedures helpful in preventing unwanted incidents, they continue in operation, comparatively free of linkage to political issues.

The principles of the Incidents at Sea Agreement can readily be extended to other kinds of incidents, in the air, on the ground, or in space.

Incidents in the Air Agreement. From time to time, one side’s aircraft have accidentally strayed into the other’s airspace. Because an accidental air intrusion during an intense crisis would be very dangerous, it would be valuable to develop agreed-upon procedures for coping with such an incident. After a U.S. reconnaissance plane strayed into Soviet airspace at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy: “Is it not a fact that an intruding American plane could easily be taken for a nuclear bomber, which might push us to a fateful step?”33 Even during normal times, such emergency safety procedures could be valuable, as the tragic downing of Korean Airlines flight 007 in 1983 reminds us. A useful first step was the North Pacific Air Safety Agreement signed in July 1985, which established links among Soviet, American, and Japanese air traffic control centers.34 It could usefully be extended to other regions of the world and to military aircraft.

Incidents on the Ground Agreement. Occasionally patrols lose their way and blunder across the border between the alliance zones in Europe. Such incidents have never yet caused a crisis, and by themselves are unlikely to. But in a time of high tension, and especially in the midst of a serious European crisis, such an incident could be serious. At all times such mistakes lead to confusion, tension, and unnecessary irritation. An Incidents on the Ground Agreement, again patterned loosely after the Incidents at Sea Agreement, may be negotiable and beneficial. Such an agreement might include procedures under which designated ranking officers from NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations could communicate directly with each other to clarify and defuse any incident without its immediately escalating to an issue between Washington and Moscow. Such contacts would help implement the unwritten rule to avoid any direct use of force against troops of the other superpower, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The superpowers might extend this understanding, perhaps informally, to other points around the world where forces come into close proximity. In 1983 and early 1984, for instance, American Marines stationed in Beirut found themselves only about fifty miles from Soviet military personnel in Syria, at a
time when rival factions in Lebanon were fighting almost continuously. U.S. Navy aircraft bombed positions between the Marines and the Soviets, and at times the battleship *New Jersey* fired into the Lebanese melee. In that situation, American military commanders wisely took great care to keep their fire away from Soviet positions. But accidents can always occur. In some future tangle, American and Soviet forces might be even closer, the regional fighting even more intense, and the danger—and hence the need for understandings—even greater.

*Incidents in Space Agreement.* The superpowers could agree to restrict their satellites and spaceships from making close high-speed passes or passes in geosynchronous orbit near the other’s satellites and spaceships. Since a surprise attack might be preceded by an attack on monitoring satellites, near-collisions and collisions in outer space can create a dangerous reaction. As space technology evolves, such dangers may increase, suggesting the importance of an incidents agreement as well as arms control initiatives in this area.\(^{35}\)

**Regular Military-to-Military Exchanges**

In addition to incidents agreements and the attendant military-to-military exchanges, a strong case can be made for regular meetings with a broad scope between the military leaders of each side. Each side spends a lot of time studying the capabilities of the other, but each has much to learn about the other’s intentions. In a crisis situation, a correct assessment of the intentions that lie behind the other side’s force deployments or military actions may well be the determining factor in avoiding inadvertent escalation. Moreover, an established working relationship between U.S. and Soviet military officers could be exceedingly important in defusing a tense confrontation.

There have been sporadic contacts over the years, most notably a few between the U.S. and Soviet commanders-in-chief in Europe, and mostly during the era of détente. There was little contact at the highest levels until recently. During the December 1987 summit in Washington, the chief of the Soviet general staff, Marshal Akhромеевич, came to the Pentagon to meet with his American counterpart, Admiral Crowe. In March 1988, Secretary of Defense Carlucci met with Soviet Defense Minister Yazov for three days in Bern, Switzerland.\(^{36}\) In August Carlucci paid an official visit to the Soviet Union.\(^{37}\) Both sides agreed to expand military contacts and to exchange information on each other’s forces. They also discussed the establishment of a new channel for dealing with military incidents and actions involving both sides.

Such exchanges would be useful at both higher and lower levels and for both civilian and military defense officials. The scope of conversation should be broad enough to encompass such issues as force posture, deployments, military uses of space, and weapons programs. Exchanges might usefully entail visits to active units. Discussions could focus on ambiguities in each side’s military stance. Currently, both the United States and the USSR are uncertain about the real meaning of various
deployments and military actions of the other. Each could make inquiries and receive at least limited explanations at an authoritative level. Simply hearing the other’s concerns about nuclear and conventional posture may be valuable.

Useful discussion would probably revolve around basic assumptions and the intentions of each side, so as to reduce the chance of miscalculation and misunderstanding. Should a crisis occur, officials already would have established a working relationship with their opposite numbers, a wish frequently expressed by American participants in past crises.

Such talks carry, of course, certain risks of misunderstandings and false confidence, as well as intelligence leaks and disinformation. While considerable caution is advisable, many American military experts, in and out of the armed forces, believe that the concept of regular exchanges is practical and that the potential benefits out weigh the inevitable risk.38

**Expanded Regional Consultations**

A joint review of the Cuban missile crisis by American and Soviet participants has revealed the tantalizing possibility that, if the U.S. and Soviet governments had held serious talks about Cuba earlier in 1962, the crisis might have been averted altogether. Khrushchev had known that Kennedy had no intentions of invading Cuba with an American force, and certainly if he had known how strongly Kennedy was likely to respond to the introduction of Soviet missiles, he very well might not have taken the perilous step of placing missiles in Cuba.39

Perhaps the most likely source of superpower confrontation is a regional crisis in the Third World. Since 1985 American and Soviet diplomats have been meeting regularly to discuss specific regional hot spots such as Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Central America. While such talks have reportedly often descended into unproductive posturing, mutual accusations, and recitations of well-known positions, they at least have the potential to reduce misperceptions about intentions and likely responses to actions taken by the other side. As one Reagan administration official, interviewed in March 1987, commented, “The Soviets think we have a secret game plan to put military forces close to their southern border.... They look at our Rapid Deployment Force, the marines in Beirut, now the patrol in the Persian Gulf. It is useful to tell them that that is not our purpose, that our concern is with freedom of navigation. They may not believe us, but it helps.”40

These consultations could be extended to clarify the global ground rules that the United States and the Soviet Union have gradually built up to limit their worldwide competition, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Such rules are open to conflicting interpretations. A case in point is Cuba.

During the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev reached a loose understanding that the Soviets would never place combat forces in Cuba that were capable of offensive operations. Still, much ambiguity remained about the exact meaning of “offensive.” In 1979 a brief, and quite unnecessary, crisis occurred when the Carter administration suddenly “discovered” a Soviet combat
brigade in Cuba and publicly demanded its withdrawal. Moscow pointed out, correctly, that thousands of Soviet troops had been in Cuba for many years to train Cuban forces. When U.S. intelligence searched for evidence that the brigade had the capability to fight outside Cuba and found none, Carter had no choice but to back off from public confrontation. The “crisis” blew over—but not before damaging the ratification prospects for the SALT II agreements.\textsuperscript{41} A recognized confidential forum for clarifying—and where appropriate extending—specific understandings could avert such crises, which, even if they pose no danger of war, damage the relationship and retard progress on arms control.

Intensified consultations may lead to agreements, formal or informal, to restrict arms sales or the introduction of military advisers in specific regions. They may also lead to joint or parallel action to bring about a ceasefire or progress toward the resolution or the containment of a particular conflict. Although the outcome is uncertain at the time of this writing, conversations between American and Soviet officials on the subject of Afghanistan in 1985–86 clearly helped clarify each side’s political interests and even included tentative commitments that provided a basis for General Secretary Gorbachev’s decision to withdraw Soviet troops.

Such consultations also help develop useful working relationships between American and Soviet officials. As one American diplomat said of the current regional consultations, “It does develop personal contacts, contacts which can be used if a crisis develops.”\textsuperscript{42}

Consultations, like all the crisis prevention measures discussed, are not without certain risks. Discussions of ground rules, especially about hot spots, could generate misunderstandings, especially false confidence between the superpowers. Officials would need to take great care in what they said and conveyed.

**CONCLUSION**

The greatest danger of nuclear war lies in a process of miscalculation, miscommunication, and inadvertent incidents in time of crisis. Against such a threat, rules of prudence and agreed general norms of behavior are not sufficient. Operational institutions and procedures are needed to implement the rules and norms. Some, such as the hot line, already exist. The nuclear risk reduction centers, incidents agreements, military-to-military talks, and regional consultations would combine with existing crisis prevention and management measures to constitute a risk reduction system of procedures and institutions that could play a substantial role in the prevention of nuclear war.
NOTES

3. Ibid.
9. The incident involving a faulty computer chip is discussed in *Recent False Alerts from the Nation’s Missile Attack Warning System*, a report to the Committee on Armed Services of the U.S. Senate, October 9, 1980.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 66.
19. Ibid.
21. This point was made again and again by Soviet participants in our joint study conversations.


25. Formally entitled “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers,” the agreement was signed by Secretary of State George Shultz and Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze on September 15, 1987, at the White House.


28. Article 3 of Protocol I reads: “Each Party also may, at its own discretion as a display of good will and with a view to building confidence, transmit through the Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers communications other than those provided for under Article 1 of this Protocol.”


31. Ibid., pp. 81–82.


38. Colonel Wade Williams interviewed twenty individuals, including former commanders-in-chief of U.S. Army Europe, chiefs of military intelligence agencies, and a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With one exception, they felt that an expanded program of exchanges was beneficial. See Williams, “Expanding the US–USSR Military Dialogue,” in Blechman, op. cit.

39. This impression is derived from a private conference between American and Soviet participants in the crisis, held at the John F. Kennedy School of Government under the auspices of its Avoiding Nuclear War Project on October 12–13, 1987. See chapter 4.


SOVIET VIEW

Mikhail Mil’shtein

The prevention of accidental nuclear war remains one of the most urgent and complex problems of our time. A series of technical accidents have forcibly drawn the attention of scholars, the public, and political leaders in both the West and the East to the danger of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, which in today’s world could have incalculable consequences.

The danger of accidental or unauthorized use has grown continuously, as a consequence of the increase in the number of nuclear weapons, their constant qualitative modernization, and the development of new means of delivery, most notably intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) with speeds as high as 24,000 kilometers an hour. Such speed has irrevocably shrunk the time available for collecting and analyzing information on which to base rational decisions. Human capabilities have become too slow and are giving way to complex automated technology. Thus gradually man is becoming a prisoner of technology of his own making. This paradox must be kept in mind when evaluating the effectiveness of mechanisms to make accidental nuclear war less likely. While some technological improvements can reduce the risks of accidents (for example, in the early warning system or in the system of command and control), more mistakes may occur in the perception and evaluation of information, even in the new nuclear risk reduction centers.

Ury correctly notes that the danger of inadvertent use of nuclear weapons sharply increases in crisis situations, in regional conflicts, and in times of increased tensions between East and West. In these conditions, mutual suspicion increases, and each side evaluates the other’s actions with worst-case thinking. As the time available for decision is compressed, the chance of miscalculations that might provoke a chain reaction sharply increases. One must agree with Ury that the most likely path to nuclear destruction lies not in the calcul-...

...nuclear war. Both the United States and the Soviet Union have come to understand the need for such a system and have gradually developed the concept. There is a problem, however, in relating these procedures and institutions to existing decision-making practices in both countries, given the difference in domestic political structures. It might easily happen that one side was better able to deal expeditiously with a crisis because its internal communications were not blocked by bureaucratic procedures, or because its personnel were better trained, or because its leader was more fit. Simply because the other side was slower, it might be accused of “cheating” or “double dealing.” The asymmetry of internal standard operating procedures (as Graham Allison pointed out in Essence of Decision) could thus aggravate tensions. A critical task of the system suggested by Ury will be to coordinate both sides’ crisis decision-making procedures so as to reduce dangerous misperceptions.
AMERICAN VIEW

David Hamburg

Most experts now agree that the greatest risk of nuclear war would arise through escalation out of crisis, probably involving miscalculation of consequences. Thus it is in both superpowers’ national interests to stay well back from the brink, since mechanical and human errors and misjudgments are all too likely to occur under the incredibly complex stress of nuclear crisis. ¹

History is replete with mistakes leading to war and mistakes exacerbating destruction once war has broken out. Even the most respected, disciplined, science-based professions such as medicine provide many vivid examples of error and misjudgment in life-and-death circumstances. There is a growing research literature on iatrogenic (medically induced) illness. In fact, serious errors of judgment under great stress are observed in every field. In relations between the superpowers, unfortunately, the characteristics of the interacting nuclear alert systems substantially increase both the risks of human and mechanical error and the interaction between the two.

Effective crisis management would be made much more difficult by the temptation to subject the opponent to coercive diplomacy for bargaining purposes, particularly if the opponent feels urgent pressure to comply with the demands and if the demands are backed up by credible threats to inflict damage. But if either side resorts to strong coercive pressure of this kind, as they have in past crises, then the confrontation readily takes on a dangerous character analogous to the game of “chicken.”

The task of crisis management becomes more complicated when the United States and the Soviet Union are drawn into a regional conflict involving their allies or client states. In the Middle East wars of 1967, 1970, and 1973, for example, each superpower confronted a difficult policy dilemma: how far to go in assisting its local ally without risking a dangerous confrontation with the other superpower. In such situations the superpowers must control not only their own forces, but also those of their regional ally. Some of the important requirements for managing crises become much more difficult to fulfill in regional conflicts of this kind.

An international crisis is a highly stressful experience for leaders and their advisers. Such stress jeopardizes the quality of decision making.

For all those reasons it is vital to develop a regime for crisis prevention rather than settle for crisis management. Some of the main points in the crisis prevention approach have been discussed in this book by William Ury. Additional crisis prevention activities might emerge from regular meetings of foreign and defense ministers, as well as regular summits. Measures aimed at crisis prevention could, with arms control agreements, contribute to a tangible and durable improvement in working relations between the two countries. This approach is not a substitute for arms control or for improvement in the general U.S.–Soviet relationship. But it is at least an antidote to complacency and a prudent, practical response to visible risks.²
The crisis prevention approach would be strengthened by the adoption of the following guidelines for improving U.S.–Soviet relations, applicable to the leaders of both nations.

1. No dehumanization or harsh deprecation of the other. Criticize in civil discourse. Make carefully differentiated assessments rather than sweeping pronouncements.
2. Try to relate principles of decent human relations to specific actions of the two countries.
3. Hold regular consultations at various levels (e.g., summits, mini-summits, regional meetings).
5. Do not put the other in a humiliating position, either directly or in relation to its allies.
6. Resist the temptation to exploit local situations drastically.
7. Safeguard systematically and incessantly against inadvertent or accidental war.
8. Do not sponsor terrorism against the other, directly or by client. View terrorism as a long-term danger to the relationship between the two countries.
9. Conduct ongoing serious negotiations of the central strategic balance. Build a cumulative record of arms control agreements that enhance stability, are verifiable, are enforced, and greatly reduce the level of the stockpiles.
10. Avoid grandiose interpretations of national interest. Learn to live in a multicentric world that respectfully accommodates many vigorous nations.
11. Expand contacts widely in different spheres of activity and sectors of society; leading edges might include scientific and scholarly exchanges, cultural exchanges, and business transactions.

If the United States and the Soviet Union alter their behavior along these lines, as they have begun to do in the late 1980s, the risk of inadvertent war will surely diminish.

NOTES


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