

FIVE

Strategies for Survival

It is time to consider how great powers go about maximizing their share of world power. The first task is to lay out the specific goals that states pursue in their competition for power. My analysis of state objectives builds on previous chapters' discussion of power. Specifically, I argue that great powers strive for hegemony in their region of the world. Because of the difficulty of projecting power over large bodies of water, no state is likely to dominate the entire globe. Great powers also aim to be wealthy—in fact, much wealthier than their rivals, because military power has an economic foundation. Furthermore, great powers aspire to have the mightiest land forces in their region of the world, because armies and their supporting air and naval forces are the core ingredient of military power. Finally, great powers seek nuclear superiority, although that is an especially difficult goal to achieve.

The second task is to analyze the various strategies that states use to shift the balance of power in their favor or to prevent other states from shifting it against them. *War* is the main strategy states employ to acquire relative power. *Blackmail* is a more attractive alternative, because it relies on the threat of force, not the actual use of force, to produce results. Thus, it is relatively cost-free. *Blackmail* is usually difficult to achieve, however, because great powers are likely to fight before they submit to threats from

other great powers. Another strategy for gaining power is *bait and bleed*, whereby a state tries to weaken its rivals by provoking a long and costly war between them. But this scheme is also difficult to make work. A more promising variant of the strategy is *bloodletting*, in which a state takes measures to ensure that any war in which an adversary is involved is protracted and deadly.

Balancing and *buck-passing* are the principal strategies that great powers use to prevent aggressors from upsetting the balance of power.¹ With balancing, threatened states seriously commit themselves to containing their dangerous opponent. In other words, they are willing to shoulder the burden of deterring, or fighting if need be, the aggressor. With buck-passing, they try to get another great power to check the aggressor while they remain on the sidelines. Threatened states usually prefer buck-passing to balancing, mainly because the buck-passer avoids the costs of fighting the aggressor in the event of war.

The strategies of *appeasement* and *bandwagoning* are not particularly useful for dealing with aggressors. Both call for conceding power to a rival state, which is a prescription for serious trouble in an anarchic system. With bandwagoning, the threatened state abandons hope of preventing the aggressor from gaining power at its expense and instead joins forces with its dangerous foe to get at least some small portion of the spoils of war. Appeasement is a more ambitious strategy. The appeaser aims to modify the behavior of the aggressor by conceding it power, in the hope that this gesture will make the aggressor feel more secure, thus dampening or eliminating its motive for aggression. Although appeasement and bandwagoning are ineffective and dangerous strategies, because they allow the balance of power to shift against the threatened state, I will discuss some special circumstances where it may make sense for a state to concede power to another state.

It is commonplace in the international relations literature to argue that balancing and bandwagoning are the key alternative strategies available to threatened great powers, and that great powers invariably opt to balance against dangerous adversaries.² I disagree. Bandwagoning, as emphasized, is not a productive option in a realist world, for although the bandwago-

ning state may achieve more absolute power, the dangerous aggressor gains more. The actual choice in a realist world is between balancing and buck-passing, and threatened states prefer buck-passing to balancing whenever possible.³

Finally, I relate my theory to the well-known realist argument that *imitation* of the successful practices of rival great powers is an important consequence of security competition. While I acknowledge the basic point as correct, I argue that imitation tends to be defined too narrowly, focusing on copycatting defensive but not offensive behavior. Moreover, great powers also care about *innovation*, which often means finding clever ways to gain power at the expense of rival states. Although a variety of state strategies are considered in this chapter, the primary focus is on three: war is the main strategy for gaining additional increments of power, whereas balancing and buck-passing are the main strategies for preserving the balance of power. An explanation of how threatened states choose between balancing and buck-passing is laid out in Chapter 8, and an explanation for when states are likely to choose war is put forth in Chapter 9.

OPERATIONAL STATE GOALS

Although I have emphasized that great powers seek to maximize their share of world power, more needs to be said about what that behavior entails. This section will therefore examine the different goals that states pursue and the strategies they employ in their hunt for more relative power.

Regional Hegemony

Great powers concentrate on achieving four basic objectives. First, they seek regional hegemony. Although a state would maximize its security if it dominated the entire world, global hegemony is not feasible, except in the unlikely event that a state achieves nuclear superiority over its rivals (see below). The key limiting factor, as discussed in the preceding chapter,

is the difficulty of projecting power across large bodies of water, which makes it impossible for any great power to conquer and dominate regions separated from it by oceans. Regional hegemons certainly pack a powerful military punch, but launching amphibious assaults across oceans against territory controlled and defended by another great power would be a suicidal undertaking. Not surprisingly, the United States, which is the only regional hegemon in modern history, has never seriously considered conquering either Europe or Northeast Asia. A great power could still conquer a neighboring region that it could reach by land, but it would still fall far short of achieving global hegemony.

Not only do great powers aim to dominate their own region, they also strive to prevent rivals in other areas from gaining hegemony. Regional hegemons fear that a peer competitor might jeopardize their hegemony by upsetting the balance of power in their backyard. Thus, regional hegemons prefer that there be two or more great powers in the other key regions of the world, because those neighbors are likely to spend most of their time competing with each other, leaving them few opportunities to threaten a distant hegemon.

How regional hegemons prevent other great powers from dominating far-off regions depends on the balance of power in those areas. If power is distributed rather evenly among the major states, so that there is no potential hegemon among them, the distant hegemon can safely stay out of any conflicts in those regions, because no state is powerful enough to conquer all of the others. But even if a potential hegemon comes on the scene in another region, the distant hegemon's first preference would be to stand aside and allow the local great powers to check the threat. This is quintessential buck-passing at play, and as discussed below, states prefer to buck-pass than to balance when faced with a dangerous opponent. If the local great powers cannot contain the threat, however, the distant hegemon would move in and balance against it. Although its main goal would be containment, the distant hegemon would also look for opportunities to undermine the threat and reestablish a rough balance of power in the region, so that it could return home. In essence, regional hegemons act as offshore balancers in other areas of the world, although they prefer to be the balancer of last resort.

One might wonder why a state that stood astride its own region would care whether there was another regional hegemon, especially if the two competitors were separated by an ocean. After all, it would be almost impossible for either regional hegemon to strike across the water at the other. For example, even if Nazi Germany had won World War II in Europe, Adolf Hitler could not have launched an amphibious assault across the Atlantic Ocean against the United States. Nor could China, if it someday becomes an Asian hegemon, strike across the Pacific Ocean to conquer the American homeland.

Nevertheless, rival hegemonies separated by an ocean can still threaten one another by helping to upset the balance of power in each other's backyard. Specifically, a regional hegemon might someday face a local challenge from an upstart state, which would surely have strong incentives to ally with the distant hegemon to protect itself from attack by the neighboring hegemon. At the same time, the distant hegemon might have reasons of its own for collaborating with the upstart state. Remember that there are many possible reasons why states might attempt to take advantage of each other. In such cases, water's stopping power would have little effect on the distant hegemon's power-projection capability, because it would not have to launch an amphibious attack across the sea, but could instead transport troops and supplies across the water to the friendly territory of its ally in the rival hegemon's backyard. Ferrying troops is far easier to accomplish than invading a rival great power from the sea, although the distant hegemon would still need to be able to move freely across the ocean.

To illustrate this logic, consider the following hypothetical example. If Germany had won World War II in Europe and Mexico's economy and population had grown rapidly during the 1950s, Mexico probably would have sought an alliance with Germany, and might have even invited Germany to station troops in Mexico. The best way for the United States to have precluded a scenario of this kind would have been to ensure that its power advantage over Mexico remained large, and that Germany, or any other rival great power, was bogged down in a regional security competition, thus poorly positioning it to meddle in the Western Hemisphere. Of course, if Germany had been a hegemon in Europe, it would have had the same incentives to do whatever was possible to end the United States's

dominance of the Western Hemisphere, which is why Germany would have been likely to join forces with Mexico against the United States in the first place.

Real-world evidence shows the importance of gaining hegemony in one's own region while making sure that rivals in distant regions are bogged down in security competition. France, for example, put troops in Mexico during the American Civil War (1861–65) against the wishes of the United States. But the U.S. military was in no position to challenge the French deployment, because it was involved in a major war with the Confederacy. Soon after winning the war, the United States forced France to remove its troops from Mexico. Shortly thereafter, in early 1866, Austria threatened to send its own troops to Mexico. That threat never materialized, however, because Austria became involved in a serious crisis with Prussia that led to a major war between them in the summer of 1866.⁴

Although every great power would like to be a regional hegemon, few are likely to reach that pinnacle. As mentioned already, the United States is the only great power that has dominated its region in modern history. There are two reasons why regional hegemonies tend to be a rare species. Few states have the necessary endowments to make a run at hegemony. To qualify as a potential hegemon, a state must be considerably wealthier than its local rivals and must possess the mightiest army in the region. During the past two centuries, only a handful of states have met those criteria: Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and the United States. Furthermore, even if a state has the wherewithal to be a potential hegemon, the other great powers in the system will seek to prevent it from actually becoming a regional hegemon. None of the European great powers mentioned above, for example, was able to defeat all of its rivals and gain regional hegemony.

Maximum Wealth

Second, great powers aim to maximize the amount of the world's wealth that they control. States care about relative wealth, because economic might is the foundation of military might. In practical terms, this means that great powers place a high premium on having a powerful and

dynamic economy, not only because it enhances the general welfare, but also because it is a reliable way to gain a military advantage over rivals. "National self-preservation and economic growth," Max Weber maintained, are "two sides of the same coin."³ The ideal situation for any state is to experience sharp economic growth while its rivals' economies grow slowly or hardly at all.

Parenthetically, great powers are likely to view especially wealthy states, or states moving in that direction, as serious threats, regardless of whether or not they have a formidable military capability. After all, wealth can rather easily be translated into military might. A case in point is Wilhelmine Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mere fact that Germany had a large population and a dynamic economy was reason enough to scare Europe's other great powers, although German behavior sometimes fueled those fears.⁴ Similar fears exist today regarding China, which has a huge population and an economy that is undergoing rapid modernization. Conversely, great powers are likely to worry less about states that are moving down the pecking order of wealthy states. The United States, for example, fears Russia less than it did the former Soviet Union, in part because Russia does not control nearly as much of the world's wealth as the Soviet Union did in its heyday; Russia cannot build as powerful an army as did its Soviet predecessor. If China's economy hits the skids and does not recover, fears about China will subside considerably.

Great powers also seek to prevent rival great powers from dominating the wealth-generating areas of the world. In the modern era, those areas are usually populated by the leading industrial states, although they might be occupied by less-developed states that possess critically important raw materials. Great powers sometimes attempt to dominate those regions themselves, but at the very least, they try to ensure that none falls under the control of a rival great power. Areas that contain little intrinsic wealth are of less concern to great powers.⁵

During the Cold War, for example, American strategists focused their attention on three regions outside of the Western Hemisphere: Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf.⁶ The United States was determined

that the Soviet Union not dominate any of those areas. Defending Western Europe was America's number one strategic priority because it is a wealthy region that was directly threatened by the Soviet army. Soviet control of the European continent would have sharply shifted the balance of power against the United States. Northeast Asia was strategically important because Japan is among the world's wealthiest states, and it faced a Soviet threat, albeit a less serious threat than the one confronting Western Europe. The United States cared about the Persian Gulf mainly because of oil, which fuels the economies of Asia and Europe. Consequently, the American military was designed largely to fight in these three areas of the world. The United States paid less attention to Africa, the rest of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the South Asian subcontinent, because there was little potential power in those regions.

Preeminent Land Power

Third, great powers aim to dominate the balance of land power, because that is the best way to maximize their share of military might. In practice, this means that states build powerful armies as well as air and naval forces to support those ground forces. But great powers do not spend all of their defense funds on land power. As discussed below, they devote considerable resources to acquiring nuclear weapons; sometimes they also buy independent sea power and strategic airpower. But because land power is the dominant form of military power, states aspire to have the most formidable army in their region of the world.

Nuclear Superiority

Fourth, great powers seek nuclear superiority over their rivals. In an ideal world, a state would have the world's only nuclear arsenal, which would give it the capability to devastate its rivals without fear of retaliation. That huge military advantage would make that nuclear-armed state a global hegemon, in which case my previous discussion of regional hegemony would be irrelevant. Also, the balance of land power would be of minor

importance in a world dominated by a nuclear hegemon. It is difficult, however, to achieve and maintain nuclear superiority, because rival states will go to great lengths to develop a nuclear retaliatory force of their own. As emphasized in Chapter 4, great powers are likely to find themselves operating in a world of nuclear powers with the assured capacity to destroy their enemies—a world of mutual assured destruction, or MAD.

Some scholars, especially defensive realists, argue that it makes no sense for nuclear-armed states in a MAD world to pursue nuclear superiority.⁹ In particular, they should not build counterforce weapons—i.e., those that could strike the other side's nuclear arsenal—and they should not build defensive systems that could shoot down the adversary's incoming nuclear warheads, because the essence of a MAD world is that no state can be assured that it has destroyed *all* of its rival's nuclear weapons, and thus would remain vulnerable to nuclear devastation. It makes more sense, so the argument goes, for each state to *be* vulnerable to the other side's nuclear weapons. Two reasons underpin the assertion that nuclear-armed states should not pursue nuclear superiority. MAD is a powerful force for stability, so it makes no sense to undermine it. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to gain meaningful military advantage by building counterforce weapons and defenses. No matter how sophisticated those systems might be, it is almost impossible to fight and win a nuclear war, because nuclear weapons are so destructive that both sides will be annihilated in the conflict. Thus, it makes little sense to think in terms of gaining military advantage at the nuclear level.

Great powers, however, are unlikely to be content with living in a MAD world, and they are likely to search for ways to gain superiority over their nuclear-armed opponents. Although there is no question that MAD makes war among the great powers less likely, a state is likely to be more secure if it has nuclear superiority. Specifically, a great power operating under MAD still has great-power rivals that it must worry about, and it still is vulnerable to nuclear attack, which although unlikely, is still possible. A great power that gains nuclear superiority, on the other hand, is a hegemon and thus has no major rivals to fear. Most important, it would not face the threat of a nuclear attack. Therefore, states have a powerful incentive to be nuclear

hegemons. This logic does not deny that meaningful nuclear superiority is an especially difficult goal to achieve. Nevertheless, states will pursue nuclear advantage because of the great benefits it promises. In particular, states will build lots of counterforce capability and push hard to develop effective defenses in the hope that they might gain nuclear superiority.

In sum, great powers pursue four main goals: 1) to be the only regional hegemon on the globe, 2) to control as large a percentage of the world's wealth as possible, 3) to dominate the balance of land power in their region, and 4) to have nuclear superiority. Let us now move from goals to strategies, starting with the strategies that states employ to increase their relative power.

STRATEGIES FOR GAINING POWER

War

War is the most controversial strategy that great powers can employ to increase their share of world power. Not only does it involve death and destruction, sometimes on a vast scale, but it became fashionable in the twentieth century to argue that conquest does not pay and that war is therefore a futile enterprise. The most famous work making this point is probably Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*, which was published a few years before the start of World War I.¹⁰ This basic theme is also central to the writings of many contemporary students of international politics. Nevertheless, the argument is wrong: conquest can still improve a state's power position.

The claim that war is a losing proposition takes four basic forms. Some suggest that aggressors almost always lose. I dealt with this claim in Chapter 2, where I noted that in the past, states that initiated war won roughly 60 percent of the time. Others maintain that nuclear weapons make it virtually impossible for great powers to fight each other, because of the danger of mutual annihilation. I dealt with this issue in Chapter 4, arguing that nuclear weapons make great-power war less likely, but they do not render it obsolete. Certainly none of the great powers in the

nuclear age has behaved as if war with another major power has been ruled out.

The other two perspectives assume that wars are winnable, but that successful conquest leads to Pyrrhic victories. The two focus, respectively, on the costs and on the benefits of war. These concepts are actually linked, since states contemplating aggression invariably weigh its expected costs and benefits.

The costs argument, which attracted a lot of attention in the 1980s, is that conquest does not pay because it leads to the creation of empires, and the price of maintaining an empire eventually becomes so great that economic growth at home is sharply slowed. In effect, high levels of defense spending undermine a state's relative economic position over time, ultimately eroding its position in the balance of power. Ergo, great powers would be better off creating wealth rather than conquering foreign territory.¹¹

According to the benefits argument, military victory does not pay because conquerors cannot exploit modern industrial economies for gain, especially those that are built around information technologies.¹² The root of the conqueror's problem is that nationalism makes it hard to subdue and manipulate the people in defeated states. The victor may try repression, but it is likely to backfire in the face of massive popular resistance. Moreover, repression is not feasible in the information age, because knowledge-based economies depend on openness to function smoothly. Thus, if the conqueror cracks down, it will effectively kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. If it does not crack down, however, subversive ideas will proliferate inside the defeated state, making rebellion likely.¹³

There is no question that great powers sometimes confront circumstances in which the likely costs of conquest are high and the expected benefits are small. In those cases, it makes no sense to start a war. But the general claim that conquest almost always bankrupts the aggressor and provides no tangible benefits does not stand up to close scrutiny.

There are many examples of states expanding via the sword and yet not damaging their economies in the process. The United States during the first half of the nineteenth century and Prussia between 1862 and 1870 are

obvious cases in point; aggression paid handsome economic dividends for both states. Moreover, little scholarly evidence supports the claim that high levels of defense spending necessarily hurt a great power's economy.¹⁴ The United States, for example, has spent enormous sums of money on defense since 1940, and its economy is the envy of the world today. The United Kingdom had a huge empire and its economy eventually lost its competitive edge, but few economists blame its economic decline on high levels of defense spending. In fact, the United Kingdom historically spent considerably less money on defense than did its great-power rivals.¹⁵ Probably the case that best supports the claim that large military budgets ruin a state's economy is the demise of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. But scholars have reached no consensus on what caused the Soviet economy to collapse, and there is good reason to think that it was due to profound structural problems in the economy, not military spending.¹⁶

Regarding the benefits argument, conquerors can exploit a vanquished state's economy for gain, even in the information age. Wealth can be extracted from an occupied state by levying taxes, confiscating industrial output, or even confiscating industrial plants. Peter Liberman shows in his seminal work on this subject that contrary to the views of Angell and others, modernization not only makes industrial societies wealthy and therefore lucrative targets, but it also makes coercion and repression easier—not harder—for the conqueror.¹⁷ He notes, for example, that although information technologies have a "subversive potential," they also have an "Orwellian" dimension, which facilitates repression in important ways. "Coercive and repressive conquerors," he argues, "can make defeated modern societies pay a large share of their economic surplus in tribute."¹⁸

During World War II, for example, Germany was able, "through financial transfers alone . . . to mobilize an annual average of 30 percent of French national incomes, 42–44 percent of Dutch, Belgian, and Norwegian prewar national income, and at least 25 percent of Czech prewar national income."¹⁹ Germany also extracted significant economic resources from the Soviet Union during World War II. The Soviets then returned the favor in the early years of the Cold War by exploiting the East German

economy for gain.²⁰ Nevertheless, occupation is not cost-free for the conqueror, and there will be cases where the costs of exploiting another state's economy outweigh the benefits. Still, conquest sometimes pays handsome dividends.

It is also possible for conquerors to gain power by confiscating natural resources such as oil and foodstuffs. For example, any great power that conquers Saudi Arabia would surely reap significant economic benefits from controlling Saudi oil. This is why the United States created its Rapid Deployment Force in the late 1970s; it feared that the Soviet Union might invade Iran and capture the oil-rich area of Khuzestan, which would enhance Soviet power.²¹ Moreover, once in Iran, the Soviets would be well positioned to threaten Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich states. During both world wars, Germany was bent on gaining access to the grain and other foodstuffs produced in the Soviet Union so that it could feed its own people cheaply and easily.²² The Germans also coveted Soviet oil and other resources.

But even if one rejects the notion that conquest pays economic dividends, there are three other ways that a victorious aggressor can shift the balance of power in its favor. The conqueror might employ some portion of the vanquished state's population in its army or as forced labor in its homeland. Napoleon's military machine, for example, made use of manpower raised in defeated states.²³ In fact, when France attacked Russia in the summer of 1812, roughly half of the main invasion force—which totalled 674,000 soldiers—was not French.²⁴ Nazi Germany also employed soldiers from conquered states in its army. For example, "of the thirty-eight SS divisions in existence in 1945, none was composed entirely of native Germans, and nineteen consisted largely of foreign personnel."²⁵ Moreover, the Third Reich used forced labor to its advantage. Indeed, it appears that there were probably as many as 7.6 million foreign civilian workers and prisoners of war employed in Germany by August 1944, which was one-fourth of the total German work force.²⁶

Furthermore, conquest sometimes pays because the victor gains strategically important territory. In particular, states can gain a buffer zone that helps protect them from attack by another state, or that can be used to

launch an attack on a rival state. For example, France gave serious consideration to annexing the Rhineland before and after Germany was defeated in World War I.²⁷ Israel's strategic position was certainly enhanced in June 1967 with the acquisition of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank in the Six-Day War. The Soviet Union went to war against Finland in the winter of 1939–40 to gain territory that would help the Red Army thwart a Nazi invasion.²⁸ The Wehrmacht, on the other hand, conquered part of Poland in September 1939 and used it as a launching pad for its June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union.

Finally, war can shift the balance of power in the victor's favor by eliminating the vanquished state from the ranks of the great powers. Conquering states can achieve this goal in different ways. They might destroy a defeated rival by killing most of its people, thereby eliminating it altogether from the international system. States rarely pursue this drastic option, but evidence of this kind of behavior exists to make states think about it. The Romans, for example, annihilated Carthage, and there is reason to think that Hitler planned to eliminate Poland and the Soviet Union from the map of Europe.²⁹ Spain destroyed both the Aztec and the Inca empires in Central and South America, and during the Cold War, both superpowers worried that the other would use its nuclear weapons to launch a "splendid first strike" that would obliterate them. Israelis often worry that if the Arab states ever inflicted a decisive defeat on Israel, they would impose a Carthaginian peace.³⁰

Alternatively, conquering states might annex the defeated state. Austria, Prussia, and Russia, for example, partitioned Poland four times in the past three centuries.³¹ The victor might also consider disarming and neutralizing the beaten state. The Allies employed this strategy against Germany after World War I, and in the early years of the Cold War, Stalin flirted with the idea of creating a unified but militarily weak Germany.³² The famous "Morgenthau Plan" proposed that post-Hitler Germany be de-industrialized and turned into two largely agrarian states, so that it no longer could build powerful military forces.³³ Finally, conquering states might divide a defeated great power into two or more smaller states, which is what Germany did to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1918 with the Treaty of

Brest-Litovsk, and is also what the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union effectively did to Germany after World War II.

Blackmail

A state can gain power at a rival's expense without going to war by threatening to use military force against its opponent. Coercive threats and intimidation, not the actual use of force, produce the desired outcome.³⁴ If this blackmail works, it is clearly preferable to war, because blackmail achieves its goals without bloody costs. However, blackmail is unlikely to produce marked shifts in the balance of power, mainly because threats alone are usually not enough to compel a great power to make significant concessions to a rival great power. Great powers, by definition, have formidable military strength relative to each other, and therefore they are not likely to give in to threats without a fight. Blackmail is more likely to work against minor powers that have no great-power ally.

Nevertheless, there are cases of successful blackmail against great powers. For example, in the decade before World War I, Germany attempted to intimidate its European rivals on four occasions and succeeded once.³⁵ Germany initiated diplomatic confrontations with France and the United Kingdom over Morocco in 1905 and again in 1911. Although Germany was clearly more powerful than either the United Kingdom or France, and probably more powerful than both of them combined, Germany suffered diplomatic defeats both times. In the other two cases, Germany tried to blackmail Russia into making concessions in the Balkans. In 1909, Austria annexed Bosnia without any prompting from Germany. When Russia protested, Germany used the threat of war to force Russia to accept Austria's action. Blackmail worked in this case, because the Russian army had not recovered from its shattering defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) and thus was in no position to confront the mighty German army in a war. The Germans tried to intimidate the Russians again in the summer of 1914, but by then the Russian army had recovered from its defeat a decade earlier. The Russians stood their ground, and the result was World War I.

Among three other well-known cases of blackmail, only one had a significant effect on the balance of power. The first case was a dispute in 1898 between the United Kingdom and France over control of Fashoda, a strategically important fort at the headwaters of Africa's Nile River.³⁶ The United Kingdom warned France not to attempt to conquer any part of the Nile because it would threaten British control of Egypt and the Suez Canal. When the United Kingdom learned that France had sent an expeditionary force to Fashoda, it told France to remove it or face war. France backed down, because it knew the United Kingdom would win the ensuing war, and because France did not want to pick a fight with the United Kingdom when it was more worried about the emerging German threat on its eastern border. The second case is the famous Munich crisis of 1938, when Hitler threatened war to compel the United Kingdom and France to allow Germany to swallow up the Sudetenland, which was at the time part of Czechoslovakia. The third case is when the United States forced the Soviet Union to remove its ballistic missiles from Cuba in the fall of 1962. Of these cases, only Munich had a telling effect on the balance of power.

Bait and Bleed

Bait and bleed is a third strategy that states might employ to increase their relative power. This strategy involves causing two rivals to engage in a protracted war, so that they bleed each other white, while the baiter remains on the sideline, its military strength intact. There was concern in the United States during the Cold War, for example, that a third party might surreptitiously provoke a nuclear war between the superpowers.³⁷ Also, one of the superpowers might have considered provoking its rival to start a losing war in the Third World. For example, the United States could have encouraged the Soviet Union to get entrapped in conflicts like the one in Afghanistan. But that was not American policy. In fact, there are few examples in modern history of states pursuing a bait-and-bleed strategy.

The best case of bait and bleed I can find is Russia's efforts in the wake of the French Revolution (1789) to entice Austria and Prussia into starting a war with France, so that Russia would be free to expand its power in

central Europe. Russia's leader, Catherine the Great, told her secretary in November 1791, "I am racking my brains in order to push the courts of Vienna and Berlin into French affairs. . . . There are reasons I cannot talk about; I want to get them involved in that business to have my hands free. I have much unfinished business, and it's necessary for them to be kept busy and out of my way."³⁸ Although Austria and Prussia did go to war against France in 1792, Russia's prompting had little influence on their decision. Indeed, they had compelling reasons of their own for picking a fight with France.

Another case that closely resembles a bait-and-bleed strategy involves Israel.³⁹ In 1954, Pinhas Lavon, Israel's defense minister, directed saboteurs to blow up important American and British targets in the Egyptian cities of Alexandria and Cairo. The aim was to fuel tensions between the United Kingdom and Egypt, which it was hoped would convince the United Kingdom to abandon its plan to withdraw its troops from bases near the Suez Canal. The strike force was caught and the operation turned into a fiasco.

The fundamental problem with a bait-and-bleed strategy, as the Lavon affair demonstrates, is that it is difficult to trick rival states into starting a war that they would otherwise not fight. There are hardly any good ways of causing trouble between other states without getting exposed, or at least raising suspicions in the target states. Moreover, the states being baited are likely to recognize the danger of engaging each other in a protracted war while the baiter sits untouched on the sidelines, gaining relative power on the cheap. States are likely to avoid such a trap. Finally there is always the danger for the baiter that one of the states being baited might win a quick and decisive victory and end up gaining power rather than losing it.

Bloodletting

Bloodletting is a more promising variant of this strategy. Here, the aim is to make sure that any war between one's rivals turns into a long and costly conflict that saps their strength. There is no baiting in this version; the rivals have gone to war independently, and the bloodletter is mainly con-

cerned with causing its rivals to bleed each other white, while it stays out of the fighting. As a senator, Harry Truman had this strategy in mind in June 1941 when he reacted to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union by saying, "If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible."⁴⁰

Vladimir Lenin, too, had this strategy in mind when he took the Soviet Union out of World War I while the fighting between Germany and the Allies (the United Kingdom, France, and the United States) continued in the west. "In concluding a separate peace now," he said on January 20, 1918, "we rid ourselves . . . of both imperialistic groups fighting each other. We can take advantage of their strife, which makes it difficult for them to reach an agreement at our expense, and use that period when our hands are free to develop and strengthen the Socialist Revolution." As John Wheeler-Bennett notes, "Few documents illustrate more succinctly Lenin's . . . understanding of the value of *Realpolitik* in statesmanship."⁴¹ The United States also pursued this strategy against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the 1980s.⁴²

STRATEGIES FOR CHECKING AGGRESSORS

Great powers not only seek to gain power over their rivals, they also aim to prevent those foes from gaining power at their expense. Keeping potential aggressors at bay is sometimes a rather simple task. Since great powers maximize their share of world power, they invest heavily in defense and typically build formidable fighting forces. That impressive military capability is usually sufficient to deter rival states from challenging the balance of power. But occasionally, highly aggressive great powers that are more difficult to contain come on the scene. Especially powerful states, like potential hegemony, invariably fall into this category. To deal with these aggressors, threatened great powers can choose between two strategies: balancing and buck-passing. They invariably prefer buck-passing, although sometimes they have no choice but to balance against the threat.

Balancing

With balancing, a great power assumes direct responsibility for preventing an aggressor from upsetting the balance of power.⁴³ The initial goal is to deter the aggressor, but if that fails, the balancing state will fight the ensuing war. Threatened states can take three measures to make balancing work. First, they can send clear signals to the aggressor through diplomatic channels (and through the actions described below) that they are firmly committed to maintaining the balance of power, even if it means going to war. The emphasis in the balancer's message is on confrontation, not conciliation. In effect, the balancer draws a line in the sand and warns the aggressor not to cross it. The United States pursued this type of policy with the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War; France and Russia did the same with Germany before World War I.⁴⁴

Second, threatened states can work to create a defensive alliance to help them contain their dangerous opponent. This diplomatic maneuver, which is often called "external balancing," is limited in a bipolar world, because there are no potential great-power alliance partners, although it is still possible to ally with minor powers.⁴⁵ During the Cold War, for example, both the United States and the Soviet Union had no choice but to ally with minor powers, because they were the only great powers in the system. Threatened states place a high premium on finding alliance partners, because the costs of checking an aggressor are shared in an alliance—an especially important consideration if war breaks out. Furthermore, recruiting allies increases the amount of firepower confronting the aggressor, which in turn increases the likelihood that deterrence will work.

These benefits notwithstanding, external balancing has a downside: it is often slow and inefficient. The difficulties of making an alliance work smoothly are reflected in the comment of the French general who said at the end of World War I, "Since I have seen alliances at work, I have lost something of my admiration for Napoleon [who almost always fought without allies against alliances]."⁴⁶ Putting together balancing coalitions quickly and making them function smoothly is often difficult, because it takes time to coordinate the efforts of prospective allies or member states, even when there is wide agreement on what needs to be done. Threatened

states usually disagree over how the burdens should be distributed among alliance members. After all, states are self-interested actors with powerful incentives to minimize the costs they pay to contain an aggressor. This problem is compounded by the fact that alliance members have an impulse to buck-pass among themselves, as discussed below. Finally, there is likely to be friction among coalition members over which state leads the alliance, especially when it comes to formulating strategy.

Third, threatened states can balance against an aggressor by mobilizing additional resources of their own. For example, defense spending might be increased or conscription might be implemented. This action, which is commonly referred to as "internal balancing," is self-help in the purest sense of the term. But there are usually significant limits on how many additional resources a threatened state can muster against an aggressor, because great powers normally already devote a large percentage of their resources to defense. Because they seek to maximize their share of world power, states are effectively engaged in internal balancing all the time. Nevertheless, when faced with a particularly aggressive adversary, great powers will eliminate any slack in the system and search for clever ways to boost defense spending.

There is, however, one exceptional circumstance in which a great power will increase defense spending to help deter an aggressor. Offshore balancers like the United Kingdom and the United States tend to maintain relatively small military forces when they are not needed to contain a potential hegemon in a strategically important area. Usually, they can afford to have a small army because their distant rivals tend to focus their attention on each other, and because the stopping power of water provides them with abundant security. Therefore, when it is necessary for an offshore balancer to check a potential hegemon, it is likely to sharply expand the size and strength of its fighting forces, as the United States did in 1917, when it entered World War I, and in 1940, the year before it entered World War II.

Buck-Passing

Buck-passing is a threatened great power's main alternative to balancing.⁴⁷ A buck-passer attempts to get another state to bear the burden of

detering or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines. The buck-passer fully recognizes the need to prevent the aggressor from increasing its share of world power but looks for some other state that is threatened by the aggressor to perform that onerous task.

Threatened states can take four measures to facilitate buck-passing. First, they can seek good diplomatic relations with the aggressor, or at least not do anything to provoke it, in the hope that it will concentrate its attention on the intended "buck-catcher." During the late 1930s, for example, both France and the Soviet Union tried to pass the buck to each other in the face of a deadly threat from Nazi Germany. Each tried to have good relations with Hitler, so that he would aim his gunsight at the other.

Second, buck-passers usually maintain cool relations with the intended buck-catcher, not just because this diplomatic distancing might help foster good relations with the aggressor, but also because the buck-passer does not want to get dragged into a war on the side of the buck-catcher.⁴⁸ The aim of the buck-passer, after all, is to avoid having to fight the aggressor. Not surprisingly, then, a hostile undertone characterized relations between France and the Soviet Union in the years before World War II.

Third, great powers can mobilize additional resources of their own to make buck-passing work. It might seem that the buck-passer should be able to take a somewhat relaxed approach to defense spending, since the strategy's objective is to get someone else to contain the aggressor. But save for the exceptional case of the offshore balancer discussed earlier, that conclusion would be wrong. Leaving aside the fact that states maximize relative power, buck-passers have two other good reasons to look for opportunities to increase defense spending. By building up its own defenses, a buck-passer makes itself an imposing target, thus giving the aggressor incentive to focus its attention on the intended buck-catcher. The logic here is simple: the more powerful a threatened state is, the less likely it is that an aggressor will attack it. Of course, the buck-catcher must still have the wherewithal to contain the aggressor without the buck-passer's help.

Buck-passers also build formidable military forces for prophylactic reasons. In a world where two or more states are attempting to buck-pass, no

state can be certain that it will not catch the buck and have to stand alone against the aggressor. It is better to be prepared for that eventuality. During the 1930s, for example, neither France nor the Soviet Union could be sure it would not catch the buck and have to stand alone against Nazi Germany. But even if a state successfully passes the buck, there is always the possibility that the aggressor might quickly and decisively defeat the buck-catcher and then attack the buck-passer. Thus, a state might improve its defenses as an insurance policy in case buck-passing fails.

Fourth, it sometimes makes sense for a buck-passer to allow or even facilitate the growth in power of the intended buck-catcher. That burden-bearer would then have a better chance of containing the aggressor state, which would increase the buck-passer's prospects of remaining on the sidelines. Between 1864 and 1870, for example, the United Kingdom and Russia stood by and allowed Otto von Bismarck's Prussia to conquer territory in the heart of Europe and create a unified German Reich that was considerably more powerful than its Prussian predecessor. The United Kingdom reasoned that a united Germany would not only deter French and Russian expansion into the heart of Europe, but it would also divert their attention away from Africa and Asia, where they might threaten the British empire. The Russians, on the other hand, hoped that a united Germany would keep Austria and France in check, and that it would also stifle Polish national aspirations.

The Allure of Buck-Passing

Buck-passing and putting together a balancing coalition obviously represent contrasting ways of dealing with an aggressor. Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency to buck-pass or "free-ride" inside balancing coalitions, although the danger that buck-passing will wreck the alliance is a powerful countervailing force. During the early years of World War I, for example, British policymakers tried to minimize the amount of fighting their troops did on the western front and instead get their alliance partners, France and Russia, to assume the costly burden of wearing down the German army.⁴⁹ The United Kingdom hoped then to use its still-fresh

troops to win the final battles against Germany and to dictate the terms of peace. The United Kingdom would "win the peace," because it would emerge from the war in a substantially more powerful position than either the defeated Germans or the battle-worn French and Russians. The United Kingdom's allies quickly figured out what was going on, however, and forced the British army to participate fully in the awful task of bleeding the German army white. As always, states worry about relative power.⁵⁰

Britain's attempt to free-ride on its allies, along with the history described in Chapters 7 and 8, gives evidence of the powerful impulse to buck-pass among threatened states. Indeed, great powers seem clearly to prefer buck-passing to balancing. One reason for this preference is that buck-passing usually provides defense "on the cheap." After all, the state that catches the buck pays the substantial costs of fighting the aggressor if deterrence fails and war breaks out. Of course, buck-passers sometimes spend considerable sums of money on their own military to facilitate buck-passing and to protect against the possibility that buck-passing might fail.

Buck-passing can also have an offensive dimension to it, which can make it even more attractive. Specifically, if the aggressor and the buck-catcher become involved in a long and costly war, the balance of power is likely to shift in the buck-passer's favor; it would then be in a good position to dominate the postwar world. The United States, for example, entered World War II in December 1941 but did not land its army in France until June 1944, less than a year before the war ended. Thus, the burden of wearing down the formidable Wehrmacht fell largely on the shoulders of the Soviet Union, which paid a staggering price to reach Berlin.⁵¹ Although the United States would have preferred to invade France before 1944 and was thus an inadvertent buck-passer, there is no question that the United States benefited greatly from delaying the Normandy invasion until late in the war, when both the German and the Soviet armies were battered and worn.⁵² Not surprisingly, Josef Stalin believed that the United Kingdom and the United States were purposely allowing Germany and the Soviet Union to bleed each other white so that those offshore balancers could dominate postwar Europe.⁵³

Passing the buck is also an attractive option when a state faces more than one dangerous rival but does not have the military might to confront them all at once. Buck-passing might help reduce the number of threats. For example, the United Kingdom faced three menacing adversaries in the 1930s—Germany, Italy, and Japan—but it did not have the military power to check all three of them at once. The United Kingdom attempted to alleviate the problem by passing the burden of dealing with Germany to France, so it could concentrate instead on Italy and Japan.

Buck-passing is not a foolproof strategy, however. Its chief drawback is that the buck-catcher might fail to check the aggressor, leaving the buck-passer in a precarious strategic position. For example, France could not handle Nazi Germany alone, and therefore the United Kingdom had to form a balancing coalition with France against Hitler in March 1939. By then, however, Hitler controlled all of Czechoslovakia and it was too late to contain the Third Reich; war broke out five months later in September 1939. During that same period, the Soviet Union successfully passed the buck to France and the United Kingdom and then sat back expecting to watch Germany engage those two buck-catchers in a long, bloody war. But the Wehrmacht overran France in six weeks during the spring of 1940, leaving Hitler free to attack the Soviet Union without having to worry much about his western flank. By buck-passing rather than engaging Germany at the same time that France and the United Kingdom did, the Soviets wound up fighting a much harder war.

Furthermore, in cases where the buck-passer allows the military might of the buck-catcher to increase, there is the danger that the buck-catcher might eventually become so powerful that it threatens to upset the balance of power, as happened with Germany after it was unified in 1870. Bismarck actually worked to uphold the balance for the next twenty years. Indeed, a united Germany served to keep Russia and France in check on the European continent, as the United Kingdom hoped it would. But the situation changed markedly after 1890, as Germany grew increasingly powerful and eventually attempted to dominate Europe by force. Buck-passing in this case was, at best, a mixed success for the United Kingdom and Russia: effective in the short run, but disastrous in the long run.

Although these potential problems are surely cause for concern, they ultimately do little to diminish buck-passing's appeal. Great powers do not buck-pass thinking that it will lead to failure. On the contrary, they expect the strategy to succeed. Otherwise, they would eschew buck-passing and form a balancing coalition with the other threatened states in the system. But it is difficult to predict the future in international politics. Who would have guessed in 1870 that Germany would become the most powerful state in Europe by the early twentieth century and precipitate two world wars? Nor is balancing a foolproof alternative to buck-passing. Indeed, balancing is often inefficient, and states that balance together sometimes suffer catastrophic defeats, as happened to the United Kingdom and France in the spring of 1940.

It should be apparent that buck-passing sometimes leads to the same outcome as a bait-and-bleed strategy. Specifically, when buck-passing leads to war, the buck-passer, like the baiter, improves its relative power position by remaining on the sidelines while its main rivals wear themselves down. Furthermore, both strategies can fail in the same way if one of the combatants wins a quick and decisive victory. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between the two strategies: buck-passing is principally a deterrence strategy, with war-fighting as the default option, whereas bait and bleed purposely aims to provoke a war.

STRATEGIES TO AVOID

Some argue that balancing and buck-passing are not the only strategies that threatened states might employ against a dangerous opponent. Appeasement and bandwagoning, so the argument goes, are also viable alternatives. But that is wrong. Both of those strategies call for conceding power to an aggressor, which violates balance-of-power logic and increases the danger to the state that employs them. Great powers that care about their survival should neither appease nor bandwagon with their adversaries.

Bandwagoning happens when a state joins forces with a more powerful opponent, conceding that its formidable new partner will gain a dispro-

portionate share of the spoils they conquer together.⁵⁴ The distribution of power, in other words, will shift further against the bandwagoner and in the stronger state's favor. Bandwagoning is a strategy for the weak. Its underlying assumption is that if a state is badly outgunned by a rival, it makes no sense to resist its demands, because that adversary will take what it wants by force anyway and inflict considerable punishment in the process. The bandwagoner must just hope that the troublemaker is merciful. Thucydides' famous dictum that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" captures the essence of bandwagoning.⁵⁵

This strategy, which violates the basic canon of offensive realism—that states maximize relative power—is rarely employed by great powers, because they have, by definition, the wherewithal to put up a decent fight against other great powers, and because they certainly have the incentive to stand up and fight. Bandwagoning is employed mainly by minor powers that stand alone against hostile great powers.⁵⁶ They have no choice but to give in to the enemy, because they are weak and isolated. Good examples of bandwagoning are the decisions by Bulgaria and Romania to ally with Nazi Germany in the early stages of World War II and then shift their allegiance to the Soviet Union near the end of the war.⁵⁷

With appeasement, a threatened state makes concessions to an aggressor that shift the balance of power in the recipient's favor. The appeaser usually agrees to surrender all or part of the territory of a third state to its powerful foe. The purpose of this allowance is behavior modification: to push the aggressor in a more pacific direction and possibly turn it into a *status quo* power.⁵⁸ The strategy rests on the assumption that the adversary's aggressive behavior is largely the result of an acute sense of strategic vulnerability. Therefore, any steps taken to reduce that insecurity will dampen, and possibly eliminate, the underlying motive for war. Appeasement accomplishes this end, so the argument goes, by allowing the appeaser to demonstrate its good intentions and by shifting the military balance in the appeased state's favor, thus making it less vulnerable and more secure, and ultimately less aggressive.

Unlike the bandwagoner, who makes no effort to contain the aggressor, the appeaser remains committed to checking the threat. But like band-

and allow the balance with the lesser threat to shift adversely, so as to free up resources to deal with the primary threat. With any luck, the secondary threat will eventually become a rival of the primary threat, thus making it possible to forge an alliance with the former against the latter.

This logic explains in part the United Kingdom's rapprochement with the United States in the early twentieth century.⁵⁹ At that time, the United States was clearly the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere, although the United Kingdom still had significant interests in the region, which sometimes led to serious disputes with the Americans. However, it decided to abandon the region and establish good relations with the United States, in part because the United Kingdom, all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, was in no position to confront the United States in its own backyard. But the United Kingdom also faced growing threats in other regions of the globe, especially the rise of Germany in Europe, which was potentially a far greater threat to the United Kingdom than was the United States, an ocean away. This changing threat environment motivated the United Kingdom to make concessions to the Americans so that it could concentrate its resources against Germany. Eventually, Germany threatened the United States as well, causing the Americans and the British to fight together as allies against Germany in both world wars.

Finally, conceding power to a dangerous adversary might make sense as a short-term strategy for buying time to mobilize the resources needed to contain the threat. The state making the allowance must not only be dealing from a short-term position of weakness but must also have superior or long-term mobilization capability. Few instances of this kind of behavior can be found in the historical record. The only case I know of is the Munich agreement of September 1938, in which the United Kingdom allowed the Sudetenland (which was an integral part of Czechoslovakia) to be absorbed by Nazi Germany, in part because British policymakers believed that the balance of power favored the Third Reich but that it would shift in favor of the United Kingdom and France over time. In fact, the balance shifted against the Allies after Munich: they probably would have been better off going to war against Germany in 1938 over Czechoslovakia rather than over Poland in 1939.⁶⁰

wagoning, appeasement contradicts the dictates of offensive realism and therefore it is a fanciful and dangerous strategy. It is unlikely to transform a dangerous foe into a kinder, gentler opponent, much less a peace-loving state. Indeed, appeasement is likely to whet, not shrink, an aggressor state's appetite for conquest. There is little doubt that if a state concedes a substantial amount of power to an acutely insecure rival, that foe would presumably feel better about its prospects for survival. That reduced level of fear would, in turn, lessen that rival's incentive to shift the balance of power in its favor. But that good news is only part of the story. In fact, two other considerations trump that peace-promoting logic. International anarchy, as emphasized, causes states to look for opportunities to gain additional increments of power at each other's expense. Because great powers are programmed for offense, an appeased state is likely to interpret any power concession by another state as a sign of weakness—as evidence that the appeaser is unwilling to defend the balance of power. The appeased state is then likely to continue pushing for more concessions. It would be foolish for a state not to gain as much power as possible, because a state's prospects for survival increase as it accumulates additional increments of power. Furthermore, the appeased state's capability to gain even more power would be enhanced—probably substantially—by the additional power it was granted by the appeaser. In short, appeasement is likely to make a dangerous rival more, not less, dangerous.

CONCEDING POWER FOR REALIST REASONS

There are, however, special circumstances in which a great power might concede some power to another state yet not act contrary to balance-of-power logic. As noted earlier, it sometimes makes good sense for a buck-passer to allow the buck-catcher to gain power if it enhances the buck-catcher's prospects of containing the aggressor by itself. Furthermore, if a great power confronts two or more aggressors at the same time, but has neither the resources to check all of them nor an ally to which it can pass the buck, the besieged state probably should prioritize between its threats