

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 24  
Number 7 September

Article 6

---

1971

# The Use of Seapower in Countering the Strategy of Interposition

William M. Pitt  
*U.S. Navy*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Pitt, William M. (1971) "The Use of Seapower in Countering the Strategy of Interposition," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 24 : No. 7 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol24/iss7/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

*The strategy of interposition is a sequential strategy designed to limit an opponent's available courses of action to two options—desist and accede to the interposer or initiate armed violence, thereby suffering the onus of escalation. Cumulative strategies offer the greatest prospect for success in countering interposition as they do not depend upon the success of any single action, but upon the cumulative effect of success in a series of lesser actions. In dealing with interposition, cumulative strategies offer a framework within which the opponent can closely control his actions in the confrontation of risk and bargaining.*

## THE USE OF SEAPOWER IN COUNTERING THE STRATEGY OF INTERPOSITION

A research paper prepared

by

Lieutenant Commander William M. Pitt, U.S. Navy

College of Naval Command and Staff

**Introduction.** The recent emergence of the Soviet Union as a major naval power has prompted a great deal of discussion, both within and outside naval circles, of the strategic use to which this power is to be applied. One such use has been suggested by Charles W. Walter, a 1970 graduate of the Naval War College, in his paper, "Interposition, the Strategy and Its Potential Use by the Soviet Union," much of which has been published as an article in the *Naval War College Review*.<sup>1</sup> In an oversimplified sense, the desired result of the use of the strategy of interposition is to induce an opponent to turn away from an objective by placing an interposing force between the opponent's forces and his objective. The result is intended to be achieved without resort

to violence. The opponent turns away because he perceives this force as a threat to involve him in a process that will involve costs and risks much greater than the worth of the objective. These costs and risks are primarily associated with the possibility that the opponent will escalate what is initially a non-belligerent situation into an armed encounter.<sup>2</sup> The threat of escalation is the principal threat of the forces of interposition and overshadows the direct military threat of the force itself.

The purpose of this paper is to develop an acceptable framework for a counterstrategy to the strategy of interposition.

Walter notes that the Soviet Union now has the means and possibly the incentives to employ the strategy of

interposition on its periphery,<sup>3</sup> but that the "concept of denial through threat superimposed on a countervailing tendency of the two nuclear powers to recognize the importance of avoiding mutually damaging or obliterating confrontations presents an apparent paradox . . ." <sup>4</sup> This apparent paradox is the central focus of any discussion of the ability of one superpower to use a naval force as either a force of interposition or a force to counter interposition vis-a-vis another superpower.

In the context of nuclear *détente*, the use of threat can develop as a contest in which neither side can threaten the other without simultaneously threatening itself. In Schelling's words, "The Soviet Union can indeed threaten us with war: they can even threaten us with a war that we eventually start, by threatening to get involved with us in a process that blows up into war."<sup>5</sup> It is this process that both interposer and opponent simultaneously threaten each other and seek to avoid.

The paradox is that in threatening each other with strategies that may result in escalation, nuclear powers must initiate actions which are in themselves hostile and noncooperative; actions which in themselves seem to be steps up the escalation ladder to the very encounter the party initiating the action desires to avoid.

This paradox is not particularly new. While it is currently explained in the context of nuclear *détente* between the superpowers, strategies involving the risks and costs of escalation have been discussed before. Corbett, in his discussion of limited war, deals with the problem of selecting the objective of a limited war in terms of minimizing the risk of escalation.

Firstly, it [the objective] must not merely be limited in area, but of really limited political importance; and secondly, it must be so situated as to be strategically

isolated or to be capable of being reduced to practical isolation by strategic operations. Unless this condition exists, it is in the power of either belligerent, as Clausewitz himself saw, to pass to unlimited war if he so desires, and, ignoring the territorial objective, to strike at the heart of his enemy and force him to desist.<sup>6</sup>

A few pages later he states that a power can wage limited war only if it can strategically isolate the objective and render impossible the invasion of his home territory. Corbett does not, however, consider the pacific use of seapower. Even in his discussion of defensive strategies and "fleets in being," his primary thrust is that such strategies are only employed when it is necessary to delay decisive action to a more opportune time, not to avoid action.

Attempts to resolve this paradox by historic example are not particularly fruitful either. Walter lists six examples of the use of the strategy of interposition that occurred prior to 1949 and seven examples of its use since 1949, the year in which the Soviet Union acquired the ability to use nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> With the single exception of the Cuban missile crisis, there is no example of the use of interposition in which the actual security of the interposing state could have been realistically threatened or damaged by the opponent in the sense that it was within the power of the opponent to pass to unlimited general war, nuclear or nonnuclear, with the interposer.

In every other case the opponent has been in the relatively inferior position of facing an adversary (the interposer) capable of severely damaging his overall military capabilities, while he (the opponent) was militarily capable of little more than forcing a local armed engagement. Walter's example of the British interposition between Sweden and Russia in the Baltic during the

period 1719-1721 is an excellent illustration of this point. While the Russians could have engaged the British Fleet in the Baltic, they had no means by which they could have realistically threatened Great Britain itself.<sup>8</sup>

Another interesting aspect of these examples is that in every case of interposition involving the use of naval force, including the Cuban missile crisis, the aggregate naval capabilities of the interposer have been superior to those of the opponent, although the capabilities of the particular forces assembled by the interposer at the point of interposition have not been necessarily superior to those assembled by the opponent.

Again the British example of 1719-1721 is illustrative. While the Russians could have forced an engagement with the relatively small British contingent immediately present, the overwhelming aggregate strength of the Royal Navy would have resulted in the eventual destruction of Russian naval capabilities in the Baltic.<sup>9</sup>

The list of incidents assembled by Walter is not, as he himself states, necessarily all inclusive. It does not mention the 1956 confrontation of the United States, British, and French Fleets during the Suez crisis or the confrontation of the United States and Russian Fleets in the Sea of Japan following the *Pueblo* crisis in January of 1968 as possible examples of interposition. The list does suggest the possibility that historically the strategy of interposition has been used primarily as a strategy that maximized the mobility and superiority of forces available to the interposer in situations where there was very little risk of failure. This is, however, just a possibility. Another explanation might be that many cases of interposition were implemented so subtly that the examples were never recognized as interposition by historians. Such situations could arise in more sophisticated applications of the strategy, wherein the interposer both left open a

path of retreat for the opponent and managed to keep the "stakes" small enough to avoid public humiliation of the opponent. An example of this could be an interposer who managed to position his forces of interposition before the opponent even began to assemble his forces. In either case the paradox in its modern context does not appear to have been addressed in practice.

The use of seapower by modern nuclear superpowers in strategies of interposition or in countering interposition cannot avoid the paradox in a clear-cut fashion. The thresholds between pacific action and belligerent action, between limited war and general war, are not nearly as clear or well defined as they were prior to the advent of nuclear deterrence. Each threshold must now be evaluated in terms of the possibility that a world cataclysm could result as the threshold is crossed. Achieving an "optimal balance of unavoidable punishment and preferred reward" between the superpowers is an infinitely more complex task of weighing costs, threats, and risks than the simplified definition of the strategy of interposition implies, and likewise, the task of countering interposition is more complex. A successful nonbelligerent counter to the strategy of interposition must place a great deal of emphasis upon the problem of first determining and then weighing the risks associated with possible outcomes of the application of such principles and moves.

The classic method of countering a strategy is to first determine its points of weakness and then to set about undermining it at these points. Such is the method of attack here, except that instead of searching for an actual weakness, we must deal with potential weaknesses. The threat being faced is that of potential use of force, risk of escalation, and possible war.

In actual warfare it would be a very natural reaction for an adversary to

## 50 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

reinforce a threatened weak position with forces from a stronger position. In a nonbelligerent confrontation resulting from the strategy of interposition, such a reaction might well be impossible. It might recast the interposer as an interventionist, an initiator of escalation, and thus destroy the premise upon which his initial strategy of interposition was dependent for success.

**The Strategy of Interposition.**<sup>10</sup> The strategy of interposition is a means by which one denies an objective to an opponent—without actual use of force—by placing one's own forces between the opponent and the opponent's objective. It differs from the usual strategic concept of denial in that the force committed to the strategy by the interposer need not be sufficient to actually defeat the forces of the opponent, but only large enough to indicate the interposer's commitment to the strategy and induce restraint in the actions of the opponent by communicating a threat of the potential use of force.

The threat of potential use of force by the interposer is not just the threat of the interposer's forces in place, but the threat of increasing the opponent's risks and costs of obtaining his objective through the possibility of escalation and placing the burden of initiating escalation upon the opponent, invoking the principle of "the last clear chance" in such a fashion that only the opponent is presented the last clear chance to avoid initiating the process of escalation.

The opponent may react in three different ways: one, he may desist in his efforts to obtain the objective, perceiving that the costs and risks of continuing his efforts outweigh the value of the objective; two, he may perceive the actions of the interposer as a bluff and, believing that the risks associated with continuing are small in comparison to the value of the objective, continue his actions, "testing the mettle" of the interposer; or three, he

may continue his actions, perceiving that the interposer is committed, but that the value of the objective outweighs the costs associated with meeting the interposer's forces in place and the possible escalation that may result from such a meeting.

The strategy is completely successful only when the opponent desists. If the opponent continues, however, the interposer may still be partially successful in that his threat may be made more credible in future situations in which he desires to use the same strategy. Interposition is a relevant strategy when the interposer does not desire to make a large-scale commitment, but considers the gains associated with denying an objective to the opponent to outweigh the risks and potential costs of the strategy. The strategy is not feasible when the opponent considers the objective worthy of great risk or cost or when geographic factors make interposition impracticable.

Since the mission of the forces assembled by the interposer is pacific, that is to communicate commitment and threat without actual use of force, the interposer must establish a means of effecting control of the force, compatible with its use as a political instrument. At the same time, the interposer should have a predetermined course of action available in the event that the opponent does not accede.

In implementing the strategy, the interposer must first determine the worth of the objective to the opponent. The strategy will not work if the opponent considers the objective worthy of high levels of risk and cost, especially if the worth is so great that he would not hesitate to go to war in achieving it.

Assuming the worth of the objective to the opponent is considered by the interposer to be low, the interposer must position a force of appropriate size. He should position quickly as the advantages of position, time, and readiness may be instrumental in the com-

munication of threat and commitment to the opponent.

The commitment must be readily understood by the opponent; otherwise, the threat of the interposer's forces may be perceived as no more than a bluff. In communicating commitment, the opponent must perceive that the decision on escalation is now his, while the interposer must manage the crisis by containing the area of confrontation and commitment, thus decoupling the crisis from other dormant crises and minimizing the risk of compound escalation. This latter process is somewhat analogous to the "strategic isolation" requirement for limited war discussed by Corbett.

In communicating commitment the factors of size and disposition of the interposer's force are very important. If the force is too small, its threat and the interposer's commitment may not be clearly perceived by the opponent. If the force is too large, the opponent has to guess as to the intention of the interposer. The opponent may perceive that the force is completely out of proportion to the actual commitment of the interposer and thus a bluff (similar to a betting bluff in poker), or that the interposer intends to deny the objective through actual use of overwhelming force. In the case of latter perception it may be difficult for the interposer to place the onus of escalation clearly with the opponent. The opponent may, in fact, think that the overwhelming forces in place are not a deterrent, but that escalation has already occurred and that it is the intention of the interposer to seek out and destroy the opponent's forces, whether the opponent accedes or not.

Proper containment of the area of the interposer's commitment and the area of confrontation is important for two reasons. Firstly, if the areas of commitment and confrontation are suitably isolated, the interposer's threat should be more clearly perceived by the

opponent, who is encouraged in his judgment of increased cost and risk presented by the force of interposition is encouraged to consider these aspects solely in light of his original objective. If the opponent does not perceive that his judgment concerning increased costs and risks should be confined to the original objective, the interposer faces a situation in which he is much less able to judge the broadening intentions of the opponent; this raises the risks and costs of interposition above those originally calculated by the interposer. Secondly, the interposer must face up to the possibility that the strategy may fail. Suitably containing his commitment and the area of confrontation is an essential element of preventing further escalation of a resulting local violent conflict.

A final but very important factor in establishing and communicating the interposer's commitment is the degree to which the interposer has put his national prestige on the line. In situations where the use of the strategy of interposition involves little risk to the interposer, questions of national prestige or national "face" are not too important. In situations where the risks of the strategy to the interposer are high, the risks may be compounded, and thus the interposer's commitment enhanced, if the interposer can establish an understanding with the opponent that the interposer's national prestige is at stake. Again, in considering the use of national prestige, the interposer must also consider the possibility that the strategy of interposition may fail and that such a failure could result in violent conflict to preserve his national prestige or national honor. Such a conflict might be much more difficult to contain or control than a conflict in which such moral issues are not at stake.

As mentioned in the introduction, historically it appears that, with the single exception of the Cuban missile crisis, there has never been a case of

## 52 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

successful interposition involving the use of naval force in which the actual security of the interposing state could have been realistically threatened or damaged by the opponent in the sense that it was within the power of the opponent to pass to unlimited general war with the interposer. Briefly, Walter's listing of the successful uses of seapower in interposition are the interposition of the British between the Russians and the Swedes in the Baltic during the period 1719-1721; the interposition of the Russians between the Turks and the Egyptians in 1833;\* the interposition of the British and the Austrians between the Turks and the Egyptians in 1839; the interposition of Chichester and his British cruisers between Dewey's squadron and von Diederich's German squadron at Manila Bay in 1898; the interposition of a U.S. destroyer between the Turks and a British refugee ship evacuating Greek refugees from Smyrna in 1922; the joint British-French naval patrol of 1937 to halt submarine sinkings of non-Spanish vessels during the Spanish Civil War; the interposition of the U.S. 7th Fleet between Chinese Communists and Chinese Nationalists in the Formosa Straits in 1954-1958; the interposition of U.S. forces between Lebanon and an external threat from Syria and Iraq in 1958; the interposition of British forces between Iraq and Kuwait in 1961; and finally, the interposition of the United States between Russian ships and Cuba in 1962.

Even a cursory review of this rather lengthy list of incidents indicates that in every case, except the Cuban example of 1962, the failure of interposition

could have resulted in limited war between interposer and opponent, but not in the opponent directly threatening the security of the interposer.

**Classical Failures of the Strategy of Interposition.** In the search for means and methods useful in countering the strategy of interposition, one scans histories in vain, looking for incidents wherein an opponent has successfully achieved his original objective despite the presence of an interposer's forces.

While there may be many instances where an opponent has tried to counter the strategy of interposition while avoiding an armed encounter, few have been recognized by historians as an application of a counterstrategy. Some attempts may have been subtle counters to interposition that succeeded so well (the interposer simply withdrew) that they were never recognized, but most such instances have apparently ended in failure. Either the opponent was unable to counter the interposer with a non-belligerent strategy (which is a successful use of the strategy of interposition) or in attempting to counter the interposer, war resulted between the opponent and interposer. While it is possible that, in the latter instance, opponents have been able to achieve their original objectives, such achievement was over the "dead body" of the interposer and not a nonbelligerent application of a counterstrategy.

There are two recorded incidents in which the strategy of interposition has been applied and resulted in failure or partial failure in the sense that either the interposer improperly applied the strategy of interposition or the opponent was able to gain an objective, although not the original objective, despite the presence of an interposer's forces. Both instances involve the Turkish Navy. The first incident involved the interposition of a British-French-Russian combined fleet between the combined Turkish-Egyptian Fleets

---

\*See later discussion for an account of the unsuccessful use of interposition in this area in 1827. The combined fleets of the British, French, and Russians attempted to interpose between the combined Turkish-Egyptian Fleet and the Greeks. The result was the Battle of Navarino.

and the Greeks, resulting in the Battle of Navarino in October 1827. The second incident involved the interposition of a combined French and British force between the Russians and the Turks, which resulted in the Russian victory at Sinope in November of 1853.

The Battle of Navarino is more an object lesson in what not to do as an interposer than an example of an effective counter to the strategy of interposition. In 1821 the Greeks rebelled against their Turkish overlords. At first they were successful, but then Mehemet Ali, Khedive of Egypt, brought his army and fleet up in support of the Turks. Nicholas I, having just succeeded to the Russian throne, saw in the conflict an opportunity to harass his country's traditional enemy, Turkey. Accordingly, he joined with Britain and France for the purpose of mediating the conflict, and the three powers joined their naval forces in Greek waters in October of 1827. The combined fleet, consisting of 10 ships of the line, 10 frigates, and some half dozen brigs and schooners, was commanded by Vice Adm. Sir Edward Codrington, with Rear Admirals de Hayden and Gauthier de Rigny commanding, respectively, the Russian and French divisions.<sup>11</sup>

The combined fleet's mission was threefold; first, to offer the services of the three powers in mediation between the Turks and the Greeks; second, to "prevent the spread of hostilities" and finally, to suppress Greek piracy.<sup>12</sup> While preventing the spread of hostilities is interpreted as a purpose consistent with the strategy of interposition, it seems clear that intervention was also a major purpose of the forces, especially on the part of Russia. Successful intervention on behalf of the Greeks presented the Russians with an opportunity to diminish the power and influence of the Ottoman Empire.

The combined Turkish-Egyptian Fleet, under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, anchored in the Bay of Navarino

on the west coast of Greece, in support of Turkish forces ashore who were subduing the rebellious Greeks in the countryside surrounding the bay. Although the fleet consisted of 65 ships, only three were ships of the line. Codrington and de Rigny met with Ibrahim Pasha on 25 September to inform him of their offer of mediation, which the Greeks had already accepted. Ibrahim Pasha agreed to keep his fleet at Navarino until the offer could be communicated to the Sultan and a reply received, whereupon Codrington's fleet withdrew, leaving two frigates for purposes of surveillance.

Before the reply was received, however, a Greek naval division appeared in the Gulf of Patras, some distance to the north. Ibrahim Pasha thereupon dispatched a force to demand the withdrawal of the Greeks. The Turkish force was intercepted off Lepanto by Codrington with three or four ships, and Codrington indicated that the Turks were not to proceed. The Turks turned back, but then made a second attempt with another detachment of some 15 vessels. Again Codrington interposed his forces, and the Turks withdrew.

During the month in which these actions were taking place, the Turks continued to press on with the job of suppressing the rebellious Greeks in the surrounding countryside. Codrington, desiring to bring more pressure on the Turks, apparently calculated that since the Turks had twice given way before a relatively small show of force, they would not attack the whole allied fleet if it were to enter Navarino Bay in strength. Accordingly, Codrington stood in, and his ships began to anchor near the Turkish vessels. A short time later the frigate *Dartmouth*, ordered to watch the Turkish fire ships, sent off a boat to request one of the fire ships to draw off a short distance. The fire ship responded with small arms fire, killing the boat's officer. *Dartmouth* immediately began giving covering fire to her boat. Thus



## 54 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

began one of the most confusing battles of history, as one by one the various ships took up the exchange. The outcome was the complete destruction of Ibrahim Pasha's fleet, the Turks and Egyptians beaching and burning their surviving ships the day following the battle.

Codrington sent envoys to explain that it had not been his intention to destroy or capture the Turkish Fleet, apparently in vain, for the Turks continued to beach and burn their surviving vessels. Codrington's actions were disowned by his government, and he was recalled to London in disgrace, though only temporarily, for he was later given command of the Home Fleet.

As stated earlier, Navarino's main lessons are those of the limitations of interposition. In turning back Ibrahim Pasha's two attempts to reach the Greek naval division in the Gulf of Patras, Codrington applied the strategy of interposition in classic fashion. In each case he placed a small force between the opponent and his objective, indicated his commitment not to permit the Turkish units to proceed, and placed the onus of escalation clearly upon the Turks. His mistake lay in his apparent assumption that in entering Navarino Bay he would simply be repeating the procedure for a third time.

In fact, he was proceeding from the successful use of interposition to intervention. Once Codrington entered Navarino Bay, the Turks lost their freedom of action. There no longer was so clear a choice as to whether they should avoid the allied force or accept the onus of escalation by confronting and engaging the allied force. In a sense Codrington himself escalated the situation by denying Ibrahim Pasha his freedom of action. The situation was also confused by the lack of control displayed by Codrington's forces. While *Dartmouth* opened fire in self-defense, the Turkish-Egyptian forces, faced with an allied fleet sailing into their anchorage, a fleet

whose intentions were unknown, one of whose ships then opened fire, can hardly be blamed for failing to recognize Codrington's pacific intention. Apparently the Turks perceived that Codrington's intention was to engage and destroy their forces.

Codrington's mistake was to press Ibrahim Pasha too hard. Codrington placed the Turks in a position from which they could not withdraw with any modicum of grace. By pushing his forces into direct confrontation, he placed himself in a position in which Turkish command and control were inadequate to insure that any decision to engage would be deliberate and centrally controlled. Codrington diminished the proportion of rationality involved and raised the influence of chance and irrationality.

The Battle of Sinope, the second example of the failure of strategy of interposition, is remembered primarily as the battle which proved the superiority of the shell gun over wooden hulls and shot fired from smooth bores. In 6 hours of fighting, the Russian Vice Admiral Nakhimov sank all seven of the Turkish frigates present and then shelled the town. At a cost of fewer than 40 dead, his 120-gun ships of the line, mounting main batteries of 68-pounder shell guns, killed nearly 3,000 Turks.<sup>13</sup>

Hostilities between the Turks and Russia commenced with the Russian Army moving into what is now Rumania in 1853. The British and French, fearful that Nicholas I might descend on Constantinople and seize the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, both dispatched squadrons to the Sea of Marmara just below Constantinople. The squadrons were both of considerable size, the French squadron under Vice Admiral Hamelin consisting of nine ships of the line and eight frigates and steam corvettes. While French motives were also tied in with the dispute with Russia over administration of Christian shrines in the Holy Land, the main purpose of the

squadrons was interposition, to deny Russia access to Constantinople. Potter and Nimitz state that they also hoped that their presence would discourage Russian naval operation in the Black Sea.<sup>14</sup> While the Russians did not make any attempt to move on Constantinople, Nakhimov cruised the Black Sea freely in search of Turkish ships.

In November he discovered Osman Pasha's winter squadron off Sinope, where the Turks had taken cover during a storm while returning from the Circassian coast. Although Nakhimov had three ships of the line with him, more than enough to deal with the seven Turkish frigates, he brought up reinforcements of three additional triple-deckers. Stationing a line of auxiliaries between Sinope and the Bosphorus to warn him if the British or French should enter the Black Sea, he entered Sinope with his six ships on the morning of 30 November under cover of heavy mist. By 4 in the afternoon, every Turkish ship in the harbor had been sunk.<sup>15</sup>

The initial reaction of the British and French, aside from dismay with the ruthlessness of the Russians, was to move their forces of interposition into the Black Sea, which they accomplished in January of 1854, and then "invited" Nakhimov to proceed to Sevastopol and remain there.<sup>16</sup>

It was, however, too late. The British and French, by placing forces of interposition in the Sea of Marmara, had signaled only a limited commitment to deny the Russians access to Constantinople. It appears that, in reality, the British and French desired to deny Russian access to the Turkish Black Sea coast, a level of commitment much higher than their forces in the Sea of Marmara had signaled. Faced with the problem of accepting the failure or increasing their visible commitment, the British and French elected the latter course and moved their forces into the Black Sea.

The movement of the British and

French into the Black Sea was in itself an acknowledgment of the failure of the strategy of interposition. If they had moved into the Black Sea initially, they would probably have denied the Russians access to Sinope. By moving their forces after the fact, the British and French were moving to prevent a recurrence of an act that the Russians had already commenced. The movement constituted intervention, a move to stop the Russians from continuing an action already begun, rather than to prevent the initiation of an action. As such, it was a movement of escalation and a failure of the strategy of interposition.

On 31 January the British Foreign Secretary, in response to a question in the House of Lords as to whether Britain was at war or peace, responded, "I am correct in saying that we are not at war with Russia, although diplomatic relations with that country are suspended. . . . I consider that we are in the *intermediate state*; that our desire for peace is just as sincere as ever, but then I must say our hopes of maintaining it are gradually dwindling away and that we are drifting toward war."<sup>17</sup>

The British and French were now practically obliged to declare war. Late in the spring they commenced their first campaign of the Crimean War with a landing of 60,000 troops at Varna on the western shore of the Black Sea and induced the Russians to retreat to the north across the Danube.

The failure of interposition at Sinope points up what is both a difficulty of the interposer and a means of countering the strategy on the part of an opponent. The British and French correctly perceived that the ultimate Russian objective was Constantinople and interposed their forces in such a manner that the Russians could not achieve their objective without confronting the forces of interposition. Nakhimov was not, however, presented with a choice

of the two courses of action previously discussed. As long as the British and French forces remained in the Sea of Marmara, he still enjoyed considerable freedom of action in the Black Sea; and employing his freedom of action, he was able to find a secondary objective.

The secondary objective was presented to him by chance, perhaps, but he was alert enough to realize that the Turkish squadron at Sinope was an obtainable objective and so situated that it would be impossible for the British and French to interpose before he could reach it (the distance from Sevastopol to Sinope is about two-thirds of that between Constantinople and Sinope).

Another interesting aspect of the incident is the manner in which the British and French increased the scope of their commitment. It seems clear that the original commitment of the interposers was intended to be relatively limited, to deny Russian access to Constantinople. Likewise it would appear that this could have been accomplished either by placing the forces of interposition in the Sea of Marmara, as was actually the case, or in the Black Sea. By choosing the Sea of Marmara and then moving into the Black Sea after the Russian victory at Sinope, the British and French increased the scale of their commitment to a point much higher than it would have been if they had already been established in the Black Sea at the time of Sinope. The movement of the forces of interposition through the Bosphorus and into the Black Sea was, in a sense, itself a move of escalation, even though its result was the retirement of the Russian Fleet to Sevastopol. The implication is that, by achieving a secondary objective at Sinope, Nakhimov had successfully countered the strategy of interposition and passed the onus of escalation back to the British and French.

In summary, we have discussed two historic examples in which the strategy of interposition failed. The first

example, resulting in the Battle of Navarino, failed when the interposer moved his forces in such a way that the opponent perceived the interposers' actions as intervention. The second example, resulting in the Battle of Sinope, failed when the interposer positioned his forces in such a way that the opponent was able to find a secondary objective that was not covered by the forces of interposition. Both cases were in the age of sail, and in both cases the aggregate naval power of the interposer was far superior to the total naval power of the opponent. Both failures resulted in battle; and in the second example the failure was a major factor in precipitating a limited war (the Crimean War). Finally, in neither example was the opponent capable of waging unlimited war against the interposing powers.

**Strategic Moves in Countering Interposition.** In dealing with the various strategic possibilities for countering interposition, it is well to note that position itself is a vital element of the strategy of interposition. The threat of an interposer's forces and the interposer's commitment to deny an opponent free access to his objective are embodied and communicated to the opponent by an appropriate concentration of force between the forces of the opponent and his objective. It follows that the interposer must know to some degree the opponent's objective and that the interposer should know the position of the opponent's forces if he hopes to effectively interpose his own forces.

While it is unlikely that an interposer would possess perfect knowledge of an opponent's objectives or disposition, a poor knowledge of the opponent immensely complicates the interposer's task of weighing his own risks in the strategy and determining the proper position for the forces of interposition.

A second important element of interposition is the sequential nature of the

strategy. The interposer must: one, determine the opponent's strategic objective; two, weigh his (the interposer's) own risks and costs in view of the value of the objective to the opponent; three, position the force of interposition correctly and in sufficient time to signal his commitment to deny the objective to the opponent; and four, clearly communicate to the opponent that he (the opponent) bears the "onus of escalation." If the interposer fails to achieve any one of these steps, the strategy will not succeed. Interposition is a step-by-step sequential process which is designed to present to an opponent a choice between two courses of action: he may either desist and abandon his objective or he may confront the interposer and escalate the conflict from nonbelligerent action to violent action between the interposer and the opponent.

Thus, in adopting a strategy to counter interposition, it should be the opponent's aim to dislocate the interposer's force of interposition simultaneously while undermining at least one of the sequential steps of the strategy of interposition. This dislocation may be either geographical or what Liddell Hart calls psychological dislocation.<sup>18</sup> The type of dislocation that an opponent attempts to achieve depends upon the circumstances of the situation: the nature and scope of the objective, the concentration and capabilities of the forces of interposition, and the concentration and capabilities of the opponent's own forces. In considering these factors the opponent seeks to find movements which ultimately result in the interposer perceiving that his forces are not properly positioned to accomplish interposition. The interposer must perceive that his forces cannot be repositioned or reorganized unless he is willing to move from a strategy of interposition to intervention. The opponent's countermoves to dislocate the interposer will be even more successful

if they result in passing the onus of escalation back to the interposer, and the interposer perceives that he now bears this onus.

The nature of the objective is the opponent's first consideration in looking for a countermove designed to achieve the dislocation of the interposer. The first step of an interposer, in implementing his strategy of interposition, is to determine his opponent's objectives and then to determine the risks and costs of interposition based on a judgment of the worth of the objective to the opponent. The interposer must, at some point, make this judgment because he is conscious that the strategy of interposition will not be successful if the opponent feels that the objective is worth a great level of risk or cost.

If the opponent can obscure his objective, the interposer will find the task of judging his own risks and costs much more difficult. There are, of course, instances in which it will be difficult to obscure an objective. If the objective is located in a small, precisely defined geographic area, the interposer will have little difficulty in defining the opponent's geographic aim, regardless of the strategic moves that the opponent undertakes. The sharp, but well-localized political strife in the Congo and Cyprus are good examples of situations where the geographic objective of an opponent bent on intervention would be nearly impossible to obscure.

On the other hand, the clarity of a geographical objective does not necessarily lead to clarity of strategic intent. In such cases the interposer is able to determine the geographic objective and thus solve the problem of finding the correct position for his forces of interposition. Not knowing the opponent's strategic objective, however, the interposer still has the very difficult task of judging his own and the opponent's relative costs and risks. The costs and risks of interposing against an opponent

## 58 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

whose strategic aim is to separate two warring factions in a local political crisis may be completely different than the costs and risks of interposing against an opponent whose strategic aim is to support one faction by defeating the other.

An opponent's objective of reprisal is another example where it might be difficult to obscure the objective, as acts of reprisal are generally closely tailored to fit the original act against which the reprisal is aimed. In conducting a reprisal, the opponent tries to connect his action as closely as possible to the original action as a means of justifying his reprisal. In some cases the objective for an act of reprisal will be obvious to the interposer, permitting the interposer to act accordingly.

In many cases, however, it should be possible for the opponent to make his objective obscure, or at least partially obscure, in the eyes of the interposer. The historical example of Sinope is a case in point. The opponent, Admiral Nakhimov, succeeded in dislocating the forces of the interposer (the British and French squadrons in the Sea of Marmara) by finding an alternative objective obscure to the interposer. Maintaining a dispersion of forces until just before initiating action made it easier for him to obscure his alternative objective from the interposer. Had Nakhimov maintained a concentration of his ships of the line for any substantial period of time prior to moving against Sinope, it is quite possible that the interposers would have perceived their dislocation and moved into the Black Sea.

A more recent example also serves to illustrate the usefulness of obscuring the objective. During the Jordanian crisis of 1970, the United States clearly signaled its intention to intervene, if it felt that such intervention was necessary to prevent the defeat of King Hussein. While the intention of the United States to intervene was clear, and it would clearly have been in the interests of the Soviet

Union to interpose her naval forces to prevent such intervention, the objectives of U.S. forces in intervention were by no means clear. In fact, the United States had a range of alternate objectives available, from direct intervention with its own forces in Jordan to operating as a tactical reserve for the Israelis who could then use their forces in intervention. The Soviets, not knowing the precise intentions or objectives of the U.S. forces, were in the difficult position of attempting to determine these intentions and objectives. If they desired to interpose, the concentration of their forces of interposition had to be positioned relative to the U.S. objectives in such a way that the Soviet forces presented the United States with both a credible threat and the "last clear chance" to avoid escalation. If the Soviets chose the wrong objective, the possibility that their forces of interposition would find themselves dislocated was very great. While these forces still would have presented a real threat to U.S. forces, the onus of escalation would not clearly lie with the United States.

Under such circumstances the success of applying a strategy of interposition would have been highly dependent upon correctly guessing the intentions of the opponent (the United States) or upon mounting sufficient force to enable the potential interposer (the Soviet Union) to interpose between the opponent and all of the opponent's alternate objectives. In either case, the strategy would have been difficult to apply successfully.

Each of the foregoing examples hints at a means of obscuring one's objective. In the somewhat more rigorous discussion that follows, means of obscuring the objective, as a means to dislocate the forces of the interposer, include the diversion or feint, the use of alternative objectives, the use of a dispersed advance, and finally, the use of alternatives of mixed capabilities, including the

alternative of threatening the forces of interposition directly.

Normally we think of feint and diversion as a means of deceiving the enemy by convincing him that the diversion is the main thrust of effort and that the objective against which the feint or diversion is aimed is the principal objective of our operations. As a counter to interposition, feint and diversion may be successful, for if the interposer is deceived, he will find his forces of interposition dislocated in relation to the opponent's true objective.

There are, however, several disadvantages to this method of deception. The first is that a feint or diversion normally requires some concentration of the opponent's forces against an objective which the opponent does not really desire. Unless the opponent possesses overwhelming force, the diversion is very likely to drain both strength and capability from the forces he intends to use against the actual objective.

The second disadvantage is that diversion and feint are themselves sequential strategies, in that the success of an opponent is dependent upon the deception working and dislocating the interposer to permit the opponent to gain his objective. If the interposer is not deceived, the opponent has no chance to achieve any cumulative results. If the deception fails, the interposer gains in the contest of relative strength of position, for he now clearly perceives the opponent's true intentions, while the opponent has diverted some portion of his strength and capabilities in the unsuccessful attempt at deception.

If deception is to be a really useful strategic tool to the opponent, some means of overcoming these disadvantages must be found. The opponent must find some means of increasing his available nonbelligerent courses of action. The best possibility is for the opponent to counter what Admiral Wylie would term a sequential strategy

by refusing to recognize the existence of only two courses of action and, instead, embark upon what might be called a cumulative strategy.<sup>19</sup>

... there is another way to prosecute a war. There is a type of warfare in which the entire pattern is made up of a collection of lesser actions, but these lesser or individual actions are not sequentially interdependent. . . . No one action is completely dependent on the one that preceded it. The thing that counts is the cumulative effect.<sup>20</sup>

Martin suggests this sort of cumulative strategy in noting that a Western naval power, faced with the possibility of confrontation with Soviet naval power, "might themselves prefer to find some non-belligerent response elsewhere by which the onus for the next and possibly belligerent step could be transferred back to Russia."<sup>21</sup> Finding a response elsewhere is a complex subject involving the possibilities of compound escalation and necessitates clearly connecting the actions "elsewhere" in a meaningful way with an opponent's actions at the scene of interposition. On the other hand, if "elsewhere" is not interpreted too rigidly, it can be a very useful concept. If the "elsewhere" is really rather close at hand, the opponent may be able to counter the interposer through skillful positioning of his forces without running the risks of compound escalation. The possibility of finding a more distant "elsewhere" is examined in later discussion.

Liddell Hart's discussion of the indirect approach is a cumulative strategy suggesting that movements in feint and diversion may be more useful when they are made against an alternative objective of some value to the opponent. In these circumstances the opponent is much more likely to achieve an objective, even if the movement is not successful in deceiving the interposer as to the main objective.

## 60 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Instead of the simple ideas of a concentrated stroke by a concentrated force, we should choose according to circumstance between the variants:

(i) Dispersed advance with concentrated single aim, i.e., against one objective.

(ii) Dispersed advance with concentrated serial aim, i.e., advanced successive objective.

(These will each demand preliminary moves to distract the enemy's attention and forces, unless the possibility of taking alternative objectives enables us to rely on such distracting effect being produced already by the enemy's perplexity.)

(iii) Dispersed advance with distributed aim, i.e., against a number of objectives simultaneously.

(Under the new conditions of warfare, the cumulative effect of partial success, or even mere threat, at a number of points may be greater than the effect of complete success at one point.)

The effectiveness of armies depends on the development of such new methods. . . ; at the practicable object of paralyzing the enemy's action rather than the theoretical object of crushing his forces.<sup>22</sup>

The third choice offers a strategic move which looks attractive as a counter to interposition. The "dispersed advance with distributed aim" places the interposer in a quandary. This dispersed advance makes it difficult for the interposer to determine either the opponent's objective or the strategic concentration of the opponent's forces. Not knowing the objective of the opponent or the strategic center of the opponent's forces, the interposer's problems of determining the value of the objective to the opponent and finding an appropriate position in which to place his forces

of interposition are much more difficult.

There are, of course, some who will argue that a dispersed advance would be improper for an opponent facing an interposer who has concentrated his forces of interposition. Such a course of action may place the opponent in a position wherein the interposer's concentration of force is locally superior to the force of the opponent. Furthermore, the opponent, by not massing and concentrating his forces, loses some of his ability to pose a counterthreat to the interposer. Such arguments are not inconsequential. While the opponent's aim is to achieve an objective while avoiding the forces of interposition, there is always the possibility that he will not be successful in his effort at dislocating the interposer and be forced to fight the interposer or abandon his objective.

The answer to these arguments lies in differentiating between the words dispersion, concentration, and mass. The purpose of an interposer's concentration of force is to communicate threat and commitment. He must, therefore, make his concentration visible, and this implies some degree of mass. The aim of an opponent is to achieve an objective despite the threat of the interposer. He, therefore, should make his concentration less visible, subject only to the requirement that the necessary mass can be achieved at the critical point when it is needed. This implies some degree of dispersion, but dispersion about a strategic center which will enable individual units to mutually support each other and mass at any one of several objective points, as the opportunity or need for such massing requires.

Julian Corbett's distinction between concentration and mass embodies this thesis.

In naval warfare at least this distinction between concentration and mass is essential to clear appreciation. It leads us to conclusions that are of the first impor-

tance. For instance, when once the mass is formed, concealment and flexibility are at an end. The further, therefore, from the formation of the ultimate mass we can stop the process of concentration the better designed it will be. The less we are committed to any particular mass, and the less we indicate what and where our mass is to be, the more formidable our concentration. To concentration, therefore, the idea of division is as essential as the idea of connection.<sup>23</sup>

Our concentrations must therefore be kept as open and flexible as possible. . . . The idea of massing, as a virtue in itself, is bred in peace and not in war. It indicates the debilitating idea that in war we must seek rather to avoid than to inflict defeat. . . . They [victories] must be worked for by bold strategical combinations, which as a rule entail at least apparent dispersal. . . . without division no strategical combinations are possible.<sup>24</sup>

The strongest argument that can be raised in objection to the dispersed advance is its heavy reliance upon alternate objectives. As mentioned earlier, there are occasions where alternative objectives of real value just cannot be found, and thus actual dislocation of an interposer's forces is difficult to achieve. In such situations it would seem that a dispersed advance loses much of its value as a device to obscure one's objectives. There are, however, two alternatives which might be of value. Both of these alternatives might be called alternatives of mixed capabilities, as they both involve finding an area of capability which the forces of interposition either lack or in which the interposer is very weak. Depending upon the nature of this lack of weakness in capability, the opponent may be able

to exploit his superiority in either moving directly on his objective, despite the presence of the interposer, or to pose a threat to the interposer himself.

The Berlin airlift of 1948-49 is an excellent example of the alternative of exploiting a capability which has been left open. In this case the Soviet Union clearly communicated its intent and commitment to deny all Allies access to Berlin via the surface corridors running through the Soviet Zone. The Allies elected to exploit their airlift capability as the one avenue of access to Berlin that the Soviets had not directly threatened. Once the airlift was started, a Soviet attempt to halt it would have amounted to escalation on the part of the Soviets, while any attempt to force access in the surface corridors would have amounted to escalation on the part of the Allies. Although the Berlin crisis of 1948 does not technically qualify as an example of the use of the strategy of interposition, there are many similarities between the position of the Allies after the Soviets had closed the surface access routes and the position of an opponent confronting an interposer.

An important point in exploiting this sort of alternative capability is that the opponent must do so quickly, for the same reasons that an interposer must position his forces quickly. Once an opponent successfully exploits such an alternative capability, the interposer cannot interfere without taking on himself the "onus of escalation," even though his forces of interposition are properly positioned to deny to the opponent the use of his principal capability against the objective.

As an example, consider a situation in which an interposer has positioned his forces to deny to an opponent the opportunity to conduct an amphibious landing at his objective. If the interposer's capability to oppose an airstrike is limited or nonexistent, the opponent might exploit his capability to conduct such strikes before the interposer can



## 62 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

reinforce or reposition his forces to deny the opponent the use of his strike capability. In any later attempt to interfere with such strikes, it would be the interposer who would bear the responsibility for escalation.

The second means of exploiting an opponent's superior capability is the use of this superiority to threaten the forces of the interposer directly. The objective (or alternative objective) is to psychologically dislocate the interposer and induce him to move back through the sequential steps of his strategy and reconsider his initial judgment of the value of the objective to the opponent. The threat to the interposer "is strongly accentuated if his realization of his being at a disadvantage is *sudden*, and if he feels that he is unable to counter the enemy's move. *Psychological dislocation fundamentally springs from this sense of being trapped.*"<sup>25</sup>

The aim of such a course of action is to induce the interposer to disperse his forces in the belief that the opponent places a much greater value on the objective than the interposer had initially assumed. In the words of Julian Corbett, "... if we are too superior, or our concentration too well arranged for him to hope for victory, then our concentration has almost always had the effect of forcing him to disperse. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

The catch is the use of the word "almost." The danger inherent in threatening the forces of the interposer is that the interposer may decide that he has no alternative but to fight. The interposer Codrington achieved this sort of psychological dislocation at Navarino, but Ibrahim Pasha chose to fight rather than disperse.

Psychological dislocation thus appears to be somewhat limited in its usefulness. To be effective it must be achieved suddenly; but if it is too sudden, it is possible that the result will be open fighting between interposer and opponent, the very thing that both seek to avoid.

In summary, the most effective moves that an opponent can use in countering interposition are those that either preserve or generate alternative courses of action for the opponent. In particular, the ability to find a range of alternative objectives, coupled with a disposition of force designed to obscure both the objectives and the strategic center of the opponent's forces, will make the interposer's problems much more difficult. In situations in which it is impossible to obscure the opponent's objective, the opponent may still be able to at least partially achieve his objective if he can find and exploit a particular capability in which the interposer is weak or not in a position to contest. Finally, the opponent may be able to threaten the force of the interposer directly and force it to disperse, although this course of action is the most difficult of all available choices, as it may result in hostilities between interposer and opponent.

**The Acceptability of a Counterstrategy.** "Seapower is a means whereby power can be brought to bear on distant places, and freedom of movement by sea is therefore a principle by which the powerful may have access to the weak."<sup>27</sup> Interposition, in the majority of its historical applications, has been the embodiment of this maxim. Traditionally the strategy of interposition has been the strategy of the strong against the weak.

The question that naturally arises is whether either the strategy of interposition or a counterstrategy is an acceptable means of conduct in a contest of the strong versus the strong, superpower versus superpower. The strategy of interposition and the countermoves employed against such a strategy both involve the inherent risk that in a resulting confrontation either the interposer or opponent may inadvertently trigger violence. As L.W. Martin puts it,

... it is clear that maneuvers of this kind [non-belligerent efforts] must always entail the risk of an armed encounter. Strictly speaking, in so far as hostilities break out, the effort at non-belligerent pressure has failed and a special case of limited war arises. An outcome of this kind ought to be contemplated beforehand, and obvious readiness to cope with whatever armed resistance is offered will be an important asset in conducting the original, would-be non-belligerent, operation to success.<sup>28</sup>

The possibility that either the strategy of interposition or counters to the strategy may result in limited war would seem at first glance quite sufficient to preclude their use by superpowers as a means of conflict with other superpowers. In the modern world of nuclear deterrence, the danger of even a limited war between an interposer and an opponent who both possess a large nuclear deterrent threat is so great that the possibility alone would seem to point to a conclusion that applications of such strategies are not acceptable.

This argument, however, misses a major point. Between interposer and opponent the success of either the strategy of interposition or a counterstrategy is dependent upon there being some risk of failure involved. It is this risk of failure that the interposer attempts to communicate as a threat to the opponent in implementing a strategy of interposition. In the process of creating the risk of failure, the interposer turns it into a more credible threat if he can place the opponent in the position of being the only party with "the last clear chance" to avoid the confrontation. Throughout the entire process the interposer's acceptance of this risk of failure is the key to the success of his strategy. The interposer must communicate his acceptance of the risk and normally accomplishes this

by signaling a degree of commitment to deny the objective to the opponent.

It is the contention of this thesis that the opponent, if he is strong, can use this same manipulation of risk to counter the strategy. The undesirability of limited war between superpowers is really the factor that makes the application of a nonbelligerent counterstrategy possible. If the opponent can destroy or displace the commitment of the interposer and then transfer the onus of escalation back to the interposer, he can counter the interposer's strategy by creating the same threat that the interposer initially attempted to use against the opponent.

Between superpowers, an attempt by one to counter the strategy of interposition of another without resort to violence becomes a two-sided game, a strategy of confrontation. This strategy of confrontation is a strategy of risk and bargaining. It is a process by which the initial situation of interposition is expanded in such a way that both interposer and opponent view the confrontation as a dynamic process rather than a yes or no, war or no war, proposition.

The opponent's actions to counter the interposer's strategy of interposition are analogous to Schelling's *compellent action* and his distinction between deterrent action and compellence:

... Deterrence involves setting the stage—by announcement, by rigging the trip wire, by incurring the obligation—and *waiting*. The overt act is up to the opponent. ... Compellence, in contrast, usually involves *initiating* an action (or an irrevocable commitment to action) that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds. ... To compel, one gets up enough momentum (figuratively, but sometimes literally) to make the other *act* to avoid collision.<sup>29</sup>

"Compellence" is more like "offense." *Forcible* offense is

## 64 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

taking something, . . . by direct action that the enemy is unable to block. "Compellence" is *inducing* his withdrawal, or his acquiescence, or his collaboration by an action that threatens to hurt, often one that could not forcibly accomplish its aim but that, nevertheless, can hurt enough to induce compliance.<sup>30</sup>

In resorting to a compellent-type action to counter the strategy of interposition, the interposer's opponent begins to play the same game of manipulation of risk that the interposer initiated. In the classical sense it is a mixed interest game, a "*bargaining game*, or *mixed-motive game*"<sup>31</sup> in which both players can simultaneously win or lose or in which players may individually partially win and partially lose.

As a dynamic process, the strategy of confrontation lends itself to cumulative strategies. In a confrontation where both parties seek to avoid escalation, the means of conducting and controlling the confrontation become as much the object of bargaining as the original objective that triggered the confrontation. ". . . in limited warfare, two things are being bargained over, the outcome of the war, and the mode of conducting the war itself."<sup>32</sup>

A sequential strategy offers at any one time only one mode of conducting the confrontation. Therefore, when only sequential strategies are used, the range of bargaining available to the interposer and opponent is very limited. If no other modes of conducting the confrontation can be found, it leaves the interposer who initiated the strategy in a strong bargaining position, as his opponent has been placed in a static either/or position. The strength of the strategy of interposition is that, when properly applied, the "or" position in which the opponent finds himself is the decision to initiate an armed encounter.

A cumulative strategy offers more than one mode of conducting the con-

frontation, possibly many modes. While the opponent initiating a cumulative strategy does not necessarily enjoy a strong bargaining position, he does enjoy a wide range of positions and is thus in a better position to gain some success. The crux of his bargaining position is that by bargaining in more than one mode of conduct, he can avoid the "or" position, choosing to yield in one area while continuing to bargain for success in another.

The strength of a cumulative strategy in bargaining is that so long as the opponent who initiates the strategy has a mode of bargaining left in which he has some prospect of success, he can afford to yield to the interposer in other modes. This presents a situation in which both can, by cooperating, arrive at a solution in which each enjoys partial success.

At first glance it would seem that there would be very little reason for two players, interposer and opponent, both bent on noncooperative strategies, to develop in the course of their strategies any means of cooperation. This problem is well stated by John C. Harsanyi, ". . . virtually all mixed interest games, without some mechanism to enforce agreements between players, lead to a Prisoners Dilemma Paradox. That is, they are situations where the players may have a very good reason to mistrust each other's intentions, so that even very rational players may be driven to the noncooperative solution even though the cooperative solution would yield higher payoffs to all of them."<sup>33</sup>

This argument is essentially true in situations where each player is permitted only one move or choice at a time, as in a sequential strategy. A cumulative strategy, however, provides a mechanism for conducting the strategy on the basis of what Schelling calls "incrementalism."<sup>34</sup> The use of cumulative strategies permits the use of a

broad range of moves, with the freedom to pick from a variety of possible decisions at each turn. As long as each player has more than one possible move or mode of bargaining with some prospect of success left, the choice of a mutually destructive move can be avoided.

"Incrementalism" thus provides each player with a means of tacit bargaining. It is a means whereby intentions and desires can be signaled. Threats and commitments can be probed on a piecemeal basis, with little danger of leading both players into a mutually disastrous armed encounter. Finally, "incrementalism" provides a means whereby it is possible for one player to pass the onus of escalation to another player. Since many modes of bargaining are available, each player retains the ability to initiate a move in one mode whenever he yields in another mode. By yielding in one mode, the first player avoids a disastrous situation and signals to the second player his desire to avoid disaster in future moves. By taking the initiative in another mode, the first player signals his intent to stay in the game and that he does expect to enjoy some success. The second player is now faced with the choice of yielding in the new mode or adopting a move that will be mutually destructive to both players.

The Berlin blockade can again be used as an illustration of tacit bargaining in many modes. The Soviet Union implemented the blockade slowly and on a piecemeal basis through the months of April, May, and June 1948. On 24 June they halted the last of what little rail traffic was still running. Although the Soviets were not applying a strategy of interposition in its pure form, their aim in denying the Allies access to their positions in Berlin was to present the Allies with two courses of action; one, withdraw from Berlin, or two, reopen their lines of access to Berlin by force. The Soviets were banking on their strategy of denial to place the Allies in

an either/or situation in which the "or" meant initiation of open hostilities by the Allies.

The Allies, specifically the United States, countered the Soviets by finding a third course of action and implementing this third alternative quickly. Truman's Cabinet discussed all three courses of action on 27 June 1948,

1. Decide now to withdraw from our position in Berlin, in concert with the other Western powers, . . .

2. Decide at this time to retain our position in Berlin by all possible means, including supplying Berlin by convoy or using force in some other manner, . . . accepting the possibility of war as a consequence if necessary.

3. To maintain our unprovocative but firm stand in Berlin, utilizing first every local means, and subsequently every diplomatic means, to obtain recognition and assertion of our rights while postponing ultimate decision to stay in Berlin or withdraw.<sup>35</sup>

The course of action adopted was number three, and the Berlin airlift was the result of utilizing every local means. In effect, the United States yielded to the Soviets on the question of challenging the Soviet blockade of access to Berlin by land routes, at the same time seizing the initiative in another mode of bargaining. The Soviets could not blockade the airlift short of shooting down the airlift transports. To have done so would have meant that the Soviets had initiated the first belligerent act. In seizing upon the airlift as an alternative capability, the United States avoided a mutually destructive move and placed the burden of finding the next such move back on the Soviets.

The use of cumulative strategies in incremental steps also provides a means of establishing "a *modus vivendi*, or tradition of trust, or dominant and

## 66 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

submissive roles" by providing the interposer and opponent experience in dealing with the other.<sup>36</sup> While this is not quite the same as the "means of enforcement" mentioned above, it does provide a means for interposer and opponent to use uncooperative strategies in arriving at a series of cooperative solutions. Neither completely wins or completely loses. The overall solution is a compromise arrived at through partial successes and partial losses in a series of partial solutions.

It must be kept in mind that implementing a cumulative strategy in incremental and discrete steps or moves is not the same thing as implementing a sequential strategy in increments. In the cumulative strategy each mode of bargaining or move is in a sense a complete "little" strategy in itself, designed to actually achieve a specified objective or implant a specific threat. The success of the overall cumulative strategy is not contingent upon the success of every "little" strategy but upon partial successes in some of the "little" strategies. In a sequential strategy, incremental execution of the moves are still sequential, aimed at the ultimate achievement of the principal objective. The impact of incrementally executing a sequential strategy is to progressively increase a threat, whereas the cumulative strategy is oriented toward overall success through the cumulative effect of achieving smaller successes.

Sequential strategies threaten direct escalation. Cumulative strategies also threaten escalation, but the escalation is less direct and spread over a wider geographic or conceptual area. Within this framework it may even be possible for an opponent to choose as one of his cumulative strategies a move in an entirely different geographical location. If the opponent can find a distant alternative objective and devise a means of moving against it—both of which can be directly and reasonably connected to his local countermoves against an inter-

poser—he is simply extending the geographical range of a cumulative strategy. The issue of "connectedness"<sup>37</sup> is important. Each part of a cumulative strategy must have a reasonable connection with the origin of the confrontation. If the incremental step of the cumulative strategy is a reasonable response in light of this origin, it serves as a mode of bargaining. If the step is not reasonably connected, it results in compound escalation with the opponent and interposer moving from one confrontation to two simultaneous confrontations.

While cumulative strategies make "incrementalism" possible, they do not guarantee it. The opponent initiating cumulative strategies as a counter to a sequential strategy of interposition has the option of making several moves simultaneously. In doing so the opponent may destroy the strength of his strategy. In pressing for a quick solution, the cumulative strategist destroys some of his bargaining and communication capabilities. If simultaneous moves are carried too far, he may saturate his opponent's judgment processes and panic him into a mutually destructive decision.<sup>38</sup>

As an example of how this might work, consider a situation in which an opponent employs a two-mode cumulative strategy. Using Lidell Hart's distributed advance, the opponent divides his forces, using one portion to seize an alternative objective and with the other portion directly threatens the forces of interposition. The opponent has the choice of implementing his cumulative strategy simultaneously or incrementally. If he moves incrementally, he gives the interposer a chance to observe the moves individually. The interposer gains experience with each move and a better understanding of the opponent's intention and commitment to achieve some success while avoiding a mutually disastrous armed encounter. If the opponent moves simultaneously, the inter-

poser has little chance to observe, and what little he does observe may panic him, possibly leading him to believe that the opponent's intention is to gain complete success. Under such circumstances the interposer is much more likely to conclude that it is impossible to avoid armed encounter and then proceed to initiate the encounter himself. By moving simultaneously the opponent has destroyed his ability to communicate and signal that, despite the fact that his overall strategy is a noncooperative strategy, he desires to find cooperative solutions.

In summary, the use of a cumulative strategy as a counter to the strategy of interposition is a strategy of bargaining or what might be termed a strategy of confrontation. When employing a bargaining strategy, the opponent is tacitly agreeing to accept partial success as a solution to the confrontation, yielding partial success to the interposer whenever necessary to avoid an armed encounter. The strategy of confrontation or bargaining, properly played, makes it possible for both opponent and interposer to control and manage the confrontation without armed encounters or resorting to limited war. As such, it may be considered an acceptable means of conduct where the avoidance of war is the criterion of acceptability.

**Conclusions.** The strategy of interposition is a sequential strategy designed to systematically eliminate an opponent's available courses of action until the opponent is placed in the position of having only two options. The first option is for the opponent to desist and accede to the interposer. The second is for the opponent to initiate an armed hostile encounter with the interposer, the opponent taking upon himself the "onus of escalation."

A successful, nonbelligerent counter to the strategy of interposition entails the development of alternative courses of action by the opponent. In de-

veloping alternative courses of action, the opponent places himself in a position whereby he may accede to the interposer in one mode or course of action, simultaneously taking the initiative in another nonbelligerent mode or course of action, and passing the "onus of escalation" back to the interposer.

Cumulative strategies offer the greatest prospect for success as a means whereby the opponent can exploit alternative courses of action in countering interposition. Such cumulative strategies do not depend upon the success of any single action, but upon the cumulative effect of success of a series of lesser actions.

Cumulative strategies also offer a framework within which the opponent can closely control his actions in the confrontation of risk and bargaining that results from his movements to counter interposition. Because the opponent enjoys a range of alternative courses of action, he can employ the concept of "incrementalism" in making his countermoves. This control enables the opponent to tacitly signal to the interposer that the opponent desires to avoid mutually damaging countermoves,

---

#### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Comdr. William M. Pitt, U.S. Navy, earned a B.A. from Brown University in economics, a B.S. from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in electrical engineering, and a master's degree from The

George Washington University in international affairs. His primary operational experience has been in destroyers, the most recent being as Antisubmarine Systems Project Manager for Staff, Destroyer Development Group 2, and Executive Officer of the U.S.S. *Compton* (DD 705). Lieutenant Commander Pitt is a recent graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff, and is currently assigned as Chief Staff and Operations Officer of Destroyer Squadron 2.

---

but that he still expects to remain in the game and achieve some modicum of success.

If the opponent can implement this type of control over his countermoves, and if partial success is acceptable, cumulative strategies are acceptable counterstrategies within the context of

the paradox of modern nuclear deterrence. "Military strategy can no longer be thought of... as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence. Military strategy... has become the diplomacy of violence."<sup>39</sup>

---

## FOOTNOTES

1. Charles W. Walter, "Interposition, the Strategy and Its Uses," *Naval War College Review*, June 1970, p. 72-84.
2. Charles W. Walter, "Interposition: the Strategy and Its Potential Use by the Soviet Union (U)," Unpublished Thesis, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.: 1970, p. 5.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 33-37.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
5. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 98.
6. Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), p. 52.
7. Walter, "Interposition," Unpublished Thesis, p. 49-52. Instances of the use of the strategy of interposition are further summarized in the next section.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 7 ff.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Walter, "Interposition," Unpublished Thesis. The section is a definition and discussion of the strategy of interposition based in its entirety on the cited thesis.
11. Jacques Mordal, *Twenty-five Centuries of Sea Warfare* (New York: Potter, 1959), p. 203-207.
12. Elmer B. Potter and Chester W. Nimitz, eds., *Sea Power* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960), p. 229.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 232-233.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Mordal, p. 211.
16. Wendell J. Coats, *Armed Forces as Power* (New York: Exposition Press, 1966), p. 296.
17. Fritz Grob, quoted in Coats, p. 296.
18. Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1954), p. 338 ff.
19. Joseph C. Wylie, *Military Strategy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), p. 23 ff.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
21. Laurence W. Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 149.
22. Liddell Hart, p. 346.
23. Corbett, p. 131 ff.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 134-135.
25. Liddell Hart, p. 340.
26. Corbett, p. 138.
27. Martin, p. 22.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
29. Schelling, *Arms*, p. 71.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
31. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 89.
32. Schelling, *Arms*, p. 135.
33. John C. Harsanyi, "Game Theory and the Analysis of Inter-National Conflict," James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 377.
34. Schelling, *Strategy*, p. 170.
35. Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), p. 452-453.

- 36. Schelling, *Strategy*, p. 170.
- 37. Schelling, *Arms*, p. 86.
- 38. Schelling, *Strategy*, p. 171.
- 39. Schelling, *Arms*, p. 34.

— — — — —  $\Psi$  — — — — —

Supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.

*Sun Tzu, 400-320 B.C. The Art of War*