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Book Review by Jeffrey W. Knopf of Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace written by Timothy W. Craford



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Book Reviews

Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. 275 pp.

Reviewed by Jeffrey W. Knopf, Naval Postgraduate School

During the Cold War, strategic theory focused on two situations in which states would rely on deterrence: direct deterrence, in which a country seeks to prevent an attack on its homeland; and extended deterrence, in which a country seeks to prevent an adversary from attacking a third party. In this highly original and valuable study, Timothy Crawford points out that states might also have an interest in relying on deterrence in a third situation: when they seek to deter two adversaries from attacking each other. Crawford describes the deterrer in this scenario as a “pivot” between the other parties, leading to the label “pivotal deterrence.”

Crawford points out that this concept is contrary to conventional wisdom. Mainstream strategic thought holds that states must clearly take a side in a dispute if they want to be effective in influencing its outcome. Hence, part of the contribution made by *Pivotal Deterrence* is in showing that in some situations a state is likely to have a clear interest in this type of deterrence and that efforts at pivotal deterrence can in fact succeed. The United States, for example, has sought to deter conflicts between Greece and Turkey, India and Pakistan, and China and Taiwan. Having a label to attach to such efforts will make it easier for policymakers to think of it as an option in their toolkit. It also creates a category of similar cases, which analysts can then compare to develop a general understanding of pivotal deterrence.

Crawford explains the logic of pivotal deterrence clearly and persuasively. For pivotal deterrence to be feasible, the pivot state must have enough power to affect the outcome of a military conflict between the two other parties, and those two parties must fear each other more than they fear the pivot so that each would be willing to cooperate with the pivot. The pivot can then exert leverage by threatening to alter its alignment. The pivot’s reliance on threats is what makes this strategy a form of deterrence and distinguishes it from other conflict-prevention tools, such as mediation. In practice, two different threats might be employed. If one of the states in a potential conflict (State A) wants the pivot’s active support before starting a war, the pivot’s threat to stay neutral can dissuade State A from using force. But if State A is willing to go to war in the expectation that the pivot will remain neutral, deterrence requires the pivot to threaten to back State B. The tricky aspect of pivotal deterrence is that the

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pivot must give one or the other of these deterrent threats to both parties while ensuring that the signal to one party does not undermine the message being given to the other.

Crawford argues that making both messages credible requires ambiguity. Pivotal deterrence works if the pivot creates sufficient uncertainty in the minds of both State A and State B about what the pivot will actually do if one of them starts a war. This again challenges conventional wisdom, which suggests that clarity of commitments is a key to deterrence success. *Pivotal Deterrence* emphasizes instead that sometimes strategic ambiguity is preferable to a clear, firm commitment. Determining the conditions under which clarity or ambiguity is better will require further research, but Crawford is right to see this as still an open question.

The book contains four detailed case studies—two that are deemed successes and two that are deemed failures. Crawford convincingly demonstrates that pivotal deterrence worked in the two successes: Bismarck's efforts to prevent war between Austria and Russia in the 1870s, and U.S. efforts to prevent war between Greece and Turkey as a result of crises over Cyprus in the 1960s. The most interesting case study, however, is one of the failures: Britain's efforts to keep France and Germany from going to war in 1914. Sir Edward Grey has been widely criticized for not making a firmer deterrent commitment to aid France. Crawford, however, interprets Grey's ambiguity as an effort at pivotal deterrence, and he shows that Grey's actions did have some restraining influence on France and Germany in the final days of the July crisis, albeit not enough to overcome the other forces working to produce World War I.

Because pivotal deterrence can either succeed or fail, Crawford seeks to specify the conditions that favor one or the other outcome. He contends that alignment options are the key. When one or both of the parties in conflict can identify plausible, useful allies other than the pivot, pivotal deterrence is likely to fail. To have deterrent leverage, the pivot must be the only game in town. The importance of the pivot and other potential allies, Crawford notes, raises doubts about many dyadic theories of war, which do not take into account how the anticipated reactions of third parties influence decisions about whether to go to war. The case studies reveal that pivotal deterrence can also be counterproductive at times because it encourages a "blame game" in which each side tries to maneuver the other side into escalating. State A does so in the hope that the pivot will blame State B for the war and will refrain from supporting State B.

In the final two chapters, Crawford discusses how unipolarity creates many situations in which the United States, as the dominant power in the world, may wish to attempt pivotal deterrence. Yet here he turns strangely reticent, emphasizing that "preponderance is no panacea" (p. 214) and that pivotal deterrence might still fail. Because Crawford's theory is so structural—pivotal deterrence succeeds or fails based entirely on the distribution of power and availability of potential allies—the book ultimately has much less policy relevance than it could have. Manipulating the alignment options available to other states is difficult in the short run. In urgent situations requiring deterrence—as a crisis threatens to escalate to war—the theory provides no advice to policymakers about how to practice pivotal deterrence if the underlying conditions

are not already favorable. Follow-up research on steps that leaders could take in the short run to bolster pivotal deterrence would thus be especially useful. However, this does not detract from the significant contributions Crawford makes in this study. *Pivotal Deterrence* is a must read for anyone seriously interested in questions of strategy and statecraft.



Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement 1971 to the Present*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. 657 pp. \$32.95.

Reviewed by Patrick Glynn

Those of us who lived through the fierce anti-nuclear debates of the 1980s—whether as proponents or opponents of the anti-nuclear position—cannot but have vivid memories of that turbulent era. Doubtless some remember those years as a period tinged with fear. I certainly recall the evening in November 1983 when the ABC network treated us all to a made-for-television movie, *The Day After*, depicting the town of Lawrence, Kansas, being obliterated in a nuclear war. The film left even Ronald Reagan feeling depressed, as he recalled in his memoir. Yet by and large the debate over nuclear weapons in the 1980s was marked by a high-mindedness and seriousness of moral purpose—I would argue on *both* sides—that is rare in democratic dialogue. (The debate certainly compares favorably with the kinds of issues that dominated public debate during the final years of the Clinton presidency.) Although it may seem strange to say so, the challenge of nuclear weapons—the dilemmas of disarmament and deterrence—in many ways brought the best out of American democracy in that era.

The value of Lawrence S. Wittner's *Toward Nuclear Abolition*—the third and final volume in his history of the nuclear disarmament movement—is to capture and preserve some of the spirit of that time. Reading Wittner's account, one is almost astonished at the true scope of the 1980s anti-nuclear movement, which spanned the globe. Western Europe, Asia, North America, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union itself—almost no country, it seems, was untouched by the welling up of popular protest against the specter of nuclear annihilation. Wittner writes as a partisan of the movement, and probably no one but a partisan would have had the patience to chronicle such a sprawling international phenomenon in such detail. Wittner draws on memoirs, archival records, and, perhaps most valuably, personal interviews with activists and government officials of the era.

In most accounts, the anti-nuclear movement forms a mere backdrop to super-power diplomacy. Here Wittner brings the tragic chorus to center stage. However, the risk of such an approach is that it introduces a measure of distortion into the historical drama. In Wittner's account, the anti-nuclear movement becomes the main historical actor in the period—not to say its hero. For Wittner, it was not Reagan or the United