 Preface

The premise of this book is that major powers have continually played a decisive role in international conflicts. Since the most precarious and quite common form of dispute between major powers arises over third nations, my primary focus is appropriately placed on so-called extended deterrence. In this type of deterrence, one side (deterrer) attempts to prevent another side (challenger) from initiating or escalating conflict with a third nation (deterrer’s “protégé”). When is extended deterrence likely to be effective? What happens if deterrence fails? In what circumstances is war likely to result from a deterrence failure? In order to address these important questions, the book presents a critical examination of the relevant literature and offers a new understanding of the dynamics of deterrence and conflict between major powers.

For deterrence to work, a potential challenger must perceive the deterrer’s threats as capable and credible for retaliation. The impact of capabilities on deterrence has been extensively analyzed in the literature, yet the core problem of effective deterrence concerns the issue of credible intentions. That is, potential attackers need to believe that the deterrer is willing to carry out its threat. There are two ways to approach the credibility issue. Shaped by the dilemmas of superpower nuclear deterrence, the strategic literature has been largely influenced by commitment theory. It prescribes various “manipulation of risk” strategies intended to build a deterrer’s reputation for strong resolve, regardless of its national interests in the particular issue of dispute. Only a few analysts challenged this view and recognized the importance of intrinsic interests in the issues at stake, also known as the inherent credibility of deterrent threats. This book demonstrates the validity of this latter approach, emphasizing the importance of inherent credibility for explaining the history of major power clashes in the twentieth century, and also suggests its greater suitability for the post–Cold War context.

More precisely, this study expands the inherent credibility
approach and takes the position, rarely examined elsewhere, that the salience of a protégé’s region for the deterrer’s national interests is a principal ingredient of the credibility of major power deterrence. My central argument is that a major power’s national interests, which shape the inherent credibility of threats and are shaped by various regional stakes, set the limits to the relevance of other factors that have received greater scholarly attention in past. Since this argument is strongly supported by the empirical findings presented in this study, the book draws important implications for conflict theory and deterrence policy for the post–Cold War era.

This book represents the culmination of a long research process during which I received indispensable help from many colleagues. My main and deepest debts are to Frank Zagare, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, and Jacek Kugler. Their work has been a constant source of inspiration for my research interests and intellectual development. I have also been extremely fortunate to benefit directly from their generosity and scholarly brilliance. Each was kind enough to read the entire manuscript, and Professor Zagare provided wonderful guidance and encouragement at every stage of its preparation. Each gave a wide range of valuable and insightful suggestions that only made this a better book. Most of the credit for what is good in this work should go to them, with any errors or lapses in argument and interpretation remaining entirely my own.

I would further like to express my appreciation to Paul Huth for his extensive and perceptive comments on separate papers, some of which have been incorporated here. Earlier versions of some of the material in this book appeared in my articles “Conceptual and Selection Bias Issues in Deterrence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (vol. 45, no. 1), and “The Sources of Threat Credibility in Extended Deterrence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (vol. 45, no. 3), used here with permission.

My gratitude also goes to Belinda Bragg and Amilcar Barreto, who patiently read the complete manuscript and gave excellent editorial assistance. Their advice on matters of style and form often led to helpful observations on issues of substance as well. I am grateful to many other colleagues and friends for their useful advice at various stages of the project or generous help in other ways: Allison Astorino-Courtois, Jon Bond, Danette Brickman, Joe Clare, George Edwards, Anat and Nehemia Geva, Robert Harmel, Charles Johnson, Jan Leighley, John Robertson, Meg and Jim Rogers, Michelle Taylor-Robinson, Guy
Whitten, Lucy Xie, and Edward Yang. Finally, I thank Jeremy Shine for his great editorial support, and Kevin Rennells and all the staff at the University of Michigan Press who assisted in the production of this book.

Foremost, I am indebted to my mother and family, whose unwavering support, despite my life far away from home, gave me the strength to carry on with this and other projects during all these years.