The domestic structure model rests on the idea that the arms dynamic is generated by forces within the state. It is, in an important sense, derived from, and complementary to, the action-reaction model. It functions as an alternative to it only in the sense that the two models compete for primacy of place in ability to explain observed behaviour within the arms dynamic. In a narrow sense, the literature on the domestic structure model is quite new, dating from the 1970s, and the failure of the action-reaction model adequately to explain what goes on between the superpowers. In a broader sense, however, it is simply an extension of the longstanding tradition that seeks to explain the behaviour of states primarily in terms of their domestic structures and affairs (Waltz, 1959, chs 4, 5).

The proponents of the domestic structure model do not argue that the rivalry between the superpowers has become irrelevant, but that the process of the arms dynamic has become so deeply institutionalized within each state that domestic factors largely supplant the crude forms of action and reaction as the main engine of the arms dynamic. The external factor of rivalry still provides the necessary motivation for the arms dynamic. But when ‘reactions’ are anticipatory, the particularities of military funding, procurement and technology are largely determined from within the state. The interesting question about this model is therefore not whether it is better than the action-reaction model in some general sense, but what proportion of observed behaviour each model explains for any given case. What structures and mechanisms within the state become the carriers of the arms dynamic?

This view of the domestic structure model fits nicely into the historically unusual character of the superpower arms race sketched in Chapter 6. It is hard to imagine that any state finding itself locked into a long-term rivalry would not adjust its internal structures to account for the rivalry as a durable issue. On this basis, there is every reason to think that institutionalization, and therefore internalization, is a natural function of longevity in an arms races. Unfortunately we have too few historical cases to put this hypothesis
to the test. An additional factor encouraging internalization is the emphasis on deterrence motives in the superpower rivalry. Deterrence requires forces in being, which in turn generate large organizations with military interests as permanent actors within domestic politics.

Most of the studies that support the domestic structure model focus on the case of the two superpowers (Allison and Morris, 1975; Holloway, 1983, chs 6–8; Kaldor, 1982; Kugler et al., 1980; Kurth, 1973; Mosley, 1985; Nincic, 1982; Russett, 1983b; pp. 86–96). This is partly a matter of priority, because of the intrinsic importance of the superpower case. It is partly by default, because information from other cases is harder to come by, though at least one author looks at the European states (Rattinger, 1975). Strong opposition to the general logic and validity of the model is rare. Since much more information is available about domestic structure variables in the United States than in the Soviet Union, the American example dominates the literature. The importance of the American case makes the exercise worthwhile, but requires us to keep in mind questions about how applicable the whole model is to other cases. Because the superpower case dominates the literature, one cannot help noticing how much of the existing material on the domestic structure model applies only to states that are major producers of arms. As was explained in Part I, such states are few in number. The relevance of the domestic structure model for the greater numbers of non-producers and part-producers remains largely unexplored.

7.1 THE AMERICAN CASE

The American case of the domestic structure model offers a whole range of factors to explain the arms dynamic. The principal ones are: the institutionalization of military research, development, and production; bureaucratic politics; economic management; and domestic politics. The normative question that underlies consideration of these factors is how they should be seen. Are they a reasonable response to the requirements of deterrence in a long-term rivalry? Or are they a distortion of the national political economy, that serves powerful vested interests, and that, whatever the validity of its origins, has become a self-serving mechanism which promotes and perpetuates the rivalry that justifies it?