



Comprehensive Deterrence Forum

Proceedings and Commissioned Papers

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Editors

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Preface

On October 30, 2015, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command facilitated a senior leader forum, hosted by the U.S. Special Operations Command and the U.S. Department of State (DoS) to explore the concept of *comprehensive deterrence*. Participants included representatives from across DoS and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). To support the forum’s exploration of comprehensive deterrence and related issues, the RAND Corporation commissioned five papers to examine various aspects of this proposal, referencing four distinct waves of deterrence literature. These papers were distributed at the senior leader forum, and are included here.

This document seeks to promote new thinking about deterrence, particularly comprehensive deterrence, for the policy community. It should be of interest to academics and government representatives from DoD and DoS.

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Summary

On October 30, 2015, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) facilitated a senior leader forum, hosted by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the U.S. Department of State (DoS), to explore the subject of comprehensive deterrence. Participants included representatives from across DoS and the U.S. Department of Defense.

According to a 2015 draft joint USASOC and USSOCOM definition, *comprehensive deterrence* is the “prevention of adversary action through the existence of credible and proactive physical, cognitive and moral capabilities (loosely defined as willpower) that raise an adversary’s perceived cost to an unacceptable level of risk relative to the perceived benefit.”¹ Part I of this report delivers the proceedings from the senior leader forum, reflecting a robust discussion of comprehensive deterrence and its application. To ensure a wide variety of perspectives and encourage free-flowing discussion, all remarks from the forum were not for attribution. As such, the conference summary seeks to draw out the main themes and observations from the discussion without attributing particular points to a specific participant.

To support the forum’s exploration of comprehensive deterrence and related issues, the RAND Corporation commissioned five papers to examine various aspects of this proposal, referencing four distinct waves of deterrence literature. These papers were distributed at the senior leader forum and are included in Part II of this conference proceeding.

In the first paper, “Moving to a Practical Deterrence Strategy: How to Make Deterrence Work in 2015 and Beyond,” Ben Connable of RAND identifies shortcomings in the current U.S. government approach to deterrence and recommends a shift in focus from “specific deterrence” to “general deterrence” as a first step to considering comprehensive deterrence.

In the second paper, “The Limits of Deterrence,” Sir Lawrence Freedman of King’s College London writes about the limits of deterrence. He explains the dynamics of deterrence strategy and examines the differences between deterrence as a strategic intent and as a strategic effect.

In the third paper, “Reimagining Deterrence: New Security Threats and Challenges to the Deterrence Paradigm,” T. V. Paul of McGill University explores the weaknesses of current deterrence efforts in prominent cases and offers guidance on how to build an effective deterrence strategy to match the complex contemporary environment.

In the fourth paper, “Expanding the Concept of Deterrence,” Patrick Morgan of the University of California, Irvine, explains past and present challenges to developing deterrence strategies. He argues that deterrence will be more difficult in the current environment but just as necessary as it was during the Cold War.

¹ USASOC, *Comprehensive Deterrence*, white paper, April 12, 2016. As of September 7, 2016: <http://www.soc.mil/Files/ComprehensiveDeterrenceWhitePaper.pdf>

In the fifth paper, “A Primitive’s View of Deterrence,” Eliot Cohen of Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies addresses the pitfalls in the U.S. approach to deterrence, highlighting how the United States might better operationalize a deterrence strategy.

The views expressed in this document are those of the paper editors, contributing authors, and forum participants, as interpreted by the RAND project team.

Acknowledgments

The editors thank U.S. Army Special Operations Command for the opportunity to explore this interesting issue, participants at the senior leader forum for their frank comments, and the individual experts who contributed papers. At RAND, we would like to thank Michael Mazarr and Sally Sleeper for their constructive comments on this document.

Abbreviations

CGSM	collective global security management
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoS	U.S. Department of State
FID	foreign internal defense
ISIS	the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JOPEs	Joint Operation Planning and Execution System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
TSC	theater security cooperation
UN	United Nations
USASOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command
USG	U.S. government
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command

PART I

Conference Proceedings

Part I of this report provides a summary of the keynote presentation and the participant comments at the forum. Findings and comments are offered as they were recorded and summarized, and do not reflect additional analysis.

Summary of the Comprehensive Deterrence Senior Leader Forum Proceedings

Part I of this report provides a summary of the keynote presentation and the participant comments at the forum. Findings and comments are offered as they were recorded and summarized, and do not reflect additional analysis. Part II of this report contains the papers written to promote the forum discussion. Each of these two parts is distinct; the explanation of the forum briefing and discussion does not necessarily flow from the individual readings.

Opening Remarks

The Comprehensive Deterrence Senior Leader Forum opened with a statement of its purposes: (1) to confirm the framing of the current environment; (2) to confirm the characterization of the solution, chiefly the need to deliver more effective and realistic security in a complex and unpredictable world; and (3) to confirm the need to relook at deterrence thinking and endorse comprehensive deterrence as a feasible starting point to frame follow-on deterrence research.

The forum sponsors stated that such trends as globalization, social media, and low-cost technology have created a unique environment and that the Gray Zone, defined as the operational space between peace and outright war, is the area wherein adversaries prefer to challenge the United States and its partners. The sponsors warned that the United States cannot react or improvise in lieu of a coherent strategy and needs to work within this space to manage risk. The sponsors also reaffirmed the value of Cold War concepts, such as grand strategy and containment, and stressed the need to apply these concepts today. They advocated a whole-of-government approach, emphasizing the need to create options for leaders to deter these challenges.

Presentation: Broadening Strategic Options

The U.S. government keynote presenter began by framing the current threat environment, declaring that transitions altering the power dynamics between state and nonstate actors make today's operating environment unique and require a more coherent U.S. government approach. In this environment, the United States has three primary strategic risk considerations: (1) difficulty in applying military power to nonstate threats, (2) unpredictability in the current environment, and (3) difficulty in controlling escalation. Additionally, the presenter argued, the United States no longer has the time, resources, or will to allow strategic challenges to present themselves; instead, the United States needs to prevent challenges from emerging.

The presenter stated that the concept of comprehensive deterrence seeks to expand on past thinking about deterrence to account for modern security threats, which are primarily located in the Gray Zone, and countering such threats, which will occur largely within the “human domain.”¹ *Comprehensive deterrence* posits that deterrence, particularly at lower levels of overt violence (sometimes known in the U.S. Department of Defense [DoD] as the left side of the operational continuum), seeks to restrain threats from escalating beyond U.S. strategic depth and capability by using a “deterrence by denial” approach, which the presenter equated with deterring threat activity by the physical presence of friendly activity.

According to the presenter, comprehensive deterrence consists of six lines of conceptual effort: (1) broadening considerations of strategic risk, (2) expanding the strategic start point, (3) rethinking strategic power and reframing power projection to include partner-based power and population-based power, (4) rethinking an asymmetric approach, (5) rethinking the strategic nexus between the land and human domains, and (6) expanding technology solutions for the human domain. These lines of effort seek to preserve decisionmaking space for U.S. leaders and retain U.S. positional advantage.

The practical application of comprehensive deterrence was discussed at length to illustrate how the concept has been used and might be used in the future. U.S. interagency efforts in Colombia from 1996 to 2015 to secure peace and enhance the Colombian government’s stability and capacity to govern were cited as a successful example of comprehensive deterrence.

Senior Leader Discussion

The senior leader discussion began by asking whether framing the environment as being characterized by persistent conflict and competition among both state and nonstate actors using irregular and hybrid tactics to achieve objectives short of war was correct. Participants agreed with this characterization of the environment, noting its differences from the previous era of deterrence. Participants identified the role of empowered populations and the decline of state power, the increased use of technology to project power and presence, and the emergence of nonstate actors challenging states as new types of threats. It was suggested that the United States will be tested not only by nonstate actors, but also by state adversaries, including emerging powers in the periphery seeking ways to assert their power. One participant noted that deterrence was previously employed during a “battle for global domination,” whereas today, the United States is the sole superpower with “the ability to project at any time, but not everywhere all the time.”

Conference participants stated that the framing of the environment should be viewed through the lens of domestic U.S. politics. Social media enables instant image and information projection, which allows U.S. citizens and members of Congress to see the full continuum of military actions without understanding what constitutes wars. This, in turn, constrains U.S. government decisionmaking space and potential responses to threats.

Participants were then asked whether Gray Zone challenges constitute systemic risk to both the United States and its partners. Participants debated whether there was a common interagency view of risk, given the different mandates of U.S. government organizations. While DoD often views risks through war plans and a kinetic lens, the U.S. Department of State (DoS) tends to focus on “opportunities” rather than problems and views risk through political, social, and economic lenses. Participants stated that the lack of a holistic definition

of risk impeded Congress' ability to provide resources for the implementation of deterrence-based policies and operations. The extreme difficulty in obtaining funds and resources for preventive defense measures,² such as those that develop opportunities like youth employment, rather than countermeasures in reaction to threats was emphasized by several participants across agencies. Participants asserted the need for a consistent definition of risk, united messaging to Congress, and for developing a whole-of-government strategy and approach to obtain resources to implement comprehensive deterrence and preventive defense.

Several participants stated that the United States and its partners need to adapt greater resiliency measures to reduce risk exposure. A senior leader argued that the U.S. government's "inability to prioritize" has led it to accept more risk. Participants also stressed the importance of resiliency for U.S. partners because without these allies, the United States loses strategic advantages against adversaries. Partners' institutional resiliency needs to be sustained in order to maintain the depth to govern, for protection against state adversaries operating in the Gray Zone, and nonstate actors seeking to destabilize states.

The senior leader forum continued with a discussion of whether a modern variant of the concept of "political warfare" could inform a whole-of-government approach to Gray Zone challenges. Participants asserted that state adversaries, such as Russia, and nonstate actors, like the Islamic State, are more adept at information warfare than the United States. This is due, in part, to the fact that many adversaries are concerned with a specific geographic area or constituency, whereas the United States is globally focused. Participants stated that the U.S. government lacks vehicles, means, and methods to both conduct information warfare and implement countermeasures. They asserted that opportunities for population-based messaging, especially for civil-society organizations within threatened states, exist but need to be encouraged. Participants acknowledged the difficulty in influencing populations, but emphasized that efforts to fix underlying political, social, and economic issues were required in partner nations to promote counternarratives.

Lastly, the senior leaders discussed how the United States and its partners should operate in the seam between peace and war. Participants stated that the United States has "self-made vulnerabilities" when it operates without a whole-of-government approach in the Gray Zone, and highlighted financial and time constraints associated with operating in this area. Solutions to threats often require addressing institutional failures, such as the lack of security or social services, and require both time and money. The difficulty for partner nations, such as Yemen, to retain capabilities amid state collapse greatly undermines the U.S. government's ability to obtain funding for such efforts.

Concluding Remarks

The senior leader forum concluded with a discussion of the way forward. Possible avenues considered include: (1) investing in deterrence thinking across the entire operational continuum, (2) investing in the study of modern political warfare, and (3) developing strategic indicators and warnings for nonstandard campaigns in the Gray Zone. Speakers stated that follow-on forums, workshops, joint exercises, and wargaming will be developed by DoD, in conjunction with DoS, to further explore the concept of comprehensive deterrence, identify future challenges and opportunities, and develop strategic solutions.

Forum Insights and Takeaways

The following conclusions emerged from the comprehensive deterrence senior leader forum. These are collective summaries of the essential discussion points throughout the forum, representing statements most commonly expressed by many participants.

Whole-of-Government Approach to Deterrence Is Needed

Participants said they believe that DoD and DoS currently have different and sometimes inconsistent or noncomplementary approaches to deterrence, whereas a whole-of-government approach is needed to combat Gray Zone threats and to address the complexities of the current global environment. This would include the development of common nomenclature, definitions, and strategic messaging plans. Most importantly, the holistic approach would help align efforts across agencies and regions of the world.

Efforts to Implement “Preventive Defense” Are Currently Hindered

Participants maintained that U.S. government efforts to develop opportunities, implement the basic tenets of preventive defense, and apply comprehensive deterrence strategies are greatly hindered by fiscal constraints, divergent interests in the U.S. Congress, and the appropriations cycle.

Better Intelligence Is Needed to Support Better Deterrence

Greater awareness of emerging security threats and prioritization among them is required to successfully implement comprehensive deterrence, according to the concept’s advocates. This will require deeper knowledge of the human domain and greater situational awareness in order to position and leverage capabilities toward potential solutions.

Deterrence Can Be Improved Through Good Governance and Global Stability

State and nonstate adversaries are assisted by underlying political, social, and economic issues in weak states. Better governance is essential to prevent these conditions from giving rise to instability. Participants said they believe that this will require greater U.S. engagement with partner nations to strengthen their institutions and capabilities.

Deterrence Needs to Provide the Space and Time for U.S. Senior Leaders to Make Well-Informed Decisions

It is essential to maintain decisionmaking space for U.S. leaders, despite domestic political constraints. As the Gray Zone creates the potential for a high number of conflicts, U.S. leaders will need space to assess, prioritize, and communicate potential threats and U.S. responses.

Greater Efforts to Understand the Human Domain Will Improve Deterrence

Participants said they believe that greater resources and capabilities should be devoted to understanding and influencing the human domain to address the underlying factors of conflict and affect its outcome.

Notes

¹ *Comprehensive deterrence* is defined by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) as “the prevention of adversary action through the existence or proactive use of credible physical, cognitive, and moral capabilities that raise an adversary’s perceived cost to an unacceptable level of risk relative to the perceived benefit.” USASOC, *Comprehensive Deterrence*, white paper, April 12, 2016. As of September 7, 2016: <http://www.soc.mil/Files/ComprehensiveDeterrenceWhitePaper.pdf>

² *Preventive defense* is defined as a “defense strategy for the United States in the twenty-first century that concentrates national security strategy on dangers that, if mismanaged, have the potential to grow into true A-list-scale threats to U.S. survival in the next century, bringing the current era to an abrupt and painful end. These dangers are not yet threats to be defeated or deterred; they are dangers that can be prevented.” Ashton Carter and William Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1999, p. 14.

Comprehensive Deterrence Papers

Part II of this report contains the papers provided to the participants of the Comprehensive Deterrence Senior Leader Forum, written with the intent of promoting discussion at the event. These papers are distinct from the forum summary provided in Part I of this report. The forum discussion did not necessarily flow from these individual papers. The views expressed in these papers are solely those of the contributing authors.

Moving to a Practical Deterrence Strategy: How to Make Deterrence Work in 2015 and Beyond

Ben Connable, Senior Political Scientist, RAND Corporation

In the context of U.S. national security, *deterrence* is the act of convincing a potential adversary not to act harmfully against U.S. strategic interests, personnel, or infrastructure.¹ This paper leverages the extensive body of post–Cold War, post-9/11 deterrence literature to argue that deterrence remains strategically relevant in 2015, and that it can be effectively redefined to allow U.S. policymakers to better address the seemingly anarchic contemporary global environment. Absent effective deterrence theory, strategy, and an associated array of operational capabilities, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) will be less able to mitigate the increasing strategic risk that the U.S. President, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, and the National Intelligence Council argue has emerged in the past two decades.²

The United States did not deter Russia’s covert invasion of eastern Ukraine, the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) across Syria and western Iraq, or Chinese cyber attacks and geopolitical expansionism in East Asia.³ In each of these cases, all of which occurred at some cost to U.S. strategic priorities, state or nonstate actors almost assuredly made cost-benefit calculations based in part on their expectations of U.S. responses. In each case, U.S. deterrence failed or was simply a nonfactor because the decisionmakers behind these actions did not consider the risk of U.S. reprisal significant enough to undermine their cost-benefit analyses. If the United States does not improve its understanding and application of deterrence, it will continue to accept considerable, and perhaps unnecessary, strategic risk across the entire spectrum of potential adversary operations.

The First Three Waves of Deterrence Theory: Locked in the Cold War

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent rise of nonstate actors led scholars and U.S. military strategists to reconsider what Jeffrey Knopf characterizes as the first three waves of deterrence theory.⁴ Each of these first waves, which emerged and evolved from approximately the mid-1950s, generally addressed state-on-state relationships and centered on nuclear or high-intensity conventional exchanges. In this context, strategic threat centered on, and was generally restricted to, the use of nuclear weapons or a major conventional war with the Soviet Union (later Russia) or China.⁵ Deterrence was a policy tool designed to prevent conventional escalation in Europe or nuclear holocaust between the superpowers; other aspects of first-through third-wave theories, including issues of low-intensity conflict, were at best subordinate considerations. When the Cold War ended, the bipolar paradigm was no longer relevant and the post–Cold War, post-9/11 fourth wave literature emerged at least partly in response to criti-

cal arguments that deterrence, too, was either irrelevant or of lessening relevance to U.S. strategy.⁶ Lawrence Freedman described how deterrence “moved to the margins” of U.S. strategic thought.⁷ Colin S. Gray offered one reason that deterrence had lost favor in what appeared, in the decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, to be a unipolar world: “[D]eterrence has been marginalized because some of the more implacable of our contemporary adversaries appear to be undeterrable.”⁸ In other words, the standing theories of deterrence did not appear to policy-makers to be applicable outside of Cold War, nuclear, or conventional military strategy.

However, Gray went on to argue that the United States “has no practical choice other than to make of deterrence all that it can be,” in large part because the world was becoming increasingly unpredictable, and, therefore, was as dangerous as it had been from 1945 through 2001, or perhaps more so.⁹ Other fourth wave scholars have built a credible case that deterrence is broadly applicable and can, indeed, be successfully applied to nonstate actors like al Qaeda, ISIS, or perhaps even to individual “lone wolf” terrorists. If they are correct that deterrence can be applied to any actor—from nation-states to individual (and seemingly irrational) terrorists, some of whom seek to obtain weapons of mass destruction—deterrence takes on universal significance for U.S. national security.

Fourth Wave Deterrence: Reframing for Nonstate Threats

Many of these critical fourth wave arguments hinge on the application of various cost-benefit theories and models to what Thomas L. Friedman described in 2004 as “undeterrables.”¹⁰ This belief that nonstate fanatics *cannot* be deterred from committing attacks against U.S. persons or strategic interests appears to rest on the assumption that many nonstate actors are inherently irrational and therefore undeterrable. For example, al Qaeda terrorists could not be deterred because their fanatical beliefs would overwhelm any “rational” cost-benefit calculations when considering terror attacks against U.S. targets, or that cyber criminals could not be deterred from conducting a massive attack on critical U.S. information infrastructure. There is significant disagreement over the term “rational,” but there is a general consensus in the fourth wave literature that nonstate actors, including fanatical terrorist groups, *can* be deterred.¹¹

In this advanced fourth wave thinking, the only potential adversaries against which deterrence is irrelevant are ardent nihilists and the clinically insane; all others must undertake some form of cost-benefit analysis.¹² Paul K. Davis and Brian M. Jenkins argued that while the first three waves of deterrence theory were not inalienably applicable to nonstate deterrence calculus, it was possible to identify clear cost-benefit thinking in groups like al Qaeda:¹³

[T]he empirical record shows that even hardened terrorists dislike operational risks and may be deterred by uncertainty and risk. A foot soldier may willingly give his life in a suicide mission, and organizations may be quite willing to sacrifice such pawns, but mission success is very important and leaders are in some ways risk-averse. Terrorists recognize that their power depends on perceptions of whether they are winning or losing; their leaders are deeply concerned with control; and martyrdom in a stymied mission lacks the appeal of dying in a spectacular, successful attack.

Davis’ and Jenkins’ argument has been broadly accepted and reinforced by other expert analyses and empirical research.¹⁴ There is general agreement that deterrence can be applied

against a full spectrum of potential threats, from terrorism to nuclear war. Expanding from the application of deterrence to terror, the collective mass of fourth wave arguments broaden the Cold War–era notion of deterrence to encompass any behavior the United States deems to be threatening. This is in many ways a reversion to a more realistic, all-encompassing vision of deterrence as standard practice. Several scholars argue that deterrence has always been widely practiced against all potential threats to state interests as a matter of necessity, and they imply that the Cold War focus on high-end threats was actually an aberration from the constant, yet fluctuating, multifaceted use of deterrence by both state and nonstate actors.¹⁵ Alternatively, it is possible to view much of the first three waves of literature on deterrence as a distraction from a more realistic and comprehensive practical use of deterrence as a universal practice: Deterrence against terrorism and nonstate actors *did* occur during the Cold War, but these activities were generally excluded from the literature.

Moving forward, if any potential threat to U.S. strategic interests *can* in theory be deterred, the next logical step is to determine which of the many threats that exist in the contemporary environment the United States *should* seek to deter. This is a question not only of strategic interest, but also of resources and capabilities. In common practice for policymaking, the government seeks to prioritize threats to U.S. strategic interests to help shape policy and allocate resources.¹⁶ As the next section shows, this kind of scaled refinement is difficult and, arguably, impracticable in the contemporary environment. This, in turn, opens the door for a different way of conceptualizing and implementing U.S. deterrence policy and activities.

What to Deter? Identifying “Strategic Threats”

The 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), which spells out the President’s conceptualization of strategic threats, appears to settle prospective debate about what is and what is not a strategic threat. In contrast to the 1987 NSS, which defines strategic threats in stark, state-level terms, the 2015 NSS takes an all-encompassing approach to defining strategic threats as part of a “comprehensive agenda.”¹⁷ These vary, from catastrophic nuclear or conventional attacks, to the spread of weapons of mass destruction, to terror attacks against U.S. citizens and U.S. allies.¹⁸ President Barack Obama’s 2015 NSS argues that these threats are exacerbated by the increasing diffusion of borders, global interconnectedness, and increasing dependence on cyber technology.¹⁹ In this latest accounting, therefore, strategic threats to the United States are pervasive, cross-domain, and extant from small-scope and -scale to large.

However, while the 2015 NSS expands the aperture and identifies various types of state and nonstate threats to U.S. national security, it does not directly address what may be the most pernicious threat to U.S. national security from other states: the increasingly effective use of *measures short of war* since 9/11.²⁰ These measures include the Russian use of “little green men,” or covert special forces, to seize Crimea; the Chinese use of fishing fleets and military presence patrols to expand international boundaries in the South China Sea; and the Iranian use of proxy terrorism against U.S. forces in Iraq in the 2000s.²¹ Writing about deterrence in 1958, RAND’s George C. Reinhardt referred to these kinds of actions as “creeping aggression” or “creeping expansion.”²² Reinhardt’s point was that the absolutist nuclear deterrence policy of massive retaliation was insufficient to address *constant* nation-state (in this case Soviet) efforts to gradually, incrementally expand their control in ways that often intentionally or incidentally undermined U.S. strategic interests.²³ Indeed, the Cold War was fought incrementally and at

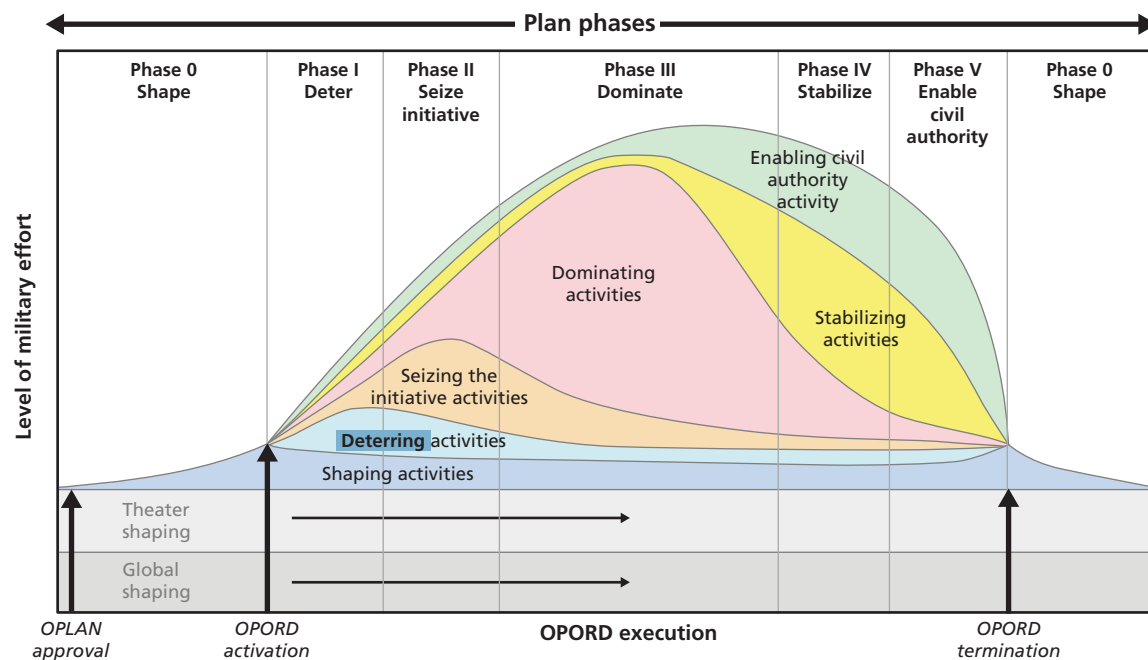
the periphery *because* nuclear deterrence was so effective. States have been, and remain, in constant competition or collusion in an effort to preserve and expand their interests.

U.S. Military Organizing Concepts for Deterrence Are Insufficient

If states are in constant short-of-war competition and collusion, and nonstate threats can and do emerge quickly and outside the bounds of conventional, set-piece war, then threats to U.S. strategic interests—described expansively in the 2015 NSS—are effectively omnipresent. Practical reality, then, is not synchronized with the kind of phased deterrence concepts found in U.S. military doctrine. This matters for the entire U.S. government (USG) because, of all the agencies that consider or play a role in deterrence, DoD is the only one that clearly defines and attempts to help organize both the military and interagency partners for deterrence.²⁴ In practical terms, DoD is the *de facto* lead agency for deterrence. Figure 1.1 shows how DoD conceptualizes deterrence within the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System, or JOPES.²⁵ This is the standard model by which U.S. combatant commands plan for and execute contingency operations against hostile forces, and it is the dominant organizing concept for U.S. joint and interagency military operations. Within this model, deterrence only occurs once conflict has begun. There is no role for deterrence in what are commonly termed “steady state” operations or, alternately, Phase Zero (Phase 0) operations within the JOPES conceptualization.

This model continued to stand as U.S. joint doctrine as of mid-2015, so it should serve as a central guidepost for most U.S. military and interagency contingency planning. JOPES

Figure 1.1
The Joint Operation Planning and Execution System Phase Model



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Defense, 1995, pp. III–39.

NOTE: OPLAN = operations plan; OPORD = operations order.

RAND CF345.1

limits the role of the U.S. military in deterrence operations to the time and space within a major contingency. For example, if a state adversary were to mass troops on a border of a state allied with the United States, the U.S. military would enter Phase 1 operations to help deter an invasion. But the U.S. military would not take any planned action to reduce the conditions that might lead to war *prior* to the near onset of hostilities. Not only does this concept fail to recognize the nature of strategic threats to U.S. interests, it also fails to leverage the vast resources of the U.S. military to help deter those threats before they blossom into a clear threat of violence or outright violence. It does not acknowledge the role of interagency partners in deterrence prior to conflict. Further, it fails to inject the U.S. military into the constant, short-of-war struggle between states, or to provide a role for the military in identifying and deterring nonstate threats, like terrorism, that might emerge and exist outside of a major contingency. In this joint doctrinal model, the military would conduct theater and global shaping (e.g., security cooperation) but would not conceptualize these activities as deterrence. In JOPES, the U.S. military's role in deterrence is tightly restricted.

In practice, though, the combatant commanders, U.S. diplomats, and other senior leaders tend to view a range of military and nonmilitary actions in the steady state, Phase 0 range as having deterrent value and deterrent effect.²⁶ Military forces engage in steady-state actions under Title 22 authority (DoS-led), and many of these actions can and do have deterrent value. Theater security cooperation (TSC) efforts across the globe can and do contribute to deterrence against potentially hostile state and nonstate actors. Some U.S. military exercises in Japan are clearly intended to have a deterrent effect on Chinese expansionism, even though the United States is not in Phase I operations against China.²⁷ While the JOPES model is not necessarily intended to provide a framework for grand strategy, it clashes with other joint doctrinal literature that describes Phase 0 military activities as integral to the joint approach to deterrence.²⁸ The U.S. National Military Strategy clearly states that deterrence is part and parcel of steady-state, Phase 0 operations:²⁹

The U.S. military deters aggression by maintaining a credible nuclear capability that is safe, secure, and effective; conducting forward engagement and operations; and maintaining Active, National Guard, and Reserve forces prepared to deploy and conduct operations of sufficient scale and duration to accomplish their missions. Forward deployed, rotational, and globally responsive forces regularly demonstrate the capability and will to act. Should deterrence fail to prevent aggression, the U.S. military stands ready to project power to deny an adversary's objectives and decisively defeat any actor that threatens the U.S. homeland, our national interests, or our allies and partners.

There is a glaring contradiction between the joint doctrinal model portrayed in Figure 1.1 and actual DoD policy and military activity: In the figure, deterrence does not exist before Phase 1, while in practice it is constant. Therefore, the U.S. military and the rest of the government must look beyond JOPES for an organizing principle on deterrence. As of mid-2015, the only other official source for detailed guidance on deterrence is the 2006 *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept* (hereafter *Deterrence Operations*) authored by the U.S. Strategic Command.³⁰

Deterrence Operations offers a way to integrate the National Military Strategy vision with the contemporary environment. It envisions an increasingly complex operating environment with concurrently increasing risk to what it terms "vital" strategic interests, and it recognizes

the end of the U.S.-Soviet dyad that was central to Cold War deterrence theory and modeling.³¹ *Deterrence Operations* embraces the notion that the United States can and should deter nonstate adversaries like al Qaeda or ISIS, and it assumes a cost-benefit model that is generally in line with contemporary theoretical literature. Unfortunately, it presents an ideal that, while more thoughtful and innovative than the approach presented in JOPES, remains burdened with flawed assumptions. It envisions an optimistic but generally unrealistic approach to operationalizing deterrence. In line with most other military deterrence publications, *Deterrence Operations* uses the term “key adversaries” to align threats with deterrent strategies.³² This perpetuates a now-unrealistic Cold War–era assumption: that deterrence can be planned to address known actors and, with some intelligence limitations, known threats from those actors. In line with much of the fourth wave deterrence literature, which retains some residual oversimplifications from the first three waves, *Deterrence Operations* seeks to descriptively arrange the environment in a way that can be observed and affected by actor-specific policies and actions.³³

In practice, however, it is impossible to identify all potential state and nonstate adversaries to the United States, and it would be impractical to label every actor that might threaten U.S. strategic interests as an “adversary.” For example, U.S. policymakers routinely complain that the government of Pakistan sometimes acts against U.S. strategic interests.³⁴ However, as of mid-2015, it would not be practical to label Pakistan as an adversary or to treat it as one. Collectively, the USG failed to identify or predict the al Qaeda capability, intent, and willingness to attack the homeland in 2001. While the United States did identify ISIS as a threat, it did not successfully predict its actions in mid-2014. Russia was identified as a potential adversary, but the USG failed to identify President Vladimir Putin’s intent and willingness to seize Crimea in 2014.

The USG lacks the ability to coordinate the kind of fast-moving, nonlinear strategy envisioned in *Deterrence Operations*. While DoD, the Intelligence Community, and DoS collaborate extensively, DoD cannot mandate deterrent theory, strategy, or practice to the rest of the government. Seeing threats, developing policy options, coordinating these options across the government, and then translating approved policy into action often takes months, if not years. This is a slow, unresponsive process not suited to flexibility or high tempo except in contingency; even then, it is often disjointed.³⁵ Increasing interconnectedness of the environment, the addition of the cyber domain, and the massive expansion of stated U.S. strategic interests compound the bureaucratic challenges within the USG. Thus, it demands insight and capabilities that do not exist and is likely to remain an unachievable ideal. This leaves the interagency without a realistic, applicable organizing principle for deterrence.

Matching Realities with Deterrence Policy and Practice

A realistic, applicable organizing principle for deterrence should accept the contemporary environment as it exists. It should derive from top-level policy guidance like the NSS, and it should be designed to leverage the USG in its current or gradually evolving form. From this point of departure, deterrence would assume that threats to U.S. strategic interests exist worldwide and that they emerge and contract rapidly and often without warning. It would assume that there are known adversaries, yet also many state and nonstate actors that will act against U.S. strategic interests without necessarily becoming adversaries; in some cases, actors will shift from

nonadversary to adversary status with little or no warning. Intelligence information and analyses will always be incomplete and imperfect to some extent, so U.S. understanding of threats will also be continually incomplete and imperfect to some extent. It should assume that many states—both known adversaries and others—will continually attempt to undermine U.S. strategic interests or act in ways counter to U.S. strategic interests, most often below the threshold for outright war.

Matching fourth wave deterrence literature and top-level policy guidance, the new principle and associated policies would assume that *most* threats to U.S. national security will present themselves below the threshold for major combat operations, or to the “left” of the JOPES Phase 1 construct. Many threats will emerge from nonstate actors. Few of these threats will be existential, but many will be strategic because in the contemporary environment, the relevance of small states and nonstate actors is amplified by the cyber domain, by rapid worldwide transportation, and by opportunities to obtain weapons of mass destruction. The new organizing principle would fully integrate deterrence into both steady-state and contingency operations. It would provide a framework within which DoD could consider *every* action to have possible deterrent effect. This framework would also allow and encourage DoD to leverage resources for specific deterrent actions outside of contingencies, and to partner with other elements of the USG whenever possible in reasonable, appropriate time frames.

While policymakers and combatant commanders will continue to try to attune regional deterrent strategies to known adversaries, potential adversaries, and threats, most deterrence will be *general* rather than specific.³⁶ Instead of attempting to concentrate the entire power of the United States against known or perceived threats, this approach would focus on building—or perhaps rebuilding—a worldwide belief that the costs of attacking U.S. strategic interests, persons, and infrastructure would outweigh the benefits. Borrowing from literature and theories of criminology, this general approach to deterrence would be intended to affect *every* potential adversary’s cost-benefit analysis rather than just those of specific, known adversaries (without ruling out specific, tailored deterrence efforts for known threats). The parallels between international relations and crime are inexact but sufficient to help analogize alternatives:³⁷

General deterrence is designed to prevent crime in the general population. Thus, the state’s punishment of offenders serves as an example for others in the general population who have not yet participated in criminal events. It is meant to make them aware of the horrors of official sanctions in order to put them off committing crimes. . . . Specific deterrence is designed—by the nature of the proscribed sanctions—to deter only the individual offender from committing that crime in the future.

Lawrence Freedman describes deterrence against criminality as a process of “building up norms” designed to lead people away from unwanted activities. He also argues that the correlation between criminal science and international relations is at best imperfect, but he leverages the analogy to show how combining general and specific deterrent approaches can be at least somewhat successful.³⁸

A general approach would not require the kind of fluid, high-tempo, and fine-grained interagency planning and actions called for in *Deterrence Operations*, other than for known adversaries. Instead, it could be developed and maintained gradually over time and kept relatively stable for years or perhaps decades. It would center on general, proactive actions rather than reactive planning and action. Most of these efforts would happen in Phase 0, or during

steady-state operations. Enacting such a broad approach seems daunting, but in fact it could be somewhat easier, far more effective, and perhaps even less costly than an attempt to enact the mostly dormant strategy of flexible deterrence.

Principles and Actions to Enact a General Deterrent Strategy

Enacting a general deterrent strategy demands realignment of doctrine and policy more than investment in additional resources. The United States is already doing many of the things required to make potential adversaries “aware of the horrors” of reprisal. These include long-standing practices like undertaking periodic military exercises, publicizing advanced military capabilities, killing anti-American terrorists, embargoing hostile nation-states, and issuing general political and diplomatic warnings to potential adversaries. All of these actions will be central to general deterrence. TSC and its incumbent parts will also be central to general deterrence. These are mostly overt actions to strengthen allies or prospective allies. For example, the military conducts foreign internal defense (FID) missions under the TSC umbrella. Military trainers are sent to train foreign military forces to defend their own territories against internal instability or external encroachment. Under JOPES, a Phase 0 activity like TSC is technically not deterrence, but in reality it can have considerable deterrent effect. The mere presence of U.S. military personnel for FID, and the act of arming a state with American weaponry, has a deterrent effect on potential adversaries to that state. *How* the United States uses TSC and similar activities matters a great deal for its general deterrent effect.

Military, diplomatic, and economic means can be employed overtly, covertly, or clandestinely.³⁹ For example, the military may publicly announce a FID mission to help bolster a friendly state and deter a neighbor, or it may undertake a clandestine or simply unpublicized mission to build up friendly capabilities in the shadows. Diplomats can publicly announce a demarche, thereby sending a broad message, or they can submit one privately for subtler effect. Sweeping economic sanctions can be announced to the world, or subtle shifts in economic policy can be used to undermine a known adversary. Overt actions tend to have both general and specific value in that they affect both local intended targets and signal U.S. intent and behavior to the rest of the world. Covert and clandestine actions tend to have only very specific intent. Therefore, a shift to general deterrence would tend toward more overt military, diplomatic, and economic activity. Such a shift to overt deterrent behavior would impact USG resource allocation. For example, guided by a general deterrent principle, the military might invest in more overt special operations forces rather than more covert or clandestine forces.

Deterrence is more successful if shows of military, diplomatic, and economic strength are backed by consistent action. This is acutely relevant for specific deterrence targeted against known adversaries: Failure to back rhetoric, stated threats, or implied threats with action erodes deterrent influence, while consistently matching word with deed strengthens deterrence and, over time, reduces the necessity for reprisals. But perfect consistency is impossible. Global circumstances change, political will ebbs and flows, and U.S. leadership can change frequently. Most recently, the United States issued a “red line” warning about the use of weapons of mass destruction in Syria, then failed to issue decisive reprisals when the red line was crossed.⁴⁰ Many critics argue that this perceived failure undermines current and future U.S. deterrence efforts.⁴¹ Specific deterrence requires specific warnings that, in turn, require specific actions. General deterrence is more ambiguous and leaves greater room for maneuver.

Broad and vague threats conveyed by overt, worldwide military presence and active diplomacy can influence more prospective adversaries than specific deterrence and, by keeping threats ambiguous, they may also give policymakers and military leaders more flexibility in selecting the method, time, and place of reprisal. One central principle of general deterrence is the avoidance of specific threats and emphasis on vague, ominous threats. For example, instead of issuing a red line warning against Syria, the United States could have instead significantly increased its military presence in the region, publicized this activity, and issued strong statements about the use of weapons of mass destruction. This approach may have still failed, but it would have reduced the impact of failure on the broader efficacy of U.S. general deterrent power.

Modular, adaptable forces capable of fighting in any region and against any foe would be well aligned to a general deterrent posture.⁴² Articulation of general deterrence as an organizing principle for DoD would help align joint planning with current practice: It would give senior military leaders the ability to leverage deterrence as a practical rationale for critical military activities like TSC, and it would help them shape these activities to support national, regional objectives. Since DoD is likely to remain the lead organizing agent for deterrence in the USG, it could then leverage the concept of general deterrence to better link interagency efforts to deter known and potential adversaries. *Nothing in general deterrence precludes specific, tailored deterrence efforts.* Tailored deterrence would still be necessary for known adversaries like North Korea, and for known threats like al Qaeda and ISIS.

Finally, *denial* must also be a central element to general deterrence. In this context, denial means either refusing access to U.S. and allied vulnerable assets, or hardening and protecting these to raise the cost of a prospective attack. This is common practice that should be incorporated into general deterrence theory and strategy. There are many ways to deny access to targets. Examples of denial activities are prolific. The German Wehrmacht used concrete and steel obstacles in an attempt to deny the beaches of northern France to allied invasion during World War II. Lebanese Hezbollah attempted to deny access to their strongholds in southern Lebanon by seeding improvised explosive devices along the routes most favorable to Israeli armored columns.⁴³ Davis and Jenkins argue that this tactic has often proven successful in deterring terrorism.⁴⁴ The term “hard targeting,” borrowed from a British tactical patrolling approach in Northern Ireland, is often used to describe activities to deter attacks by denying access to targets.⁴⁵ Denial can also be achieved by deploying security forces, limiting access to cyber domains, controlling individual travel, and by deception. An overarching strategy of general deterrence buffered by both specific deterrent activities and aggressive denial tactics is viable and, arguably, the best strategic option for the contemporary environment.

Conclusion and Discussion Questions

Currently, the United States has no practical, overarching deterrence strategy. Instead, various components of the government use their respective ways and means to deter threats as they appear. Agencies and departments tend to focus on known adversaries and, as a result, they are in a near-constant state of reaction to emerging threats. Enacting a practical deterrent strategy, even if it is done only within DoD, can help move the entire government closer to addressing the realities of the current environment. General deterrence is not a panacea, and it carries incumbent risks. Increasing overt activity worldwide might elicit unintended responses, or

perhaps evoke a return to Cold War–era escalatory military development among nation-states. However, there is considerable evidence that states like Russia, China, and Iran are already fully intent on building their military forces to challenge the United States and its allies. If general deterrence can be translated into more-practical, effective deterrence, the risks of potential escalation will likely be outweighed by the benefit of reduced conflict.

This short paper identifies a lag between the theoretical literature on deterrence and DoD deterrence doctrine: Current approaches appear to be mired in third wave, Cold War thinking. However, none of this literature (including this paper) ends the debate over deterrence. In order to move toward a more practical approach, senior leaders will have to determine which assumptions in the fourth wave literature are accurate, and they will have to determine the actual gap between current policy and optimized deterrence.

Considerations for the Comprehensive Deterrence Senior Leader Forum

Participants in the forum should consider the same basic questions that drove the shift toward broader interpretations of deterrence, and also consider how a new organizing principle might be enacted:

- Is strategic deterrence relevant against all threats, or only known state threats?
- What is the common organizing principle for deterrence for the USG, if it exists?
- How do the limits of intelligence and game theory affect our predictive capabilities?
- How should deterrence be applied in Phase 0, or steady-state operations? Who leads?
- How should the United States apply deterrence against states operating in the “Gray Zone?”
- What is the best way to leverage existing capabilities to improve deterrence?
- How should the USG balance overt versus covert or clandestine deterrence?

Notes

¹ There are many alternate and competing definitions of deterrence in both official and academic literature. See, for example: DoD, *Deterrence Operations: Joint Operating Concept*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Strategic Command, December 2006, p. 3, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/joint_concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf; Wyn Q. Bowen, “Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism,” in Ian R. Kenyon and John Simpson, eds., *Deterrence and the New Global Security Environment*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006, p. 50; Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Three Items in One: Deterrence as Concept, Research Program, and Political Issue,” in Thazha V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 31–57.

² Paul, 2006, argues that deterrence is “a theory, a tactic, a national security strategy, a larger defense policy approach, and a critical component of security for the international system.” (Paul is quoting from Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.) Thazha V. Paul, “Complex Deterrence: An Introduction,” in Thazha V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 5.

³ The organization's name transliterates from Arabic as al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fi al-'Iraq wa al-Sham (abbreviated as Da'ish or DAESH). In the West, it is commonly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (both abbreviated as ISIS), or simply as the Islamic State (IS). Arguments abound as to which is the most accurate translation, but here we refer to the group as ISIS.

For examples of the results of the lack of effective U.S. deterrence, see Ronald R. Luman, ed., *Unrestricted Warfare Symposium 2009, Proceedings on Combating the Unrestricted Warfare Threat: Terrorism, Resources, Economics, and Cyberspace*, Laurel, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 2009; Andrew Scobell, "Slow-Intensity Conflict in the South China Sea," Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 13, 2000, <http://www.fpri.org/article/2000/08/slow-intensity-conflict-in-the-south-china-sea/>; Stephen J. Hadley, and Damon Wilson, "Putin's Takeover of Crimea is Part of a Larger Strategy," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2014; Anne Applebaum, "Putin's New Kind of War," *Slate*, April 16, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/04/vladimir_putin_s_new_war_in_ukraine_the_kremlin_is_reinventing_how_russia.html; Peter Marzalik, "NATO Preparation For Russia's Hybrid Warfare," *International Affairs Review*, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, February 10, 2015, <http://www.ia-r-gwu.org/content/nato-preparation-russia%E2%80%99s-hybrid-warfare>.

⁴ See Knopf, 2012, for a summary of the first three waves. The first wave addressed the immediate threat of Soviet nuclear capability. The second wave applied game theory to nuclear strategy. The third wave used "statistical and case-study methods to empirically test deterrence theory." Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Terrorism and the Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research," in Andreas Wenger and Alex Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012, pp. 1, 21–45.

⁵ There were some significant exceptions to this high-end-only approach to deterrence theory and practice, including at RAND (see, for example, George C. Reinhardt, *Deterrence Is Not Enough*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, P-983, 1958, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P983.html>). Theorists in the first three waves of literature tended to address low-order or low-intensity threats in the context of overarching state-on-state competition. See Barry Wolf, *When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, N-3261-A, 1991, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/notes/N3261.html>.

⁶ Fourth wave literature includes, but is not limited to: Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1619-DARPA, 2002, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1619.html; Bowen, 2006; Frank C. Zagare, "Deterrence is Dead: Long Live Deterrence," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2006, pp. 115–120; Joshua Pollack, "Challenges of Future Deterrence," briefing, Washington, D.C.: Science Applications International Corporation, 2008; Emanuel Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric Warfare Era," in Thazha V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009; Arreguin-Toft, Ivan, *Unconventional Deterrence: How the Weak Deter the Strong*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009; Colin S. Gray, *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 2009; S. P. Kapur, "Deterrence and Asymmetric Warfare," *Seminar 599*, July 2009; Knopf, 2009; P. M. Morgan and T. V. Paul, "Deterrence Among the Great Powers in an Era of Globalization," in T. V. Paul, P. M. Morgan, and J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009; Andrew R. Morral and Brian A. Jackson, *Understanding the Role of Deterrence in Counterterrorism Security*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-281-RC, 2009, http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP281.html; Paul, 2009; Janice Gross Stein, "The Politics and Power of Networks: The Accountability of Humanitarian Organizations," in Miles Kahler, ed., *Networked Politics: Agency, Legitimacy, and Power*, 2009; Paul K. Davis, *Simple Models to Explore Deterrence and More General Influence in the War with al-Qaeda*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-296-OSD, 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP296.html; Eric Sterner, "Retaliatory Deterrence in Cyberspace," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2011, pp. 62–80.

⁷ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence*, Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2004, p. 1.

⁸ Colin S. Gray, *Maintaining Effective Deterrence*, Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 2003, p. vii. Also see Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Defense, Deterrence, and the Prospects for Peace," *Ethics*, Vol. 95, No. 3, 1985, pp. 659–672, for his previous conceptualization of the problem.

⁹ Gray, 2003, p. 10.

¹⁰ Thomas L. Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorists*, New York: Anchor Books, 2004, <https://books.google.com/books?id=2pPbJb82hWwC&pg=PA221&lpg=PA221&dq=thomas+l.friedman+undeterrables&source=bl&ots=G3BTL9oyym&sig=EVVNV0X7SNnyBa0TNbCZeYaoTgs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiH-0jMIVTAhVH7IMKHfsuDQwQ6AEILjAF#v=onepage&q=thomas%20friedman%20undeterrables&f=false>. Fredrick E. Vars (2014) presents a range of interconnected arguments on the term "undeterrable." Fredrick E. Vars, "Fear of an Undeterrable Other," *Louisiana Law Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1, 2014, pp. 1–28.

¹¹ For debates over the term “rational” in deterrence literature, see, for example: Thomas C. Schelling, “An Essay on Bargaining,” *The American Economic Review*, June 1956, pp. 281–306; Partha Chatterjee, “On the Rational Choice Theory of Limited Strategic War,” *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1973, pp. 157–172; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “The Costs of War: A Rational Expectations Approach,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 77, No. 2, 1983, pp. 347–357; Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,” *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1989, pp. 143–169; Frank C. Zagare, “Rationality and Deterrence,” *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1990, pp. 238–260; James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1995, pp. 379–414; Jack S. Levy, “Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 87–112; Jeffrey W. Legro, and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1999, pp. 5–55; Steven M. Walt, “Rigor or Rigor Mortis? Rational Choice and Security Studies,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1999, pp. 5–48; Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Rational Choice and Security Studies: Stephen Walt and His Critics*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000; Stein, 2009. See Sterner, 2011, for analysis of cyber deterrence.

¹² Michael Quinlan (2006) makes a similar argument. See Michael Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability,” in Ian R. Kenyon and John Simpson, eds., *Deterrence and the New Global Security Environment*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006, p. 6.

¹³ Davis and Jenkins, 2002, p. xii. Also see Morral and Jackson, 2009.

¹⁴ See, for example: Freedman, 2004, p. 124; Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2006, pp. 87–123; Morral and Jackson, 2009; Jeffrey W. Knopf, *The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research*, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, 2010, p. 10.

¹⁵ Reinhardt, 1958, and others make the argument that deterrence is a universal concept and an organically emergent behavior that long predates the nuclear era.

¹⁶ This is common practice in the national security organizations of the U.S. government. For example, the Director of National Intelligence directs priorities for the allocation of limited collection and analytic assets through the National Intelligence Priorities Framework. See U.S. Director of National Intelligence, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Committee*, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 26, 2015, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Unclassified_2015_ATA_SFR_-_SASC_FINAL.pdf

¹⁷ Ronald W. Reagan, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1987; Barack H. Obama, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2015.

¹⁸ Obama, 2015, introduction and p. 2.

¹⁹ Obama, 2015, pp. 2–5. These concerns and focus areas are echoed in the 2015 National Military Strategy. See U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2015.

²⁰ *Measures short of war* is a term coined, or at least popularized, by George Kennan. See Giles D. Harlow and George C. Maerz, eds., *Measures Short of War: The George F. Kennan Lectures at the National War College, 1946–1947*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1991; George F. Kennan, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950, Retrospective Volume, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, May 4, 1948, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d269>.

²¹ For insight into Iran’s use of measures short of war in Iraq, see Kimberly Kagan, *Iran’s Proxy War Against the United States and the Iraqi Government*, Institute for the Study of War, 2007, <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/IraqReport06.pdf>; Helene Cooper, “Iran Fighting Proxy War in Iraq, U.S. Envoy Says,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/12/world/middleeast/12policy.html>; Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and “Other Means,”* West Point, N.Y.: Combatting Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy, October 13, 2008.

²² Reinhardt, 1958, pp. 3, 9.

²³ Reinhardt wrote “‘Creeping expansion’ of Communism whether by local use of force or by subversion and insurrection with the potential sanction of force, can in time prove as deadly to free peoples as nuclear assault on the U.S.” Reinhardt, 1958, p. 9.

²⁴ Other agencies address deterrence in practice, and deterrence emerges in a range of interagency and international plans and operations. DoS is probably as focused, perhaps in some ways more focused, on deterrence on a day-to-day basis than DoD. However, while U.S. diplomats are probably the most prolific government deterrence theorists and practitioners, DoS has not put into place a comprehensive, integrated theory and policy for deterrence that approaches the depth, breadth, or operational focus of DoD efforts cited here. At DoS, the Office of Strategic Stability and Deterrence appears to be most involved in deterrence policy and practice, but this office generally focuses on nuclear deterrence, top-level state-to-state engagement, and treaty verification. See DoS, “Office of Strategic Stability and Deterrence (AVC/SSD),” homepage, undated, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/c23758.htm>.

²⁵ DoD, *Joint Operation Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, August 11, 2011, pp. III–39, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf. Also see DoD, *Users Guide for JOPES (Joint Operation Planning and Execution System)*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, May 1, 1995, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/other/jopes.pdf>.

²⁶ There is a subtle but important difference between the terms *steady state* and *Phase 0*. *Steady state* refers to any and all activities undertaken by DoD, while *Phase 0* implies actions that are specifically intended to address potential contingencies that have already been envisioned. The former is general and agnostic to specific events, while the latter fits within the JOPES construct. This distinction is not always noted or made in either literature or professional discourse.

²⁷ See, for example, Kirk Spitzer, “U.S. and Japanese Forces Lock and Load With One Eye on China,” *Time*, September 23, 2014, <http://time.com/3419988/us-japan-ground-self-defense-force-joint-training-okinawa-china/>.

²⁸ See, for example, DoD, 2011, pp. V-9, V-10.

²⁹ The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., 2015, p. 7.

³⁰ DoD, 2006. For mentions of deterrence in the context of joint doctrine, see DoD, *Joint Planning*, Joint Publication 3-22, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, 2010a; DoD, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, November 8, 2010b (amended 2015), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf; DoD, 2011; DoD, *Joint Intelligence*, Joint Publication 2-0, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, October 22, 2013, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp2_0.pdf#search=JP 2-0](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp2_0.pdf#search=JP%202-0); DoD, *Special Operations*, Joint Publication 3-05, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, July 16, 2014, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_05.pdf#search=JP 3-05](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_05.pdf#search=JP%305). These are all references to the JOPES model.

³¹ DoD, 2006, pp. 1–8.

³² Some variation of the term *adversary* is used in all of the joint doctrinal publications cited in this report, and in most of the fourth wave literature on deterrence.

³³ For example, see Paul, 2009, p. 8.

³⁴ For example, see Elisabeth Bumiller and Jane Perlez, “Pakistan’s Spy Agency Is Tied to Attack on U.S. Embassy,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/asia/mullen-asserts-pakistani-role-in-attack-on-us-embassy.html?_r=0; Laurie Ure, “Kerry, Lugar Defend Pakistan Aid,” CNN, May 5, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/05/05/kerry.lugar.pakistan/>.

³⁵ Even in the relatively slow-moving wars in Afghanistan (2001–present) and Iraq (2003–2011), the interagency process was often uneven and in many cases slow or disjointed. Agency cultures, budget feuds, and disagreements between key leadership can and do undermine the effectiveness of interagency planning and decisionmaking. See, for example, Anthony H. Cordesman, *American Strategic and Tactical Failures in Iraq: An Update*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006, http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/060808_iraqfailures.pdf; Kenneth R. Dahl, *New Security for New Threats: The Case for Reforming the Interagency Process*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2007/7/defense-dahl/dahl20070731.pdf>.

³⁶ Morgan distinguishes between *general* and *immediate* deterrence, with the former occurring prior to the emergence of a crisis (akin to deterrent shaping in JOPES Phase 0) and the latter involving specific deterrent threats during crises, as envisioned in Phase 1 deterrence in JOPES. See Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Library of Social Science, 1977.

³⁷ Ihekwoaba D. Onwudiwe, Jonathan Odo, and Emmanuel C. Onyeozili, “Deterrence Theory,” in Mary Bosworth, *Encyclopedia of Prisons and Correctional Facilities*, Washington, D.C.: SAGE Publications, 2005, pp. 233–234, <https://marisluste.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/deterrence-theory.pdf>. The term *general deterrence* is also used in various contexts for international relations and security, although typically for specific deterrence objectives.

³⁸ Freedman, 2004, pp. 60–74.

³⁹ The differences between *covert* and *clandestine* are significant in the framework of U.S. policy. Clandestine activities are conducted by intelligence experts under the day-to-day auspices of intelligence oversight. Covert activities require specific, high-level findings and authorities; they have tailored, often time-sensitive objectives; and they are typically conducted under Title 50 authorities. See Marshall Curtis Erwin, *Covert Action: Legislative Background and Possible Policy Questions*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2013.

⁴⁰ See, for example, “Obama Warns Syria Not to Cross ‘Red Line,’” CNN, August 21, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/20/world/meast/syria-unrest/>; Raf Sanchez, Richard Spencer, and Damien McElroy, “Barak Obama ‘Red Line’ Warning Over Chemical Weapons in Syria,” *The Telegraph*, August 20, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9488314/Barack-Obama-red-line-warning-over-chemical-weapons-in-Syria.html>; Glenn Kessler, “President Obama and the ‘Red Line’ on Syria’s Chemical Weapons,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/>.

⁴¹ See, for example, Albert R. Hunt, “Obama’s Red Line Comes Back to Haunt Him,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/us/politics/obamas-red-line-comes-back-to-haunt-him.html>; David Jackson, “Obama Tied Down by Syria ‘Red Line’ Comment,” *USA Today*, May 6, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2013/05/06/obama-syria-red-line-new-york-times-story/2138249/>; Richard Minitzer, “How Obama’s ‘Red Lines’ Made the World Much More Dangerous,” *Forbes*, February 16, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/richardminitzer/2015/02/16/how-obamas-red-lines-made-the-world-much-more-dangerous/>.

⁴² See, for example, Nicholas Malay, “Innovation in Action—Adaptive Force Packages,” U.S. Department of the Navy, Public Affairs, undated, http://www.secnav.navy.mil/innovation/HTML_Pages/2015/06/AdaptiveForcePackages.htm; William M. Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991–2005*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army, Center of Military History, 2007, http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/transforming_an_army/CMH_70-108-1.pdf.

⁴³ See, for example David E. Johnson, *Hard Fighting: Israel in Lebanon and Gaza*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1085-A/AF, 2011, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1085.html>.

⁴⁴ Davis and Jenkins, 2002.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Ken Wharton, *The Bloodiest Year 1972: British Soldiers in Northern Ireland in Their Own Words*, Oxon, UK: The History Press, 2011, p. 35.

The Limits of Deterrence

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Deterrence strategies appeal to governments because they can be presented as being defensive but not weak, and firm but not reckless. They offer the prospect of controlling security threats without actually fighting. In this way they suit status quo powers because they encourage restraint rather than a push for change.

Deterrence's positive aura was acquired during the Cold War when it is generally held to have worked well. Since 1990 there have been regular discussions of the possibility of achieving comparable results through reconceptualizing deterrence and applying it to the security challenges of the post-Cold War world. The two sets of circumstances, however, appear to be very different. Cold War deterrence was about superpower confrontations and nuclear exchanges. Now the threats are many and varied, posed by states large and small, non-state actors, and even individuals, such as "lone-wolf" terrorists. The full spectrum of weapons systems must also be addressed, taking into account the possibilities opened up by cyber and information operations, or even measures which subvert security without violence.

A deterrence strategy sufficiently comprehensive to cover all contingencies must in principle mean that every type of security problem could be solved by ensuring that potential enemies appreciate the risks that they would run if they tried to harm the United States. For this to be a serious aspiration, the strategy would be required to cover not only the most dangerous contingencies at one extreme but also the most trivial at the other. It would mean that the most minor actor, when contemplating inflicting harm on the United States, must reckon on being rebuffed and expect to suffer a painful riposte. In practice, a theory capable of coping with all contingencies can only achieve its inner unity at a high, and probably banal, level of generality. A useful theory of deterrence requires a view of its limits, the necessary variations in its application, and clarity about the circumstances in which it is unlikely to work.

To appreciate the limits and possibilities of deterrence we can start with a simple definition: A *deterrence strategy* is one in which the deterrer A persuades a potential opponent B not to take action against a defined interest because the prospective costs will exceed any prospective gains.

This definition suggests four features of deterrence:

First, the deterrent effect can be achieved by manipulating calculations of prospective gains as well as prospective costs. In the literature, the former is described as *deterrence by denial* and the latter as *deterrence by punishment*. By and large, denial is the preferred approach because it involves fewer questions of credibility. B is dissuaded because it is aware that it will face practical problems in meeting its objectives. With punishment, B might be able to meet its objectives without too much bother, and will only be deterred if convinced that A will hurt it elsewhere.

Punishment will not necessarily stem, mitigate, or recover losses. Its main value in the security context, as in the criminological, is to influence future events, to demonstrate that objectionable acts have consequences. Acts that go unpunished are more likely to recur.

Second, calculations of risk are related to the interests engaged. During the Cold War, national survival and the integrity of alliances were at stake. It was reasonable to assume that direct challenges to these most vital interests would be taken seriously even if the response was fraught with danger. Such an assumption becomes more problematic when the challenge is to lesser interests, especially if there is a degree of ambiguity about how much they really matter.

This is why care is needed when tempted to attach deterrence to every foreign policy concern. Not all issues can be given the same priority, nor does it work to attempt to tailor deterrent threats to the interests at stake so that a relatively minor concern is backed by a relatively minor deterrent threat. The deterrent threat will need to be geared to the importance of the interest to B, and the practical demands involved in addressing B's acts or imposing a suitable punishment. If the area of interest not only matters more to B than to A but is also more readily accessed by B than A, then B may be beyond deterrence.

Third, as with all coercive policies, deterrence depends on how the target views the situation. Deterrer A must influence how B sees the world and then how it acts in consequence. The outcome depends on how both sides view the other's approach to risk. Crafting deterrence strategies therefore requires a degree of empathy, an insight into B's risk calculus. This may not always be too difficult. When faced with the possibility of nuclear war, states that vary hugely in circumstances, cultures and ideologies may tend to the "rational actor" of realist theory. The distinctive characteristics of key actors are much more important when the contingencies are more varied and the interests less stark.

In assessing another's risk-taking propensities, past behavior and reputation will be a factor. This has been an important aspect in establishing a general deterrence posture. If certain acts are dealt with severely, then those contemplating similar acts will be aware of the risks they are running. If A tells B not to pass a red line, and then fails to do much about it when the red line is passed, future threats, even in quite different situations, will lack credibility.

This is an argument for only making threats that can be kept. It also points to one of the dangers of a generalized deterrence posture. During the Cold War, this was known as the "interdependence of commitments." It elevated the importance of standing firm in a particular situation, irrespective of whether any vital interests were engaged, because of the reputational consequences of backing off. As the immediate risks might still be the overriding factor, this is another argument for not attaching general credibility to outlying interests.

Fourth, for these reasons, it may not always be clear when and why a deterrence strategy is succeeding. We know A's deterrence strategy has failed when B acts against its interests. But do we know that A's deterrence strategy has succeeded if B does not act? There might be a number of explanations for inaction.

- B might never have intended to act. The situation may be one in which, despite A's fears, B has little interest, or else B can pursue other priorities without provocation to others.
- If there had been an intention to act, this might have been set aside for reasons that had nothing to do with A, such as costs and risks that had to be considered even before attention turned to what A might do.
- If some capability of A was a material factor in B's decision not to act, this might not be the one that A had actually highlighted.

All this leads to a distinction between deterrence as strategic intent and deterrence as strategic effect. As strategic intent, it refers to an attempt by A to warn B against adopting a particular course of action. This requires B to receive and interpret threats as intended and modify behavior accordingly. As a strategic effect, it refers to a decision by B not to take a course of action because of concerns about A's response. Just as deterrent threats are issued that have no effect, deterrent effects occur without threats being issued. Deterrence thus happens all the time without much prompting, but when there is a prompt it may nonetheless fail.

The purpose of a deterrent strategy is to stabilize situations. The more stable they become, the more successful the strategy and the easier the strategy. As a situation becomes unstable and dangerous, deterrence strategies become more important but also more difficult. Indeed, it is arguable that when deterrence is at its most immediate and urgent it is most likely to fail. In the face of a new and specific challenge, A must define and then assert its interests, convey warnings, and strengthen capabilities. As it does these things, B's challenge may be gathering momentum, fortified by uncertainties surrounding A's warnings and commitments and by doubts about whether A has the capabilities appropriate to the situation. Even if A issues deterrent threats, B may conclude that the risks of backing down are greater than the risks of forging ahead, so daring A to make good on its threats. B may have a number of options for causing confusion or playing on ambiguity, so that even if A's threat causes it to be deflected from its original course it can still find another way forward.

If that is the worst case, the best case is one in which B, having decided not to act and then adjusted to the consequences of not acting, abandons the prospect of acting in the future. Equally, if there are regular and effective responses to certain acts, then it becomes prudent not to act in this way. These are the mechanisms by which deterrence comes to be internalized. It comes to be taken for granted that certain acts are not for serious consideration. They are filtered naturally out of B's strategic thinking. During the early stages of the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union were in a dynamic conflict in which they did contemplate direct moves against the interests of each other, but over time the relationship calmed down. Although the antagonism was still there and preparations and planning for war continued, political leaders did not spend much time on these issues. Internalized deterrence of this sort was extremely effective and valuable.

From this analysis, certain themes emerge which might inform an overall approach to deterrence:

- Denial is a more reliable form of deterrence than punishment. Making it practically difficult to complete a hostile act is more credible than a threat to punish an act once it has been completed.
- Deterrence cannot be considered separately from wider issues of foreign policy, because that identifies the interests to be protected. Clarity about interests is an essential part of any deterrence posture.
- As all interests are not of equal worth, it is unwise to make them all subjects of deterrence.
- Tailoring a deterrent threat to a particular situation will be helped by empathy for the target's world-view, but in the end it will be difficult to identify all the factors influencing its decisionmaking. There are inherent uncertainties in determining the sources of another's conduct in unique and stressful situations. This, along with the above, is another reason not to attach deterrence to too many different situations.

- Deterrence works best when it has been internalized over time. Thus, once a situation has been stabilized, the longer it can stay stable, and the less likely more disruptive action will occur.
- This underlines the extent to which deterrence is bound up with all other aspects of foreign policy, including alliance commitments, norm-setting, positive inducements, and war-fighting.

One of the conclusions from this is that the real problems with deterrence do not lie so much at the high end of major war. The prospect of major war, with all the chaos, death, and destruction that it would entail, is a deterrent in itself. Even powers that seek to challenge the status quo, such as Russia, China, and Iran, tend to do so through proxies, probes, and limited (though at times bloody) actions.

Equally, alliances, as long-established security commitments of the United States, provide a degree of protection for allies. It is notable that Russia has attacked non-allies Ukraine and Georgia rather than allies Estonia and Latvia, or that China has pushed harder against Vietnam.

The question of how far alliance guarantees should be spread has been an important one for U.S. foreign policy since the start of the Cold War. The most recent wave of alliance formation, in post-communist Europe, clearly alarmed Moscow by reducing Russia's freedom to maneuver in its near-abroad. During the Ukraine crisis, Russia has gone out of its way to deter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization from getting too involved in support of Kiev, including invoking its nuclear capacity. There is no more definite way to extend deterrent commitments than by extending alliances. This should only be done if the commitments are meant seriously, as the closer they are to Russia or China, the more they may have to be realized.

If the United States is not prepared to make a country a full ally, it should be clear that it is not prepared to act as if it were in an alliance. This is not to argue for ignoring violations of international norms such as non-aggression or the responsibility to protect, but that responses to such violations should be worked out pragmatically, in terms of the interests of other states in the outcome, the feasibility of alternative responses, and their likely effectiveness. The response to Russian aggression against Ukraine demonstrates the importance of multilateral cooperation, international organizations (such as the International Monetary Fund), the possibility of using economic sanctions, diplomatic activity, help with internal reforms, and forms of military assistance. None of this could have been promised easily beforehand without knowing the particular circumstances. It can be argued that it is not enough and more would have been better, but in the end everything was conditional on how the Ukrainians chose to respond to the Russian challenge. Deterrence is at work in the crisis, in setting restraints on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization but also on Russian actions. It is, however, a complex situation with a number of strands. Unavoidably, therefore, many foreign and security problems will involve responding to events as well as possible rather than anticipating them all and deterring in advance.

With areas such as humanitarian intervention, a norm has developed about the circumstances in which it is justified in interfering in another's internal affairs when human rights are being violated on a large scale, but international practice has hardly been consistent. Over time, those oppressing their own people may conclude that there are risks of external intervention if they turn the screw another time, but there can be no certainty here. Again, strategy develops with the crisis.

Acts of terrorism or cyber war launched by one state against another can in principle be deterred as much as any other attack against national territory or citizens, although issues of attribution and proportionality will be more difficult. The perpetrator should know that if responsibility can be assigned there will be consequences. In general, however, these are areas where the most effective deterrence lies in security measures capable of frustrating attacks. Even would-be suicide bombers can be deterred if they conclude that their martyrdom may well be futile. Again, this is a learning process that requires adversaries to learn from experience that terrorism is hard to execute and does not necessarily produce any valuable political results. When and how these lessons will be learned and internalized will be hard for an outsider to know.

In this respect, it is important to recall the distinction between deterrence as strategic intent and deterrence as strategic effect. The latter can develop over time as a result of the cumulative impact of U.S. foreign policy and responses to particular challenges as and when they happen. As strategic intent, it is best to use deterrence sparingly, associated with those core interests, such as threats to allies, which no government could ignore.

Reimagining Deterrence: New Security Threats and Challenges to the Deterrence Paradigm

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With the rapid increase in conflicts around the world, more prominently involving Russia and China, as well as non-state actors, deterrence has once again been suggested as a solution to many security challenges faced by the United States and its allies. Developed in the context of the high-conflict environment of the Cold War between two nuclear-armed superpowers, deterrence theory and its associated strategy have gone through different waves.¹ These waves roughly correspond to the diverse security challenges faced by the United States in the nuclear age and efforts by analysts to grapple with them.

In the post–Cold War era, or more concretely, in the post–9/11 era, deterrence has once again become the focus of attention, although some analysts argue that it is not all that relevant today. The reason for this skepticism arises from the complexity of the international system characterized by multiple threats, multiple actors, and different types of conflicts in which deterrence, based on threat of retaliation, may not work as anticipated in theory.² Moreover, the reluctance of the United States and its Western allies to use lethal force to restrain new challengers, largely a result of fatigue from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, has added to the question marks on the effectiveness of deterrence as a strategy. Nuclear deterrence today faces additional challenges, as I will discuss below.

New Threats and the Deterrence Paradigm

Non-State Actors

The major concern that lingers on is whether non-state actors can be deterred from acquiring and using chemical, biological, and dirty bombs involving fissile materials. Every advance that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) makes in Syria, a country with chemical weapons, and possibly in Iraq warns us of the dangers of this threat in the Middle East and beyond. The fear that al Qaeda and the Taliban have been seeking nuclear weapons from Pakistan persists. The threat of the use of dirty bombs by terrorist groups has not materialized yet, but cannot be precluded in the future. The possible use of chemical and biological weapons by besieged states and non-state actors constitutes a major challenge to international security. The use of chemical weapons in recent years by the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria against civilians, and possibly by Egypt towards protesters, has caused concern on the ability of the international community to deter these actions.

The problem is compounded by the fact that cataclysmic terrorist groups may be driven by *value rationality* as opposed to *instrumental rationality*, which forms the key basis of deterrence

theory and policy. Under *instrumental rationality*, actors are expected to behave on the basis of cost-benefit calculations to advance their self-interests and modify their goals if the costs of attaining their objectives are exceptionally high. On the other hand, if they are motivated by *value rationality*, they may pursue intangible goals with a high degree of commitment even when the costs are too high and success is uncertain. Deterrence, based on threats of retaliation or denial of victory, might not work against such enemies. Those who are driven by value rationality may pursue goals that involve ideological and religious objectives or psychological ends, such as self-respect, dignity, and religious or ethnic pride, for which individuals are willing to sacrifice everything, including their lives, even though from an instrumental perspective it may make little sense to behave in this way.³ In order for deterrence to work, transformation of such groups as custodians of state should take place.

In the decades ahead, deterrence could become even more complex because of changes along several dimensions of the international system: an increase in the importance of multiple weak states and non-state actors, the decline of the relative position of the United States, and the rise of new powers with different strategies and motivations. These powers are unlikely to confront the United States frontally as the Soviets did in the Cold War era, but will do so indirectly. The goals, ideals, and issues are also changing, with asymmetric challengers seeking to alter the regional status quo in poorly governed spaces through methods of terror. Deterrence operates best when there is clarity on these elements, while ambiguity makes deterrent relationships complex, both in the realms of theory and policy. Thus, the root cause of the present situation is structural indeterminacy with respect to power relationships. This indeterminacy manifests itself in the areas of signaling threats, attributing responsibility for hostile actions, and asymmetry of interests as diverse actors are driven by different calculations that are difficult to assess and manipulate for deterrence purposes. Complexity makes deterrent threats hard to execute. I have defined *complex deterrence* elsewhere as “an ambiguous deterrent relationship, which is caused by fluid structural elements of the international system to the extent that the nature and type of actors, their power relationships and their motives become unclear, making it difficult to mount and signal credible deterrent threats in accordance with the established precepts of deterrence theory.”⁴

Weaknesses of Deterrence as a Strategy in Today’s World

Designing Around Deterrence: Russia in Its Near Abroad

It was Alexander George and Richard Smoke who argued that opponents could design around deterrence. This was a concern arising out of a belief that during the Cold War era, the Soviets would not attack the United States directly in the European or Asian central theaters, but would indirectly challenge U.S. interests in the peripheral regions of the world where Washington would have no interest to retaliate with nuclear weapons.⁵ Today, Vladimir Putin’s Russia has proved to be following this strategy in Ukraine. The United States has shown little ability to deter Russia from annexing Crimea or to give military support to the rebels in Eastern Ukraine to deter further encroachments. In the contest for interests, Ukraine holds more importance to Russia than to the United States or Western allies. The West has indeed imposed economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, which may have more deterrent impact on Russian behavior in the long run than threats of military retaliation would.

However, effective military deterrence may be necessary to prevent further escalations beyond Ukraine. The question is: What sort of force structures, direct or indirect, will deter Russia from undertaking aggressive actions instead of further provocation? The important issue is whether this sort of aggressive action can be repeated by Russia toward other states, especially in the Baltic region. The Russian strategy is not to directly invade but offer military, economic, and political support to ethnic co-nationals who seek independence or more autonomy from the central government. The key to deterrence success vis-à-vis Russia may be a reassurance strategy that such movements do not repeat in other parts of the former Soviet empire. It is also important that none of the Baltic states, or other ex-republics where Russian minorities are present, pursue policies that alienate Moscow further and thereby give reason to Putin to stroke nationalist fervor in such poorly defended countries. It is also critical that Ukraine and Georgia are not encouraged to make further radical moves to cut themselves off from the Russian sphere of influence, as it constitutes a direct challenge to Russia's great power interests. The European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have a special role to play here in not pushing for the expansion of the so-called "liberal pacific union." Deterrence toward Russia could be achieved more effectively if legitimacy is on the side of the West.

Better bilateral and multilateral institutional frameworks may be necessary to deal with challenges in the former Soviet republics and Eastern Europe. NATO's forward deployment in Eastern Europe might help to deter a direct invasion, but it may not deter ethnic mobilization in former Soviet republics if disgruntled groups want to engage in fissiparous activities. Deterrence needs to be calibrated with reassurance, as deterrence is not a substitute for good foreign policy initiatives that should prevent a Ukraine-like situation. Ironically, general deterrence may be working, as evidenced by Russia not making massive aggressive moves. However, immediate deterrence is where Western and U.S. weakness lies, especially if the challenger is mounting only asymmetrical threats.

China's Limited Probes

Similarly, China has engaged in an asymmetric strategy to assert claim over disputed islands and islets in the South China Sea, as well as with Japan in the so-called gray zones of the region. Once again, the strategy of the challenger is not direct military action, which may well be the success of the U.S. general deterrent presence in the Pacific. The Chinese strategy is to engage in limited pushes and territorial encroachments followed by a pause, and then restarting the same strategy after some time. The playbook is taken from Mao and Sun Tzu's ideas of asymmetric warfare and the weaker party gaining its objectives through nontraditional means. Western logic is often driven by Clausewitzian ideas of direct challenge, and deterrence is part of that strategic tradition. Beijing's aim appears to mount a limited challenge to the U.S. dominance in the Pacific and eventually position China as an equal or superior power in the region in the decades ahead.

More importantly, by extracting resources from these global commons, China gains valuable military assets through its infrastructure-building, especially airstrips and naval facilities. How to deter such activities will be a key challenge, given that the U.S. and Chinese economies are more deeply interdependent than ever, and the inability of regional allies to effectively counter Chinese moves. A proper response to China will require more-subtle instruments than sheer military power. However, adequate military presence is needed to deter major escalations by China or the smaller states, such as Vietnam or the Philippines, by way of unwanted military responses. Similarly, cyber threats have increased and the efforts by China in this

regard have generated considerable tensions with the United States. Cyber warfare is likely to continue, and any future war will have a cyber component that is difficult to predict, given the introduction of new technologies in such a short span of time. The cyber threat is also an asymmetrical challenge not so easily deterred, given the two-way impact escalation can generate, which means deterrence is a two-way street in this gray zone.

The Challenge of Asymmetric Deterrence

One element of deterrence that was neglected during the Cold War but that is becoming more apparent today is the ability of the weak to deter the strong. Deterrence theory, as developed during the Cold War, dealt with how militarily superior powers could deter challengers that were either inferior or equal in capability.⁶ Weak states can use multiple asymmetric means, including employing clever strategies and tactics, hurting allies of the stronger power by threatening an attack on them, and affecting the economic calculations or the reputation of the state it is trying to deter. A weaker state can deter a stronger adversary by significantly increasing the political costs of attack. The deterrent capability of the weaker actor is also based on its ability to hurt the civilian population of the stronger power and its allies in the region. Increasingly, weaker powers such as North Korea resort to cyber warfare as a means to deter or punish their stronger enemies.

Deterrence by the weak may be grounded in the stronger resolve a state, its leadership, and its people may possess. It may also be based on the high risk-taking propensity of the regime. The weaker actor can “attempt to circumvent disparities in power in order to inflict pain but avoid ‘force-to-force’ confrontation.”⁷ The element of regional versus global capabilities is also crucial in this context. Even though the superior power may be stronger at the global level, it may have specific weaknesses or vulnerabilities in the local theater where the weaker state should have some capabilities that it can exploit and use against a superior adversary.

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, there is also something inhibiting the United States and other Western countries in particular from using unlimited force, including nuclear. This is called *self-deterrence*, which can be defined as the unwillingness to use coercive military power against an adversary, despite a declaratory threat to do so, due to self-imposed as opposed to other-imposed constraints.

The Challenge of Self-Deterrence

A number of influential U.S. scholars continue to argue for usable nuclear weapons and the value of large-scale nuclear possession, and escalation if necessary to achieve their goals. For instance, Keir Liber and Daryl Press contend that it is inevitable that the United States will, in the future, have to fight against an adversary that has nuclear weapons and, to do so, the United States must possess the right tools to ensure limited escalation.⁸ Matthew Kroenig argues that nuclear superiority can be translated to successful crisis outcomes of the possessor.⁹ Similarly, Keith Payne claims that targeting smaller regional adversaries and non-state actors might work, as happened in the case of Saddam Hussein not escalating the war by means of chemical weapons use in 1991.¹⁰ These assertions are problematic, as deterrence and compellence regarding the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and terrorist groups are much harder to achieve due to self-deterrence considerations. A nuclear state may not be able to mount and execute a nuclear retaliatory strike against a non-nuclear state or a non-state actor for reasons beyond military calculations. The nuclear state could be restrained by moral, legal, and other normative considerations.¹¹

Tactical and strategic considerations, domestic politics, bureaucratic practices, and leaders' psychology, especially in terms of risk aversion, could be other reasons for self-deterrence. Reputational considerations appear to be crucial in explaining self-deterrence in light of instances from U.S. nuclear history. These reputational considerations derive largely from three main sources: the tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons, moral restraints, and legal principles regarding the use of nuclear weapons. Leaders can be directly and indirectly constrained by these factors even if they do not always publicly acknowledge their existence. Deterrence theory and policy need to take into account this aspect of self-deterrence along with cultural, psychological, and domestic-level constraints that have been presented as challenges to the premises and applicability of deterrence theory.

Policy Options

Deterrence remains a key to escalation control and war prevention in the new era involving great powers, especially the United States, and resurging powers such as Russia and China. It is a mistake to rely on military aspects alone, in particular nuclear retaliation, given the types of threats, nature of adversaries, and changing popular attitudes toward the use of force by the United States. It is important to broaden the deterrence spectrum to include dissuasion through other means. Dissuasion through international institutions, treaties, economic sanctions, raising reputation costs, soft balancing, and diplomatic engagement should be part of a comprehensive security strategy. Each of these elements has pros and cons and may work only under certain conditions. Raising reputation costs is crucial in stopping adversaries from engaging in unlawful activities. Nuclear deterrence in the general sense could remain the central strategy to prevent a power transition war or an aggressive push by China or Russia, but it has several limitations to deter asymmetric threats posed by both smaller states and non-state actors alike. Possession of adequate usable capabilities in specific regions for the defense of allies may be necessary for deterrence to work. However, not all states will be protected through military response, as we have noticed in the Ukrainian case. The return of competition for geopolitical spheres of influence may suggest that gradual integration of the rising powers may be necessary for obtaining a peaceful order. As long as military challenges remain limited, the United States should pursue diplomacy more than anything else to face rising powers and the challenges they pose.

Reassurance is necessary to prevent further military escalations involving Russia and China. But the question becomes: When will reassurance be perceived as appeasement? Further, NATO expansion may not be an effective strategy in the near term. However, those states under NATO's umbrella must be protected through adequate conventional and nuclear capabilities. There is a need to reduce excessive nuclear threats as they may not be effective against Russia's support for sub-national groups. As I mentioned above, it is unlikely Russia will engage in more revanchist adventures by way of direct conquest of territory similar to Crimea.

With regard to non-state actors, three kinds of deterrence are proposed. First, there is indirect deterrence through third party pressure; second is deterrence by denial of victory to the terrorists; and third is "deterrence by de-legitimation" of the cause that terrorists are fighting for.¹² All of these types of deterrence have limitations if terrorist groups believe in cataclysmic strategies. Micro deterrence at the individual level should be considered key here. This entails deterring individual jihadists from joining the groups or undertaking mindless acts of violence.

Conventional deterrence could form an element of military response but a less important one unless the jihadist groups have nation-states and infrastructures to be protected. Defense, detection, prevention, and preemption are most effective because terrorists, like guerrilla fighters, tend not to have fixed points of operation. Drone attacks may be necessary for prevention and preemption vis-à-vis terrorist groups, although we are yet to see evidence on the exact deterrent effect they generate. These could be useful for deterrence to some terrorist leaders, but new ones tend to emerge and circumvent U.S. ability to deter and defend. Proper on-the-ground intelligence may be more important for effective use of targeted strategies based on precision-guided attacks. Nuclear deterrence has little relevance to fighting terrorist groups, as self-deterrence will inhibit the United States from executing the retaliatory threat.

Notes

¹ For three initial waves, see Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 2, January 1979, pp. 298–324. For a fourth wave, see Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Terrorism and the Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research,” in Andreas Wenger and Alex Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012, pp. 21–45.

² Thazha V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

³ See Thazha V. Paul, “Complex Deterrence: An Introduction,” in Thazha V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 1–27. I draw the idea from Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Vol. I, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978, pp. 24–25.

⁴ Paul, 2009, p. 8.

⁵ See Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in U.S. Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 402.

⁶ In various versions of deterrence theory it is thus assumed that a necessary condition of deterrence is “the weak will never attack the strong” and that the strong will attack the weak if there is nothing to prevent them from doing so. See Jack S. Levy, “Review Article: When Do Deterrent Threats Work?” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 18, No. 4, October 1988, pp. 485–512.

⁷ Alex S. Wilner, “Deterring the Undeterrable: The Theory and Practice of Coercing Terrorists,” dissertation, Halifax: Dalhousie University, Fall 2008, p. 53.

⁸ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The Nukes We Need: Preserving the American Deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 6, November/December 2009, pp. 39–51. See also Richard K. Betts, “The Lost Logic of Deterrence: What the Strategy That Won the Cold War Can—and Can’t—Do Now,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 2, March/April 2013, pp. 87–99.

⁹ Matthew Kroenig, “Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes,” *International Organization*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2013, pp. 141–171. See also Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, “Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail,” *International Organization*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2013, pp. 173–195; Bradley A. Thayer and Thomas M. Skypek, “Reaffirming the Utility of Nuclear Weapons,” *Parameters*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter-Spring 2013, pp. 41–45.

¹⁰ Keith B. Payne, “Maintaining Flexible and Resilient Capabilities for Nuclear Deterrence,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 2011, pp. 13–29.

¹¹ These factors operate in addition to considerations about the tactical or strategic suitability of the weapon concerned in most regional contexts. Thazha V. Paul, “Self-Deterrence: Nuclear Weapons and the Enduring Credibility Challenge,” unpublished paper, McGill University, September 2015.

¹² Knopf, 2012, p. 22.

Expanding the Concept of Deterrence

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Although deterrence is an old practice, it became so necessary and frightening after World War II that deterrence theory was developed to better grasp and manage it, and then it was used to help cope with both the nuclear arms race and Cold War political and military conflicts. Preventing military attacks and war, especially nuclear war, was the ultimate initial objective, but deterrence and deterrence theory soon were making critical contributions on conventional conflicts and forces and lesser kinds of strife. In preventing, halting, managing, and containing warfare, they offered considerable value and became a cornerstone of international security affairs. They were also used to help discourage the building and spread of nuclear weapons, under the heading of *arms control*. A variant of deterrence, “compellence,” was identified, in which the goal is less preventing someone from *initiating* an attack than preventing the opponent from *continuing* to do something abhorrent by threatening retaliation if that action was not halted or reversed, or to compel him to do something else he did not want to do, like abandoning a nuclear weapons development program. Compellence and deterrence overlap, but compellence is generally believed to be harder to use successfully.¹

Deterrence has two broad categories—general and immediate—that are very different in concept and definition, use, and the time scale involved. *General deterrence* conveys a somewhat vague, broad, continuous threat of retaliation for any future attack. It can be mounted to protect the deterrer or others the deterrer wants protected. It can be applied by a collective actor, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in the same fashion. *Immediate deterrence* is threatening retaliation when an attack looms, or has already occurred and the victim wants to deter its continuation. General deterrence is therefore a much larger, more common, and typically more durable phenomenon: It might extend for decades. Immediate deterrence is scarier and intense, though often fairly brief in application or implementation.

A final initial point: Deterrence is heavily influenced by the surrounding context, which helps shape why, where, and how it is needed and used. Shifts in context usually change the nature of deterrence, and can often strongly affect deterrence effectiveness.

Levels of Deterrence

In contemporary international politics, deterrence operates at three levels of states’ interaction. One is deterrence at the state-to-state level. When deterrence is employed, usually just two or a small number of actors are involved, and the issue is in their neighborhood, for example, on their borders. Today, it often involves a threat or ongoing battles in a serious internal conflict

(e.g., a civil war, an insurgency), or two or more states battling about an internal conflict in one of them (for instance, over how ethnic relatives of one state or group are treated by and in the other). Other neighboring states might also be involved in some fashion. Sometimes conflicts at this level—a serious threat of war, already ongoing fighting, interrelated wars in the area—attract military intervention or threats of it from members of the regional international system or the global system, even if the conflicts are not highly important to them. Of the 80-plus current military conflicts among or within states, this level is where most are located and some related deterrence is being actively pursued. Thus, deterrence is often a prime way states or groups come to interact, and is often employed in what becomes more than a two-party conflict.

At the second level are conflicts among states or groups of states that are major actors in a regional system or the global system having more-than-average power, ambition, capabilities, and interests, perhaps even some capacity to dominate their regional system, or actors that may believe they face actual or potential threats. But often they have weak underpinnings, and thus serious domestic conflicts also: threats to their rulers; their domestic, political, and other systems; their international status and relationships; or their power and influence. These include Iran, Brazil, Egypt, Nigeria, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, India, and their significant neighbors. The threats may stem from internal unrest, religious radicalism, economic collapse, coups, and corruption, along with competition among themselves and sometimes from powerful members of the global system.

On the third level are conflicts involving states so powerful and important, individually or as a group, and with such significant ambitions, capabilities, and interests, that they play a notable role in or may even seek to dominate a major portion of the international system. Their major conflicts almost always seriously affect much of that system. They also frequently take an interest in, intrude in, and try to affect conflicts at the other two levels and perhaps even in those states' internal conflicts.

States have a basic interest in autonomy, peace, and security, so maintaining some capacity to use deterrence is fairly widespread. Often they believe they can enhance not only their peace and security, but gain other benefits by grabbing more territory, citizens, and natural resources, or sustaining nonthreatening neighbors and buffer areas.

At the international level and in some regions, states also often cluster in groups, trying to collectively enhance their security. This readily leads to “balance-of-power” arrangements among themselves or vis-à-vis other groups of states. Such efforts are always suffused with deterrence practices. At this level, powerful states have often sought to dominate, not balance, in seeking peace and security. But in the modern history of international politics, very strong states have periodically turned to a version of what can be called *collective global security management* (CGSM), and downplayed power balancing.² The intent is to concentrate the power of states, particularly of great powers, for the purpose of protecting everyone from threats by anyone via threats of serious collective retaliation. At its best, CGSM is a general deterrence effort, and is also capable of meeting threats that call for immediate deterrence. It uses the ultimate form of “collective actor deterrence.”³

The State of Deterrence Today

The context for contemporary deterrence is now deteriorating at all three levels, has been for some time, and is shaping deterrence accordingly. It must now be conducted with this in mind; the deterioration is of huge potential importance. Starting with the global level and nuclear deterrence, the end of the Cold War and sharp decline in great power conflicts led to the elimination of well over half of the world's nuclear weapons. Nuclear deterrence and to some extent, deterrence more broadly, were recessed and reduced. Major nuclear powers' delivery systems, production facilities, and stockpiles began shrinking, both physically and in political-strategic terms, including readiness, perceived utility in a war or in deterrence, and in public acceptance.⁴ Their nuclear weapons, especially the size of their nuclear arsenals, became inane and inappropriate. There was a decline in the growth rate of new or potential nuclear powers.

All this has slowed or stopped. Nuclear deterrence and its components are gradually reviving.⁵ Several great powers have plans for modernizing and expanding nuclear forces. There is a modest revival of nuclear arms racing among several great powers and some other states like North Korea, Pakistan, and India. These steps are regularly justified as necessary for healthy deterrence, and often mirror steps by competitors, but they are eroding the contribution of deterrence to minimizing the threat of nuclear weapons. This is due to declining relations among the great powers, and strains in their relations with certain other states. It is also because various nuclear-armed states cut conventional forces substantially after the Cold War. Their nuclear weapons are more prominent now, when their security situations seem to be deteriorating.

Next, deterrence at the regional level has lost ground: for example, the tension and fighting in Ukraine and the resulting sanctions against Russia; Russian threats over the status and future of Russians in Eastern Europe; Russian military demonstrations around the Black and Mediterranean Seas and off the coasts of Western Europe; and the tightening of the force postures of NATO members. Much more dangerous is the situation in North Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan with fighting in and among states and a variety of non-state actors with state support, and military intervention (relatively limited) and widespread financial support from numerous states. Deterrence has been tried, repeatedly unsuccessfully, before and during fighting by numerous local-, regional-, and global-level actors. The enormous refugee flows, rampant terrorism, inability of great powers to mount sufficient threats and efforts to deter successfully, and rising casualties and destruction all reflect a serious breakdown of regional security management. Internal fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan continues—ethnic, religious, terrorist, and political in origin, and the relationship between India and Pakistan remains tense, with deterrence of attacks periodically failing.

China is at odds with neighbors over its expanding military buildup and its claims to surrounding areas, and particularly with the United States on military and other matters. Africa is rife with military conflicts between some countries and through internal conflicts in many others, involving religious and ethnic disputes driven by terrorist groups. In Southeast Asia, fighting continues within and along the border of Burma, in Thailand, and in the Philippines. Deterrence efforts in all of these places have failed to work well, whether mounted by governments or powerful outside states and collective actors.

Deterrence at the state-to-state level is now a much more volatile endeavor and a necessity. In many, mostly internal conflicts, the demand for deterrence is very substantial, not only among individual states but in the organized efforts of leading governments and international

organizations to suppress them. But it is not doing well in suppressing conflicts and, in numerous cases, is making things worse. Various states have generated immense flows of weapons among and within states: among governments and military forces, many insurgents, international and domestic radicals, organized terrorists, and criminal sects. This is widely known, but less well appreciated is its impact on deterrence. It is now far more difficult to maintain domestic peace and security in a large portion of the world, even with significant outside military intervention, including from the United States. Deterrence is therefore becoming a far more combat-oriented security resource. Deterrence threats look more feeble when arms and other military capacities are plentiful and the spectrum of military threats is much broader. Threats then become more difficult to deflect or stamp out in many places, especially with some states backing them. Many fighters have immense ethnic or religious motivations driving fighting in spite of casualties, or they fade when vigorously confronted and then return when attention moves elsewhere. State-to-state wars remain scarce, thanks in part to deterrence responses. But other violent conflicts and threats often show little or no respect for standard deterrence tools, not even for special operations forces and specially-trained regular forces.⁶

Causes

This overall situation is partially the result of, and partially responsible for, the retreat from CGSM by the Western world. For various reasons, the United States led military interventions to promote and sustain national and international peace and security in various places after 1990. At the end of the Cold War, the United States led the way in pressing to shift the focus of its security and that of its friends and allies toward a CGSM arrangement. This was orchestrated initially in the Clinton Administration mainly with the European allies, then applied in the Balkans, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then used in response to the Arab Spring developments. It was supposed to draw on the United Nations (UN) as well, but this met with only limited success. Going through the UN was deemed largely unacceptable, unattractive, and unworkable by the start of the Iraq War. The heart of the new arrangement was NATO and other U.S. alliances or arrangements with key states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the Middle East; Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in South Asia; and Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, the Republic of Korea, and Japan in East Asia.

It was to provide general deterrence to stabilize security across much of the world, and immediate deterrence when war was about to break out or had already broken out. Included was readiness to provide deterrence for societies with brutal or very weak governments barely managing highly divided societies with serious violent conflicts or threats of them. This has meant going beyond traditional deterrence into efforts in nation-building, humanitarian activities, government-building, suppression of terrorists and anti-Western elements, suppression of domestic violence, and modernization. Numerous non-military as well as military activities have been involved under the heading of deterrence.

This effort began with the problems in the Balkans in particular, but it soon involved similar situations elsewhere. The key reason offered initially was that internal disarray, violence, and humanitarian disasters were conditions that could readily generate threatening situations within and across national boundaries via refugees, terrorism, boundary disputes, merging multiple sections of an ethnic or religious group, criminal elements, and flows of weapons.

After 9/11, the main focus was given to terrorism, culminating in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have never fully ended, and various interventions elsewhere.

In other words, with the exception of terrorism threats, American deterrence and related endeavors were at least partly disengaged from deterrence for coping with direct threats to the United States and redirected primarily toward deterrence on behalf of other governments, societies, and regions. This was justified primarily by humanitarian concerns; worries about threats to U.S. interests abroad; fears of disarray in various parts of the world spreading; and protecting friends, allies, and associates. It was also strongly justified as needed to help spread liberal democratic ideas and practices.⁷ The American deterrence effort, aided by various friends and allies, came to involve utilizing, expanding, and maintaining a huge network of bases; providing military training for many governments and other groups; and stockpiling of arms abroad plus arms sales and donations.

Out of this also came a preoccupation with limited wars and other conflicts involving much more use of special operations forces as well as private security resources, and heavy use of advanced technologies in detection, communications, surveillance, and reconnaissance in the conduct of military operations. This was accompanied by an expansion in the concept of deterrence. Many kinds of targets were not threatening to directly attack the United States, were not primarily military in their purposes and activities, or were certainly not organized military entities. The rise of the special operations forces was a major response to all this, due to their flexibility and ready availability.

Thus, deterrence became far more than using threats of harm to prevent attacks, and became deeply involved in wide efforts to inflict harm for a broader spectrum of reasons. It was often conducted along with local forces and contributions of forces from friends and allies, and thus took on aspects of collective-actor deterrence. In this context, deterrence became much more complex and multifaceted, much more multilayered, as much or more involved in fighting as in preventing fighting, and was often associated with things like community development or humanitarian activities.

As a primarily American effort and preoccupation, often with modest support and involvement by others or extensive support and involvement for only a limited time, one result was others feeling they were seeing American wars driven by American objectives. These wars could not be fully sold even to close allies. When the wars did not work out well, the United States shifted to intervening only on a limited scale, as in the Arab Spring. The result was frequent interpretations that the United States was getting weaker, less capable of leading the world's dominant coalition, and probably less committed to protecting its allies. The credibility of American deterrence has suffered, in both general and immediate terms.

Sometimes, utilizing the U.S. network worked, but in a number of instances it did not. As a result, the United States and other Western states have lost a good deal of domestic public support for global security management due to limited successes, high costs, and casualties, combined with strenuous objections from the people being helped. Reinforcing this has been the impact of the Great Recession on citizen morale, government budgets, and national priorities. One result has been a shift from normal military actions toward using special operations forces or other limited steps.

On top of this, many of the participant states, having relied for their security for years on deterrence provided primarily by the United States, cut their defense budgets sharply after the Cold War. For years, NATO-member defense budgets have been collectively half or less-than-half the level of U.S. spending. Japan is only now pursuing a suitably major-power military

capability and considering future participation in global peace and security management. Even the Republic of Korea, which has serious military forces, has long relied on U.S. military support in air and missile defense, naval forces, and advanced targeting and tracking if war with North Korea breaks out.

The CGSM, as a mostly American effort, has had steadily declining support from international partners and the American people due to mistakes; mismanagement; the Great Recession; and the costs involved, which have contributed to expanded anti-Americanism, rising disarray and violence in various states, increased refugee flows, and a sharp decline in the West's relations with Russia. The use of deterrence has naturally become much more complicated and now needs adjustment because of greater uncertainty as to how global security is to be managed. A related response is increased interest in what is being called "deterrence by denial," anticipating that if deterrence threats will be declining in credibility, defeating opponents' attacks will be increasingly necessary to make deterrence work.⁸

The retreat from CGSM is the most significant development affecting deterrence today. The replacement arrangement is very likely to be a resurgence of power balancing. Major components of this are already apparent in Russian and Chinese military activity and spending, and their preoccupation with seizing buffer border areas on land, at sea, and in the air. Many Western international affairs analysts are enamored of power balancing as the best way to pursue peace and security. Many more simply regard it as inevitable, saying it may work unevenly but is always how states behave in the end. They have been expecting what is now happening and calling for necessary adjustments to be made. One would be reducing U.S. (and Western) involvement in managing global peace and security, particularly through a sharp reduction in deterrence activity, because the supposed U.S. national interest in maintaining global peace and security is overblown. For example, these analysts dismissed the Russian grab for Ukraine and, before that, Crimea, saying that the West has no serious security interests in Ukraine, its government, or its people; that it was only natural that Russia would react as it has to Western efforts to absorb Ukraine into the West, and that it is natural for a major state to protect its border and regional interests. Thus, the current problems in Western-Russian relations are really the West's fault. Widely applied, this means a sharp reduction in applying deterrence at the state-to-state level and in trying to stabilize regional security systems—leaving that to more power balancing at the regional system level. That means less use of deterrence by the United States, especially when looking at the public opinion polls.

Unfortunate Additional Results

There has been a flood of military materials across the world, many relatively modern, flowing not just to governments and their military depots, but to rebels; criminals; retired military personnel; and local leaders of clans, tribes, and religious and ethnic groups. Many of the men involved have had significant military training from interacting with Western forces. As a result, deterrence efforts face enemies that now have far more resources and training available for making Western intervention costly and dangerous. Another result is the weakening of governments such as Iraq when confronted with violent domestic challenges. These challenges represent the rise of whole new groups, some cross-national, representing religious, ethnic, and other grievances and aspirations. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is the best example, and has been very well-equipped for exploiting violence. This is essentially the latest wave, and

latest impact, of the Revolution in Military Affairs. On the one hand, the Revolution in Military Affairs greatly escalated the military capabilities of the United States, permitting it to do more with much smaller forces. On the other hand, it has escalated the moral restraints under which those forces fight: They are expected to be much more precise, inflict fewer casualties, and damage less property.

As noted earlier, in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places, large amounts of military equipment have been left behind, considered too expensive to ship home, given to local friends and allies, stolen, lost, sold off cheaply, seized by enemy forces, or privately turned over to them by local officials. The continued elevation in modern technology has also reinforced private efforts at violence (by terrorists, ethnic or religious groups, and other political factions). Together this has greatly improved the military capacities of groups the West wants to suppress directly or indirectly, by working to strengthen local governments and favorable groups. This has contributed enormously to the difficulties in trying to sustain or revive peace and security in the Middle East and, to an extent, Africa. The targets have been much more willing to ignore or actively confront deterrence efforts because of this acquisition of equipment that provides so much mobility and firepower, and being able to draw on modern communications technology, not only for fighting, but for reaching supporters and attracting recruits by lauding their achievements and victories.

Briefly, many new threats to peace and security at all three levels of the international system coexist with a decline in capabilities for confronting them. Deterrence is weaker now, often less well-supported and sustained over time as conflicts drag on, hence the expanded appearance of serious conflicts in several places simultaneously, especially during the Arab Spring. It was evident almost immediately that those developments would have immense ramifications for the West (in energy, refugees, terrorists and terrorism, the suppression of liberal values and practices, the collapse of national governments, and a surge of anti-Western sentiments). But interest in doing something about this has been consistently restrained. Immediate deterrence responses to deteriorating situations have been weak or considerably delayed, with fighting often breaking out and spreading before efforts to control it were seriously discussed. In short, immediate and general deterrence have been intertwined: The circumstances of one affecting the use of the other are not appreciated quickly enough by many governments and analysts.

Another important development has been stretching the conception of deterrence to encompass its use against nonmilitary threats or threats short of war, i.e., attacks by very small armed units or individuals as in terrorism, by criminal groups, or in assassinations, and in response, expanding uses of deterrence into dealing with cyber-attacks, using severe sanctions, providing military training operations, and making very selective raids. Deterrence can sometimes now be extended to massive cross-border movements seeking to escape internal conflicts, genocides, breakdowns of domestic order, or regime collapses. Such threats are getting greater attention with the expanded concept of security threats.

Things to Keep in Mind

Deterrence will continue to be heavily affected by technological change with continuing interaction between the armed forces and civilians generated and the exploitation of new technologies. This is now referred to as *cross-domain deterrence*, where civilian practices and behavior

cross-breed with those in military and other security organizations for improving fighting, intelligence, unmanned military actions, communications, training, and opponent monitoring. This is helping to promote the rethinking of deterrence, with numerous implications for its future conduct.⁹

Next, it is clear there is a growing problem as to the durability of deterrence efforts of any magnitude. Public support in democratic societies does not last long with respect to the casualties and costs of deterrence, especially if it is consistently called upon and the workload (fighting, casualties, financial support, other aid) is very unevenly distributed, which the United States has experienced since the Cold War. The same applies to *humanitarian considerations*. Civilian casualties, even on the other side, and destruction in civilian areas now generate complaints from allies, friends, international organizations, and people back home. Deterrence has become broadly entwined with moral concerns. Once, this applied mainly to nuclear weapons, but now it is applied to using many other weapons. Mistakes in the use of those weapons attract serious criticism too.

It is also worth reemphasizing an old consideration in deterrence. Threatening is easy, but communicating threats accurately and effectively is hard. In addition to standard miscommunication difficulties, there are perceptual and cultural barriers. And there are emotional reactions to manage: Threats often appear insulting, abusive, or demeaning, tending to rigidify the opponents' thinking and plans to attack. Now also involved are nationalist, ethnic, religious, and related loyalties driving many conflicts and often shaping opponents' rejection of deterrence threats. Those loyalties are often more profoundly felt than the conflicts themselves. The causes at stake are often being taken as more important than life—behavior currently on display in the Middle East—which often erases expected responses to deterrence efforts.

Finally, the most serious problem in the nuclear age—possible escalation of war—is turning out to be serious well below the nuclear level too. The standard concern about a possible war on the Korean Peninsula today is that it could easily lead to a Chinese intervention from the north and an American intervention from the south, with other neighbors intervening to prevent waves of refugees at their borders or seacoasts. The situation in Syria and its effects, caused by an escalation in fighting, is a perfect current example. Fears of a confrontation, even military strife, between Russia and the West are surprisingly widespread. Confidence in deterrence is not all that high. In fact, recent Russian and Chinese behavior indicates that they consider American deterrence to be less credible, which is an often-heard refrain among American allies.

Conclusion

Contemporary deterrence is more complicated, more dangerous, and less effective and will probably remain so in the foreseeable future. Great-power deterrence efforts are not being intensively mounted against each other yet, and their relations still lack the depth of a true great-power balance-of-power system. But relations between the United States and both China and Russia strongly suggest a traditional balance-of-power system is reappearing. If so, the international system will have both a more traditional security structure and the decline of recessed nuclear deterrence in favor of more reliance on it for global system security and in system management at the regional and global levels. Thus, we are seeing the shifting orientation of Chinese and Russian forces and a rising American inclination to upgrade and better

fund its forces in response, especially in nuclear weapons. We are also seeing a modernization and expansion of China's nuclear forces. Deterrence more along Cold War lines is emerging, and is helping to promote expansions of the nuclear weapons systems of Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea.

Deterrence efforts are confronting so many cases of weak states and internal fighting that there has been a surge in the availability of modern weapons for all sorts of groups, including criminals, terrorists, retired soldiers, and tribes. Thus, deterrence activities are likely to be more violent and more lethal. And there are more men available to such groups that have some military training, due to earlier failed efforts to deter and the leftover equipment strewn about. Western reluctance to push deterrence efforts into fairly sizable military clashes is likely to remain as it is or even decline further.

Notes

¹ Compellence results in a more obvious giving in or backing down. Facing a deterrence threat (i.e., "don't attack or else"), the actor can simply say it never had any intention to attack (i.e., it is not giving in or backing down). That is easier to accept, politically and psychologically. Although not discussed in this paper, compellence is very pertinent to deterrence today and will be in the future.

² Examples of CGSM include the Concert of Europe in the 19th century, the League of Nations in the 20th century, and later the United Nations.

³ *Collective actor deterrence* can be operated by an alliance or an international organization or association (global or regional).

⁴ For example, China had had a small fixed number of nuclear weapons for some time and largely froze its nuclear weapons capacity during this time.

⁵ See, for example, Vladimir Dvorkin, "Nuclear Weapons in Russia's Amended Military Doctrine," Carnegie Moscow Center, January 22, 2015; Wendell Minnick, "U.S. Report: China's Nukes Getting Bigger and Better," *Defense News*, November 20, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/asia-pacific/2014/11/19/us-report-chinas-nukes-getting-bigger-and-better/19325953/>.

⁶ This is also true of peacekeeping now: It is more dangerous and less effective because it is undermanned and out-gunned. Peacekeeping is a very lightly applied form of deterrence. Omitted here is deterrence with regard to cyber-attacks, a very important but quite different problem that is now widely discussed and studied. For a valuable introduction, see Martin Libicki, *Cyberdeterrence and Cyberwar*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-877-AF, 2007, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG877.html>.

⁷ Promoting democracy has also proceeded very unevenly and with much resistance from other societies and governments. See the discussion of this in several articles in "Democracy in the 21st Century: Turbulent World, Resilient Values," *International New York Times*, September 14, 2015, pp. 6–7.

⁸ A current research project on "deterrence by denial" is in progress under the direction of Professor Wilner Alexandre at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto (and Senior Researcher, ETH Zurich).

⁹ The Cross Domain Deterrence project, directed by Professor Erik Gartzke at the University of California, San Diego, is tracking cross-domain developments that bear on deterrence and collecting academic and other studies on the subject.

A Primitive's View of Deterrence

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A report from the land of policymakers: As far as I can figure out, from both reading and personal experience, they pay no attention whatsoever to the academic literature on deterrence. They know nothing of the first, second, third, nor fourth waves; they are not interested in constructivist, feminist, or traditional realist interpretations. They do not read *International Security* or *International Studies Quarterly*. They may occasionally be interested in the policy ideas of professors with whom they get along, but rarely, if ever, their conceptions of how the world works. Which is not to suggest that their disregard of the academic literature is entirely without interest.

Policymakers definitely use the words *deter* or *deterrence* in either of two senses. The first, common-sense usage, is when they think of a threat of some sort: to stop another country or organization from doing something, usually by force or the threat of force. The second usage reflects the experience of the Cold War. In this case, *deterrence* becomes a kind of strategic pixie dust, to be sprinkled over a geopolitical problem in the hope of making it go away. Thus, deterrence, like *containment*, or *balancing*, or *forward presence*, can be an incantation rather than a specific policy. We may, for example, wish away the problem of a nuclearized Iranian state by saying that its leaders will be deterred by the existence of an American nuclear arsenal. Such thinking usually relies—sloppily—on the experience of the Cold War.

Why don't policymakers care about the literature on deterrence? Some of it has to do with the impoverished prose of academic journals, but that is not the main reason. For the more thoughtful ones, it is because deterrence is about relationships with particular persons and particular states, in particular settings. Whereas much of the academic literature, to this day, treats deterrence as though it were a phenomenon universal across time and space, politicians know that they have to worry about specifics. It is the great point of Isaiah Berlin's essays on "political judgment" and "the sense of reality."¹

In the realm of political action, laws are far and few indeed: Skills are everything. What makes statesmen, like drivers of cars, successful is that they do not think in general terms. "Their merit is that they grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation—this and no other."²

Berlin followed from a long strain of political thought, beginning with Thucydides, if not before. Athenians and Spartans (and others), in both the run-up to the Peloponnesian War and throughout its conduct, worried about deterring and coercing one another. They did so on the basis of estimates of the character of the opposing *polis*, rather than simply on judgments about states writ large. When arguments turned to general propositions as opposed to very specific circumstances, the former ended poorly, as the Melian Debate shows. The hapless Melians, pressed by the Athenians to abandon their neutrality, made general arguments that got batted

down one by one by Athenian negotiators who kept on bringing the Melians back to their real, and dire, circumstances. The Melians made general claims on the laws of politics, the justice of the gods, and the (presumed) reliability of the Spartans, rather than, as the Athenians pointed out, the realities of Spartan politics. The Melians ended up being exterminated for their pains.

The importance of personalities and the indeterminacy of the basic calculations about deterrence remain true today. Deterrence theory could not establish whether or not Saddam Hussein could have been (or for some time was) deterred from invading Kuwait before 1990. To know how to deter him, one would have had to know a great deal about his psychology, his life experiences, and his tolerance for risk. That kind of knowledge is exceptionally difficult to acquire.

A great deal of the psychological research that informs our understanding of cognition and decisionmaking depends on the reactions of exceedingly unrepresentative kinds of people, usually undergraduates keen on minimum-wage compensation for participating in curious but decidedly nonlethal experiments. But deterrence works, if it does, inside the heads of all kinds of people—megalomaniacs and sociopaths, or hardened bureaucratic killers, or theocratic fanatics, all in their fifties or sixties—who do not subject themselves to probing questions from academic psychologists and who are playing for much higher stakes.

By and large, the academic political science literature does not really deal with individual character: The bent of most social scientists is towards generalization. Most politicians, however, will tend to think that the personality of a Vladimir Putin, a Xi Jinping, or an Ayatollah Khamenei matters more than generalizations about state actors. Moreover, even if deterrence theorists were to concede the importance of individual decisionmakers and study them, their tools for doing so would be severely limited. Historians know very well that memoirs, even by the principals concerned, are unreliable indicators of what went on inside a leader's head at the time. What people actually thought and why they made their decisions may be very different from what they later say about them.

Politicians who do not think about deterrence as pixie dust think about it in a much simpler way: as the manipulation of fear. Admiral Jackie Fisher, architect of a reconstructed Royal Navy at the turn of the twentieth century, alarmed fellow delegates at the 1899 Hague conference on the laws of war:

What you call my truculence is all for peace. If you rub it in, both at home and abroad, that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line, and intend to be first in, and hit your enemy in the belly, and kick him when he is down . . . then people will keep clear of you.³

Fisher was speaking crudely and for effect, but that is the heart of what he, and others like him, believed deterrence of war and aggression was all about.

In democracies and dictatorships alike, politicians are always in the business of trying to scare others off of doing things: running against them, criticizing them, undermining them, confronting them. They may seek deterrence by denial (e.g., “I have such a large war chest that you can never hope to beat me in a campaign”), or by punishment (e.g., “cross my country on Ukraine and worry whether you will get natural gas this winter”), but, in either case, they rarely attempt to be too subtle, knowing, as the successful ones do, that complicated stratagems in politics rarely succeed.

What they also know for a certainty is that deterrence often fails. No one studied the problem of deterrence more closely than Niccolò Machiavelli, whose model for successful statecraft was the Romans (see *The Discourses on Livy*). Yet, the Romans, who gave exemplary thought, in his view, to how to maintain and expand the Republic, often failed to deter all kinds of enemies—Carthaginians, Greeks, Persians, Gauls, Germans—let alone all sorts of rebels. Indeed, one scans the index of *The Discourses* in vain for the word “threat,” although there is a great deal on the word “fear.”⁴ Similarly, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli says that it is better to be feared than loved. But the operative word here, again, is fear, not threat.

Fear is produced by deeds, not words, which are liable to all kinds of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, particularly when political leaders of very different cultural backgrounds encounter one another. This was perhaps most noticeable in the run-up to the first United States–Iraq war in 1990, where American statements about not letting aggression stand seemed altogether meek compared with more flowery Arabic expressions. For that reason, it is well to have a sober sense of the limits of any kind of theorizing about deterrence, to realize that it often fails, but more importantly, that the threats may be literally lost in translation. To deter an enemy, the best thing is to do a modified Jackie Fisher: to be very strong, and to appear to be ready to strike hard, because you really are.

Notes

¹ See Isaiah Berlin, “Political Judgment” and “The Sense of Reality,” in Henry Hardy, ed., *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996, pp. 1–53.

² Berlin, 1996, p. 45.

³ Quoted in Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940, p. 347.

⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 311–347.

On October 30, 2015, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) facilitated a senior leader forum, hosted by the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the U.S. Department of State (DoS), to explore the subject of comprehensive deterrence. Participants included representatives from across DoS and the U.S. Department of Defense.

According to a 2015 draft joint USASOC and USSOCOM definition, *comprehensive deterrence* is the “prevention of adversary action through the existence of credible and proactive physical, cognitive and moral capabilities (loosely defined as willpower) that raise an adversary’s perceived cost to an unacceptable level of risk relative to the perceived benefit.” Part I of this report delivers the proceedings from the senior leader forum, reflecting a robust discussion of comprehensive deterrence and its application. To ensure a wide variety of perspectives and encourage free-flowing discussion, all remarks from the forum were not for attribution. As such, the conference summary seeks to draw out the main themes and observations from the discussion without attributing particular points to a specific participant.

To support the forum’s exploration of comprehensive deterrence and related issues, the RAND Corporation commissioned five papers to examine various aspects of this proposal, referencing four distinct waves of deterrence literature. These papers were distributed at the senior leader forum and are included in Part II of this conference proceeding.



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