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RESEARCH MEMORANDUM

DETERRENCE

Olaf Helmer

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The RAND Corporation
1700 MAIN ST. • SANTA MONICA • CALIFORNIA

SUMMARY

Considerations of deterrence are affecting our foreign policy and our military planning to a considerable degree, and rightly so. The somewhat aphoristic statements of the present paper are offered in the hope of stimulating discussion and analysis of the issues involved.

DETERRENCE

Deterrence is much in everybody's mind these days. Considerations of deterrence are affecting our foreign policy and our military planning to a considerable degree, and rightly so. See, for instance, the articles and books in the appended list of references. Yet little systematic thought seems to have been given to the subject.

The following somewhat aphoristic statements are offered in the hope of stimulating discussion and analysis of the issues involved. Some of the statements perhaps do not adequately reflect all the significant realities of the complex world situation that is actually involved. Others clearly are platitudes; yet the views one hears expressed publicly, if not our national policies, are frequently at variance with them.

1. Deterrence, as applied to warfare, relies on the potential enemy's belief that, should he start a war, retaliation would be so heavy that the probable outcome would compare unfavorably with what he might have achieved without war.

2. To accomplish increased deterrence, therefore, it is necessary either to strengthen the enemy's belief that continued peace will be more rewarding or to strengthen his belief that aggression will be severely punished.

3. The former alternative, which emphasizes peaceful prospects, must be well distinguished from appeasement, which affords little if any deterrence in the long run. Appeasement involves a sacrifice without positive recompense on the appeaser's part;

it is thus in the nature of a ransom payment, having at best a delaying effect. A deterrent policy based on the expected pay-offs of continued peace, on the other hand, must call for co-operative efforts entered into by both sides for mutual benefit.

4. The advent of nuclear weapons has had two effects, and it is debatable to what extent they offset one another as far as the probable long-run effects are concerned: it has raised the catastrophic aspects of all-out war, but it has by mutual deterrence enormously lowered the probability of the occurrence of such a war.

5. Mutual military deterrence from nuclear war among the central powers encourages peripheral wars; for, to the extent to which it is effective, it removes the fear that a small war might grow beyond control into an all-out central war.

6. Deterrence for peripheral war, therefore, is a separate problem and should be given separate attention. It is in fact becoming the more important problem since central deterrence is already moderately well established whereas the fear remains that a peripheral war may inadvertently turn gradually into a central war.

7. As for peripheral deterrence, our policy has tended to go to one of two extremes—namely, either (a) to underplay our willingness to intervene in the peripheral theater or (b) to threaten central retaliation. Neither of these attitudes is compatible with a policy of deterrence. This is obvious for the first (Hitler's attack on western Europe and the invasion of South Korea being clear examples); and the second is only

too readily put down to bluffing, since a peripheral situation will rarely involve a sufficiently vital interest to warrant initial reply by all-out central war with all its catastrophic implications.

8. For peripheral deterrence we must rely on an expressed willingness and a demonstrated capability of instant peripheral intervention in the case of aggression, being careful to avoid a tie-in with central deterrence but otherwise keeping the enemy guessing as to precisely what form of military response to aggression he should expect.

9. The belief, on the part of the enemy, on which military deterrence rests can be broken down into two parts: his belief that the deterror has the capability of heavy retaliation, and his belief that the deterror may possibly have the intention of carrying it out.

10. Since deterrence is a matter of belief as well as of fact, it follows that it is not logically necessary that deterrence be based solely on an actual capability and an actual intent.

11. Actual capability is more accessible to enemy intelligence than actual intent. Moreover, the former is highly stable while the latter can change over night.

12. The enemy intelligence apparatus cannot be expected to be greatly deluded regarding actual U. S. capabilities. Feints can have only marginal effects, slightly increasing or decreasing enemy estimates of U. S. capabilities.

13. Feints regarding U. S. intentions (say, by diplomatic maneuvers or planted leaks) are more promising, on the other hand, and careful consideration must be given to the strategic implications of this possibility.

14. An enemy, faced with the possibility of war, will weigh his chances of winning if he attacks compared to those if he should be attacked. Deterrence, in this case, will be ineffective if the enemy is led to conclude that retaliation, though massive, would still give him a chance while he would have none were he to be attacked first. Hence the very opposite of deterrence is achieved by demonstrating a high aggressive capability which, at the same time, appears to be vulnerable if the enemy gets in the first strike.

15. Conversely, deterrence would be highest if the enemy could be convinced that he who strikes last strikes best. While it is unlikely that the first strike can ever be made to appear disadvantageous, one of the most important aspects of a deterrence policy must be to minimize (actually and by feint) the reduction that one's retaliatory capability would experience as a result of a first strike by the enemy.

16. Public pronouncements emphasizing the dependence of instant retaliation on democratic processes of government (congressional and presidential approval) are at variance with a policy of deterrence; so is any public discussion stressing the response delay caused by the intricacies of the military decision-making apparatus.

17. The seemingly autonomous position of SAC, to the extent to which it may succeed in convincing an enemy of SAC's relative independence of democratic decision-making processes, constitutes a powerful support for a policy of deterrence.

18. It is a matter of controversy whether the bombing of civilian populations causes a rise or decline in the nation's will and ability to resist. A policy of deterrence should foster the belief that the effect would in fact be a rise (the wounded-buffalo hypothesis).

19. In order to demonstrate a high retaliatory capability (even to ourselves) it is necessary to prepare detailed war plans emphasizing the reprisal effect. There is no reason why such deterrent war plans should actually be carried out once their motivation, namely deterrence, has failed.

20. Deterrent war plans either emphasize the destruction of cities or rely on the inevitability of high urban damage and thus increasingly promote a spirit of indifference as to choice of precise targets. There is a danger that the deterrence motivation makes us lose sight of the prime goal of a war plan, namely, that of winning the war in the sense of best defending our national values and institutions.

21. If we had nothing but a war plan based on the assumption of an inviolate strategic air force and designed to produce deterrence by the horror of urban annihilation (and one sometimes wonders if this is not all we have), we would be committing a double mistake: Since SAC is in fact not invulnerable, such

a plan would invite rather than deter a first strike by the enemy, who would thereby force us to adopt a make-shift strategy derived from the hypothetical war plan by adaptation to the real situation; moreover, by carrying the original deterrent intent to the absurdity of locking the barn door after the steed has been stolen we might fail to salvage anything by insistence on revenge rather than self-protection.

22. A war plan devised to win the war in the face of any reasonable contingency arising out of a first strike by the enemy may or may not incidentally be highly deterrent. If it is not, and it thus appears as an alternative to a deterrent war plan, then it is essential that the enemy at least be kept guessing as to which of the two plans will be put in action in case of war.

The main points in the above considerations may perhaps be summarized in the following maxims: Demonstrate a flexible and highly invulnerable retaliatory capability. Neither state precisely nor understate the retaliatory intentions. Base actual war plans on the assumption not of an inviolate base of operations and a deterrent target system but of a partly damaged base and a target system chosen to minimize destruction at home. Promote peripheral deterrence separately. Emphasize attractive alternatives to war and thus tie a deterrence strategy in with a positive policy toward peaceful international pursuits of mutual benefit.

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