

# Deterring Russia and Iran

## Improving Effectiveness and Finding Efficiencies

JEFFREY MARTINI, ANDREW RADIN, ALYSSA DEMUS, KRYSZYNA MARCINEK, DARA MASSICOT,  
KATHERINE PFROMMER, ASHLEY L. RHOADES, CHANDLER SACHS, KAREN M. SUDKAMP, DAVID E. THALER,  
DAVID WOODWORTH, SEAN M. ZEIGLER

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### ISSUE

The United States makes significant investments in military activities intended to deter Russia and Iran. These investments have only grown in Europe since Russia's 2014 invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea and remain substantial in the Middle East despite the overall trend of the United States reducing its forward posture in that theater. Juxtaposed against the priority of competing with China in the Indo-Pacific, extended deterrence requirements in Europe and the Middle East naturally lead defense planners to consider how the United States can most effectively and most efficiently deter Russia and Iran while balancing those missions against its other global priorities.<sup>1</sup>



### APPROACH

We used a multimethod approach to generate a baseline assessment of deterrence in the two theaters we considered (U.S. European Command [EUCOM] and U.S. Central Command) to anticipate the impact on deterrence if U.S. military activities were reduced in these theaters and to assess the deterrent values of different U.S. operations, activities, and investments (OAIs) on deterrence outcomes. We accomplished this through a literature review, structured roundtables with subject-matter experts, quantitative analysis, and a multi-episode case study. We then organized our results by category of OAI (forward posture, exercises and short-term deployments, and security cooperation). Finally, we interpreted the results by theater, since the characteristics of U.S. extended deterrence and the nature of the threat posed by the adversary vary considerably between Europe and the Middle East.



### FINDINGS

Table 1 illustrates our findings by OAI category. U.S. forward presence generated the clearest evidence of deterrent value, although all OAI categories we analyzed may contribute to deterrence and are fielded for multiple reasons, including to satisfy the interrelated objective of reassurance. Because deterrence can

<sup>1</sup> This research was completed in September 2021, before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has not been subsequently revised.

be achieved via denial of adversary benefits or threat of punishment, elements of forward posture that communicate these consequences should have the greatest deterrent effect. Such capabilities could include basing infrastructure that enables rapid reinforcement during times of crisis or strike capability that holds the adversary at risk.

For strategists and defense planners focused on finding efficiencies in deterrence missions, exercises and short-term deployments appear most ripe for reductions given the weaker empirical basis for their deterrent impact. Cuts to the frequency of exercises rather than their scale might be particularly feasible. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, often provided by the Department of the Air Force, were identified as crucial in both theaters for early warning and attribution of adversary actions. Because the early warning and attribution provided through ISR facilitate a rapid response to deter an adversary at the outset of an action, ISR is an essential enabler of deterrence.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt more-specific ways of describing adversary actions than “malign influence.” Tailored deterrence strategies require a more precise definition of the adversary actions that the United States seeks to prevent.
- Align U.S. forward presence to reinforce clear deterrence logics. The ability to rapidly reinforce signals the denial of adversary benefits, whereas the posturing of additional strike assets signals the threat of punishment.
- Clarify the logic of BTF and naval presence missions to ensure that the deployments strengthen deterrence by signaling the denial of adversary benefits or the threat of punishment.
- Consider cost in the implementation of force employment concepts, differentiating between applications of dynamic force employment or agile combat employment that are fertile for generating efficiencies and those that generate additional requirements for which there is an opportunity cost.

**TABLE 1. FINDINGS ON OAI DETERRENT EFFECTS, BY RESEARCH METHOD**

OAI	Existing Literature	Roundtables	Quantitative Analysis	Case Study
Forward posture	Very important for crisis deterrence, but there are some conflicting findings on importance for general deterrence	Most important OAI for deterrence in EUCCOM; infrastructure for rapid reinforcement is key to both theaters	Not applicable	Declining U.S. forward presence in EUCCOM may have contributed to deterrence failure in Crimea, but how much to weight this factor is uncertain
Exercises and short-term deployments	Larger, outside-in deployments increase chances of successful deterrence	Exercise size and complexity are more important than frequency	Naval presence missions and bomber task forces (BTFs) either are positively correlated with adversary actions or have no statistically significant effect	Not applicable
Security cooperation	Not applicable	Important for reassurance; deterrent effect is unclear	Not applicable	May have contributed to Russia limiting its aims in eastern Ukraine after Minsk II, but to what extent is uncertain



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