

## CHAPTER 1

### **New Thinking on Deterrence**

Barry Schneider and Patrick Ellis

Deterrence thinking has evolved from the Cold War to the present. During the period from 1945-1991 when the United States sought to deter attacks by the U.S.S.R. and Warsaw Pact, U.S. nuclear forces were fielded primarily to prevent nuclear war or escalation of war. However, with the breakup of the Soviet Union, as an immediate threat to the United States, and the rise of lesser nuclear states proliferating nuclear technologies, deterrence is once again reexamined for newer solutions.

During the Cold War, deterrence strategy evolved over time as officials and defense strategists thought through the changes brought by nuclear weapons. Clearly after 1945, warfare had a new component. Long-range airpower gave states an intercontinental reach. The first A-bombs had an explosive power a thousand times more powerful than an equivalent weight of high explosive bombs like TNT. When thermonuclear weapons were created half a decade later, they, in turn, were a thousand times more powerful per unit weight than the A-bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

So in a period of four or five years, bomb explosive yields per unit weight increased a thousand times a thousand. This combination of long-range delivery vehicles coupled with warheads or bombs a million times more powerful than their World War II conventional counterparts led to a revolution in the way wars might be fought in the future if such weapons were employed.

In the nuclear era the homelands of the United States and other great powers are vulnerable to attack within a very short time. Everyone was now “at the front.” The two great oceans had historically protected America, but now everyone was in the cross-hairs. There was no longer any delay in receiving or delivering absolutely devastating blows that could threaten the existence of a nation. A central nuclear war could start and be essentially over in a day. Indeed, nuclear weapons and long-range

delivery opened up the possibilities that the populations and societies of a country might be destroyed even before their military forces were fully defeated – in just a few short minutes or hours.

### **Classic Cold War Deterrence**

Because strategic defenses lagged so far behind bomber and missile-offensive forces, the United States came to embrace a Cold War deterrence strategy dependent upon several key elements including:

- Maintaining a retaliatory capability that could inflict what an adversary would clearly believe to be an unacceptable level of damage to their own country and regime.
- Having a “second-strike force” capable of such retaliatory power, even after the United States was attacked first in a surprise attack.
- Having the will to use such overwhelming force in retaliation, or, if necessary, in a first strike if war had begun and appeared heading toward Armageddon.
- Being able to clearly communicate the U.S. had such a retaliatory capability and the will to use it.
- Having a rational adversary that values its own leader and population survival, national power and key assets more than being able to inflict losses on the United States.
- Having the capability to identify the origins of any nuclear attack on the United States in a timely way, so as to remove doubt about the target of a U.S. retaliatory strike.
- Being able to hold at risk, locate and identify those assets that a rival leadership most values.

As long as these conditions held true, the U.S. leadership believed it could deter a Soviet attack on the United States and its declared allies. Even so, there were tense times when a wrong move might have triggered a nuclear war. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is often cited as the event when we came closest to nuclear war with the U.S.S.R. and its allies.

Since the overthrow of the Communist Party in all eight past Warsaw Pact countries and 15 Soviet republics, a whole new set of nuclear rogue state and terrorist aspirants and powers have emerged on the world scene, each presenting their own unique threat and profile. Even Iraq, at one point before 1991, had a robust program to acquire nuclear weapons. Fortunately, this program was snuffed out by subsequent inspections and destruction of their capability.

For the most part, every country that embarks on nuclear weapons procurement presents dynamic challenges since there is no cookie cutter approach to deter any of them. North Korea, a rogue totalitarian state run by Kim Jong Il and a small group of family members presents its own unique set of problems. Other distinct problems are presented by Iran where the Ayatollah Khamene'i rules the Islamic Republic, a theocracy that is the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world, and whose brand of Islamic revolution threatens everyone else in the region. Still another threat is posed by Syria, a state that appears to have collaborated with North Korea in pursuit of a nuclear weapon.

Rollbacks have averted some nuclear threats in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and South Africa. Further, pressure or regime changes have terminated or temporarily blocked nuclear weapons research program in Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, Argentina, Romania and Brazil. Further, a nuclear Libya was narrowly averted by adroit U.S. negotiation with the regime of Muammar Qadhafi, assisted by the interception of a shipment of A.Q. Khan black-market centrifuges bound for Libya.

And, alas, somewhere in the world, the al-Qaeda leaders still hide and still plot attacks on the "far enemy." They say they aspire to attack and are authorized to kill up to four million Americans using, if necessary, weapons of mass destruction. They are known to have sought nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, so far without result. At present, they have no known return address to retaliate against if they succeeded in acquiring and using a nuclear weapon. Such opponents may prefer martyrdom and "paradise" if they could strike a devastating nuclear blow against their declared enemy in the West.

Pakistan and India are recent entrants into the nuclear weapons state club. Still other states may start or re-start their nuclear weapons

programs if the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs are allowed to proceed unchecked.

The many new actors in the nuclear weapons arena mean that persons of very different cultures, languages, experiences, strategic situations and intentions must be deterred from using the ultimate weapon. This fact argues for a second approach to nuclear deterrence, namely tailored deterrence. Building on the deterrence elements of the Cold War and those assumptions, it can be argued that each regime, each leadership and each national situation is somewhat unique and therefore requires an approach to deterrence uniquely tailored to achieve maximum effect on that particular group of decision-makers.

### **Tailored Deterrence of New Actors**

Tailored deterrence is, in the words of Dr. Jerrold Post, an actor-specific set of deterrence capabilities designed to influence a specific leader or leader's group.

Deterrence strategy may be tailored to the actors to be deterred, the capabilities needed to execute this strategy, and to the points in ongoing scenarios where there are opportunities to deter the adversary.<sup>1</sup>

This book looks at all three. We look at tailoring a deterrence strategy to Russia, North Korea, Iran and al-Qaeda. We discuss specific capabilities necessary to enhance deterrence like good strategic communications, attribution capability and programs to improve public resilience. In addition, we explore unfolding scenarios to look at decision points for deterring a conflict or escalation of a conflict such as in the example of the 1990-1991 Gulf War when Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait.

To increase the possibility of influence requires a full understanding of the enemy or potential enemy, and act accordingly. This means that one will have to develop an understanding of:

- Who in the regime is in charge of what kinds of national security decisions?
- Adversary decision-maker personalities, tendencies, views and experiences.

- Opponent leadership value hierarchy.
- Rival perceptions and knowledge of the situation, stakes and views of the U.S.'s willingness to use force in the scenario.
- The rival leadership's commitment to achieving particular outcomes in a given crisis or conflict.
- Past regime security decisions, decision processes and standard operating procedures.
- Regime behavior in past conflicts, crises and exercises.
- Regime history, strategic situation and strategic culture of the state.
- Regime military leaders, their unit capabilities, military doctrine and strategy.
- Regime internal and external allies, opponents and publics.
- Regime strengths: leaders, diplomatic, intelligence, military and economic.
- Regime weaknesses: leadership splits; any diplomatic, intelligence, military and economic (DIME) flaws; and their international rivals and borders.

### **Scenario Dependent Deterrence**

In addition to these two views of what goes into effective deterrence, classic Cold War deterrence and tailored deterrence of a regime, it is important to mention the importance of context. Decision-makers can act very differently in different scenarios. These diverse scenarios give context to discussions about deterrence. Potential flashpoint scenarios must be anticipated and thought through ahead of time. This may allow the U.S. to take actions and communicate clearly in a timely way before events take on a life of their own. Just as a winning chess strategy requires the correct sequencing of moves to achieve a checkmate, the same is true of crisis and conflict decisions. Thinking through potential scenarios is an international chess match to be undertaken before the events take place so correct moves can be taken to prevent disastrous surprises and defeats. As the proverb says, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Correct sequencing of moves can bolster deterrence, and scenario analysis may help inform such moves.

## **Tailoring Deterrence**

This book was written with senior United States government leadership and decision-makers in mind as a key audience. It is meant to help them analyze the best means of deterring future conflicts with state and non-state adversaries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The central focus is on actor-specific tailored deterrence that influences force postures, communications and actions based on contextual and scenario considerations. Any top government decision-makers who formulate policy and strategy to counter nuclear and other WMD threats should read it. In addition, this volume would be instructive to interested national security experts, military officers and informed citizens.

This book addresses this series of deterrence questions:

- Why is it important to develop an actor-specific approach to deterrence of adversaries? Does one standard deterrence formula fit all adversaries and situations? Or must we craft a unique deterrence approach to each potential adversary?
- How do you deter a peer competitor like Russia, the only other nuclear superpower on the planet, and what is different about deterring Russian adventurism than any other state?
- How can we deter Iran, the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world, after it achieves a nuclear weapons capability?
- Similarly, how can we influence North Korea's leaders to avoid war and spreading nuclear weapons to others now that they are a nuclear weapons state?
- What kind of extended deterrence policy is in the United States interest, and how much nuclear capability do we need to make an extended deterrent credible and capable?
- How can we deter non-state actors with no return address from using nuclear or other WMD weapons against us and our allies?

How can we influence a terrorist leader's WMD acquisition and use calculus?

- How might the United States have better deterred the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990? To what degree did deterrence play in the decisions of both sides of the 1990-91 Gulf War as it unfolded?
- Why might the demonstrably weaker side sometimes attack much stronger opponents as has happened often in history? Why did or might deterrence fail in such cases of the weak attacking the strong?
- How might deterrence succeed or fail in a future Taiwan crisis that pits the People's Republic of China against the Taiwan government supported by the United States? What might be the role of asymmetric interests and asymmetric military power?
- How might deterrence work or fail to work during future crises in a world of zero nuclear weapons? Would the removal of nuclear weapons leads to a greater likelihood of conventional war?
- What United States strategic nuclear force structure will represent the strongest deterrent to war as deeper cuts are made by negotiated arms control treaties? Is a triad superior to either an ICBM-SLBM or Bomber-SLBM dyad? What are the deterrence tradeoffs?
- What is the role of strategic communications in transmitting our capability and will to potential adversaries and allies dependent on the U.S. nuclear extended deterrent? How can strategic communications be improved?
- Can the U.S. and allied publics be organized, trained and equipped to bounce back after a WMD attack and can the increased resiliency improve deterrence of adversary attacks? How might resilience be improved?
- What is the importance of being able to identify in a quick and sure way the identity of an adversary that has struck the United States with a weapon of mass destruction? What impact can possessing a known nuclear attribution capability have in deterring such state and terrorist attacks on the United States?

It has been said if one wishes to keep the peace, prepare for war. Part of that preparation is to tailor the retaliatory threat to the specific potential enemy in such a way you maximize your influence on their decisions in all likely scenarios. This will require tailored deterrence that builds upon the elements of Cold War deterrence strategy and thinking through deterrence opportunities in future scenarios.

## **Notes**

---

<sup>1</sup> See Elaine Bunn, “Can Deterrence be Tailored?” Strategic Forum No. 225, (January 2007), Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University. Also, see Karl-Heinz Kamp and David S. Yost, NATO and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Deterrence, (Rome: NATO Defense College, May 2009), 11-58.