

## CHAPTER 15

### Summary and Conclusions

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The purpose of a deterrence strategy as defined in this analysis is to dissuade an adversary from starting a war or escalating a conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The Latin word “*deterre*” means to frighten from or frighten away. Deterrence success, even if achieved, is hard to prove because you cannot know absolutely why a war or escalation was avoided. After all, the adversary might not have intended to attack or escalate a conflict in the first place. Unlike the natural sciences, history does not let you repeat the experiment and change the variables. On the other hand, it is very clear when deterrence has failed, obvious as soon as the war drums sound.

And deterrence often does fail. As noted in our chapter on deterrence in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, in roughly a third of the inter-state wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wars were begun by weaker states that attacked demonstrably stronger foes. In the majority of cases, superior might when recognized by the less powerful party creates a deterrent effect. Hence, the Roman motto “*si vis pacem, para bellum*” – if you wish for peace prepare for war. This is the thought behind the famous U.S. Strategic Air Command motto of “Peace is our profession.” Peace through strength works in many cases but, nevertheless, there are also a significant fraction of cases when states have launched a war despite significant comparative military weakness.

An example was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor destroyed much of the U.S. Pacific fleet in December 1941. However, at the time of the attack the Japanese GNP was about 10 percent of the United States GNP. A long war to the finish would inevitably favor the United States, a fact not lost on Admiral Yamamoto who planned the attack and explained the problem to the Japanese war leaders. They elected to gamble that the United States would stop short of a total war to the finish, and be willing to conclude a compromise peace leaving them in possession of all or much of their conquests. The Japanese leaders failed to understand the

determination in America to completely defeat them and insist on a near total surrender. Their risky Pacific War venture backfired and left Japan in ruins.

Deterrence can fail for many reasons. Some leaders can be irrational, uninformed, misinformed, and reckless; gambling on adversary behavior, more focused on immediate gains than possible long term consequences, or driven to strike first because they calculate time is not on their side. Some are also willing to risk all in a war effort rather than give up their ambitions or honor as they define it. Deterrence efforts can at times fail to inhibit war escalation once the conflict has begun, as emotions often drive policy. Sometimes, as casualties mount, determination hardens, and mission creep widens the commitment to winning, lessening the willingness to compromise and end the conflict.

In this volume we look at deterrence strategy through three lenses: (1) Classic Cold War Deterrence Strategy, (2) Tailored Deterrence Strategy, and (3) Deterrence Strategy in specific Scenarios.

### **Classical Cold War Deterrence Strategy**

The classical Cold War strategy of deterrence is most applicable when dealing with a rival state run by rational decision-makers who value their own power and survival over other objectives. An example of this kind of leadership is the Soviet high command during the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Unlike the Cuban leaders like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara at the time, they were not willing to attack the United States because of the U.S. power to retaliate and devastate the U.S.S.R.. On the other hand the Cuban leaders were willing to become martyrs if it meant destroying the United States. Classic deterrence theory would not have worked against them in this case.

The deterrence strategy that emerged in the United States in the Cold War had seven classic elements and appeared to work to help keep the Soviet Union from war with the West:

- Having retaliatory forces capable of inflicting a level of damage considered unacceptable to the Soviet leadership;

- Possessing a second strike capability that could survive a surprise attack;
- Having a will to use this nuclear force in a confrontation, if necessary;
- Communicating the US had both the will and the capability described so the U.S. threat was credible;
- Having an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance system able to identify the origins of any attack, answering the “who did it?” question;
- Having the capability to identify and strike a target set of highest value to the Soviet Union and its leaders.
- Having a rational adversary leadership who preferred to live and stay in power rather than die in order to inflict destruction on the United States.

Both sides held the life of the other society in their hands. Both were a few minutes or hours away from nuclear oblivion. The U.S. SAC triad of nuclear bombers, ICBMs, and SLBMs along with NATO nuclear and conventional forces deployed across from the Warsaw Pact in Europe was what we think kept the peace. The system worked, although it is a common judgment nuclear war was narrowly averted in the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

One of the limits of classic Cold War theories of deterrence is the requirement to have a rational opponent, and one not attracted to martyrdom. There are a number of problems with this requirement. First, there may be different interpretations of rational behavior in a crisis. Poor signaling or poor reception of adversary signals can lead to misunderstandings, war and escalation. A lack of leader situational awareness can undermine deterrence as can imprecise or misleading communications. Further, some leaders may misread ambiguous signals or may miss them altogether. Adversaries may also see what they expect to see rather than what is intended by their rival’s words or actions. Or they may see only what they want to see rather than the reality of a situation. All this can lead to irrational actions, sometimes better seen in hindsight rather than in the heat of the moment of decision.

As Franklin Miller notes in the early years of the Cold War the message to the Soviet leadership was simple: “attack the United States or our allies, and we will immediately launch an all-out nuclear response against the Soviet homeland and on its forward deployed military forces using all elements of our nuclear arsenal. As noted, this was neither tailored nor subtle.”<sup>2</sup>

But the Kennedy administration began to take some first steps towards a more tailored deterrence in the early 1960s. Kennedy wanted options. He did not want to have to decide on doing nothing or to initiate thermonuclear war if the Soviet leadership decided to attack with its superior conventional forces. Some U.S. strategists were convinced that the Soviet leadership might consider risking limited conventional attacks against NATO’s less powerful conventional forces unless they were confronted with tailored and more believable (as opposed to all-out) U.S. and NATO nuclear responses. Thus, the administration introduced the “Flexible Response” policy.<sup>3</sup>

Later, during the Carter administration, the move toward a more tailored approach towards the Soviets was further refined when U.S. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown called for a Nuclear Targeting Policy Review leading to the countervailing strategy (Presidential Decision 59) based on the view “deterrence could only be achieved when the United States focused on what the Soviet leadership valued — and then threatened to destroy those assets if war occurred.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. strategic nuclear forces are still sized and postured to deter aggression by Russia. Between them, the two nuclear giants hold over 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons and Russian nuclear forces still pose the greatest existential threat to the United States.

### **U.S. Force Structure and Deterrence: Alternative Postures**

Because the Russian arsenal retains an overwhelming destructive capacity, the U.S. Strategic Command still maintains a triad of strategic bombers, ICBMs, and fleet ballistic missile submarines to deter attacks. The New START Treaty signed and ratified in 2010 has now reduced those forces significantly but any new reductions beyond those limits will

pose new issues for deterrence and the U.S. force structure needed to maximize it.

Kurt Guthe looked at the implications of a deeper-cut arms control regime and evaluated the pros and cons for deterrence of alternative U.S. strategic force structures. He compared three alternative force postures: (1) a strategic dyad made up of Bombers/SLBM forces, (2) a strategic dyad of ICBM/SLBM forces, and (3) the present strategic triad of air, land and sea forces. A fourth alternative is a triad made up of ICBMs based in silos and on mobile launchers, and a fleet ballistic missile force.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. strategic nuclear force structure would have to change as a result of downsizing. So the question is what nuclear force structure should the United States adopt at lower force levels?

Clearly the current triad of bombers, ICBMs and SLBMs has certain advantages over dyads forces, and perhaps over other triad configurations. Each leg of the triad contributes unique advantages. ICBMs are based on U.S. soil and an attack on them is an attack on the continental United States. Such an attack is guaranteed to trigger a massive U.S. retaliatory response and this fact should make any would-be attacker think twice. On the other hand, it is not so clear that this would be true if the United States lost a ballistic missile submarine on the high seas or a strategic bomber outside U.S. air space. ICBMs are also thought to have the most secure reliable and redundant command and control links to U.S. leaders of any element of the U.S. triad. Further, ICBMs are “fast fliers” capable of reaching targets at intercontinental ranges with high accuracy within 30 minutes of launch. An adversary military planner would likely try to destroy this land-based missile force first, since they can react the fastest and are extremely difficult to defend against once launched.

Silo-based U.S. ICBMs are hardened forces that can survive all but the most accurate enemy missile attacks. Even if attacked accurately, a fraction of them are likely to survive because of the configuration and spacing of the silo-launchers would create so-called fratricide effects, whereby one enemy warhead’s detonation would destroy others aimed at adjacent U.S. targets. An adversary would be very unlikely to be able to destroy all U.S. ICBMs simultaneously and would have to attack those furthest away first to avoid fratricide effects of following incoming reentry vehicles. Otherwise an over-the-pole attack that struck the northernmost

rows of U.S. missile silos would send a wall of tons of dirt into the sky thereby blocking following adversary reentry vehicles from getting to their targets.

This adversary “South-North Walk” through the missile fields would enable the northernmost U.S. ICBMs time to launch while the others were being attacked. Also, an adversary would want to strike the fast fliers of the United States first to prevent such a response or limit it. Thus, they would likely try to hit the ICBMs first, leaving a window of time for U.S. bombers to get airborne. Also an attack on all three legs of the triad will dilute the weapons that could otherwise be devoted to overwhelm a less diverse force.

The most survivable element of the triad is the SLBM forces at sea. Once submerged and sent out to deep water stations far at sea, the current submarine fleet is believed to be all but invisible and virtually undetectable. Moreover, like bombers, the fleet ballistic missile submarines can provide a 360 degree azimuth threat complicating enemy defenses and forcing them to spread their missile defenses around the entire defensive perimeter. Ballistic missile submarines also complement the other two legs of the triad by providing the most survivable launchers once deployed on the high seas. Positioned off an adversary coastline, the SLBM force could reach enemy targets in the least amount of time if given timely orders. These sea-borne forces are also good at signaling U.S. readiness if they are flushed from their home ports in a crisis. And, if sighted off an adversary coastline, they would convey a near and ominous threat that should bolster deterrence effects.

There are several deterrence advantages to maintaining a bomber leg to the retaliatory forces. Basing bombers at the end of runways during crises or sending some of them aloft at one time or another can signal readiness to strike back in more evident ways than by putting ICBMs and on-station submarines on alert. Bombers also can provide a 360 degree azimuth threat to enemies and are reusable and recallable. Bomber capability would also force a rival to spend large sums on air defense and divert such funds from missile defenses. Conversely, a bomber’s path to targets can be paved by ICBM and SLBM strikes against air defenses. So all legs of the strategic triad work synergistically, complicating the plans of any enemy commanders assigned the task of attempting to negate the U.S. capability to retaliate in case of war. Such combinations of sea-land-

air launchers would checkmate any such plans and this is why U.S. military planners are opposed to converting the triad to a dyad that carries somewhat more risk. Guthe argues that the present triad enhances our strategic force survivability, lethality, flexibility, visibility, and adaptability -- all the components needed for strong deterrence. He concludes any move from the present triad to a dyad would diminish U.S. strategic force survivability.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the trend in arms control negotiations is to negotiate ever smaller nuclear forces under SALT II, START, START II, SORT, and New START. Also, with the ending of the Cold War and the focus on the fighting of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is a squeeze on U.S. defense resources that leads policy makers to consider nuclear force cuts for financial cost and nuclear nonproliferation reasons. Deeper cuts in allowed nuclear warhead and strategic delivery vehicle numbers will increase the pressure for either eliminating one leg of the strategic triad and/or changing the basing modes of some of the strategic force.

One solution might be to eliminate bombers from the nuclear mission and then subdivide the ICBM force, keeping some in silos and deploying others on Hardened Mobile Launchers (HMLs). The Midgetman<sup>7</sup> program of the late 1980s and early 1990s was already tested in this mode and might be a cost-effective way to complicate enemy targeting at lower force levels under any new deeper cut arms control regime. Further analysis is needed to evaluate the utility of fielding a triad of a mixed ICBM force, some in silos, and others on hardened mobile launchers, alongside SLBM aboard strategic submarines. At lower numbers of strategic delivery vehicles and warheads that basing mode begins to look attractive.<sup>8</sup>

Alternatively, the United States could move to a bomber/SLBM or a SLBM/ICBM dyad option. The downside of the first dyad is that with no ICBM problem to solve, an adversary could concentrate on defeating the submarine-bomber force. An anti-submarine warfare breakthrough coupled with improved air defenses could reduce the deterrent effect of such a dyad.

On the other hand, a SLBM-ICBM dyad presently seems like a guaranteed retaliatory capability, even without bombers in the mix, but such a dyad would be put into jeopardy if an adversary achieved a breakthrough in anti-submarine warfare and in their ballistic missile

defenses (BMD). Clearly if the adversary states did not have to build air defenses alongside their missile defenses, they could concentrate their resources on BMD improvements.

### **Extended Deterrence: What Is Required?**

David Trachtenberg investigated the concept of extended deterrence and examines the question “How Much Capability Is Too Little?” This is an important question to ask since over 30 U.S. allies depend on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to protect them. Trachtenberg believes that extended nuclear deterrence has had a long and successful history and continues as a strong theme in U.S. security strategy. However, much has changed since the Soviet Union dissolved at the end of 1991. The Cold War ended. New states have acquired and tested nuclear weapons – India, Pakistan and North Korea. Still others are attempting to acquire them, witness Iran. Non-State actors have pursued weapons of mass destruction capability – al-Qaeda and Aum Shinrikyo. Further, the nuclear arsenal of the United States was progressively reduced under START, START II, SORT, and New START ceilings. Under the administration of President H.W. Bush, the U.S. tactical or “non-strategic” nuclear weapons have been removed from the inventory.

Further, some may come to believe the United States is less serious deterring nuclear threats at a time when it has signaled less of a reliance on nuclear weapons and has set a long term goal of eliminating them altogether if others can be made to follow the U.S. lead. On the other hand, the Obama administration has embraced maintaining a strong retaliatory capability as long as other states are threaten with nuclear weapons, and supports extended deterrence as reflected in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review and through statements of senior leaders.

Sending such mixed signals may cause some U.S. allies presently reliant on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to wonder if one day they should not begin to create a nuclear deterrent of their own rather than trust another power to shield them. Leaders of allied states might question whether any state would be willing to risk a nuclear war, and millions of casualties, on their behalf. The reality is that not all allies are of equal importance to the United States. An attack on some is guaranteed to be met with a U.S.

military response. An attack on some others might not so readily cause a U.S. response. Some allies are absolutely vital to the survival and prosperity of the United States, others are not. Some allies have U.S. armed forces on their territory. An aggressor attack that shed American blood would involve the United States immediately.

Ironically the number of states wanting to be under the U.S. nuclear umbrella may increase at the same time the size of our nuclear forces, providing that umbrella, is decreasing. This thought of a declining U.S. deterrent might lead to a new wave of nuclear proliferation by states such as Turkey, Republic of Korea, Japan, and others. In a worst case, at some point a continued and much deeper U.S. nuclear force reduction could trigger a new nuclear breakout from the NPT regime.

On the other hand, this threat may be exaggerated. The United States will long have the capacity for retaliation beyond what is needed. The real question is one of will. Does the adversary believe the U.S. government will act in a given contingency? That is the question, not U.S. retaliatory or war fighting capability. It is unclear just how many nuclear weapons the United States would need to convince a Kim Jong Il or Ayatollah Khamene'i that it would unwise to use nuclear weapons on a U.S. ally. The answer probably is very few.

Clearly, a single nuclear weapon, or no more than a few nuclear weapons, has the capability to do absolutely catastrophic damage to smaller states. Indeed, the same might be said of very large states. Some smaller states are, as one observer has noted, close to being "one-bomb states."<sup>9</sup> A half dozen nuclear weapons could totally devastate a country like Iran, Syria or North Korea so it would be a long time before the U.S. nuclear arsenal was so depleted it could not be used to check or destroy the military capability of such rogue regimes.

And, although the United States has over 30 allies who seek protection under the nuclear umbrella that does not mean it must maintain anything like 30 times the weapons needed for deterrence. The same nuclear arsenal can be applied to all as needed for deterrence given the extremely unlikely event that more than one or two serious nuclear threats need be confronted at one time. Indeed, the first use of a nuclear weapon against an aggressor could trigger a surrender since that regime would know more nuclear strikes could be unleashed. It would be far better to cease combat before things escalated further.

## **Tailored Deterrence Strategy**

Today's world is different from the days of the Cold War. Our adversaries are different and more diverse, and the complexities in being able to influence each of them have gotten somewhat harder, especially when trying to deter non-state actors like al Qaeda. We cannot simply use the deterrence strategies used to deter Soviet Union in the Cold War against al-Qaeda, North Korea, Iran, Syria, China and others without making adjustments. Our potential adversaries have different strategies, personalities, cultures, languages, histories, views of rational behavior, and some have a different willingness to die for their cause. All are factors that must inform our approach to tailored deterrence strategies.

As Jerrold Post points out, "In this post-Cold War era...it is clear that deterrence must be tailored and based on nuanced actor-specific behavioral models." He would have us focus on adversary's intentions as the "locus of decision making" and concludes "when it is a leader predominant society, such as Iraq under Saddam, and the leader is judged to not be deterrable, this calls for a tailored communications program designed to drive a wedge between the leader and his followers." This strategy might also be employed against some of the factions within the Iranian leadership.

It should be emphasized that each leadership of each country is different in personalities, governmental structure, regime goals, strategic culture, political and military history, internal and external threats they face, and in how they make and implement decisions. Each is different in its relations with the United States and the history of that relationship. Thus, the United States and its allies need to tailor and customize a unique deterrence strategy to maximize its dissuasive power against each of these potential adversary states.

When designing a tailored deterrence strategy, the U.S. and its allies need to get answers to a range of questions about adversary regimes, including:

- Who makes decisions on war and peace issues for the regime?
- What do the top leaders value most? How could we leverage that value to deter them?

- What motivates these leaders most? Personal power? Regime survival? Ideology? Righting past wrongs? Religion? Desire for territorial expansion?
- What are these leaders like in personality, style, personal history and views?
- How are they influenced by their strategic culture?
- Can they be influenced most by particular threats or accommodations?
- Is there a predominant leader or is power shared? Who makes what kinds of decisions? Is decision-making centralized or dispersed?
- What is the history of risk-taking by these leaders in the past?
- Are there leadership factions? Can their leadership be split?
- What U.S. actions and deterrence messages might work best with each faction?
- How are national security decisions made? What is the process of decision?
- What influence does bureaucratic bargaining play in decisions?
- What are the regime's standard operating procedures (SOPs) and military doctrine?
- What are the influences of their culture and history on decisions made?
- What are their current foreign and defense policies?
- Who do they consider to be their domestic and international allies and rivals?
- What military capabilities and vulnerabilities do they possess?
- What is their center of gravity? Can it be exploited to enhance deterrence? What are their pressure points on which to exert deterrence leverage?
- How do they implement decisions once top leaders have decided on a course?
- What does their command and control system look like? Can it be interrupted?
- What warnings and indicators do we have when they are preparing to use force?

- How can we most effectively communicate with the rival regime?

In the case of non-state actors, the United States needs a tailored deterrence policy capable of dissuading those aiding and abetting terrorist groups like al-Qaeda from assisting that organization from acquiring and employing weapons of mass destruction. It will be important to establish clear red lines that the United States and allies will not permit to be crossed. Potential aiders, abettors, and aggressors need to be clearly informed of these thresholds and must be made to understand the extremely high costs in taking such actions.

Building a history of credible responses to threats and having strategic communications that make crystal clear the costs of crossing those red lines should be part of the important work done to shore up deterrence in the post-Cold War.

In the case of leader predominant states such as Kim Jong Il's North Korea or the former Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein, a tailored deterrence approach is especially valuable. Where power is concentrated in just one or only a few persons, leadership profiles and personal histories are extremely important in discerning how to influence their decisions. Such tailored deterrence also becomes more important in crises than in day-to-day normal dealings with a rival regime since crisis decisions are often made at the highest levels in face-to-face groups in crises where time is short, stakes are high and there is often an element of surprise.

Because of the high stakes in acute international crises, top national leaders are under pressure to get personally involved, cutting out the normal bureaucratic layers of decision. There is a greater tendency for individual decision-makers or small face-to-face top-level decision groups to make these urgent and important decisions. Precisely at such times, logic often wars with psycho-logic. At just such junctures psychological factors may interfere with clear thinking. Profiling and understanding the tendencies of rival leaders can help predict some of these crisis outcomes.

When dealing with regimes where power is more widely shared, especially when rival factions are discerned in ruling elite, it is still important to understand the participants and what faction they belong to. Here the emphasis might be placed on attempting to empower and influence the faction that is most likely to take the decision path that is in the best interest of the United States and its allies while also attempting to

avoid empowering the side bent on conflict or escalation. Hence, a sophisticated understanding of the cliques within ruling circles is a necessary element of a tailored deterrence posture vis-à-vis that state. Also, note that during crises, the dominant personality or views of a faction are magnified under stressful conditions. Those prone to aggressive actions tend to be even more aggressive in situations of duress and vice versa.

The United States leadership also needs to understand the difference in decision-making done in crises as opposed to normal times by the rival leadership. During acute international crises, the top leaders are more immediately involved in decisions and psychological factors and may have a greater role. Day-to-day decisions usually involve more bureaucratic politics, and things done through standard operating procedures (SOPs), and more players involved in policy and execution decisions. Thus, in this situation, a tailored deterrence policy should also include attempting to identify the normal time decision-processes of the regime, the wider range of bureaucratic players, and the SOPs followed as their elements interact and create outcomes.

A tailored deterrence posture also requires us to understand the rival's views of deterrence of the United States and its allies. If, as Saddam Hussein believed, the United States was a casualty adverse society and we would cut and run after a certain level of casualties, then such a ruler might be prone to take greater risks, thinking he could persuade us to retreat rather than finish the job if we were to go to war. Such adversarial thinking can possibly be reversed through a series of forceful and preparatory U.S. actions and statements counteracting the rival leader's perceptions, especially if communicated in clear and unambiguous ways.

As Jerrold Post recognizes, a "special dilemma is posed by transnational radical Islamist terrorism, many of whose members seek martyrdom."<sup>10</sup> He proposes that for:

    this challenging target, a four point program of tailored communications is proposed with the overall goal of reducing the ranks of terrorists by inhibiting potential terrorists from joining the group, producing dissension in the group, facilitating exit from the group, and reducing support for the group and delegitimizing its

leaders. Messages designed to inhibit the development and use of weapons of mass destruction is included in the suggested program.<sup>11</sup>

We must customize our deterrent strategies to match the adversaries we face and the scenarios in which we might confront them. Therefore, in the tailored deterrence part of this book our authors looked at different state and non-state actors as individual challenges, each to be dealt with uniquely.

The tailored approach to deterrence<sup>12</sup> is particularly apt when confronting an adversary state or group that is significantly different from the United States in culture, values, perspectives, capabilities, goals, and willingness to suffer great losses to achieve their ends. Tailored deterrence is also very important when confronting a rival state or group led by a pre-dominant leader. Examples are Germany under Adolph Hitler, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, or North Korea under Kim Jong Il. Profiling the leader's personality, personal and political history, and his strategic culture can provide insights in how to deal, deter and influence that regime. Of course, some leaders may be undeterrable. Hitler, Napoleon and Saddam Hussein were pre-disposed to violence and risk-taking on a grand scale.

Many obstacles can stand in the way of an effective tailored deterrence strategy. Intelligence may be lacking on rival leaderships. We may fail to understand their personalities, histories, culture, decision process, stakes and capabilities. The factions and policy splits among them on various issues may be poorly understood. Communication may be difficult between foes with different cultures, languages, experiences and problems. Communications can be difficult because a government has multiple audiences to persuade at the same time – the rival government, allies, the press, the public and other decision-makers. Effective communications to one audience may not play well with another.

## Tailored Deterrence of Iran

For at least two decades, the U.S. and allied governments have been concerned about the emerging nuclear program in Iran. As a state actor with a penchant to poke its finger into the eyes of western powers and especially the United States, Iran presents unique deterrence challenges.

Greg Giles points out that tailoring a deterrence strategy for Iran will not be easy because the Iran's leaders presents a unique set of behaviors such as "intense factionalism, belief in conspiracy theories, apocalyptic messianism and superstitious reliance on fortune telling."<sup>13</sup> Further, Iran is committed to spreading its radical Islamic revolution to other countries and believes the United States lacks the desire to stop it. Giles says these factors set the stage for U.S. and allied deterrence to fail and prevent future Iranian aggression.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, Giles does believe deterrence failures could be minimized if U.S. governmental planners take four specific actions:

- First, "recognize America's track record of deterring the Islamic Republic since 1979 is rather poor, and they must understand why that has been the case."<sup>15</sup>
- Second, "tailor deterrence strategy and tactics to Iran's unique decision- making environment."<sup>16</sup>
- Third, rebuild the credibility of U.S. deterrent threats which will require a greater willingness to employ limited force against Iran even if it possesses nuclear weapons, while maintaining U.S. escalation dominance to discourage Iran from initiating nuclear use.<sup>17</sup>
- Fourth, "use simulations and exercises to explore various means by which a nuclear crisis with Tehran could be defused."<sup>18</sup>

However, in the event all of these actions fail we should be prepared to use the full force of our military capability to limit Iranian adventurism and nuclear use.

## Tailored Deterrence of North Korea

In addition to Iran, a second major rogue state problem is presented by North Korea. If matters were not already tenuous enough in Korea, the March 2010 North Korean sinking of the South Korean Navy's ship *Cheonin* by torpedo, and, in November 2010, the North Korean artillery shelling on South Korea's *Yeonpyeong* Islands have escalated tensions between South and North Korea.

How we deter North Korea WMD usage is a question examined by Bruce Bennett who believes North Korea poses a serious WMD threat. He argues North Korea is a failing state and will have incentives to use its nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in future crises and conflicts.

Bennett argues a deterrence strategy against the Pyongyang regime first must be "based on a combination of their [U.S./ROK] capabilities for denial and punishment, both of which need to be increased."<sup>19</sup> Second, we must "focus on the internal threats the North Korean regime faces."<sup>20</sup> They must be made to understand their society would come apart in any wartime environment and the regime would not survive in that case. Third, it is important to "convince North Korea its WMD use would often be thwarted by U.S./ROK denial capabilities."<sup>21</sup> Finally, the U.S. and "ROK should develop a strategy and plans for a ROK-led unification of Korea and use key elements of such a strategy to punish and deter North Korean provocations."<sup>22</sup>

Bennett says to "prevent North Korean WMD use in provocations and limited attacks, the United States and the ROK must first work to resolve the ROK gaps in defenses against limited attacks."<sup>23</sup> If North Korea can be denied success in limited attacks, the U.S. and South Korean deterrence effort will be strengthened.

## Deterring Non-State Actors

Leaving the more easily understood deterring of states we now examine the difficulties and challenges of deterring non-state actors. Groups like al-Qaeda generally have no return addresses or traditional assets to hold hostage to reprisals. Thus, anyone planning deterrence

strategies must develop newer forms of tailored deterrence for each targeted group. Lewis Dunn discussed how to influence the terrorist WMD acquisition and use calculus and focused on a strategy directed towards two groups: the al-Qaeda core leadership around Osama Bin-Ladin and their support group of aiders and abettors. Dunn points out these groups are susceptible to influence, although in various degrees. He suggests terrorist groups and their aiders and abettors might be persuaded not to acquire or employ weapons of mass destruction in attacks if they were convinced:

- such use was against the religious or ethical principles of the audience they were trying to recruit and influence;
- cheaper and more cost-effective means were available to achieve their ends;
- technical difficulties of executing a successful WMD attack were too great;
- WMD use would arouse more opposition than support for their cause;
- trying to acquire WMD capability involved too much danger and risk.

How does this apply to al-Qaeda's core leadership, and associated aiders and abettors? Dunn points out that its leaders are not easily deterred from use by the argument that weapons of mass destruction are not justifiable and legitimate according to Islamic religious doctrine. Its leaders have persuaded a few radical Islamic religious leaders to bless WMD use and to release fatwas sanctioning mass killings and WMD use against infidels.

According to Dunn a more favorable approach would be to convince that use of the weapon of mass destruction was *not* the most cost-effective means of achieving their ends, rather, other means are the *smart to use* options.

Finally, there also might be a way to influence al-Qaeda leadership if they believe use of such weapons would alienate them from the greater Muslim world, and might not be the best use of their resources. Deterrence of al-Qaeda's use of WMD might be strengthened by using all

strategic communication and partnership means to propagate and reinforce the view in the Muslim world that mass killings are outside the bounds of decent and respectable behavior.

### **Nuclear Attribution as Deterrence**

Deterrence by the threat of punishment will fail if you do not know who to punish. It is hard to retaliate against assailants who leave no clue as to who they are. Thus, nuclear attribution is necessary to deter a rival equipped with nuclear weapons. An adversary state or group must know they will be targeted if they attack the United States or its allies. Should deterrence fail, then the United States needs to be able to attribute where that attack originated from. If it's a nuclear weapon set off by a terrorist, we need to know who gave them the bomb.

Nuclear forensics is the tool to help bring to light the likely perpetrators. The United States must let the world know that if a nuclear weapon, is used it has the ability to find out who did it and then send them a message to the return address. A strong nuclear attribution is central to this message.

As Michael Miller has said, current attribution technology is developed, but is not foolproof. State and non-state actors would be more effectively deterred from nuclear weapons use if current U.S. capabilities were more widely known and if the post-blast evidence assessment process was more internationalized.

What steps could be taken to improve nuclear attribution capabilities? First, an international capability must be created to examine post-blast attribution using assets from international groups that combat nuclear smuggling and work with nuclear forensics. Second, an effort should be initiated that strengthens the science of nuclear forensics and how the world views it. Third, international capabilities for post-blast attribution should be developed and tested that provide an accurate and unprejudiced analysis leading to the source of the bomb. Fourth, speedy and accurate attribution still requires careful and full investigation and the acquisition of the right resources, before the final conclusions can be reached on the sources of the nuclear materials used and possible perpetrators of the attack. At the same time, the United States and its allies

should continue to improve their databases of worldwide nuclear signatures.

This nuclear attribution capability should be coupled with a strategic communications program telling the world that those unleashing nuclear attacks upon the United States and its allies will be identified and punished.<sup>24</sup>

### **Matching Deterrence Strategy to Specific Scenarios**

The use of scenarios to help you think through deterrence at critical times and places can also inform U.S. and allied leaders about what actions to take and strategic communications to transmit to rivals during an ongoing crisis or conflict.

In the hypothetical future Taiwan crisis described in this book, it is important to note how an asymmetry of interests can cause the side with the most commitment to winning to take riskier decisions even if the other side has the preponderance of military capability. The United States might have superior military capability in such a crisis but China might have a greater stake in the outcome, more zeal for victory and might be willing to take greater risks.

In the case study of Saddam Hussein and deterrence in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, it is instructive to note that Hussein had a view of what would deter the United States from totally defeating him, 5,000 U.S. personnel killed in action. Likewise, U.S. leaders believed he would back out of Kuwait when faced with superior firepower. Both were wrong. The United States was prepared to incur far more casualties if necessary and Saddam was not willing to move because to retreat would pose a risk to his hold on power in Iraq.

Case studies also bring new deterrence factors to the fore – such as the need to decide and communicate early and clearly to the adversary. It is important to clearly draw lines on the map that should not be crossed, warning the adversary what steps would trigger a war. The 1990-1991 Gulf War case also indicated that the U.S. needed to send military capability early to Kuwait prior to the Iraqi invasion, even if just a trip wire force, if it wanted to convince Saddam Hussein not to start the invasion.

Several other deterrence lessons were discovered in the Gulf War case study of deterrence and Saddam Hussein. This was a case of serial deterrence steps. It shows the value of careful analysis of scenarios in identifying deterrence opportunities as the situation unfolds. Thus, scenarios help you to think through junctures in a scenario where war might be avoided or further escalation prevented. In the Gulf War case, had the United States better calculated the threat to its Middle East oil supplies if Kuwait were to fall to Iraq, it might have paid more attention to the border and oil dispute between Iraq and Kuwait prior to the Iraqi invasion.

Had the United States anticipated the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, it might have drawn a line in the sand spelling out dire consequences for Iraq if it intervened and might have thus deterred the Iraqi invasion. Had it moved US forces into Kuwait prior to the invasion, the United States Government might have communicated better its will to use force, even if the US forces sent were only “tripwire” forces.

With regard to deterring Iraq’s use of chemical and biological (CB) weapons it seems likely Saddam Hussein was deterred from using them because of a stern warning communicated to the Iraqi leadership by President H.W. Bush warning indirectly but clearly of a possible U.S. nuclear retaliation in that eventuality. Also, President H.W. Bush was deterred from occupying Iraq in 1991 by his estimates of the further costs that would entail in lives, treasure, alliance cohesion, domestic political support and pain of occupying and rebuilding a defeated country.

Profiling leaders is important if we are to understand how to influence them. Saddam essentially made all major foreign and defense policy for Iraq and he was a risk taker. Indeed, as noted earlier,

the Iraqi dictator took risks far beyond what Soviet leaders were willing to risk in the Cold War when confronted with overwhelming U.S. military power and a dedicated deterrent posture. The risk-taking and violent personality of the Iraqi leader, coupled with the mild deterrent signals the U.S. sent at the beginning of the Iraq-Kuwait confrontation, led Saddam Hussein to gamble on seizing an oil rich treasure that could bail him out of the financial problems caused by the huge costs of the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>25</sup>

A study of possible flashpoints and escalation scenarios also can help decision-makers see the points where they will need to take forceful actions and send strong messages if they are to curtail crises and avoid later escalations.

### **Deterrence in a Future U.S. China Crisis over Taiwan**

Even though the United States and China are each other's best trading partners, there is a flashpoint that could one day trigger a military conflict, Taiwan. McCready argued that the asymmetrical interests of the United States and China might tilt the outcome and cause the Chinese leadership to escalate a crisis or conflict further than we might expect

Misunderstandings and misperceptions unique to both countries seem to center on national interest for each country. McCready believes that the "most dangerous misunderstanding is the belief, prevalent in both the U.S. and China, that the U.S. has no significant national interest at stake."<sup>26</sup> If this is the case then it's imperative for the U.S. leadership to define why this commitment is important and clearly communicate it to the P.R.C. and to the U.S. public.

However, the problem is that for the past six decades the United States has been intentionally ambiguous as to what we would do if China invaded Taiwan. This has worked since China has not used force to take the island back, but it is questionable if this will continue to be the case in the future.

McCready identified four areas of mutual misperception that need to be corrected at the top leadership levels of both countries in order for peace to be maintained over Taiwan's status:

- First, "the nature of the national interest involved"<sup>27</sup> must be clarified;
- Second, "the level of commitment to that interest,"<sup>28</sup> should be clarified;
- Third, "the governmental decision-making process," should be better understood;<sup>29</sup>

- Fourth, “the attitudes that drive each nation’s international behavior” must be more explicit<sup>30</sup>

One serious misperception according to the Chinese is the American failure to understand the seriousness of their intent to regain Taiwan. That island nation has been a source of tension ever since the communist Chinese took over control of the mainland of China almost 60 years ago. In China’s view “the island now became a symbol of the incompleteness of the communist victory in the civil war.”<sup>31</sup> This fact must continuously be factored into any U.S. deterrence strategy.

### **Deterrence at Near Zero or Zero Nuclear Weapons**

President Obama in his 2009 Prague speech discussed an eventual goal of zero nuclear weapons if other nations could also be persuaded to follow that path. In the meantime, the President has indicated that the United States will maintain a nuclear deterrent capability to maintain the peace until such time as conditions are safe to move to zero nuclear weapons or near zero. Would a world of zero or near zero nuclear weapons make the world safer or more dangerous? Would this be a world of less conflict or would global zero make conventional combat more likely because it entailed less risk? Barry Blechman argues that complete or near total nuclear disarmament need not make conventional wars more likely.

As early as 1946, in the Acheson-Lilienthal plan, the United States, then the sole possessor of the nuclear bomb offered to give them up and advocated that nuclear weapons be banned. Truman wanted to avoid a world of nuclear weapons states. Still later, the United States pledged itself to general and complete nuclear disarmament in Article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). The reason is that U.S. and other world leaders feared a future world beset by nuclear wars and catastrophic casualties. In the view of those advocating global zero, they see it as the only means of preventing such a future.

For those who claim that nuclear weapons are the deterrent to war and nuclear disarmament is a path to more rather than fewer wars, Blechman cites some examples where possession of nuclear weapons did

not deter attacks from states armed only with conventional arms. North Korea and China fought the nuclear-armed United States in the Korean War. Egypt and Syria attacked a nuclear Israel in 1973. Argentina attempted to take back the Falkland Islands from a nuclear United Kingdom, and North Vietnam fought a nuclear United States in the Vietnam War. Also terrorist attacks took place inside Russia, the United States, United Kingdom, India and Pakistan despite their nuclear weapons status. Obviously, nuclear weapons do not deter all conflict. Also, at least 200 other conflicts took place among the non-nuclear weapons states in the 65 years of the nuclear era. The absence of nuclear weapons may or may not spur more conflicts – the evidence is mixed and unclear.

In a world of zero or near zero nuclear weapons, air and missile defenses could play a much greater role in deterrence. If such defenses were prohibited or greatly limited, even small nuclear arsenals of perhaps 100 nuclear weapons could inflict major damage on any aggressors and thus could be effective deterrents to war or escalation. Small nuclear arsenals would have to be protected and made more survivable by multiple basing modes probably relying more on defense of the deterrent, mobility and position location uncertainty to maintain their retaliatory capability.

In a global zero world there would always be the possibility and problem of the clandestine cache, a regime that cheated and withheld some of its nuclear weapons for the time when others had disarmed. Obviously, verification of global zero would be a major problem, and the world is a big place. Also, any nation possessing nuclear weapons where others did not might gain a decisive nuclear advantage in a crisis confrontation.

As the saying goes, “in the valley of the blind the one-eyed man is king.” Cheating and breakout and the responses to them would make a zero nuclear world possibly less safe than a world of small or large nuclear arsenals. If cheating and breakout were detected, the probability is an immediate return to the manufacture of new nuclear weapons by rivals of the cheating state.

The absence of nuclear weapons, if even achieved and sustained, could remove the threat of nuclear war. However, for the foreseeable future global zero is a distant mountaintop vision and the world has only inched toward the “base camp” where we could see any reasonable path to the top. In between that base camp position are nine nuclear weapons

states run by very different people who do not seem inclined to give up their nuclear arsenals any time soon.

### **Strategic Communications: a Key to Deterrence**

Richard Estes discussed the key role of strategic communications in deterrence. He emphasizes how important it is for the United States to deliver a coordinated and effective strategic communications to convince the world that our deterrence pledges and threats are believable. To maximize our influence, all departments and divisions of our government need to speak with one convincing voice to our allies that we will defend them and to our adversaries that aggression will be met with overwhelming force. Moreover, our words must be matched by our capabilities and actions.

It would appear that the United States government has to reconcile two contrary ideas. First it must communicate to potential rivals that U.S. nuclear forces will retaliate in kind if nuclear weapons are used against it or its allies. Second, and at the same time, the U.S. government is also trying to move the world toward non-use of nuclear weapons, reduction of existing nuclear forces, and to the eventual abandonment of nuclear weapons worldwide if it can be done safely and by all parties. To communicate this dual message to the world requires a solid strategic communications campaign.

Estes stresses that for this strategic communication campaign to be effective it must have a vision that consist of certain elements:

- First, the vision and message begins with the U.S. President. Whoever is in this position must tell the world the vision of the United States, a vision that our deterrent is credible and secure.
- Second, this vision should be consistent across the administration.
- Third, it must be solid enough that policies are based on the vision and message, but have the flexibility that allows the President and other top officials to be able to shape the vision.
- Fourth, the vision and its associated policies should always aim for the moral high ground that helps build confidence in its leadership.

- Fifth, this campaign should continue to promote the United States as a good steward of its own decreasing nuclear weapons arsenal while showing faithful commitment to its allies who rely on the U.S. nuclear deterrent.
- Sixth, it should have an element that heralds the very high threshold the U.S. has on use of nuclear weapons, but also that this threshold has limits and could be reached in very critical cases, triggering a U.S. nuclear response.
- Seventh, the vision and message should have an element that communicates our focus on rogue nations who would use their emerging nuclear programs to bully their neighbors, but also indicating that we still have an eye on past adversaries.
- Eighth, any message the U.S. sends should work to compel rational leaders of other nations to help in preventing rogue nations and terrorist from obtaining nuclear material and weapons.
- Ninth, “words matter. Actions matter. Allies and partners matter. Pulling all three together effectively and communicating a coherent, tough, and credible message to adversaries and allies is the essence of deterrence, and of strategic communication.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Implications of Resilience for Deterrence Success**

A very different aspect of deterrence deals with a nation’s ability to absorb an attack and bounce back. This is a form of deterrence by denial. If adversaries know that any attack they plan might be deflected or may serve to provoke more than to injure, they may not conduct it at all. Deterrence begins in the mind of the adversary and that leadership may decide it is not cost-effective to attack a target known for its resiliency. It may not be deemed worth the great effort it takes to plan and conduct an operation, wasting resources, if the plan entails a high probability of failure.

For a nation to develop resiliency they must strengthen in three key spheres: leadership, infrastructure, and population. The United States should strive to build resiliency to make it appear to our rivals as a harder much more difficult target. Once we have: (1) trained our leaders to cope better through national and regional exercises and study of future options,

(2) erected greater protections of our critical infrastructures and key national assets, and (3) have organized, trained and equipped our public to cope better with future crises, then the United States will be in a better position to absorb a punishing attack and bounce back, minimize losses, and win, making such an attack a move the rivals will ultimately regret.

However, for deterrence of such attacks to succeed, preparations must be mated with strategic communications that let the adversary know that their attacks will backfire. Resiliency must be developed and then advertised and this message must be based on fact and not just propaganda. The U.S. schools and educational system may be the best medium for helping to prepare the U.S. public to be resilient against natural or man-made catastrophic events.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

This study of deterrence focused on three approaches to understanding deterrence. Classical Cold War deterrence principles will probably be relevant in most state-to-state relationships but what worked in the U.S.-Soviet relationship may not fully work against every other rival state or coalition. Added to this approach, not replacing it, should be an attempt to tailor the U.S. deterrent posture to rival regimes based on a more precise understanding of such enemy leaders and their regimes. A third approach, one that can supplement but not replace the other two, is one based on analysis of influence or decision points in an ongoing or contemplated scenario to discern at what junctures what actions and communications may be required to deter war or further escalation of an ongoing conflict. Mating the elements of classic deterrence with a nuanced understanding of the enemy and combining those two approaches with detailed scenario analysis can give U.S. and allied leaders the analytic tools to craft an effective deterrent capability against rival states.

This is only part of the approach to deterring a WMD attack since terrorists and insurgents have now shown an interest in WMD capability and may be more prone to use it since they are harder to find and retaliate against. The program for deterring and preventing WMD terrorism will be improved with improved strategic communication to the Islamic world, better WMD attribution capabilities, more effective defenses and

programs for building U.S. and allied public resilience. Finally, deterrence will be best facilitated by letting aiders and abettors of such terrorists know they will be identified and become targets of our retaliation if WMD is used and if they were found to be part of the chain of custody from the source to the terrorist group.

There are many means to thin out the WMD threat. The United States employs three such programs: *nonproliferation* to prevent proliferation of WMD to adversaries, *counterproliferation* to use military means to offset such capabilities where they exist, and *consequence management* capabilities to survive, recover, fight and win despite such attacks.

At the heart of the counterproliferation program is deterrence of war and escalation of war. This program promises an adversary that an attack on the United States or an allied state will be catastrophically counterproductive. Moreover, U.S. and allied active and passive defenses as well as offensive capabilities can help prevent some of the harm intended from happening even if a rival strikes.

It is well that there is a rebirth of thinking about the deterrence mission for the combination of deterrence-by-punishment and deterrence-by-denial of enemy success are the strongest U.S. and allied tools available for keeping the peace.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This volume does not discuss deterrence of WMD proliferation. Instead the focus is on deterrence of military conflict or escalation of such conflict.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, Franklin, "Chapter 3 - Tailoring U.S. Strategic Deterrence Effects on Russia," p. 43

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 44

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 48

<sup>5</sup> Lt. Col. Marc A. Peterson, "The New Triad," Professional Studies Paper, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, (Dec. 10, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Guthe, Kurt, "Chapter 11 - Deterrence, the Triad, and Possible Dyads."

<sup>7</sup> The Midgetman, MGM-134, was developed in the 1980s for the U.S. Air Force. It was a three stage solid-fueled small mobile ICBM seated on a Hardened Mobile Launcher. Designed to use a "cold launch" method for lift-off it would augment the existing Minuteman and Peacekeeper missile systems. The program was terminated in 1992 as the Cold War ended. See <http://www.designation-systems.net/dusrm/m-134.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, "The New Triad."

<sup>9</sup> Statement of Anthony Cordesman of CSIS about most states in the Middle East.

<sup>10</sup> Post, Jerrold, "Chapter 2- Actor-Specific Behavioral Models of Adversaries: A Key Requirement for Tailored Deterrence," p. 37

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 37-38

<sup>12</sup> As the May 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy states "we will draw on diplomacy, development, and international norms and institutions to help resolve disagreements, prevent conflict, and maintain peace, mitigating where possible the need for the use of force. This means credibly underwriting U.S. defense commitments with *tailored approaches to deterrence* and ensuring the U.S. military continues to have the necessary capabilities across all domains—land, air, sea, space, and cyber."

<sup>13</sup> Giles, Greg, "Chapter 5- Deterring a Nuclear-Armed Iran from Adventurism and Nuclear Use," p. 151

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, Bruce, "Chapter 6 - Deterring North Korea from Employment of WMD in Future Korean Conflicts and Crises," p.191.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Miller, Michael, "Chapter 14 – Nuclear Attribution as Deterrence," pp. 451-452.

<sup>25</sup> Schneider, Barry, "Chapter 7 - Deterrence & Saddam Hussein: Lessons from the 1990-1991 Gulf War," p. 241.

<sup>26</sup> McCready, Douglas, "Chapter 4 -Crisis Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait," p.63.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Estes, Richard, "Chapter 12 - The Role of Strategic Communications in Deterrence: Lesson from History," p. 380.