

Question 1 (Tasking for the Policy, Weapons, and Intelligence Requirements Subcommittees):

[The Policy Committee was requested to prepare a Terms of Reference that could be used as a baseline for the other subcommittees to use in expanding the concept of Deterrence of the Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction.]

Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence

1995

Introduction

Over the period of the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union developed an understanding of deterrence and its role in preventing war with one another. With the end of the Cold War and the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, deterrence takes on a broader multinational dimension. This paper addresses the broader view of deterrence and the question, "How do we deter nations, other than the Former Soviet Union, from using Weapons of Mass Destruction?"

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Overview

Framework for Question I

A. Deterrence: a process that goes beyond the rational

1. Deterrence is an active and dynamic process.
2. Deterrence can't be just
 - a theory
 - a doctrine
 - a concept
 - a strategy
3. It must affect the emotions, as well as the rational mind, of an adversary.
4. It needs to change as leaders (on either side) change.

B. Knowing values and communicating them

1. We should inaugurate the deterrence process by first considering the value of US interests that are, or may be, threatened.

If US vital interests are attacked, such an approach can appropriately blur the distinctions between the different types of WMD that are used, putting a value hierarchy in its place.

2. We must communicate, specifically, what we want to deter without saying what is permitted.
3. We must understand in advance, to the degree possible, what an adversary values.

C. Keeping our options open and our determination clear

1. We must be ambiguous about details of our response (or preemption) if what we value is threatened, but it must be clear that our actions would have terrible consequences for them.
2. We should have available the full range of responses—conventional weapons, special operations forces, and nuclear weapons, so that we can decide which to use based on the circumstances.
3. Our deterrence plans need to be country- and leadership-specific.
4. We must communicate our capability to hold at risk what they value and, if possible, to protect what we value.
5. Without perceived national will and actual capability, none of the above steps work.

An adversary must perceive that we have the national will to carry out responses.

- Deterrence of the Soviets never depended on having "rational" leaders. Stalin was in charge when the Soviets first began a build-up of nuclear arms, and it is difficult to consider him as an example of a rational leader. This is perhaps the grossest error of those who make arguments that the new multilateral threats are "undeterrable" because the new regional actors are not likely to be rational. Stalin was hardly more rational than they. The very framework of a concept that depends on instilling fear and uncertainty in the minds of opponents was never, nor can it be, strictly rational. Nor has it ever strictly required rational adversaries in order to function.
- What should be sobering to all of us in viewing deterrence as a process is that its outcome was never, nor can it ever be, strictly predictable. Yet its degree of success will, in large measure, correlate with the amount of effort we put into the process. This should be our guide to adapting the deterrence process for future threats. The critics would otherwise be correct: if we put no effort into deterring these threats, they will be "undeterrable" by definition. If, on the other hand, we expend the efforts necessary to give the maximum likelihood of deterring new aggressors' use of WMD, we will have maximized the chance that our efforts will be rewarded by the prevention of such hostilities and the massive casualties that would result.

Deterrence can't be just

- a theory
- a doctrine
- a concept
- a strategy

—As a part of the Policy Subcommittee's efforts, _____ has done an outstanding study of the literature to examine deterrence as a theory, a strategy, a doctrine, and a policy. His evaluation includes the work of analysts, historians, and even neuroscientists. What emerges is a quite complicated picture—one not likely or easily reduced to a simple predictive formula, but rather a still evolving concept—more like watching human history unfold than a static set of prescriptive principles that, if carefully applied, could be used to ensure peace and freedom.

It must affect the emotions, as well as the rational mind, of an adversary.

- The ways in which humans process and react to information is doubtless one of the most complicated and least understood processes. Yet, scholars working in a number of disparate disciplines—philosophy, neurobiology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology—suggest that this complexity of human behavior can be studied and understood. This is especially true for the issue of self-preservation. Rousseau wrote: "Man's first law is to watch over his own preservation; his first care he owes to himself; and as soon as he reaches the age of reason, he becomes the only judge of the best means to preserve himself; he becomes his own master."

— In these two contexts it is easy to see the difficulty we have caused ourselves in putting forward declaratory policies such as the "Negative Security Assurances," which were put forward to encourage nations to sign up for the Nonproliferation Treaty. It is a mistake to single out nuclear weapons from the remainder of other WMD, without making the tie between the damages (or potential damages) that the US would find unacceptable from the threat or use of any of these weapons. It is important for the US and other major powers to address the issue of universal membership within the NPT, the BW Convention, and the CW Convention. Treating these issues in a piecemeal fashion will not be in the best interests of our long-term security. It should be noted, however, that there are critical differences between these agreements — the BW and CW Conventions outlaw such weapons for all signatories, while the NPT makes a distinction between the possession of nuclear weapons by the five original nuclear weapons powers and everyone else.

We must understand in advance, to the degree possible, what an adversary values.

- The concept of "value-based targeting" is not new. But just as for deterrence itself, it is similarly fraught with difficulty, if one tries to be too rational in considering how best to determine what a particular adversary values. Determining what a nation's leadership values is complex, since, to a considerable extent, it is rooted in a nation's culture. One is almost certain to err if "mirror-imaging" is used as a surrogate for understanding an adversary's values.
- Getting inputs from intelligence assets on the ground within the adversary's territory, along with other intelligence information—such as intercepted communications—is likely crucial in deciding what to target. The usual categories will, of course, include strategic weaponry (both deployed and in storage or production), other military capabilities, and war-supporting industry, along with national leadership. But it may be necessary to consider other unique motivators of either a society or its leaders.
- The story of the tactic applied by the Soviets during the earliest days of the Lebanon chaos is a case in point. When three of its citizens and their driver were kidnapped and killed, two days later the Soviets had delivered to the leader of the revolutionary activity a package containing a single testicle—that of his eldest son—with a message that said in no uncertain terms, "never bother our people again." It was successful throughout the period of the conflicts there. Such an insightful tailoring of what is valued within a culture, and its weaving into a deterrence message, along with a projection of the capability that can be mustered, is the type of creative thinking that must go into deciding what to hold at risk in framing deterrent targeting for multilateral situations in the future. At the same time this story illustrates just how much more difficult it is for a society such as ours to frame its deterrent messages—that our society would never condone the taking of such actions makes it more difficult for us to deter acts of terrorism.

B. Knowing values and communicating them

We should inaugurate the deterrence process by first considering the value of US interests that are, or may be, threatened.

If US vital interests are attacked, this approach can appropriately blur the distinctions between the different types of WMD that are used, putting a value hierarchy in its place.

- The first focus in achieving deterrence is to articulate the specific act or acts that we want to prevent. We must first make clear to ourselves, and then to a potential adversary, the level of value we place on certain people, assets, and territory (e.g. that which would be at risk in any attack against the US homeland). It must similarly be clear that what we seek to deter has such a direct and strong relationship to our most important national interests, with few if any options but to carry through on our deterrent threat, that we can, and will, act. Thus, deterrent statements tied to direct defense of a homeland carry an inherently stronger credibility than deterrent threats extended in behalf of others. But the strength of resolve to act in behalf of others can be demonstrated through past performance in such alliances and when it appears that there is a strong consensus and emotional or cultural attachment among our leaders.
- This "value-based approach" can help to be the great equalizer in blurring the distinction between an adversary's use of a particular weapon of mass destruction. There are levels of damage or destruction that we find unacceptable whether caused by (or resulting from) nuclear, biological, chemical, or conventional armaments.

We must communicate, specifically, what we want to deter without saying what is permitted.

- It will be important to frequently communicate with the adversary so that there is little room for doubt as to what the US holds of sufficient value that we seek to deter attack against it, and for which we are willing to greatly escalate the level of conflict. The communications should be delivered in a timely fashion, in terms that can be easily understood, leaving no doubt of its seriousness, nor the authority of the communicator.
- While it is crucial to explicitly define and communicate the acts or damages that we would find unacceptable and, hence, what it is that we are specifically seeking to deter, we should not be very specific about our response. It is, however, crucial that the level of our commitment to the things we value be unfaltering, and that the adversary have little doubt of this. Without saying exactly what the consequences will be if the US has to respond, whether the reaction would either be responsive or preemptive, we must communicate in the strongest ways possible the unbreakable link between our vital interests and the potential harm that will be directly attributable to anyone who damages (or even credibly threatens to damage) that which we hold of value. Thus, it is undesirable to adopt declaratory policies such as "no first use" which serve to specifically limit US nuclear deterrence goals without providing equitable returns.

-- Fear is not the possession of the rational mind alone. Deterrence is thus a form of bargaining which exploits a capability for inflicting damage at such a level as to truly cause hurt far greater than military defeat. Although we want any rational calculations about future state to caution against action, to be most effective, deterrence must create fear in the mind of the adversary—fear that he will not achieve his objectives, fear that his losses and pain will far outweigh any potential gains, fear that he will be punished. It should ultimately create the fear of extinction—extinction of either the adversary's leaders themselves or their national independence, or both. Yet, there must always appear to be a "door to salvation" open to them should they reverse course.

— The emotional fears that we are seeking to invoke in an adversary should be compelling, but should not be paralyzing. He must be free to make choices, specifically, the choice to abandon the behaviors or actions we are seeking to deter. A threat is most compelling when an enemy cannot rationalize away the destruction, pain, suffering, and chaos you are threatening to unleash if deterrence fails.

It needs to change as leaders (on either side) change.

— No single method can determine how best to induce terror in the mind of an adversary. Similarly, the personal characteristics of US leaders will be variables that affect how, or whether, an adversary's leaders are apt to believe the stated deterrent threat. Different leaders will be motivated in different ways.

— Examining how leaders in the past have reacted when faced with deterrence choices is one of the best means of demonstrating its value for the future. For example, Hitler possessed chemical weapons, and certainly nothing in his value system contradicted their use against Russian soldiers or civilians. Such use might well have salvaged a losing campaign. But he knew that both Roosevelt and Churchill had stated categorically that any use of chemical weapons by German armed forces would be met with retaliation in kind, and that the retaliation could well be directed against German industrial centers. Allied long-range bomber forces were already conducting bombing raids on a scale which made credible the threat that the destruction would be greatly escalated should chemical weapons be introduced. Fearing retaliation and its consequences for the German war-supporting industries, Hitler did not use chemical weapons.

— In a similar vein, the warning by George Bush to Saddam Hussein, in January of 1991 prior to Desert Storm, states that "the United States will not tolerate the use of chemical or biological weapons" and further: "The American people would demand the strongest possible response. You and your country will pay a terrible price if you order unconscionable acts of this sort." In this case as well, such weapons were not used in the ensuing conflict. Members of the UN Special Commission on Iraq, who made inspections throughout that country after the war, speculated the letter had been effective since everywhere they went individuals had copies of the Bush letter, even though there was almost no other document in common.

C. Keeping our options open and our determination clear

We must be ambiguous about details of our response (or preemption) if what we value is threatened, but it must be clear that our actions would have terrible consequences.

- After the text of the Bush 1991 letter to Hussein was made public, the press speculated whether the US would use nuclear weapons should Iraq fail to heed the warning. After the White House press spokesman had too quickly discounted such possibilities, President Bush himself appeared before the press (on Feb. 5, 1991) to discuss the matter. When asked whether if Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons the United States might "in turn use weapons of mass destruction," he avoided a direct reply but said, "I think it's better never to say what you may be considering." He said he was "leaving the matter there" because he wanted the Iraqi leader to "think very carefully" about launching a chemical attack "because I would like to have every possible chance that he decides not to do this."
- Because of the value that comes from the ambiguity of what the US may do to an adversary if the acts we seek to deter are carried out, it hurts to portray ourselves as too fully rational and cool-headed. The fact that some elements may appear to be potentially "out of control" can be beneficial to creating and reinforcing fears and doubts within the minds of an adversary's decision makers. This essential sense of fear is the working force of deterrence. That the US may become irrational and vindictive if its vital interests are attacked should be a part of the national persona we project to all adversaries.

We should have available the full range of responses—conventional weapons, special operations forces, and nuclear weapons—so that we can decide which to use based on the circumstances.

- Just as nuclear weapons are our most potent tool of deterrence, nevertheless they are blunt weapons of destruction and thus are likely always to be our weapons of last resort. Although we are not likely to use them in less than matters of the greatest national importance, or in less than extreme circumstances, nuclear weapons always cast a shadow over any crisis or conflict in which the US is engaged. Thus, deterrence through the threat of use of nuclear weapons will continue to be our top military strategy.
- Unlike CW or BW, the extreme destruction from a nuclear explosion is immediate, with few if any palliatives available to reduce its effects. It is no wonder then that the use of nuclear weapons has become elevated to the highest level of threat that is possible. The US has now eschewed the use of either chemical or biological weapons and is seeking the complete elimination of such weapons by all nations through the CWC and BWC, but we would consider the complete elimination of our nuclear weapons only in the context of complete and general disarmament. Thus, since we believe it is impossible to "uninvent" nuclear weapons or to prevent the clandestine manufacture of some number of them, nuclear weapons seem destined to be the centerpiece of US strategic deterrence for the foreseeable future.

- In the context of non-Russian states, the penalty for using Weapons of Mass Destruction should not be just military defeat, but the threat of even worse consequences. President Clinton's statement of July 11, 1994, about North Korea gave some of the flavor of these "other consequences" when he said: "...it is pointless for them to develop nuclear weapons. Because if they ever use them it would be the end of their country." Similarly, President Bush's statement to Saddam Hussein on January 13, 1991, also telegraphed greater consequences: "You and your country will pay a terrible price if you order unconscionable acts of this sort [the use of chemical or biological weapons or terrorist acts against the coalition nations]." Should we ever fail to deter such an aggressor, we must make good on our deterrent statement in such a convincing way that the message to others will be so immediately discernible as to bolster deterrence thereafter.
- We should always attempt to respond to any such breaches of deterrence in ways that minimize the numbers of civilian casualties. Particularly when dealing with the less than nation-threatening aggression which is likely to characterize WMD conflicts with other than Russia, the US does not require the "ultimate deterrent"—that a nation's citizens must pay with their lives for failure to stop their national leaders from undertaking aggression. A capability to create a fear of "national extinction" (as discussed above) by denying their leaders the ability to project power thereafter, but without having to inflict massive civilian casualties, will not only galvanize the deterrence convictions of the US leadership, but will simultaneously help to prevent misinterpretation on the part of the enemy as to whether the US would be willing to act.