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THREE ITEMS IN ONE:
DETERRENCE AS CONCEPT, RESEARCH PROGRAM, AND POLITICAL ISSUE¹

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Introduction

This essay seeks to place recent debates about deterrence in a larger context. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath helped trigger a new round of research and debate on deterrence, of which the present volume can be seen as an example. This chapter steps back from post-9/11 developments to consider how they might relate to deterrence theory and practice before 9/11. The primary concern of this chapter is to assist policy analysis rather than to address theory debates.

September 11 created an impetus for new deterrence research because the 9/11 attacks ushered in a dual crisis for deterrence – in the real world and in U.S. policy. First, September 11 led to new doubts about whether the strategy of deterrence could in reality still work. Most fundamentally, if deterrence is taken to rest upon a threat of retaliation, it is hard to figure out how to retaliate against people who already plan to kill themselves in order to carry out a suicide attack. Second, 9/11 helped bring about a shift in U.S. policy. The George W. Bush administration began emphasizing a new doctrine of preemption, which it applied to rogue states as well as terrorists. Many observers concluded that the Bush doctrine meant that, whether or not it remained viable, deterrence had been cast aside by U.S. leaders.²

Both inferences are incorrect. Although there are limits to deterrence, it is still possible to achieve some deterrence against both rogue states and terrorists. And the Bush administration did not abandon deterrence; it continues to be a component of U.S. national security strategy.³

² For example, a critique of Bush administration foreign policy by two senior scholars at the Brookings Institution stated that the administration had “effectively abandoned a decades-long consensus that put deterrence and containment at the heart of American foreign policy.” Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 125. While Daalder and Lindsay represent a liberal perspective, many conservatives reached a similar conclusion. In his typically colorful manner, Colin Gray declared, “The Bush administration did not formally retire deterrence as concept or policy, but it left observers in no doubt that in the global war that it declared against terrorism, deterrence generally would be left on the bench.” Colin S. Gray, “Maintaining Effective Deterrence,” Strategic Studies Institute monograph (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, August 2003), 7.

³ This paper will not address current U.S. strategy, but in other work in progress I describe in detail the Bush administration’s continued efforts to apply deterrence and provide a critical evaluation of its approach to deterrence.

The twin challenges posed by suicide terrorism and the U.S. embrace of preemption did, however, provide good reasons to reexamine deterrence. As a result, there has been an outpouring of studies seeking to assess deterrence against the “asymmetric” threats that have dominated U.S. concerns in the early years of the 21st century.⁴

Despite rhetoric suggesting that “9/11 changed everything,” it is not the case that all pre-9/11 experience was rendered irrelevant. This chapter identifies certain themes in deterrence theory and practice before 9/11 that could prove helpful in ascertaining potential uses of deterrence in the current security environment. The chapter has two major foci: a conceptual analysis and historical reflections. The chapter begins with a conceptual analysis because the most basic question raised by 9/11 and the U.S. preemption doctrine is whether deterrence still works. The answer one gives to this question, however, may depend on what one thinks deterrence is. Defined one way, deterrence may appear irrelevant, but under a different definition deterrence might still be deemed applicable. It is hence worth reconsidering the concept of deterrence.

The conceptual analysis will argue for a broader concept of deterrence than specialists in security studies have traditionally employed. This volume’s focus on complexity reflects a widespread perception that deterrence today confronts a more complex set of challenges; if so, we need to think in a more complex way about the range of potential responses. Developing a

For a preliminary version, see Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Whatever Happened to Deterrence?” paper prepared for the ISSS/ISAC annual meeting, Tucson, AZ, Oct. 26-28, 2006.

⁴ Some good, representative examples include Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002); Ian R. Kenyon and John Simpson, eds., special issue of *Contemporary Security Policy*, 25, no. 1 (April 2004); Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done,” *International Security*, 30, no. 3 (winter 2005/06); Derek D. Smith, *Deterring America: Rogue States and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David P. Auerswald, “Deterring Nonstate WMD Attacks,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 121, no. 4 (winter 2006-07); and James H. Lebovic, *Deterring International Terrorism and Rogue States: US National Security Policy after 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2007).

broader concept of deterrence might help people think more creatively about alternative ways to practice deterrence and hence enhance the chances for identifying effective deterrent strategies.

The conceptual discussion is followed by a historical analysis, reflecting the fact that deterrence already has a long history in the realms of both theory and policy. This part of the chapter offers historical observations on deterrence in three contexts: as a tool of statecraft, a subject of policy debate, and the focus of an academic research program. The historical section shows that deterrence has always had ups and downs and that reservations about deterrence are not new. The chapter ascribes this partly to changes in the systemic environment, but only partly. It also notes that, even when the strategic incentives for using deterrence have been strong, the status of deterrence has often been tenuous. In both scholarly research and actual policy debates, deterrence has usually had many critics.

Despite this, deterrence has a way of surviving and still being employed. This history suggests it should not be hastily dismissed in light of current challenges. Politically, deterrence tends to reflect a compromise around people's second choices. In practice, debates about deterrence frequently are not about deterrence so much as the alternatives to deterrence. When support grows for either relatively more soft-line or hard-line alternatives, those who are skeptical about those alternatives tend to rally behind deterrence. Thus, in recent years, support for deterrence has often been based primarily on reservations about preemption and regime change.

The chapter concludes that this history shows the continuing relevance of the normative model of rational policy analysis. Historically, people have often evaluated deterrence relative to potential alternatives, at least informally, but it would be desirable to do this more rigorously. Deterrence will not always be the best choice. At times, however, the case for deterrence will

echo Churchill's famous comment about democracy: in some circumstances, deterrence is the worst strategy there is, except for all the others. This chapter closes with some suggestions for how social science research could assist rational policy analysis with respect to deterrence.

The analysis in this chapter accepts the conclusions of other recent reassessments of deterrence: the strategy remains viable, but it will not be as central as it was during the Cold War.⁵ At the same time, the chapter seeks to spur efforts to go beyond current theory and practice by arguing for the broadest possible concept of deterrence and for greater self-awareness about the politics of deterrence. Deterrence has always involved choices: whether or not to use it, and how best to implement it. In the more complex security environment discussed in this volume, these choices can be harder to make. By placing post-9/11 debates in a larger context of reflections on the concept and pre-9/11 history of deterrence, this chapter aims to offer some pointers that could improve our odds of making good choices.

Why This Matters

There are three important reasons to continue to assess the role that deterrence can play against contemporary threats. First, if the preemption doctrine leads U.S. leaders to dismiss deterrence more completely than they need to, this could lead the United States into unnecessary wars. If the United States attacks or invades a country that could have been contained and deterred, the United States will pay potentially high costs in blood, treasure and diplomatic friction with other countries when those costs could have been avoided. The better a state's ability to recognize when deterrence is likely to work, the better its chances of saving preemption for only those cases where it is most likely to be advisable.

⁵ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004).

Second, even if one has grave doubts about deterrence and strongly supports preemption, the problem remains that it is not possible to undertake preventive military action against all potential threats simultaneously. While some threats are being preempted, others will have to be contained and deterred until they can be dealt with. Estimating which situations pose the gravest dangers of deterrence failure and which have higher chances of being deterred for the time being is thus necessary even if a doctrine of preemption serves as the primary element of strategy. Switching to a doctrine of preemption does not eliminate the need to practice deterrence. Hence, even supporters of preemption should not dismiss deterrence and should instead be interested in identifying where it has the best chances of working.

Third, because deterrence remains an element of policy and is likely to continue to do so, it is important to consider how to make it work best. Different approaches to deterrence could vary in effectiveness. Careful assessments of “what makes deterrence work” of the kind that have been widespread in the literature continue to be needed. Also potentially valuable, however, will be efforts to identify new ways of achieving deterrence, if such exist, and to determine how to make them politically sustainable. The analysis that follows seeks to stimulate such new thinking.

It is important to keep in mind that deterrence is not always appropriate. Using deterrence in such situations is not cost free – it can be counterproductive. For example, when dealing with an actor that is motivated by insecurity, deterrent threats might only heighten their sense of insecurity. This could lead the other actor to escalate or attack in response, meaning an inappropriate use of deterrence can lead to exactly the result it was intended to prevent.⁶

⁶ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), ch. 3; Janice Gross Stein, “Deterrence and Reassurance,” in Philip E. Tetlock et al., eds., *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

At the same time, although the security environment has changed since the Cold War, security threats have not disappeared. There are situations in which deterrence could be crucial, provided it can be made reasonably effective in today's complex international system. In thinking about whether and how deterrence might be applied against contemporary threats, it can be helpful to return to the underlying concept.

The Concept of Deterrence: Reasons for a Broad Approach

It is possible to distinguish the concept of deterrence from the variety of strategies for practicing deterrence.⁷ Before considering possible deterrence strategies, it is useful to reflect on the underlying concept, because our understanding of the concept will affect the range of strategies we consider. This section argues for broadening the concept from its usual connotations in International Relations (IR). It seeks to widen the concept not only relative to the stereotypical view of Cold War era nuclear strategy but also relative to the definitions used in academic studies of conventional deterrence.

The reasons for seeking a broader concept are normative. There are still security threats against which deterrence might be a valid response. If deterrence can be made effective against such threats, it will generally be worth attempting in order to reduce the chances of suffering a potentially catastrophic attack. When deterrence is necessary and has a good probability of succeeding, it will also usually be preferable to preemption because it provides security while avoiding the costs and risks involved in using military force. To put it simply, in situations in which it is appropriate, deterrence, if successful, has the attractive quality that it maintains both peace and security. There are considerable doubts, however, about whether traditional

⁷ Alexander L. George, "The Need for Influence Theory and Actor-Specific Behavioral Models of Adversaries," *Comparative Strategy*, 22, no. 5 (Dec. 2003), 480.

deterrence will work against contemporary threats.⁸ This makes it worthwhile to consider whether there are new or different ways to practice deterrence. In short, it is important to find the approaches to deterrence that are most likely to be effective. Broadening the concept of deterrence may help us imagine new ways to practice deterrence that have better odds of success or lower costs.

Given these normative considerations, it is important to consider whether broadening the concept of deterrence is legitimate. This section will provide three justifications for working with a broader concept of deterrence. First, deterrence has already long been employed in a much wider range of circumstances than traditional IR uses of the term encompass. Second, a broader definition is compatible with certain uses of the term in ordinary language. Third, recent developments in U.S. strategy are already moving toward a broader concept.

The diversity of deterrence applications

The first reason to embrace a broad understanding of deterrence is that this reflects reality. Deterrence has been employed since long before the Cold War and in situations far beyond international relations. As a concept, the idea of deterrence is quite old, appears in different contexts, and takes various forms. These three observations about deterrence provide one line of argument for working with a fairly broad concept of deterrence.

First, although it is sometimes associated with the Cold War, deterrence is actually much older. Indeed, the use of deterrence has likely been part of human affairs from the beginning. The first cave parent who attempted to prevent a child from misbehaving by threatening to punish future misdeeds was practicing a form of deterrence. As an element of statecraft,

⁸ These doubts are not necessarily all valid. Elsewhere, I have argued that skepticism about deterring WMD-armed rogue states is likely overstated. See Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Deterrence or Preemption?" *Current History*, 105, no. 694 (Nov. 2006).

deterrence has been around at least since the Roman General Vegetius declared, “If you want peace, prepare for war.”

Second, while IR scholars think of deterrence in the context of trying to prevent military attacks, this is not the only context in which deterrence is utilized. Apart from the child-rearing example just mentioned, deterrence is important in criminology, where law enforcement measures are evaluated in part in terms of their ability to deter crime. Lawrence Freedman, and Robert Jervis in his chapter for this volume, both point out that attempts to deter even extend beyond the human race to other species: Freedman cites various insects that use deceptive markings and other techniques to persuade potential predators to keep their distance.⁹

Third, not only can deterrence arise in different contexts, but, these examples show, it can also take different forms. Since Glenn Snyder’s seminal work, most specialists have recognized at least two distinct paths to deterrence: punishment and denial.¹⁰ The parent’s threat to its child is a form of deterrence by punishment, while the well-known Latin adage implies deterrence by denial: the ability to fight and deny the other side its war aims can convince it not to attack in the first place. Because terrorism occupies a gray zone between crime and interstate war, ideas about deterrence developed in other contexts might be helpful in dealing with current asymmetric threats, and we should not limit our thinking about deterrence to the stock of ideas developed in strategic studies. Given the variety of contexts and forms in which deterrence has arisen over time, it would be appropriate to have a concept of deterrence broad enough to capture this variety.

Ordinary-language analysis

⁹ Freedman, *Deterrence*, 6; Robert Jervis, “Deterrence, Rogue States, and the Bush Administration,” 1.

¹⁰ Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment* (Princeton University Center of International Studies, Research Monograph No. 1, 1959); Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

A second reason for thinking broadly comes from stepping outside the international relations domain to consider ordinary language. There is some irony here because, in contrast to many terms used by international relations scholars, we might expect the meaning of deterrence to be widely understood. Ask the average person on the street what an “epistemic community” is, and odds are they will look at you blankly if not hasten to get away. Yet nearly every lay person could offer a definition of deterrence, and their definitions would likely all be about the same: threatening to do something that will make the costs of an action outweigh the benefits so as to convince others not to do it.

Our very familiarity with the word “deterrence” threatens to unduly narrow our understanding of it. To see this, consider that the same root can be expressed as a noun or a verb. The terms “deterrence” and “deterrent” are usually nouns, or sometimes adjectives (e.g., a deterrence strategy). The concept, however, also comes in a verb form: “to deter.” Logically, these should all have congruent meanings. Utilizing the passive voice, imagine an actor who is deterred. We could inquire about what caused this actor to be deterred. Anything we then identify that actually served to deter an actor might be something that could be utilized deliberately as a form of deterrence. The usages that exist in ordinary language make it clear that the category of things that can be described as “a deterrent” should be equivalent to the list of things that can act “to deter.” If the policy goal is to be able to deter, it is worth thinking broadly about the types of measures that might produce this effect rather than limiting ourselves to a single, narrow definition of deterrence.¹¹

This cuts against the grain of much IR writing on deterrence. As with any concept that becomes important in academic study, there can be debate over whether or not to restrict usage

¹¹ This has a parallel in Lawrence Freedman’s suggestion to revive use of the now-archaic term “determent” (*Deterrence*, 8). Determent refers to an end state in which deterrence of an actor has successfully been achieved. If the goal is to achieve determent, anything that accomplishes this goal could be considered a form of deterrence.

to a narrow definition. In strategic studies, the preference is usually to maintain a narrow definition. Some argue that deterrence inherently implies the threat of punishment, so that even denial should be considered an aspect of defense, not deterrence. The most thorough and careful discussion of the concept of deterrence remains the work of Patrick Morgan. Morgan argues deterrence should be defined as “the threat of *military* retaliation to forestall a *military* attack.” If we include other means, we risk conflating deterrence with other types of preventive measures, while if we include other ends we may make deterrence equivalent to foreign policy as a whole.¹²

This made some sense in the context of Cold War debates. During the Cold War, deterrence came to be associated with the effort to prevent nuclear strikes by threatening massive nuclear retaliation. In effect, the connotations associated with massive retaliation and the subsequent strategy of mutual assured destruction (MAD) displaced all other denotations of the word “deterrence.” To limit the definition to this usage however is to reduce the concept of deterrence to just one form of deterrent strategy.¹³ Morgan is right that not every effort at prevention should be considered deterrence. For example, there are efforts underway to delegitimize terrorism so that many who might support it today become convinced it is morally wrong in any circumstance; these are a form of suasion, not deterrence. However, there are other steps that are being taken or that could be taken whose aim is to deter, even though they do not rely on threatening massive punishment in retaliation for a military attack. For example, efforts to harden potential terrorist targets are intended in part to increase the chances a terror operation will fail if it is attempted; such efforts are also intended, though, to convince terrorists that such a

¹² Patrick M. Morgan, “Deterrence in Foreign Policy,” *Armed Forces & Society*, 3, no. 4 (Spring 1977), and *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), quote at 29, emphasis in original.

¹³ Morgan, it should be made clear, does not restrict deterrence to this image of Cold War nuclear strategy. His definition also accommodates conventional deterrence. Morgan does limit usage of the term purely to military deterrence however.

prospective operation actually will fail, because this might deter them from trying it in the first place.

There is a tension here between the logic of academic social science and the logic of policy. In social science, we are admonished to select on the independent and not the dependent variable, to define terms precisely, and to beware of conceptual stretching. All of this aids in the tasks of hypothesis testing and generalization. If deterrence is defined narrowly as using the threat of military retaliation to prevent military attack, it is possible to identify like cases for comparison or large-N data analysis. From this, we can learn a great deal about military threats: the overall likelihood they will work, other variables correlated with their success or failure, and the features of a military threat that are likely to make it more effective.

Such knowledge is policy relevant, but it is not a policy analysis. The threat of military retaliation is just one option, which has to be compared against other options. Some of these other options might also have the potential to deter an unwanted action; in some cases, they might work better than threats of highly punishing retaliation. If there are other ways to deter, they should also be considered deterrent options. In a full policy analysis, the various deterrent options would also be evaluated against non-deterrent options. In choosing policy, we in effect select on the dependent variable – the goal we want to achieve dominates the analysis. Ideally, we try to identify as many different independent variables – i.e., policy options – as possible that might contribute to achieving the goal. If the goal is to deter some unwanted action, then any measure that might contribute to achieving the goal should be considered a possible form of deterrence. Studying the effects of military threats is useful, but it is not equivalent to studying deterrence.

In addressing the complex deterrence situations being analyzed in this volume, policy concerns make it advisable to embrace a broader definition than normal social science would recommend. If there are alternatives to the use of traditional military threats that are morally acceptable and could help deter terrorism or the use of WMD, it is important to identify them. The traditional IR definition of deterrence facilitates the social science objective of cumulating knowledge within an existing research program. In the policy realm, however, it could limit our ability to imagine alternative approaches and unnecessarily restrict the range of options we analyze. If there is a non-traditional approach that would be an effective deterrent, it could provide security while making it possible to avoid an unnecessary preventive war. This makes it imperative not to reduce the concept of deterrence to a single, narrow strategy.

To give an example, one might make an analogy to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The goal of the ICC is to hold individual leaders – rather than states as a whole – accountable for crimes against humanity. One reason for creating a system to put leaders on trial and assign punishment is deterrent: the hope is that the prospect of individual accountability will dissuade some leaders from perpetrating such crimes. It is unclear at this point whether or not the ICC will be an effective deterrent. If such an approach looks promising, however, one could attempt to apply a similar approach to more traditional national security concerns. One can already see such reasoning in action in U.S. warnings before the Iraq war that Iraqi military leaders would be tried for war crimes in response to any use of chemical or biological weapons by their troops.¹⁴ Efforts to get states to criminalize WMD development and trafficking by private actors have a similar logic.¹⁵ Such ideas do not replace traditional deterrence – threats of military retaliation are probably still the best way to deter rogue states from launching WMD

¹⁴ Wade Boese, “U.S. Issued Warning on Threat of Possible Iraqi WMD Use,” *Arms Control Today*, 33, no. 4 (May 2003).

attacks. For lesser activities, however, threats of massive retaliation might not be credible, and it would help to have a broad framework that might assist in identifying other deterrence options.

Deterrence defined

The suggestion to adopt a broader notion of deterrence has a parallel in recent debates over narrow versus broad definitions of security. Here, as well, it has proven useful to separate the underlying concept from its varied applications. David Baldwin has shown that there is a core concept of security that is recognizable in different applications of the concept, but is still delimited in a way that distinguishes security from other values that might serve as policy goals.¹⁶ This means that adjectives become important as a way to distinguish different forms of security. National security, international security, and human security all involve a concept of security, but the adjectives specify different referent objects (the state, the system, and individuals, respectively) and imply different threats (military attacks by external actors, instability, and actions that harm people within a state, respectively). This suggests we should start with an abstract, generic concept of deterrence, then use adjectives or other modifiers to indicate how deterrence will be applied in a particular context.

With this approach, it is still possible to talk about and examine deterrence in the way scholars in security studies think about it, without conflating it with other possible approaches to deterrence. One could label it “traditional deterrence” or “classical deterrence” in those situations where the addition of an adjective would help clarify the type of deterrence to which one is referring.

¹⁵ Mitchell B. Reiss, Director, Office of Policy Planning, U.S. State Department, “Steps to a Brighter Future: The Bush Administration's Non-proliferation Policy,” Remarks to the 2004 Carnegie International Non-Proliferation Conference, Washington, DC, June 21, 2004, <www.state.gov/s/p/rem/34267.htm>, accessed Sept. 20, 2007.

¹⁶ David A. Baldwin, “The Concept of Security,” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1997).

Based on the foregoing arguments, it is now time for this chapter to give its preferred definition of deterrence. Conceptually, *deterrence is a form of preventive influence that rests primarily on negative inducements*. First, deterrence is preventive: when used as a conscious strategy, deterrence aims to prevent an action that another party might undertake. This distinguishes deterrence from the alternative coercive strategy of compellence, which aims to get the target to take a new action or to stop or undo an action already underway (though which is operating in a given case is not always easy to tell and policy in practice may aim at deterrence and compellence simultaneously).

Second, deterrence is a form of influence: it operates by affecting an actor's decisionmaking. As many commentators have noted, the way it works is more psychological than physical. In a classic discussion, Thomas Schelling distinguished between brute force and coercion; Lawrence Freedman has updated this with a distinction between control strategies and coercive strategies.¹⁷ Control strategies seek to take away any choice for the other side by eliminating its ability to act or establishing physical domination. Deterrence, in contrast, leaves the other side with the ability to make a choice, but conveys certain threats as a way to influence that choice. This distinguishes deterrence from some other forms of prevention. For example, military preemption is a control strategy that aims to take away the other side's ability to launch an attack. A pure defense posture also does not aim to influence the other's decision; it accepts that an attack may occur and aims only to ensure the attack will not succeed.

Finally, deterrence emphasizes negative inducements. Preventive influence might also be pursued through the promise of rewards or offer of reassurances, but these represent positive inducements. Deterrence, in contrast, arises mainly because an actor expects a course of action

¹⁷ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2; Freedman, *Deterrence*, 26, 86.

to lead to a negative outcome. Deterrence success often requires pairing a threat with certain positive messages, so deterrence strategy usually does not rest exclusively on negative incentives, but the essence of deterrence is the other actor's anticipation that taking a certain action will lead to a negative result. The threat to impose costs in retaliation for a transgression, which is deterrence by punishment, obviously involves a negative incentive. But deterrence by denial also rests upon a form of negative inducement. The ability to resist and ultimately frustrate another actor's efforts can deny it any benefits while still leaving it with the costs of its efforts, again leading to a net negative outcome for the other side. An expectation of such a negative result is the key mechanism involved in deterrence.¹⁸

The anticipation of a negative outcome is a potentially open-ended concept, so it is worth clarifying the types of negative inducements that are involved in deterrence. IR research on deterrence is often framed in terms of a defender and challenger. In such a relationship, deterrence involves the challenger's fear of negative consequences in terms of its own interests, values, or objectives. Concern about the well-being of the defender is usually not part of the deterrence equation. Hence, if a person says to a friend or loved one, "if you do this, you will hurt my feelings," it might persuade the other person not to act, but we would not normally describe the friend or loved one as having been deterred. Because the second party in this relationship cares about the first party, it has no desire or intention to attack or hurt the first party, and hence this is not a deterrence situation. It is true that "hurt feelings" could be considered a negative consequence, but the mechanism here is the second person's sympathy or affection for the first, not the second party's assessment of its own costs and benefits.

¹⁸ It is important to distinguish the definition of deterrence from the conditions for deterrence success or failure. From expected utility analysis, we know that deterrence can still fail even when the costs of a course of action outweigh the benefits, if the net consequences of not taking the action are evaluated as being even more negative. The existence of an acceptable alternative for the other side is thus a necessary condition for deterrence success, but it should not be made part of the definition of deterrence. Deterrence rests on the threat or risk of suffering consequences or obtaining a result one does not desire.

Deterrence involves influencing calculations of self-interest (though the “self” in question can involve a collective identity, such as one’s family, community, nation, or the like); changing behavior by appealing to purely other-regarding concerns is a different influence mechanism, separate from deterrence.

The anticipated negative consequences that produce deterrence must also have something to do with the perceived capabilities or potential reactions of the entity that would be harmed or the response of third parties who might act on its behalf. If one tells someone not to do something “because it will harm the environment,” this is not deterrence. It might persuade the other person not to act, but again this would involve their other-regarding concerns rather than some threat one has issued or the other person’s own self-interest. If one tells them not to do something harmful to the environment because they will be sued or arrested for violating pollution laws, that is a form of deterrence. If one tells them not to do something because it will cause a tree to fall on their house, or lead to their house being flooded, or otherwise cause destruction of their home, that is also a form of deterrence. The actor who responds in this case may be “Mother Nature,” but it is fear of negative consequences for themselves in response to their actions that persuades the other person not to act.

Thus, deterrence involves anything that prevents an actor from taking an action by influencing its decisionmaking through its fear the action will lead to a negative result for the actor’s own interests or objectives due to the capabilities or responses that the action might bring into play. This generic concept of deterrence can be distinguished from the strategy of deterrence. Doing this makes it possible to recognize that there might be situations in which an actor is deterred without anyone having tried to send a deterrent message or signal. Even where there is no conscious attempt to employ a strategy of deterrence, a condition of deterrence can

still result. Actor B might decide for itself that a path of aggression is likely to end badly, and actor A might never have the slightest inkling that B ever contemplated hostile action. This is an example of a condition often labeled “self-deterrence,” and recognizing a distinction between the concept of deterrence and particular strategies for trying to create it is part of what makes it possible to conceive of a phenomenon like self-deterrence. Deterrence arises when a possible course of action is prevented because the anticipation of negative consequences influences an actor’s decisionmaking, even if no other actor took steps meant to bring about such a result. In any situation in which an actor was deterred (the verb form), it should logically be valid to say there was deterrence (the noun form).

Some existing distinctions in the literature involve a similar differentiation between active efforts at deterrence and deterrence as more of a background condition. Morgan’s influential notion of “general deterrence” and Freedman’s more recently coined term “internalized deterrence” both point to situations in which deterrence is maintained without much explicit issuing of deterrent threats.¹⁹ We still do not have a very thorough understanding, however, of the pathways through which the stable, long-term condition of deterrence implied by these terms can be brought about.²⁰

Although deterrence might be unintended on the defender’s part, the questions of interest for this chapter mainly concern consciously chosen, deliberate efforts to deter. Where the

¹⁹ General deterrence exists when a potential challenger becomes convinced it is not worth initiating any active challenge that would produce the type of crisis in which “immediate deterrence” becomes necessary; see Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* and *Deterrence Now*, ch. 3. Internalized deterrence arises when an actor internalizes certain norms such that it no longer believes it would be legitimate to take certain actions; see Freedman, *Deterrence*.

²⁰ For one attempt to test theories of general deterrence, see Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “General Deterrence between Enduring Rivals: Testing Three Competing Models,” *American Political Science Review*, 87, no. 1 (March 1993). The Israeli notion of “cumulative deterrence,” in which deterrence is eventually established by defeating one’s adversaries over a series of wars, could also be considered a pathway to general deterrence. This is a costly way to establish deterrence however. If there are less costly options, it would be valuable to identify them. The argument in this section for a broader concept of deterrence is intended to help stimulate consideration of a wider range of alternatives, including potential non-military sources of deterrence.

intention to deter exists, we have a strategy of deterrence. From here on, the term “deterrence” will be used to mean “deterrence strategy,” unless otherwise indicated.

Broadening impulses in U.S. strategy

The preceding discussion of deterrence as a concept says little about either the means used or the ends sought – it does not require that either be military in nature. Recent U.S. military doctrine has utilized an “ends, ways and means” framework that can be helpful here. In fact, this framework has already been applied to deterrence in a guidance document produced by the U.S. Strategic Command, the “Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept” (DO-JOC).²¹

As a generic concept (in my approach, not necessarily the U.S. military’s), deterrence implies that the end sought is to prevent something, but is open as to what that something might be. It could be to prevent an armed attack, but it could also be to prevent states from giving assistance to terrorism or helping other states acquire WMD, two further objectives that are clearly relevant to national security. Beyond being preventive, however, the ends sought can be wide ranging; hence, deterrence is most distinctly associated with the “ways” part of the “ends, ways and means” formulation. It is a way of preventing an unwanted action by creating the ability or threatening to respond in a manner that will likely produce negative results if some other actor takes that action. From this perspective, punishment and denial can be considered two different ways of practicing deterrence.²² There are other ways of trying to prevent

²¹ The military published what is now referred to as version 1.0 of this document, the “Strategic Deterrence Joint Operating Concept,” in February 2004. In December 2006, the military published version 2.0, now titled the “Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept.” The newer draft is available at www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/concepts/do_joc_v20.doc; last accessed April 12, 2007.

²² The DO-JOC adds a third way of seeking deterrence, which it labels “deterrence by inducing adversary restraint.” In this approach, one tries to raise the benefits and/or lower the costs for the other side of choosing not to act. This third “way” reflects a well-known point derived from expected utility analysis: even a credible threat of retaliation can fail to deter if the other side perceives the costs of not acting as even greater than those of acting. To describe efforts to make the status quo more palatable to the other side as a form of deterrence requires broadening the concept even further than I have called for here. By my definition, encouraging restraint is not deterrence. What the DO-JOC describes instead encompasses some other terms in the literature. Partly, it reflects Schelling’s famous

something (such as moral suasion or pure defense) and there are other ends that can be sought besides prevention (such as compelling an action or eliciting cooperation), so this formulation still bounds the concept of deterrence without tying it specifically to the Cold War understanding of the term. Finally, one can also utilize different means in seeking deterrence. Strategic deterrence has historically involved military means, but there is no logical reason why economic or informational or law enforcement measures cannot be used to achieve deterrent effects.

In fact, on paper at least, U.S. doctrine already seeks to do so. The DO-JOC, for example, explicitly states that sometimes non-military means will be needed to achieve deterrence.²³ A concrete example is efforts to improve consequence management in the event of a WMD attack. U.S. strategy documents since 9/11 have regularly listed improving the ability to minimize the effects of WMD use as a part of efforts to deter such use.²⁴ This provides a third argument for adopting a broad concept of deterrence: the fact that U.S. policy has already moved, however hesitantly and incompletely, to contemplate deterrent efforts that are not based on the threat of military retaliation. Because real-world security strategies are already moving in

insight about the need to incorporate assurances in a deterrence strategy – but assurance is not a separate way to deter, it is a necessary component of the first two ways. If the strategy goes beyond assurance to try to assuage deeper fears about the future on the other side (i.e., to lower its expected costs of continuing the status quo), it becomes a strategy of reassurance. If it offers new benefits for restraint, it becomes a strategy of positive incentives. In practice, it is often a good idea to combine these with deterrence, but they are not best understood as a form of deterrence. In short, while I advocate a broader concept of deterrence than typically found in the IR literature, I do also see limits on how far the term should be broadened.

²³ DO-JOC, 16, 28.

²⁴ Consequence management (CM) obviously has a better chance of making a difference if the type of WMD in question is a chemical or biological agent rather than a nuclear bomb. Efforts to mitigate the destruction from a nuclear blast cannot possibly be effective enough to make nuclear use an unattractive option for terrorists who want to carry out spectacular attacks. CM is described as a deterrent measure as early as the famous 2002 National Security Strategy, which is often viewed as having dismissed deterrence in favor of preemption (President of the United States, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” Sept. 2002, 14). The second iteration of the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism released by the Bush administration explicitly lists deterring terrorist WMD use as an objective, and also mentions CM as one measure that can contribute to that goal (United States Government, “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,” Sept. 2006, 14). It is worth noting that the United States would seek to improve CM even if it had no deterrent benefits, in an effort to reduce the harm of potential future attacks. In this case, deterrence is purely a secondary, bonus effect. There are few if any new, non-military steps the administration is pursuing that are motivated exclusively by the expectation they will contribute to deterrence. In this sense, some of the broadening of deterrence practice underway is largely a spinoff of measures the United States would pursue anyway, for other purposes, and is not driven primarily by efforts to bolster deterrence.

the direction of alternative approaches to deterrence, it makes no sense for IR scholars who study security to limit ourselves to a definition that is narrower than the actual policies we are supposed to be studying.

Although non-military means could produce deterrent effects, there is still something distinctive about the threat or use of military force.²⁵ Threats of force will in most cases have a greater, more disturbing psychological impact than the use of other means, and if the threat is implemented this will usually result in greater destruction and more far-reaching political consequences. Hence, it is important not to group together military and non-military approaches to deterrence in a way that would elide any distinction between them. Where relevant, appropriate adjectives or other descriptors should be used to clarify the means being considered. Hence, deterrence as conventionally understood in IR could be labeled *military deterrence*. Other approaches to deterrence could be labeled non-military or else described more specifically, using phrases such as “deterrence through improved physical protection” or “deterrence by threat of sanctions.” The distinctiveness of strategies that involve the threat or use of force actually points to a possible advantage of adopting a broad concept of deterrence. Because this approach encourages the use of adjectives to clarify the type of deterrence in question, it might make use of the term “military deterrence” more common in situations where people would usually employ the word “deterrence” on its own. This would highlight the fact that a threat of force is involved and make it more explicit when military means, with their distinctive implications, are being used as the basis of deterrence.

As a concept, deterrence can involve anything that influences an actor not to do something based on the actor’s expectation it will get a negative result (or any attempt to exert such influence). To turn deterrence from an abstract concept to a specific strategy or tactic, one

²⁵ I thank Pat Morgan for drawing my attention to the importance of this point.

has to become more specific about the ends, ways, and means. What ends does one seek to prevent, what means will be employed to do so, and in what way or ways will one seek to influence decisionmaking?

For most of the 20th century, deterrence as an element of national security strategies was military in both ends and means: it used military means to seek the end of preventing military attacks by states. Historically, the ability to defend made possible a degree of deterrence by denial. With the advent of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, however, states could not find a way to guarantee effective defenses, so the “ways” part of the equation shifted to deterrence by punishment. When a state cannot count on stopping a nuclear-armed missile from reaching its target, it tries to prevent such missiles from ever being launched by threatening retaliation in kind, creating the nuclear deterrence strategy so familiar to us from the Cold War.

Nothing inherently limits deterrence to this one form however. The end of the Cold War and the rise of the terrorist threat have led to a de-emphasis on this one form of deterrence, but not the death of the concept. Instead, deterrence has been in transition, as the ends, ways and means have all been in flux. Indeed, the list of potential national security ends for deterrence has been expanding. In addition to preventing military attacks launched by states, the United States and many other international actors are now concerned about preventing terrorist attacks mounted by non-state actors. They are also concerned about preventing both states and private actors from assisting terror networks. And they want to prevent rogue states and terrorist organizations from acquiring or transferring WMD, not just from using them. Far from being obsolete, deterrence is potentially being asked to do more than it has ever done. This makes it all the more important to understand why there is so much skepticism about deterrence. In the short

term, one major reason is obviously the psychological impact of 9/11.²⁶ The next section places deterrence doubts in a broader historical context however. Doing so will show that there has always been reluctance to rely exclusively on deterrence.

Deterrence as Policy Choice: Lessons from Its Diplomatic, Political, and Intellectual Histories

Some critics of the Bush administration expressed shock that the administration had, in their view, jettisoned decades of U.S. commitment to strategies of containment and deterrence.²⁷ Some of the concerns expressed by the critics were correct, and I have argued elsewhere that the administration was too skeptical about the prospects for deterring rogue states and overstated the necessity for preemption.²⁸ Some criticisms ignored the larger historical picture however. There is no basis for expecting that deterrence will remain forever ensconced as the lead element in a state's security strategy. Strategy, if rationally chosen, is a response to the international security environment. It makes sense that the importance of deterrence will vary as circumstances change; for purely strategic reasons, we should not expect the role of deterrence to be a constant. Moreover, even in periods when deterrence is important strategically, such as during the Cold War, support for deterrence is often shaky. The U.S. commitment to containment and deterrence has never been unwavering. Reservations about deterrence have been expressed not just in the political arena, but in the scholarly arena as well. For all these reasons, the status of deterrence can be both uncertain and variable. A particular deterrence strategy is unlikely ever to be set in stone.

Conversely, however, the same factors that explain why deterrence does not usually go unchallenged as the lead element in national security strategy also make it clear that deterrence is

²⁶ For an analysis of how "lessons of 9/11" contributed to support for the Iraq war, see Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Misapplied Lessons? 9/11 and the Iraq Debate," *The Nonproliferation Review*, 9, no. 3 (fall/winter 2002).

²⁷ See, for example, the quotation from Daalder and Lindsay in note 2.

²⁸ Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Deterrence or Preemption?" *Current History*, 105, no. 694 (Nov. 2006).

unlikely ever to go away completely. These reflections will be used to argue for the value of the traditional normative model of policy analysis. Deterrence is a choice that emerges out of a strategic, political, and intellectual environment. Whether or not it is a good choice depends on what actors want to achieve and what other options are available. Sometimes deterrence will be the best alternative; sometimes it will not. *Ex cathedra* pronouncements either that we need to hold fast to an existing strategy of deterrence or that deterrence no longer applies and should be abandoned are worse than useless – they are actively harmful. There can be different ways of practicing deterrence, some of which might work better than others in a given situation. Whether any of these is appropriate depends on the other feasible options. To evaluate the role of deterrence against contemporary threats, conventional social science research is important, but overall judgment requires linking research findings to a broader policy analysis.

IR research typically treats deterrence as the independent variable. It inquires about whether or not a deterrence strategy is likely to work, and the conditions under which it is more or less effective. One can, however, also make deterrence the dependent variable and ask when states will choose to make deterrence a major component of national strategy. As with many foreign policy choices, the commitment to deterrence can vary because of strategic factors as emphasized by realists, domestic political factors as emphasized by second-image theorists, and ideational factors as emphasized by constructivists and first-image theorists. All three sets of factors have contributed, at various points in time, to discouraging a reliance on deterrence.

Variations in the strategic context

Strategic incentives to seek deterrence have never been entirely absent, but they have varied in intensity over time. Historically, the centrality of deterrence in Cold War strategy is an

anomaly. Deterrence has rarely been the overriding strategic goal for major powers. For most of history, the leading powers were expansionist. They sought to expand their borders and influence and to acquire empires. These goals required offensive strategies and made deterrence a distinctly secondary concern, though fending off others' offensive attacks did create some concern with defensive strategies. Thus, Clausewitz discusses both offense and defense – but not deterrence.²⁹

This does not mean deterrence was irrelevant. The classic European balance-of-power system can be considered a mechanism of deterrence: to the extent alliance commitments remained flexible, a potential aggressor would be prudent to consider whether expansionism on its part would trigger a superior counterbalancing alliance. But European diplomats of this period did not focus primarily on the potential deterrent effects of alliances. They perceived of the balance of power as a means to defend themselves and contain potential hegemonies, and there is little writing on strategy in this period that delves into the inner workings of deterrence.

Eventually, popular attitudes began to shift from acceptance or even passionate embrace of imperialism to disapproval of war and aggression. At the same time, some of the leading states became status quo powers. These shifts made defense more important, but still did not require states to think much about deterrence *per se*. Strong, effective defenses would naturally exert a deterrent effect, reflecting the logic of deterrence by denial, but deterrence was a side benefit of the commitment to defense, not a primary goal of strategy in its own right.

Hence, even though the concept of deterrence is ancient, explicit efforts to employ deterrence strategies and develop theories of deterrence only became prominent during the 20th century. This process began with the advent of air power. Beliefs that “the bomber will always

²⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

get through” gave rise to a view that security might have to be based on deterrence.³⁰ As is widely recognized, though, development of nuclear weapons most strongly spurred systematic theorizing about deterrence, as a way to avoid nuclear war. Although the atom bomb was sufficient to trigger Bernard Brodie’s famous observation that henceforward the goal of military forces would no longer be to win wars but to avert them,³¹ it took the subsequent development of the hydrogen bomb and the long-range ballistic missile to move deterrence fully to center stage. In a situation in which there were no effective defenses against ballistic missiles and good reasons to doubt that either disarmament or a first-strike knockout blow would be successful, most leaders came to the conclusion that deterrence was the only feasible strategic option. The unimaginable destructive power of the H-bomb made the recourse to deterrence not just desirable but imperative.

If strategic considerations promoted a lead role for deterrence during the Cold War, it is natural that the end of that confrontation might cause deterrence to be downgraded in U.S. national security strategy. The implications of strategic considerations in the post-Cold War world are not necessarily so clear cut however. WMD proliferation to so-called rogue states and the September 11 terrorist attacks have created new security challenges. Given new threats to security, one might predict that the role of deterrence would be restored. To the contrary, however, there has been no unambiguous return of deterrence to center stage. The immediate reason for this is that many question whether deterrence can be effective against the new threats, especially religiously-inspired suicide terrorism. Because this very question has become the

³⁰ George H. Quester, *Deterrence before Hiroshima: The Airpower Background of Modern Strategy* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966). The statement “the bomber will always get through” was made by British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin before the House of Commons in 1932 (quoted in Quester, 67). Interestingly, Baldwin lacked confidence in the prospects for mutual deterrence and instead advocated an essentially preemptive strategy of massive offensive operations against the other side at the outset of hostilities.

³¹ Bernard Brodie, “Implications for Military Policy,” in Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), 76.

subject of considerable scholarly and public debate, probably the most accurate conclusion is that strategic considerations have become indeterminate.

The shift from a bipolar to a unipolar system adds further ambiguity.³² As the world's only remaining superpower, the United States has sought to maintain its freedom of action. Accordingly, the United States has not wanted smaller states to acquire the ability to deter U.S. action. This creates a systemic incentive to downplay the relevance of deterrence in the current international system, although in practice the United States has given a lot of indications that it can be deterred by regional states that acquire nuclear weapons or the ability to direct the activities of terrorist organizations.

Two conclusions follow from the analysis in this section. First, the role of deterrence is historically contingent in part because strategic incentives in the international system can vary. The range of contingency is bounded on both ends however. On the one hand, use of deterrence in international relations is unlikely to disappear altogether as long as states remain important actors and the system remains anarchic. There will always be potential security threats for which deterrence might be an appropriate response. On the other hand, deterrence is unlikely ever to be embraced wholeheartedly and unreservedly as the only element of national security strategy. As an influence strategy and not a control strategy, deterrence leaves the final choice up to the other side – even in the face of what should be a credible deterrent threat, it can still choose to attack and deterrence can therefore fail. It is always uncomfortable to live with a risk of deterrence failure, and there will always be a temptation to seek to eliminate the risk. For states with sufficient power, desire to assert control and not merely influence can lead them to attempt preemption or even preventive war.

³² I thank T.V. Paul for this observation.

This leads to the second conclusion of this section's strategic analysis: One cannot predict purely from an analysis of the current security environment whether or not the United States or other major powers will make deterrence a major goal of their strategies. There are systemic pressures to continue to employ deterrence, but there are also contrary systemic pressures to dismiss the relevance of deterrence and to embrace more controlling strategies. The net result of strategic incentives in the complex post-9/11 international system is hence ambiguous. As a consequence, the status of deterrence is also being determined by other factors, including political and ideational factors. Consideration of the political and intellectual history of deterrence will show that conditions already existed that would incline many Americans to skepticism about deterrence.

Policy debates about deterrence

Doubts about deterrence long pre-date the September 11 attacks. Indeed, before the 19 hijackers carried out their deadly mission, faith in deterrence had been considerably weakened by criticisms that arose in both public policy debates and academic research. Because of the legacy of past debates, many Americans would already have been inclined to seek alternatives to deterrence when the shock of 9/11 gave them extra motivation to do so. This section summarizes the relevant history of policy debates, while the next section points out parallels in academic research and debate.

Resistance to a reliance on deterrence was present in the political arena from the start of the Cold War. Deterrence became prominent in part because of its importance in avoiding nuclear war, but it also got a boost because it fit well with the larger U.S. grand strategy of containment. If the U.S. political goal was to contain Soviet expansion, it made sense for the

military strategy to emphasize deterrence of possible Soviet military aggression – not only at the nuclear but also at the conventional level. Yet, from the beginning, deterrence and containment had critics on both the left and the right. Those on the political right saw containment as a sell-out and argued for a strategy of “rollback” to “liberate the captive nations” in Eastern Europe. The most hawkish military strategists also urged preventive strikes against the Soviet Union before it could achieve its own nuclear strike capability.³³ Those on the left, meanwhile, called for being more accommodating of Soviet concerns in an effort to preserve the World War II alliance. They also favored nuclear disarmament over deterrence as the way to avoid nuclear war.

These basic splits re-emerged periodically throughout the Cold War. Social protests in the late 1950s and early 1960s sought to ban nuclear testing or even “ban the bomb.” Even more massive protests against the nuclear arms race emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and some of the movement’s rhetoric criticized the expectation that nuclear deterrence would work indefinitely. The origins of the acronym MAD are also instructive. It was coined in the 1960s by Donald Brennan, who meant it as a pejorative label for what he viewed as the crazy logic of deterrence theory; like many conservatives, Brennan argued for building missile defenses instead of relying on deterrence.³⁴ This perspective found a champion in President Ronald Reagan, who launched the Strategic Defense Initiative based explicitly on the belief that the United States could not count on deterrence to work – he called for replacing mutual assured destruction with mutual assured survival.³⁵ Despite their criticisms, however, neither doves nor hawks could identify a convincing replacement for deterrence. Deterrence thus continued to feature

³³ Marc Trachtenberg, “A ‘Wasting Asset’: American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954,” in Sean M. Lynn-Jones et al., eds., *Nuclear Diplomacy and Crisis Management* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

³⁴ Robert Jervis, “Mutual Assured Destruction,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 133, (Nov./Dec. 2002), 40.

³⁵ One example is a speech at Hambach Castle in Germany in 1985. See AP, “Reagan in Europe: Speech in Germany, Arrival in Spain,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1985, A8.

prominently in U.S. strategy as a sort of centrist compromise, but it had few advocates who promoted it publicly with enthusiasm.

After the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, questioning of U.S. reliance on deterrence only increased. The sharpest criticism came from missile defense advocates. Although the Soviet threat had disappeared, new security concerns arose regarding countries that came to be known as rogue states. Given the continuing proliferation of WMD and ballistic missiles to these states, supporters of building missile defenses gave special emphasis to the potential undeterrability of rogue states, especially those led by fanatical dictators like Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il. Such leaders, they claimed, might be so crazy or risk acceptant, and so thoroughly insulated from effective reality checks, that they might not be deterred by the U.S. ability to annihilate their countries through nuclear retaliation (or, it might be added, by U.S. conventional superiority).³⁶ The 1990s also witnessed renewed calls for nuclear disarmament, including some by prominent former political and military leaders.³⁷ Their arguments for abolition generally included expressions of doubt that deterrence could successfully prevent use of nuclear weapons over the long term. Hence, the decade before 9/11 involved some of the most vigorous challenges yet to deterrence in the political arena, from both the left and the right; it is hard to think of any equally energetic political advocacy for deterrence.

The deterrence research program

³⁶ See, for example, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), "Opening Statement of Senator Jesse Helms," *Ballistic Missiles: Threat and Response*, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, April 15, 1999 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2000), 2; Baker Spring and James H. Anderson, "Making the Case for Missile Defense," *Backgrounder #1225*, Heritage Foundation, October 5, 1998, <www.heritage.org/Research/MissileDefense/BG1225.cfm>, accessed March 21, 2007.

³⁷ See, for example, the Report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, August 1996, available at <www.dfat.gov.au/cc/cchome.html>, accessed April 26, 2007. Convened by the Australian government, the Canberra Commission was an international group of experts that included former high-level government and military leaders.

Public debates in the political arena constituted one source of challenges to reliance on deterrence. Scholarly writings gave rise to a second source of doubt. What Robert Jervis has labeled the first two waves of deterrence theory, from the end of World War II to the 1960s, drew on methodological tools like game theory to develop what became the standard model of deterrence.³⁸ The initial waves of deterrence theorizing assumed both the necessity and the feasibility of deterrence, but eventually criticisms of deterrence arose in the academic community as well. A 1974 book by George and Smoke represented the major turning point, inaugurating what Jervis called the third wave of deterrence theorizing. George and Smoke reviewed historical case studies of conventional deterrence failures and argued that deterrence can fail for several reasons, including because states do not always act with the level of rationality assumed by existing deterrence theory.³⁹

Subsequent research by Jervis, Lebow, Stein, Morgan and others followed in this vein. Collectively, they developed a potent critique of what has come to be known as rational deterrence theory (RDT). Lebow in particular stressed that deterrence can fail even when deterring states do everything right. Earlier deterrence theorists identified four steps to establish a credible deterrent: make a clear commitment (i.e., define one's "red lines"), communicate one's commitment, have the capabilities to act effectively on the commitment, and demonstrate the resolve to act. However, researchers in the third wave claimed the case study evidence showed that even meeting all four conditions is not sufficient to ensure success. In particular, if potential challengers are highly motivated due to fear that their international position is becoming more unfavorable or due to domestic political considerations, a variety of

³⁸ Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics*, vol. 31, no. 2 (Jan. 1979).

³⁹ Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

psychological biases can cause them to dismiss what should be credible signals of a deterrent commitment.⁴⁰

The third wave is generally associated with the use of a comparative case study methodology and an emphasis on psychological variables. In the evolution of the deterrence research program, however, there is another important change from the first two waves to the third wave that has usually been overlooked. Because the initial waves of deterrence research focused on credibility, they in practice had to emphasize actions taken by the deterrer to explain deterrence success or failure. RDT in effect “blamed the victim”: if deterrence failed, it would be because the defender did not take the necessary steps to make its deterrent threat credible. Although not given much attention in Jervis’s typology, the first empirical evaluations of RDT used statistical methods. From its beginnings in the 1960s, the statistical literature has largely emphasized structural variables, such as the military balance or, in the case of extended deterrence, the extent of political and economic ties between a protector and the state it seeks to protect.⁴¹ Here, deterrence success or failure is explained largely in terms of underlying factors that are not under the short-term control of either the defender or challenger. One further innovation of the third wave, in addition to its use of case studies and emphasis on constraints on rationality, is that it put the focus much more squarely on the deterree than did the previous research. Because deterrence is an influence strategy, not a control strategy, the proximate cause of deterrence success or failure is the decision of the challenger about whether or not to be

⁴⁰ Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, eds., *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Janice Gross Stein, “Deterrence and Reassurance,” in Philip E. Tetlock et al., eds., *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴¹ For a good example, see Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980,” *World Politics*, 36, no. 4 (July 1984).

deterred. One merit of the third wave is that it drew attention to the wide range of factors that could lead a challenger to initiate an action that the defender had hoped to deter.

George and Smoke also pointed out that deterrence does not address the underlying frustrations that might lead a state to challenge the status quo. They concluded that deterrence is best used as a time-buying strategy, enabling a defender to seek a way to alleviate the deeper factors generating potential conflict. In light of the limitations of deterrence they identified, most of the scholars in the third wave advocated making greater use of positive incentives, strategies of reassurance, and diplomatic initiatives to address the underlying sources of tensions. In U.S. policy debates, this tended to align them with political liberals.

Some strategic thinkers on the conservative side, however, also largely embraced the third-wave critique of RDT. Colin Gray and Keith Payne have been especially important figures in the conservative or hawkish case against deterrence.⁴² They have cited the same reasons as the third-wave theorists for why deterrence can fail even when RDT would predict success. In addition, though, they have added a strong culturalist strand to the debate. Gray and Payne have argued that other actors will perceive and evaluate deterrent threats in terms of their own cultural values and frames of reference. Such cultural differences can undermine deterrence, they argue, by making it hard for the deterrer to know what values of the other side must be held at risk in order to make deterrent threats effective.⁴³ In Cold War debates over nuclear strategy in the 1970s and 1980s, Payne and Gray joined others, such as the historian Richard Pipes, who argued that Soviet leaders might be sufficiently willing to sacrifice the lives of their people that they

⁴² Both authors have published extensively. For good recent summations of their thinking, see Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); and Colin S. Gray, "The Reformation of Deterrence: Moving On," *Comparative Strategy*, 22, no. 5 (Dec. 2003).

⁴³ In addition to the writings of Payne and Gray, see also Adam Garfinkle, "Culture and Deterrence," Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes, Aug. 25, 2006, <www.fpri.org>.

would not be deterred by the threat of massive retaliation against the Soviet population.⁴⁴ These critics called for seeking nuclear war-fighting capabilities that could target Soviet leaders directly and ensure Soviet defeat if a nuclear war occurred. In principle, this was not so much a dismissal of deterrence *per se* as it was an effort to shift strategy from deterrence by punishment to deterrence by denial. In practice, though, the critiques by hawks added to the body of literature that called into question U.S. reliance on deterrence.

In the academic literature, others have risen to defend rational deterrence theory, making two major responses to the critics. These defenses, however, have not fully addressed the sources of unease about relying on deterrence in the policy realm. First, champions of RDT have pointed out that much of the case-study literature on deterrence suffers from selection bias: it has looked only at cases of deterrence failure but not deterrence successes.⁴⁵ This is a problem if one wants to estimate the likelihood that deterrence will work. Looking only at deterrence failures makes it appear that deterrence often fails, but in the full universe of cases where deterrence is potentially relevant it could instead be true statistically that deterrence works a high percentage of the time. Against an argument that deterrence is usually ineffective, this would be an important counterargument, but many deterrence critics do not make such a sweeping claim. Instead, they emphasize simply that “deterrence can fail”⁴⁶ even when states implement a deterrence strategy exactly as RDT prescribes. The historical cases they cite are sufficient to show that one cannot expect a 100 percent guarantee from deterrence.

⁴⁴ Richard Pipes, “Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win and Nuclear War,” *Commentary*, 64, no. 1 (July 1977).

⁴⁵ Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,” *World Politics*, 41, no. 2 (Jan. 1989). James D. Fearon argues that selection effects also affect the main large-N, quantitative tests of deterrence. “Selection Effects and Deterrence,” *International Interactions*, 28, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 2002).

⁴⁶ Keith B. Payne and Dale C. Walton, “Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World,” in John Baylis et al., eds., *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 170ff.

The second main defense of RDT actually reinforces this concern. Supporters of rational-choice analysis argue that many cases of deterrence failure can actually be explained in rational terms.⁴⁷ They claim that, in many of the cases cited in the case-study literature, the challenging state could rationally have believed that it could get around the deterrent threat and avoid retaliation. In other cases, states could rationally have believed the utility for attacking would be higher than for not attacking, even factoring in the costs of the defender's retaliation, because of what the attacking state perceived as the even greater costs of not acting. According to Frank Harvey, the four conditions identified in the theory for making deterrence credible should only be considered necessary conditions, not sufficient ones.⁴⁸ Meeting the conditions still improves the odds of success, Harvey claims, but because they are not jointly sufficient conditions, even RDT predicts there will be some deterrence failures even when all four conditions are met.

In essence, defenders of RDT say that failures of deterrence as policy do not automatically equate to failures of the theory. This is true, but it completely misses the point for those concerned about policy. For those seeking to make or influence policy, what matters is whether deterrence will succeed or fail. If deterrence does fail, it will be cold comfort to learn that the attack one has just suffered can still be explained in rational terms. If what one seeks from a deterrence strategy is certainty that it will work, the acknowledgment that a perfectly

⁴⁷ Achen and Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory." For an argument that most of Lebow's cases specifically involve failures to implement deterrence correctly rather than failures of RDT, see John Orme, "Deterrence Failures: A Second Look," *International Security*, vol. 11, no. 4 (spring 1987).

⁴⁸ Frank P. Harvey, "Rigor Mortis, or Rigor, More Tests: Necessity, Sufficiency, and Deterrence Logic," *International Studies Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (Dec. 1998). In part for reasons argued above, I believe the four conditions are only probabilistic factors, not necessary ones. There can be cases in which an actor is deterred even though no explicit deterrent threat was issued. Communicating a deterrent message when a genuine threat exists is likely to improve the odds of success, but it might not in all cases be necessary.

executed strategy can fail even against a rational actor means doubts will remain even if RDT proponents “win” their academic debates over theory and method.⁴⁹

The case for policy analysis

The preceding sections show that deterrence was already on shaky ground when terrorists struck on 9/11. Deterrence had been questioned by certain political leaders and social activists for half a century and by an important body of academic research for a quarter century. The emergence of ballistic missile defenses as a major issue kept arguments about the limitations of deterrence simmering through the 1980s and 1990s, as did debates about the dangers of nuclear proliferation and renewed calls for nuclear abolition. By 2001, many people had already concluded that deterrence could be unreliable.

In the policy realm, this shifts the terms of debate. The question becomes what inferences to draw from the fact that the success of deterrence cannot be guaranteed in every situation. Does the absence of certainty rule out the use of deterrence? In the run-up to the Iraq war, the Bush administration and its supporters implied the answer was yes. They argued that the risk deterrence and containment would fail required the United States to undertake a war of preemption against Saddam Hussein. But the limitations of one option do not automatically make another option preferable; the basic reason is that none of the alternatives offers an ironclad guarantee either.⁵⁰ The possibility that deterrence might fail does not necessarily mean

⁴⁹ In addition to work on deterrence using rational choice and case study methods, there are many studies that use statistics. The statistical research generally finds modest support for the propositions of RDT. Because the data sets contain cases of failure, however, the large-N literature also indirectly confirms that deterrence can either succeed or fail. There are factors that increase the probability of success, but there are no infallible deterrent strategies. For a good review, see Paul K. Huth, “Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 2, 1999. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, ch. 4, reviews and compares the findings from the formal modeling, statistical, and case study research.

⁵⁰ Even Colin Gray, who generally supports hard-line positions, acknowledges this point and uses it to argue for not unduly dismissing deterrence. See his “Maintaining Effective Deterrence,” vi, 9.

it should be abandoned. In particular, the potential limitations of a deterrence strategy do not by themselves make the case for preemption. The likely results of preemption must also be evaluated in their own right. As with deterrence, preemption could fail, and the costs and risks of even successful preemption must be considered. Nor are these the only two options; deterrence and preemption must be evaluated not only against each other but against other possible alternatives.

In short, traditional policy analysis remains necessary. Deterrence should not be analyzed in isolation. The compelling logic of an abstract deterrence model cannot by itself make the case for adopting a deterrence policy, while the potential flaws of deterrence revealed by empirical research do not by themselves make the case for ruling out a deterrence strategy.

Because judgment rests on how one perceives deterrence relative to the alternatives, people can sometimes appear to switch sides. Prior to the Iraq war, the conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer highlighted what he saw as an inconsistency in the views of many of the opponents of going to war. He noted that many of those who argued that Saddam could be contained and deterred had been critics of the same strategies during the Cold War, and he excoriated “the hypocrisy of the antiwar movement’s current newfound affection for deterrence.”⁵¹ If it is hypocrisy to support deterrence in some situations but not others, however, then the same charge could be leveled at many hawks and conservatives. There are many who stressed the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in deterring the Soviet Union who later questioned the viability of deterring Saddam.

One of the most interesting examples is George Shultz. In November 1983, the ABC network broadcast a made-for-TV movie “The Day After,” which presented a grim depiction of

⁵¹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Obsolescence of Deterrence: Cold War nostalgia grips the antiwar movement. Apparently they’ve forgotten about the balance of terror.” *The Weekly Standard*, 8, issue 13, Dec. 9, 2002, <www.theweeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/001/964dzkuf.asp>, accessed April 26, 2007.

the aftermath of a U.S.-Soviet nuclear war. After the movie, ABC granted airtime to then-Secretary of State Shultz, speaking on behalf of the Reagan administration. Shultz made the classic argument for deterrence, reassuring viewers that the United States maintained nuclear weapons only to prevent their use by others.⁵² In September 2002, however, the former Secretary of State published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* stressing the urgency of preemption in Iraq; Shultz's analysis of the threat posed by Saddam did not even mention deterrence.⁵³ Making the portrait even more complex, in January 2007 Shultz joined three other former high-ranking government officials to endorse "a world free of nuclear weapons."⁵⁴

Perhaps these positions are all inconsistent, and Shultz is guilty of serial hypocrisy. More likely, however, Shultz adopted positions based on the specifics of each situation. After the Cold War ended, Shultz could contemplate the case for nuclear disarmament, even though he had perceived a continuing need for nuclear deterrence while the Soviet Union still existed. And comparing Saddam Hussein to the Soviet leaders he had dealt with, Shultz apparently decided the Iraqi leader was less susceptible to being deterred; because Iraq was much weaker than the United States, it was also possible to think that preemption would be feasible, while this was clearly not a viable option against the Soviet Union. These different policy positions were not necessarily all correct – I am personally more sympathetic to his position in 2007 than I was to his views in 1983 or 2002 (and many conservatives probably feel the reverse). But the Shultz case does provide an example of why we should not expect the status of deterrence to remain constant. People can change their minds about the appropriateness of deterrence without any

⁵² Jon Niccum, "Fallout from 'The Day After': Cast and crew of the TV movie remember how Lawrence coped with nuclear devastation," *Lawrence.com*, November 19, 2003, <www.lawrence.com/news/2003/nov/19/fallout_from/>, accessed April 26, 2007.

⁵³ George P. Shultz, "Act Now: The danger is immediate. Saddam Hussein must be removed." *Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 2002, A25.

⁵⁴ George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 4, 2007, A15.

hypocrisy being involved. As argued above, strategic circumstances can change, making deterrence less (or more) relevant than before. The actors and actions one seeks to deter can also be different, with deterrence success more likely in some situations than in others. Finally, the feasible alternatives can also vary. Sometimes, there will be a better alternative to deterrence. Sometimes, even if there are potential risks or limitations to deterrence, it will still be better than the alternatives.

This helps explain the politics of deterrence. When momentum starts to build for strongly hard-line policies, such as preventive war, pro-peace forces will tend to align with moderates in support of deterrence as the preferable alternative. When doves gain momentum, as in the peak years of anti-nuclear weapons protest, hawks swallow some of their reservations about deterrence and join centrists in defending it.⁵⁵ This gives deterrence some of its Churchillian character: sometimes, it is the worst strategy there is, except for all the others.

Deterrence is not always the best option, even when it does emerge politically as a compromise around most people's second choices. Nor does majority support for a different option, such as preemption, necessarily mean deterrence was actually a worse choice. The fact that political debates tend to be framed around competing alternatives, however, does suggest that democratic political systems are capable of engaging in a comparison of alternative policy options. Such political debate would be aided by a more explicit commitment to the normative model of rational policy analysis. If political and military leaders, as well as non-governmental experts on strategy, seek to identify the full range of potential options and to evaluate carefully their pros and cons, they are more likely to come to sound policy conclusions and to be able to marshal stable public support for those policies. Deterrence will not and should not always be

⁵⁵ A partial exception is the early 1980s, when the Reagan administration responded to the nuclear freeze movement by holding out the dream that nuclear weapons could be rendered obsolete through its "Star Wars" proposal instead.

the choice that emerges from this process; sometimes, there are better options. Conversely, though, deterrence is not going away; sometimes, it will be an appropriate strategy. Either way, the status of deterrence will not be a constant. Even when the political and intellectual climates are receptive for deterrence, the strategic environment can vary in ways that induce shifts in the use of deterrence.

Conclusions

The 9/11 attacks seemed to sound a death knell for deterrence. In response, many researchers sought to identify ways in which deterrence could still prove viable. Stepping back from post-9/11 developments to consider the pre-9/11 history of deterrence shows that this is nothing new – it fits a broader pattern of deterrence ups and downs. In both the political arena and academic research, deterrence has always had critics, but it still often emerges as a policy compromise around most people's second choices. Systemic factors point in the same direction. In a changing strategic environment, it was unlikely deterrence would remain as central as it was during the Cold War. At the same time, the continued existence of security threats made it unlikely deterrence would go away completely. However, the complex nature of the contemporary security environment makes it desirable to broaden our understanding of deterrence to see if there are new ways to achieve deterrence that might prove more effective than traditional deterrent strategies.

Social science research is not the same as policy analysis. It is not the responsibility of academic specialists in security studies to carry out the types of options analyses taught in public administration programs. It should not even be considered necessary for every piece of IR research to have direct policy relevance. At the same time, however, some lines of social science

research, when well executed, can help inform policy debates concerning deterrence. It is also important to embrace a sort of Hippocratic oath for deterrence research, and try to do no harm. Scholars should try to avoid framing research or presenting conclusions in a way that could have negative consequences if that work enters the public arena. Blanket statements that “deterrence is the best strategy” or “deterrence does not work” should be avoided. In most situations where there is serious debate, deterrence has some probability of success and some probability of failure. Whether or not deterrence is the best choice will depend on what other options are available.

This is not just a question of how deterrence compares against other options; it is also a question of what alternative deterrent options might be available. To encourage new thinking in this area, this article has reviewed the concept of deterrence and argued for a broader understanding than the field of security studies has traditionally employed. At the risk of tautology, this chapter has argued that anything that can serve to deter is a potential basis for a deterrent strategy. Importantly, nothing intrinsically limits this to military means. When U.S. defense planners call for giving the president a wider range of deterrent options, they typically still mean military options, such as nuclear versus conventional. We should be trying to identify an even wider range of deterrent options that involve various non-military means as well. Embracing a broad concept of deterrence could help stimulate creative thinking about new ways to achieve deterrence, especially with respect to challenging asymmetric threats in today’s complex international system. If some of the new approaches to deterrence would be effective in circumstances where more traditional deterrent measures might not be, actors in the international system would gain a greater ability to protect their security without having to use military force.

This might appear to be an unpromising time to propose new approaches to deterrence. After 9/11, many people concluded that deterrence is no longer relevant against the most pressing national security threats of today. The Bush doctrine of preemption suggested the U.S. government had rejected deterrence as well. Yet the larger history of deterrence cautions against reading too much into this. It turns out deterrence rarely enjoys widespread support. Even during the Cold War, deterrence had critics on both the left and the right politically, and it was subject to sustained academic critique. Nevertheless, deterrence can still emerge from the hurly-burly of domestic politics as an important element of strategy, because a majority in the end often prefers it, however reluctantly, to the other alternatives on the table. This has already been happening in the United States, where the Iraq war has considerably lessened the enthusiasm for preemption. In the political arena, feelings about deterrence taken in isolation do not alone determine policy; how people evaluate other options also matters. This suggests the traditional normative model of policy analysis is still relevant, and research that helps inform rational policy analysis could help the public and its leaders evaluate the options.

In sum, this chapter reaches three primary conclusions. First, deterrence doubts after 9/11 were not unique. Past critiques did not lead to deterrence being abandoned, and this was unlikely to happen after 9/11 either. Second, new, complex challenges call for creative thinking about possible new approaches to deterrence. The broad concept of deterrence proposed in this chapter, which removes any presumption that deterrence must be military in either means or ends, is meant to help in the identification of new approaches to deterrence. Third, deterrence will not always be the best option; comparative analysis of policy options remains as important as ever.

This means some of the most important research on deterrence will not be on deterrence at all. It will focus on potential alternatives to deterrence, so as to improve the basis for comparing deterrence against other options. Given recent U.S. policy debates, systematic research on preemption is particularly important. At the same time, though, the debate on preemption versus deterrence is remarkably narrow. There might be a range of other alternatives that could contribute positively to peace and security. The classic critique of deterrence theory by George and Smoke concluded that deterrence has to be evaluated in the context of a broader theory of influence that incorporates alternative strategies.⁵⁶ I can do no better than to make this my conclusion as well.

⁵⁶ George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*.