DEFINING 'DETERRENCE'

Framing Deterrence in the 21st Century
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Introduction

This note addresses military deterrence in the broadest sense. During the Cold War the word was generally associated with nuclear weapons. After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was more interest in conventional deterrence. However, in the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (MoD) there was a high level view that any study of conventional deterrence would imply dependence on conventional capability at the expense of the nuclear deterrent and that nuclear deterrent policy would be weakened by the process.[1]

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) military operations in the Kosovo War focused the spotlight on military coercion, in particular the ineffectiveness of air power to force the Bosnian Serb leader, Slobodan Milosevic, to withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo within the timelines envisaged by NATO at the start of the campaign. This failure was the genesis of a discussion on both sides of the Atlantic into 'Effects Based Operations (EBO)' and 'The Effects Based Approach (EBAO)'. While there was nothing new in the notion that military action should be planned and executed to deliver the required military and political effect, this focus emphasised the importance of the cognitive domain in delivering military effect. There has been something of a presumption in the Western military community that a full understanding of the cognitive domain in any particular operation will

be the philosophers' stone for success. Typically, in doctrinal work and other military analyses, 'deterrence' and 'coercion' are presented as two aspects of military activity in the cognitive domain.

The Physical and Cognitive Domains

At this stage it is useful to draw the distinctions between the physical and cognitive domains in the application of the military instrument. The defining purpose of the military is the state-owned, organised use of violence for combat. 'Combat' means the use of violence to effect a decision – that is, to overwhelm an opponent. The military uses violence in two broad ways. First it can deny the opponent of his military capability by destroying it or removing access to it physically. Secondly, it can coerce the opponent into conceding by influencing his decisions in the cognitive domain. Denial and coercion are closely related. Most wars and conflict situations are ultimately terminated in the cognitive domain by a decision to accede by such authority as may remain. However destructive action at the tactical level may persuade leadership at the operational level to retreat – in turn allowing physical advantage at the strategic level. Conversely a tactical force may disperse or withdraw through fear allowing physical advantage at the operational level which in turn may persuade strategic leadership that the case is hopeless.

Royal United Services Institute

PRE-CONFERENCE NOTE

DEFINING 'DETERRENCE'

Armed Suasion

Latent Suasion
routine undirected

Deterrent Mode   Supportive Mode

Active Suasion
deliberate action

Supportive
reassurance   Coercive

Positive
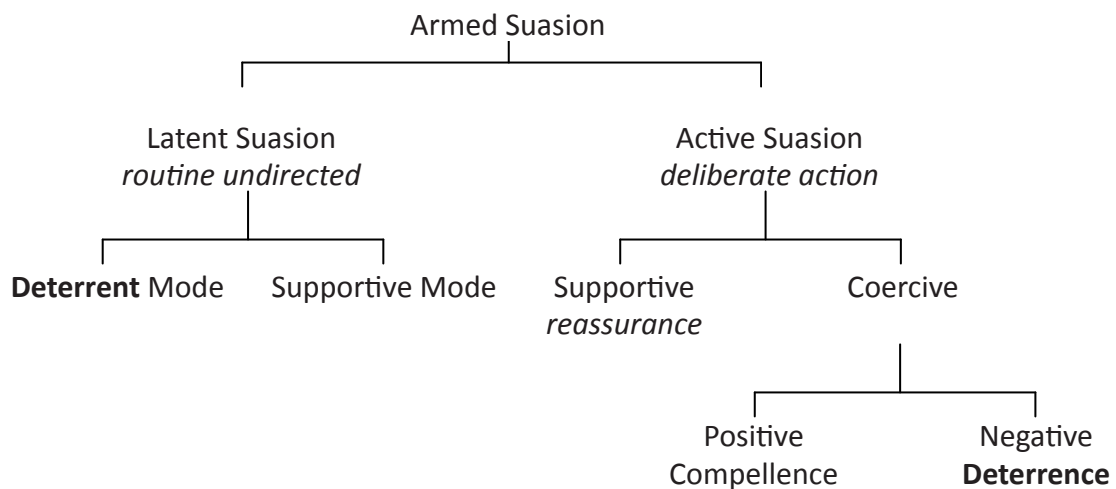Compellence   Negative
Deterrence

Figure 1: Typology of Armed Suasion (Luttwak)

The manoeuvrist approach, which has dominated Western military doctrine since the 1980s, emphasises domination of wills – that is, winning in the cognitive domain through coercive effect. However the effect in the cognitive domain is less predictable than physical destruction. Effective coercion in combat typically requires evidence of dominant capability as well as evidence of intent and reputation.

The focus of this discussion of deterrence is of course on posture and actions short of full scale combat. However, it is important to bear in mind that coercive effect in the cognitive domain is every bit as relevant in combat as in the context of deterrence. Indeed deterrence itself continues into combat with regard to the choice of weapons (deterrence of the use of nuclear capability and other weapons of mass destruction), to the geographical scale of conflict (deterrence of escalation outside a particular theatre) and deterrence against other forms of escalation such as the targeting of civilians or decapitation of political leadership.

The focus of the remainder of this note is on the cognitive domain, but this relationship should be borne in mind.

Typologies

Also during the Cold War there was a parallel area of study into 'naval suasion'. The classic work on this subject is James Cable's *Gunboat Diplomacy*.[2] Cable's presentation of the types of 'gunboat diplomacy' as the 'definitive', 'purposeful', 'catalytic' and 'expressive' uses of force is vivid. However it is somewhat literary. It does not stand up to the test of strategic analysis and is not particularly useful for military practitioners. A less well-known monograph, Edward Luttwak's *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, contains a more systematic typology of naval suasion.[3] It is comprehensive enough to be extended to suasion generally, and this is the launch point of this note.

In Luttwak's typology (see Figure 1), active deterrence against a particular target entity is the negative subset of coercion – preventing a specific opponent from doing something they may wish to do. The positive subset is compellence – forcing an opponent to do something that they would not wish to do.

Importantly, there is also a latent deterrent mode. Here, a target entity is not specifically identified. Military capabilities are generated and deployed. A potential opponent is not specifically targeted by this behaviour or any accompanying rhetoric, whether diplomatic or informal. However, potential opponents would be expected to draw conclusions about capacity and will which would inform their own posture and actions.
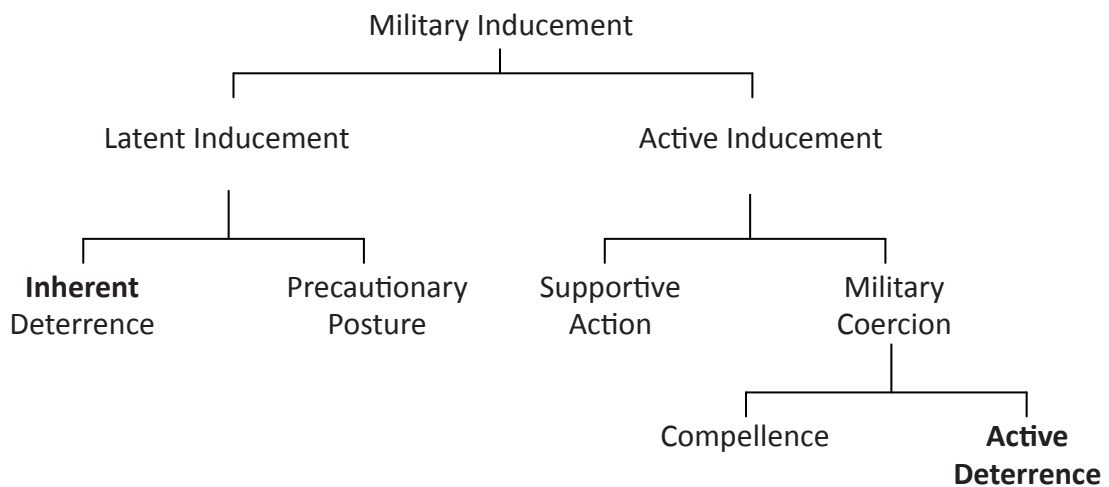
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                              Military Inducement
                    ┌─────────────────────┴─────────────────────┐
              Latent Inducement                          Active Inducement
              ┌───────┴───────┐                      ┌───────────┴───────────┐
         Inherent      Precautionary            Supportive            Military
        Deterrence        Posture                 Action              Coercion
                                                              ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                                                         Compellence          Active
                                                                            Deterrence
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Figure 2: Typology of Military Inducement

This latent deterrent mode has been variously described as 'inherent', 'undirected' or 'existential' deterrence. One might associate shades of meaning with these three words, but the concept is clear.

When applied to Cable's terminology, his 'purposeful' use of force – the application of force to change the policy or character of the target government or group – constitutes robust active suasion, whether compellent or deterrent. 'Expressive' use of force – the use of forces to send a political message – would be symbolic, active suasion. 'Definitive' use of force to create or remove a *fait accompli* is arguably not an act of suasion at all.[4]

The interesting category is the 'catalytic' use of force, which Cable treats as a phenomenon where the purpose is not defined but forces are deployed to buy time. There is a touch of cynicism in his language here. In Luttwak's typology, this is latent use of suasion which could embrace a spectrum from robust to symbolic.

When the authors of the first edition of the United Kingdom's strategic maritime doctrine, *The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine: BR1806*, were faced with the challenge of addressing suasion in a practical way, they simplified this fusion of Cable's and Luttwak's analyses into three broad categories:[5]

- **Coercion**, which embraces both compellence and active deterrence, as Luttwak argued, but which implies robust posture and deployment including the limited use of violence

- **Symbolic** uses, which could be directed or undirected, and supportive or deterrent, but would constitute posture and deployment without the use of violence – naval presence is in this category of undirected symbolic use

- **Preventive, Precautionary and Pre-emptive** uses where there is not a specifically defined mission or purpose except in the widest sense of avoiding maldeployment, expressing interest, and being prepared to address a range of possible objectives. This expression attempted to capture Cable's meaning of 'catalytic' without the irony.

A version of Luttwak's analysis (see Figure 2 above), which addresses the current environment in a practical way, uses the word 'inducement' rather than 'suasion', a word not widely used except amongst scholars.[6]

Superimposed on this typology is the degree of inducement expressed by capability and rhetoric. There is a spectrum of armed inducement (see Figure 3 below).

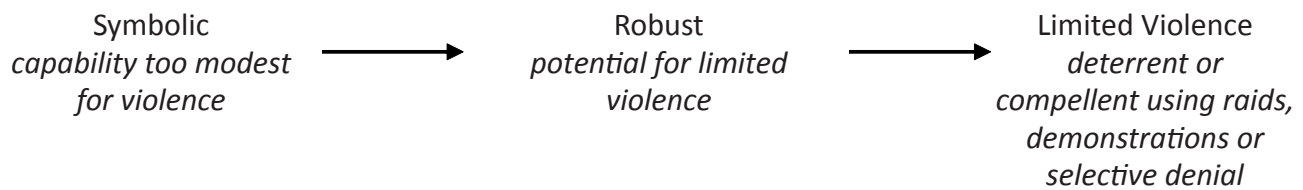| Symbolic		Robust		Limited Violence
capability too modest for violence	→	*potential for limited violence*	→	*deterrent or compellent using raids, demonstrations or selective denial*

Figure 3: Spectrum of Military Inducement

It is also important to note that inducement can shift from latent to active very rapidly and this is the essence both of a precautionary posture and of inherent deterrence. For instance, a Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD) based around a submarine-borne nuclear missile may be providing inherent deterrence, but CASD specifically permits a rapid transition to active deterrence and indeed use of the weapon if deterrence fails. In conventional cases the maritime environment typically permits nuanced shifts from latency to active inducement. This feature explains the emphasis on naval inducement in doctrine and the provenance of some of this analysis. The typology is, however, equally appropriate to the land and air environments and, indeed, to cyberspace.

Elements of Deterrence

The factors essential to understanding inducement are generally that effect is achieved through influencing the **perceptions** of actors – whether these are actual or potential opponents, actual or potential friends, or the wide number of different stakeholders for whom the consequences may be a spectrum of engagement from consent through to assent to mere acquiescence. There are three elements to all forms of inducement which apply to deterrence. These are **perception of capability to deliver violence**, **perception of will** and **reputation** of the ability to implement intentions effectively.

Directed deterrence will usually be aimed ultimately at elements of the leadership of a potential or actual opponent entity with whom the decisions will rest. This entity may be a state government or a non-state actor of some description. However, deterrence may be effective against some elements of a multiple leadership or at some levels of leadership with the result that the leadership as a whole may be effectively deterred. Furthermore deterrent action may affect support for leadership. The effect on, say, a population could be to undermine the leadership's decision to continue with a course of action. Equally, a population could become more united against a common opponent as a result of coercive action, and this support would strengthen the hand of a leadership.

It bears mention that it is a feature more of compellence than deterrence that populations may habituate to coercive action, particularly if the effect is incremental. It is however relevant to deterrence in that this may be reinforced by limited denial or punishment. However the use of limited violence in this way could harden the resolve of a population against the deterring power.

One final factor is the perceived **legality and morality** of deterrent action. This could influence the support to a leadership that is the target of deterrent action amongst the population or by other groups for whom support could be valuable (for instance, potential friends and allies). It is also relevant to the support given to the leadership of the deterrent power by friends and allies and its own population.

It has been suggested that there is a useful **distinction** to be made between **dissuasion** on the one hand and deterrence on the other. Dissuasion could be used to mean purely diplomatic action to prevent actors from taking particular courses of action, while deterrence would imply that military capability and intentions would be a contributing factor. The problem with this distinction is that '*dissuasion*' was used by France in the Cold War as the French translation of 'deterrence'. France

pursued an independent nuclear strategy from NATO, and *dissuasion* using French pronunciation has legacy meanings embracing the *préstrategique* concept and *tous azimuths* targeting. In any event, if the distinction is not apparent in translation into the language of a nuclear power, it is probably not a useful one to pursue, except in that in English 'dissuasion' might have a gentler nuance.

Understanding the Cognitive Domain

The point has been made earlier that the cognitive domain is less predictable than the physical domain. In the debate over the effects-based approach, it is frequently overlooked that positive effects are only a subset of consequences of military action and that many other effects could be negative. The cognitive domain is complex because of the vast number of variables. Furthermore, students of complexity in its technical sense would argue that unpredictability is a defining factor of complexity. Another feature of the cognitive domain is that the academic disciplines that explore it (sociology, social psychology, anthropology etc) are immature in comparison with the exact sciences. An important conclusion is that any strategic or operational plan that is heavily dependent on an understanding of the cognitive domain in a particular theatre is extremely high risk. Solutions cannot be engineered. The de-risking of such plans requires branches and sequels that are not so dependent on 'managing' the cognitive domain.

Once again, it is compellent strategies and operations that are most at risk in this respect. Intuitively, a nation, alliance or coalition cannot be totally dependent on conventional deterrence, whether inherent or directed, and there will usually be plans to address its failure. Nevertheless, nations will typically see strategic choices that emphasise deterrence as more economical financially, particularly in the context of alliances and economies which might be made in plans to address the failure of deterrence.

One method of de-risking deterrent strategies is to have a commonly accepted international framework of understanding (which may be expressed in law and agreed practices) in which deterrence operates. There were presumptions of such a framework during the Cold War which fortunately were never tested. In the present environment there is no truly comprehensive conceptual framework. In any event, such a framework would most probably exist among and between nation actors and the most difficult security challenges are posed by non-state actors operating within unshared conceptual frameworks and, perhaps, with transcendental aims.

Nuclear Deterrence

While nuclear deterrence fits into this general analysis, there are some important features which need to be highlighted:

Inherent Deterrence
The issue of inherent deterrence is particularly salient in the present security environment. It is patently not helpful for existing nuclear powers to identify targets for deterrence in their declaratory policies and, since the Cold War, most have avoided declaring direct deterrence. However, nuclear powers need benchmarks for their capabilities, which will probably be the existing levels available to the other nuclear powers, among other measures of requirement.

Deterrence of Other WMD
The issue of nuclear deterrence of non-nuclear weapons and war is particularly testing. Declaratory policies typically do not imply that nuclear weapons have this role. Equally, uncertainty as to the occasions for use is a feature of inherent nuclear deterrent strategies. There is also a presumption that major nuclear powers are unlikely to confront each other in conventional war because of the risk of escalation raises the question of deliberate first use.

Probability of Response
There has been a shift from the Cold War nuclear deterrent message of a high level of probability that nuclear weapons would be used in certain defined situations (Flexible Response and the ladder of escalation) to messages of deliberate uncertainty

as to the circumstances of use. Intuitively, the world is hardly a safer place as a result.

Communications

A related issue is that of communication of nuclear policy and intentions. During the Cold War there were clearly defined protocols involving formal signal traffic which would have served to minimise misunderstanding amongst a relatively small number of actors. There is now a larger number of state and potentially non-state actors with very different characteristics, operating in a more globalised environment with a host of informal means of communication involving the media and internet. In addition to the complexity problems mentioned earlier, there is the one of reinforced misunderstanding through informal communications and ill-considered rhetoric.

Perception of Legality, Morality and Entitlement

The framework of international treaties and agreements governing ownership of nuclear weapons and restraining proliferation may have international legal standing but perceptions as to the morality of entitlement within strategic cultures will affect nations' decisions to pursue nuclear weapon capability. It is important for existing nuclear powers to reinforce the moral standing of their ownership through their declaratory purposes if they are to justify non-proliferation measures and limit nuclear arms races. Declaratory devices such as '**no first use** policies' and '**negative security assurances**' are examples.[7] A crucial moral justification for major nuclear powers' ownership is extended deterrence: that is, the treaty obligation to provide nuclear deterrence to non-nuclear powers.

Conclusions

This analysis generates several broad conclusions, each of which merits further discussion:

- It is helpful to understand deterrence within the broad concept of inducement. Directed deterrence is a subset of military coercion. Its partner is compellence.

- Inherent, undirected or existential deterrence is an important concept in the present security environment, allowing nations on the one hand to build relationships across difficult boundaries in a globalised world, while on the other preserving deterrent capacity to deny options for the use of the military instrument for bullying and blackmail without provoking arms races.

- While there is a distinction to be made between latent and directed inducement, and inherent and directed deterrence in particular, the posture and behaviour of forces can communicate a rapid shift from one side of the divide to the other.

- There is a spectrum of direct inducement, from symbolic actions to the limited use of violence. Deterrence may be reinforced by limited violence, but this runs the risk of unintended consequences.

- Inherent deterrence has particular relevance in the nuclear context, but there is the associated problem of deliberate uncertainty and the risks that this could spawn – particularly in an environment in which communication means are multiple, diverse and open to misunderstanding.

Strategic culture is an intrinsically important variable in multipolar deterrence. If states or other actors do not share a common strategic culture when they communicate and respond to the intention to deter, there is a high risk that the deterrent message will not be delivered effectively and with predictable consequences. Strategic culture is fundamental to effective communication. Understanding the differences and shaping perceptions in an alien culture are key challenges.

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NOTES

1. See Michael Codner, 'Coercion from the Sea' in Eric Grove and Peter Hore (ed.), *Dimensions of Sea Power: Strategic Choice in the Modern World* (Hull: The University of Hull Press, 2001). The author prepared a paper on conventional deterrence for the Naval Staff in 1993 at the request of the outgoing Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Peter Abbott. The response of the central Policy Department is not in the public domain but was critical for these reasons. The paper was not taken forward but its analysis was published in this chapter.

2. James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919-1979: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986). There is a 1996 revision.

3. Edward N Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

4. In his classic analysis, Thomas Schelling contrasts 'brute force' with coercion. Cable's 'definitive use' is in Schelling's class of brute force. See Thomas C Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

5. *BR 1806: The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine* (London: HMSO, 1995). New editions have since been produced.

6. It is not, however, an academic neologism. 'The suasioun of swetenesse' features in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385).

7. The conditional undertaking not to use nuclear weapons against a state which does not possess them.

Military Sciences Department, RUSI

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