FRAMING DETERRENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Post-Conference Briefing Note

21 May 2009

Conference co-sponsored by

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies

Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London

United States Air Force Research Institute,
Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, USA

This post-conference joint briefing note follows a two day forum that took place between the 18 and 19 May 2009. Co-sponsored by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI); the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London; and the United States Air Force Research Institute, the meeting was convened to discuss the issues surrounding the framing of deterrence in the twenty-first century.

The influence of nuclear weapons – and their arrival in the bi-polar geostrategic context of the Cold War – served largely to confine the focus of deterrence debates to nuclear issues and to the Cold War itself, with discussion focused for internal politics and audiences. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, in broad deterrence terms, the preference of some policy makers has been to focus on using pre-emptive military force rather than deterrence in dealing with security challenges. Today, the nature and theory of effective deterrence in practical terms needs to be re-framed. Therefore, a re-examination of the fundamentals of deterrence theory, its related strategies, and of what constitutes effective deterrence is particularly timely.

This conference provided the opportunity for such a re-assessment and addressed four primary questions:
- **What is deterrence?**
- **What are the instruments of deterrence?**
- **Why does deterrence fail?**
- **What are the consequences of deterrence policies?**

Blending these major themes with specific case studies in two days of discussions, the conference brought together a community of officials, scholars, strategists, and national security experts from the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe to discuss how to frame deterrence in the twenty-first century. In particular, they explored if, why and how deterrence is relevant in the more diverse and complex modern strategic environment, and

scrutinised the political and military implications of deterrent postures as a means of illuminating and informing government policy choices.

The resulting conference report, to be released in the summer 2009, is intended to inform national policies and thinking, impending international strategic weapons and non-proliferation treaty negotiations, and the United States' impending Nuclear Posture, Quadrennial Defense, and Base Closure and Realignment Commission reviews. Another primary objective of the conference was to identify issues requiring further discussion or research.

Proceedings
'Framing Deterrence in the 21st Century', was structured around five general sub-topics:
- deterrence in general terms
- deterrence and counter-proliferation
- deterrence relative to non-state actors engaging state actors
- deterrence relative to state actors engaging other state actors
- deterrence relative to state actors engaging non-state actors.

The forty conference participants examined each sub-topic area employing a three-part process:
- keynote presentations
- case studies
- workshops to further address the four primary questions, listed above.

The conference's case studies examined:
- the 2008 Russian War in Georgia and the implications for deterrence
- policy instruments for deterring proliferation
- the 2004 Madrid train bombings
- the implications of the India/Pakistan situation
- the 2006 Israeli-Hizbullah War.

Themes and Findings

- In general, participants agreed that a generationally rigid Cold War perception frames 'deterrence' as a nuclear face-off between the US and the Soviet Union. The participants agreed also that deterrence is about much more than nuclear weapons: it is essentially a core activity which guides relations between actors in dealing with crisis and conflict

- Deterrence is a status quo equation, vital to promoting international stability

- Deterrence is the product of one entity's ability to influence the behaviour of another entity; but the targeted entity decides whether or not they can and will be deterred

- In the new multi-polar world, multiple behavioural/cultural elements of every potential adversary must be thoroughly understood in order to devise strategies to effectively influence behaviours favourable to the influencer, and in a worst case scenario, generate unanticipated and unfavourable results for the adversary

- Evolving notions of 'deterrence' that necessarily reflect the dynamics of the current national security environment have been slow to surface, and adjusting deterrence strategies to fit this new process will take time
  - One participant opined, 'we will look back on the Cold War as the heyday of the unitary actor'

- Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the primary challenges confronting many states have expanded beyond traditional state-on-state, force-on-force strategic *calculi*

  - The implications of this expanded range of threats should be considered in the context of an increasing level of globalisation, an international 'interconnectedness' which presents a new strategic paradigm
  - The desired effects, probable costs and unanticipated consequences of any future military or political deterrence strategy should be examined in the context of an apparent decline in the effectiveness of normative deterrence – a process in which states or actors are deterred by the simple existence of established international norms of behaviour
  - Participants agreed there remains no consensus on how to utilise deterrent theories, policies, and force structures developed in the Cold War nuclear context in today's complex security environment

- The concept of deterrence (and subsequent strategies) must be framed within the new paradigm of warfare

- The participants acknowledged the continuing risk of major state-on-state crisis and conflict, for which deterrence – and understanding how to apply it in political, military and other contexts – is still relevant

- After much discussion, the participants agreed non-state actors generally cannot be deterred by state actors employing traditional deterrence strategies, and that new processes and understandings must be found
  - States have a shared interest in stability; certain non-state actors have an interest in instability; this situation has the potential of aligning

traditionally adversarial state actors with a shared interest in stability and drive them into a collaboration in response to the instability generated by non-state actors

- o State actors must devise strategies to communicate with non-state actors
- o State 'narratives' (actions and words) are often in conflict and incongruent; non-state actors and those they wish to influence employ these incongruent state 'narratives' to validate their actions to destabilise international security

- There is a danger that deterrence concepts and strategies may be levied with unachievable expectations
  - o Non-state actor generated-insurgencies are an example – once an insurgency is underway, the generally accepted understanding is that deterrence strategies and methods of persuasion, inducement and threat have failed
  - o But within this context, there are opportunities to deter non-state actors engaged in an insurgency from taking subsequent extreme actions
  - o Participants debated whether or not state actors can harness and deter non-state actors by overtly and covertly threatening extremist idealism – there was no consensus on this issue, but it posed an important question requiring significant further research

- Within the context of a globalised, interconnected world, deterrence will increasingly rely on established alliances, trusted communication, improving understanding of different strategic cultures and engagement that establishes credibility with various actors

- Established alliances, both formal and informal, permit the use of extended deterrence by the possessors of nuclear weapons to cover and protect the non-nuclear weapon states within that alliance. However, in a multi-polar world, does extended deterrence still apply, and in the same way, moreover are the traditional 'rules' of such relationships understood as before?

- Moves towards re-starting arms control and disarmament processes are welcomed but, as these processes move forward, their principles must be developed while taking into full account their potential impact upon proliferation and deterrence.

Conference proceedings will be released in a variety of formats over the summer. Individuals interested in further information regarding this conference can contact either Daniel Sherman, Royal United Service Institute in London at + 44 (0) 20 7747 2617 or Robert Potter, US Air Force Research Institute, in the US at + 1 334 953 3969.

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