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THE MIDDLE EAST; DETERRENCE AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

Abstract

With the signature of the controversial nuclear agreement with Iran, the Middle East could reshape once again its regional equilibrium and deterrence logics. Nevertheless, this historical moment brings one more time an opportunity to review the deterrence theory, its weakness and strengthens but above all, represents a chance to look into the future alternatives to weapons of mass destruction as arms controls initiatives or regional disarmament processes. Without being an easy process with just a single and correct answer, this paper examines the current evolution of the theory as well as in the Middle East case analyzing its future plausible options.

KeyWords

THE MIDDLE EAST; DETERRENCE AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

I. DETERRENCE THEORY

I.I. History

When analyzing the Middle East nuclear policy there is a clear need to review deterrence theory and the current regional understanding of deterrence strategies. Deterrence theory has probably been one of the most studied theories in International Relations since the Cold War era until present, becoming none less contested and still sparking several controversial debates about its validity.

To begin with, in order to define deterrence it is worth mentioning the classical definition by Thomas Schelling, which became popular during the Cold War, and by which deterrence was defined as a military strategy based on the issue of a threat intended to refrain an adversary from starting something.[1] In other words, deterrence intends to avoid an adversary from pursuing an action. In the International Relations context a threat is normally perceived as an act which includes a military dimension and implies the capability to project military power to any other actor or adversary.

Deterrence theory departs from being the relations between states the heart of its central paradigm. It should be emphasized that, according to this paradigm, states operate in an anarchic international system. The absence of a central authority is considered to be the main reason to justify the inherent conflict nature of the international politics. In such a chaotic system, states should endeavor to have levels of power in order to ensure achieving national interests of their respective countries.[2] This is the main argument that deterrence classical theory has adopted in order to justify the need of a state to use its power in order to influence other states decisions. Nevertheless, as it will be further explained through this article, the appearance of nuclear weapons as an extended mean of deterrence, has been changing the initial deterrence model circumstances by the proliferation and sophistication of nuclear

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1 SCHELLING, Thomas C. Arms and Influence, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

2 SODUPE, Keppa. La teoría de la disuasión: un análisis de las debilidades del paradigma estatocéntrico. Barcelona: Àfers Internacionals, núm. 22, CIDOB, 1991, pp. 54-55.

weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). In this sense, one of the main theory challenges came with the emergence of different non-state actors which today are reshaping the international scenario being ISIS appearance one of the latest examples.

In order to understand this evolution, it merits mentioning the work done by Patrick M. Morgan, one of the main authors on the subject, who perfectly defined deterrence and its evolution in his book Deterrence Now as "a strategy that refers to the specific military posture, threats, and ways of communicating them that a state adopts to deter, while the theory concerns the underlying principles on which any strategy is to rest".[3]

In order to continue with the understanding of the fundamentals of deterrence theory, it's of great help to review the different scholar waves which through their contribution have helped to adapt the classical deterrence theory to the international conditions of each historical moment. In order to explain it, it is valuable to use the model proposed by the International Relations professor, Robert Jervis, which has been further developed and analyzed by the Political Sciences professor, Amir Lupovici. According to the latter, there are different waves by which deterrence theory has been constantly evolving in the scholar field.

The first wave was developed just after World War II, with scholars as Wolfers, Viner or Broadie. Back then the main objective was to define, the basic strategic advantages that nuclear weapons had, having still a few policy impact compared to the other following waves.[4] The second wave emerged in the late 1950's and incorporated game theory models in order to study deterrence, where most of the efforts were put into understanding the actors tactics; this is also the moment where most of the criticism towards deterrence theory emerged asking for the need of new verifications and em pirical research The third wave of deterrence continued to deal with these challenges while tried to coup, not always successfully, with the heavy reliance on deductions that deterrence theory had since its conception.[5]

Furthermore, some scholars argue the emergence of a fourth wave, considered to have started since the September 11 attacks, when deterrence theorists expressed the need to review the classical deterrence theory in order to address the challenges of deterring non-state actors as for example, terrorists willing to use WMD or other means to seek their objectives. At the same time, other scholars seemed to be more

3   MORGAN, Peter M. Deterrence Now, Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 1.

4   LUPOVICI, Amir. The Emerging Fourth Wave of Deterrence theory Toward a New Research Agenda", International Studies Quarterly, volume 54, Issue 3, September 2010, p. 706.

5   LUPOVICI, Amir. The Emerging Fourth Wave of Deterrence theory Toward a New Research Agenda, International Studies Quarterly, volume 54, Issue 3, September 2010, p. 706.

concerned on the analyzing of the preemptive means that the theory defines.[6] The so called fourth wave, appeared to readdress the new International Relations realities to an already classical concept of deterrence theory. On top of that, current terrorist attacks carried out by the so called "lonely wolfs" could challenge deterrence theory by merging it into a new wave, were new paradigms of deterrence could be also measured, even if this is not the current goal of this piece.

Going back to the historical tracks of deterrence, it should be pointed out that deterrence theory has been reviewed in several occasions, mainly after the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, considering the current nuclear rising tensions in the Middle East and the regional WMD proliferation, it appears to be mandatory to discuss deterrence theory and deterrence based policies. This comes up attached to basic questions as if deterrence really works or if on the contrary, it has become an irrelevant guideline for defense strategies, especially within some regional contexts as the Middle East.

I.II. Concept and evolution

At a very first stage, and during the Cold War period, deterrence was presented as a mean of exercising one state influence's on the decision making process of another actor, describing it as an almost monolithic process. Nevertheless, as the current intenational politics paradigm has shown, deterrence theory seems much more depending on a very complex international system, where nuclear proliferation also depends on non-state actors and escaping from the traditional state actor theories. In this new complex scenario, general deterrence as a long term strategy appears differs from just an immediate deterrence strategy. In this sense and as Morgan states, both concepts should already be defined into two: "an immediate deterrence situation is a crisis, or close to it, with war distinctly possible, while general deterrence is far less intense and anxious because the attack is still hypothetical".[7]

Before going further on this article, an important mention should be made, and it comes with the fact that while dealing with deterrence theory, there is an absence of a single deterrence concept. It can be understood differently from administration to administration. Nevertheless, above all, deterrence it can be summarized as a large defense theory which accepts the use of force as a threat to deter an adversary from carrying an action. Further, considering the fact that security depends on every specific context and from the adversary reaction itself, deterrence strategies pretend to build

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6   KNOPF, Jeffrey. The fourth wave in deterrence research, Contemporary Security Police Issue, 2010, p. 2.

7   MORGAN, Peter M. Deterrence Now, Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 9.

security on the assumption that other actors will be deterred from their action after knowing the other party capabilities.

In order to work, deterrence strategies should operate in a situation where both actors do their calculations based on their respective values but sharing the same rational framework. Deterrence is commonly thought as a decision making process relation between two rational entities, where one of the two entities issues a threat of retaliation which carries a very high damage that the other state then balances that the benefits obtained by an attack are not enough to justify the attack itself.[8] However, in order to pose a credible and convincing threat, normally military threats accompany all types of deterrence strategies. In the context of an overall policy, military force is likely to be only "one tool among many diplomatic, economic, political, military responses or anticipatory actions designed to guide development of an international interaction in directions that will prevent an outcome inimical to our interests".[9]

This brings to different basic conclusions that can be extracted from the deterrence theory itself. Firstly, deterrence assumes a shared rationality within a deciding process where both states will be also able to know the costs and benefits being balanced by the other actor. Secondly, deterrence in order to work needs that the other entity notices the threat as real and credible. A state who has a reputation for standing firm not only will be able to win disputes by threatening to fight, will be able to avoid confrontations without damaging its image.[10]

When looking into the Middle East reality, this has been one of the main founding principles of the traditional deterrence Israeli policy, where all the country retaliatory and preemptive actions intended to have a parallel effect and wanted to arouse a firm reputation in order to avoid possible future confrontations. Thus, on the other hand, this can be found in the Iranian nuclear aspirations conducted during the last three presidential administrations, where the country sough a deterrence power to counter balance the Israeli deterrence power by gaining a reputation of renewed regional power.

Overall, a deterrence strategy cannot be considered as a static situation, therefore it does involve specific dynamics. Firstly, it should balance the main factors involved in the situation that the country wants to avoid, what is wanted to be avoided and which is the new desired scenario. The target of deterrence also needs to be accurately defined so that the necessary analyses can be undertaken to understand the adversary's objectives. A very complex process where the action that is to be deterred, the key

8   SODUPE, Keppa. La teoría de la disuasión: un análisis de las debilidades del paradigma estatocéntrico, Barcelona: Àfers Internacionals, núm. 22, CIDOB, 1991, p. 62.

9   NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, Post-cold war conflict deterrence, National Academy of Sciences, 1997, p. 12.

10   JERVIS, R, Deterrence and perception, International security, vol. 7, winter 1982-83, p. 9.

vulnerabilities, the propensity to take risks, the bases of power, the most valued assets and other factors are likely to influence key decisions.[11]

To sum up, the target of deterrence actions and what is considered to be a security risk to the country integrity directly depends on the values and the defense policy lines that the country follows. In that sense, as seen during the recent nuclear negotiations in the Middle East, Iran for example, may have different guidelines than other countries of the region, perceiving as a national threat what other entities would consider it differently. This is where one of the main questions of this article appears; into what extent is feasible or has any sense to predict deterrence strategies as they depend on non always shared rational decisions. This complex set of perceptions games is difficult to assess and predict in general levels. These differences, both randomly and systematically influence the deterrence power.[12]

Considering the importance of the above mentioned conditions and as understood by the deterrence concept itself it's now important to introduce the notion that deterrence theory was conceived within a self operated "punishment" system. For the same, deterrence could also be used to prevent other sorts of harm from an actor's development of nuclear weapons or by a state which might want to deter the formation by its opponents of an alliance, or an opponent taking control of a valuable strategic position.[13]

Lastly, before finishing this introduction on deterrence theory; the deterrence concept should be also regarded differently from compellence, the latter referring to "the use of threats to manipulate the behavior of others so they will stop doing something unwanted or do something they were not previously doing".[14] However, while being different both concepts are normally used behind the logics of a same punishment strategy from one entity to another adversary entity. Whilst deterrence's main objective is to prevent that some action won't be initiated, compellence refers more to the change of the course, to persuade the opponent to change his behavior.[15] As they tend to appear together, both concepts can be located in an overall strategy of coercive diplomacy.

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11   NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, Post-Cold War Conflict Deterrence, National Academy of Sciences, 1997, p. 3.

12   JERVIS, R. Deterrence and Perception, International Security, Vol. 7, Winter 1982-83, p. 3.

13   MORGAN, Patrick M. Non-State actors, Nuclear Next Use, and Deterrence, California: University of California Irvine, July 2011, p. 1.

14   MORGAN, Patrick M. Deterrence Now, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 2.

15   SLANTCHEV, Branislav L Deterrence and compellence. Introduction to International Relations, Department of Political Sciences, University of San Diego, 2005, p. 2.

By coercive diplomacy can be understood a diplomatic strategy that implies a degree of coercion as the name itself implies. Actions which are included go from economic sanctions to military force. Coercive diplomacy seeks to persuade an opponent to cease aggression instead of asking them stop that action. To do so, here is a need to demonstrate resolution and to communicate credibility, meaning that in case of need, greater force will be used if necessary.[16] This enables to locate a deterrence strategy into a broader punishment style of diplomacy that uses coercion methods as its main guidelines. Nevertheless, when looking into the recent diplomatic agreement with Iran, some doubts appear showing that coercion with diplomacy does not necessary curb countries nuclear ambitions.

Once the logics behind the theory have been presented, it should be remarked the importance of understanding the difference between the theory itself and the strategies that use deterrence tactics, which portrays the difficulty to apply deterrence as policy guideline. From a conceptual point of view and according to the theory, there are different elements that need to be given in order to create a deterrence situation: "the assumption of rationality, the presence of a severe conflict, the possibility of a retaliatory threat, the concept of unacceptable damage, the notion of credibility and the notion of deterrence stability".[17] All of them in the conceptual framework seem to be mandatory in order for a deterrence situation to work, but it does not automatically imply that they will do so within a real scenario.

On one hand, the review of the philosophical and theoretical background of the theory is mandatory to understand how in reality, countries try to use defense strategies based on deterrence theory. On the other hand, is not less obligated to review deterrence theory in order to understand already its theoretical weakness and in further extent, understand why deterrence based policies cannot assure stability on an empirical level and at long term. Moreover, there are different goals behind any deterrence policy: "first, to prevent an armed attack against a state territory, which is considered to be as direct deterrence, and secondly, to prevent an attack against a second state which can also be damaging for the own state sovereignty which is known as extended deterrence".[18]

This tangled dependency on extended deterrence has been seen in different historical occasions and regional contexts, but traditionally has been the case in the Middle East. A complex situation that has driven the nowadays damaged Israel-United States

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16   JENTELSON, Bruce. Coercive diplomacy: Scope and Limits in the contemporary world, Policy Analysis, vrief, The Stanley Foundation, December 2006, p. 2.

17   MORGAN, Peter M. Deterrence Now, Cambridge, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 8.

18   HUTH, Paul. Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debate, Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 2: 25-48, 1999, pp. 25-45.

relations, or more recently, within the Russian engagement with the Iranian nuclear aspirations or the ongoing Syrian crisis. In all cases, deterrence strategy can be done through "immediate deterrence, as a short term threat or a longer strategy to prevent a threat to develop into a military conflict, known as general deterrence".[19]

To finish with this introductory theory review is of interest to mention the new contributions to the theory that happened since the emergence of the fourth wave, which have been centered on the role of non-state actors. As Morgan's expresses, the main reason is due to the fact that when deterrence theory was developed during the 50's and 60's actors involved were states.[20] The ongoing reality in the Middle East makes impossible to give complete credit to a theory which presents a reality that is going further and further away from the current geopolitical scenario. In addition, it should be noted that when the deterrence theory was designed, states operated in an environment that could be regarded as an anarchic system. The "absence of any overall government within the international system did give freedom to the different states to be their ultimate authority".[21] Today, most of the countries, into different extents, are attached to the international relations normative scenario, which even if constantly defied, still constitutes a big limitation to deterrence theory deployment and the concept of self interest.

II. NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

II.I. Definition

As already presented, the deterrence concept should be understood as a strategy to persuade an adversary from not initiating an unwanted action, which could be achieved by different means. Looking into a much more concrete deterrence power, the nuclear deterrence logic is based on the presumption that nuclear weapons can be the best dissuasive tool in order to protect the country integrity's by the use or threat of a nuclear attack. In this sense, nuclear deterrence takes the optimistic view of rational deterrence theory on the assumption that the possession of nuclear weapons

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19   Ibid.

20   MORGAN, Patrick. Non-State Actors, Nuclear Next Use, and Deterrence, University of California Irvine, 2011, p. 8.

21   MORGAN, Patrick. Deterrence Now, Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 65.

reduces the likelihood of war precisely as it makes the cost of the war too high that the adversary wont initiate any war or attack towards the nuclear state.[22]

From a historical point of view, the appearance of nuclear deterrence strategies represented a new conception that moved traditional defense strategies to a new more offensive level as they intend to prevent conflicts, even before they have started. This is grounded on the assumption that a state who has nuclear capabilities could decide to attack its adversary producing huge damages. In this sense, nuclear deterrence transformed civilian populations in one of the main military objectives in modern war. In addition, technology has also contributed that countries can bound their defense strategies on the reality that a country could be destroyed without the necessity that their armies should be previously fought or weakened.[23]

When classifying deterrence and its different types, both conventional and nuclear deterrence can be related to a broader punishment strategy.[24] This does portray that nuclear deterrence will work not just with the possession of nuclear capabilities but showing the adversary that the country is well prepared and therefore any attempt will fail in pursuit of its objectives. Furthermore, and according to deterrence theory, there could be situations of deterrence applied by just one country with nuclear arms or situations of deterrence with two or more countries having nuclear capabilities.

For decades, nuclear weapons have influenced the deterrence conception of most of the big powers since the 50's and during the Cold War era until the present day. In that historical context, it was the United States who first decided to adopt a nuclear deterrence strategy based on the deployment of different delivery systems for attacking the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons. It was actually during the development of those dissuasive relations between the two powers that the logics of what is known today as nuclear deterrence settled down. On the basis of the relations between the two great powers the fact that both had open nuclear capabilities referred both countries from using them as they knew the costs of a possible confrontation would be too high.[25]

Nevertheless, before reaching this point, nuclear strategies had a previous evolution. At first, and under Eisenhower's administration, deterrence power first evolved into a strategy that intended to deter a state who initially attacks by the capability of giving a

22   SAGAN, Scott D. The perils of proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons, International Security, Vol. 4, Spring 1994, pp. 92-93.

23   SODUPE, Keppa. La teoría de la disuasión: un análisis de las debilidades del paradigma estatocéntrico, Àfers Internacionals, núm. 22, CIDOB, 1991, p. 59.

24   EVRON, Yair. The Israeli Nuclear Dilemma, Routledge, 1994, p. 38.

25   SODUPE, Keppa. La teoría de la disuasión: un análisis de las debilidades del paradigma estatocéntrico, Àfers Internacionals, núm. 22, CIDOB, 1991, p. 57.

harsh response, which could include the use of nuclear weapons, approach known as massive retaliation. Concretely, it was the Secretary of State at that time, John Foster Dulles, who provided the most memorable public rationale for the administration's national security stratagem. In 1954, Dulles addressed the Council on Foreign Relations and presented a strategy with a more reliance on deterrent power and less dependence on local defensive, which encouraged some military planners to assume that fewer constraints might be placed on use of the nuclear option.[26] As contraposition, this evolved into a second strategy, known as flexible response, which developed under Kennedy's administration, intended to diminish any real possibility of use of nuclear weapons, by also having the possibility to use conventional forces to deter and fight wars.

It was the fact that the URSS escalated the situation when acquiring second strikes capabilities that a most extreme doctrine of nuclear strategy appeared. This came up with the military situation of a scenario where any war between two nuclear states would deem expensive, referring the countries from using its nuclear arsenal. In military strategy this situation is named as Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), which does count on the probability that a first nuclear strike carries a second strike by the attacked country leading to the destruction of both entities, being an unwanted situation for both actors.[27]

This is the framework which guided most of the policy makers during the Cold War era, which quoted by the North American Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, could be summed up into: "In the light of the certain prospect of retaliation there has been literally no chance at all that any sane political authority, in either the United States or the Soviet Union, would consciously choose to start a nuclear war".[28] It's important to note when MAD and nuclear deterrence logics were established, one of the Cold War conditions was that actors shared the same rationality, crucial to be able to understand later on the different critics to the MAD concept and deterrence theory nowadays. As it will be further discussed, the current Middle East situation and its nuclear proliferation trends cannot guarantee that a MAD scenario could work in the present's conditions.

Going back to the theoretical point, when the nuclear deterrence and MAD concepts were defined it was along some specific conditions that enabled that mutual nuclear deterrence could work. This was considered within a military scenario with two nuclear powers, who would be deterred from attacking if the following technical

26   OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE. Cold War Foreign Policy Series. Special Study 3, Evolution of the Secretary of Defense in the Era of Massive Retaliation, 2012, pp. 5-6.

27   SOKOLSKI, Henry D. Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, its origins and practice. Sweden: SSI, 2004.

28   BUNDY, Mc. George. To Cap the Volcano, Foreign Affairs 48, no. 1, 1969, p. 9.

conditions were given; firstly, each side has the ability, if attacked by the other, to inflict on the attacker in a way that the produced damage would deter and recalculate all possible gains of the other country to initiate an attack; secondly, no side can rule out that the other might use their nuclear ability if attacked.[29] These two basic conditions are believed to be one of the main reasons why MAD situation could work, moreover, indirectly it assumed that there is a possibility to eliminate the adversary in only one time.

In addition, a further implied condition on this assessment is the fact that both actors share a same rationality where they would fear mutual destruction. This is one of the main points when considering the future nuclear policy of the region and the doubts that appear when looking into the respective Iranian and Israeli nuclear strategies. The difficulties to assess if the same logics of the Cold War era would work today are challenging. Following this, no nuclear confrontation has occurred through recent history as none of the actors involved, were irrational enough to set in motion such a catastrophic confrontation.

Most of the current nuclear strategies take for granted the basic assumption that the fulfillment of a wellplanned policy with nuclear assets as its main deterrent agent, will convince potential rivals that any military action against them would lead to the final failure of their goals.

II. II. Nuclear deterrence dilemmas

Nuclear deterrence as a deterrence strategy cannot be reduced to the simple assessment of possession of nuclear weapons in order to prevent an adversary to do an unwanted action, yet to a more complex political and military process which is based on cost-benefits calculations contained in the different national defense strategies. In the case of the Middle East, nuclear deterrence strategy has been seen under a broader Arab-Israeli conflict where other regional dynamics are also present. Moreover, in the Middle East, regional states are embraced on nuclear deterrence games with other states such as the United States or Russia who play an important extended deterrence role, turning it into a much more complex situation, difficult to predict by the classical conception of nuclear deterrence.

Overall there is a clear problem with nuclear deterrence as well with the deterrence theory itself: they both work under assumptions and speculations which could in reality fail due to their strong psychological and cognitive components. Nuclear deterrence has probably worked in the past, however in order to work nowadays and

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29   FISHER, David. Morality and the Bomb, Croom Helm, 1985, p. 7.

succeed in dissuading an adversary from initiating a military action, the costs benefits calculations should be perceived for all intervening states on the same way.

From a deterrence theory point of view, it's true that the appearance and use of nuclear weapons during the World War II could be seen as having given more sense to the deterrence theory itself. As in that sense, nuclear capabilities have maximized the deterrence threat to a new strategically further dimension. However, as it will be further debated, new realities and historical evolution can contradict this tendency and argue that deterrence did not really work, but accelerated a general arms race in the world.

Traditionally, deterrence and its stability concept have depended on the military balance of power that different international actors have had. Since the appearance of nuclear weapons, a change in the validity and scope of deterrence theory has occurred. In the case of conventional weapons, some equality of forces in order to deter an adversary was needed. In a nuclear era, the only possible balance is the ability to achieve an unacceptable damage in case of confrontation to the other actor. In this sense, nuclear weapons are the mean that confer superiority and threat, even without necessity to have some nuclear equilibrium.[30]

To finish, since the end of the Cold War, the world has believed that nuclear weapons have assured stability. Moreover, a parallel trend until recently sustained by most of the countries, has been based on the developing of missile defense capabilities in order to prevent the risks of MAD situations. This as political scientist, Heinz Gärtner develops in his work, leads to a deterrence related paradox which comes with "the connection between offensive and defensive weapons […] the strategic missile defense can be a driving force for new offensive weapons. Whether strategic missile defense actually work will always remain uncertain, so it cannot replace deterrence".[31]

As a whole, the current Middle East situation along with the appearance of some non-state actors at the international level, have shown that nuclear deterrence can if not contested, at least be challenged. This can also be found within the undergoing scholar debate around the theory validity which is constantly trying to fit it into new political realities. Before introducing the next section, in an attempt to present a complete, neutral and objective paper; it should be mentioned that this piece explores the Middle East case but always being conscious that it's just a case of a much complex global challenge.

In that sense, MAD situations are present in many countries, for example in China, who has not abandoned the idea that holding their adversaries' cities at risk is necessary

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30   FISHER, David. Morality and the Bomb, Croom Helm, 1985, p. 8.

31   GÄRTNER, Heinz, "Deterrence, disarmament and arms control", OIIP working paper, no. 68, May 2013, p. 11.

to assure their own strategic security. Nor have the US and allied security officials' and experts fully abandoned the idea. At a minimum, acquiring nuclear weapons is still viewed as being sensible to face off a hostile neighbor that might strike one's own cities.[32] Both are examples which account a MAD scenario as their basis, but the list could be further extended to the both Koreas and India-Pakistan relations or a much more large list.

III. MIDDLE EAST BELIEF IN NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND WMD

Before introducing alternatives to WMD and deterrence for the Middle East, it should be previously introduced the general regional belief in nuclear deterrence. As it happens with this entire paper, the focus will be the Middle East case, however, the balance of alternatives to WMD depends not just from the regional but the international reality where the Middle East does not stand alone.

As seen during the theoretical introduction, nuclear weapons appeared in the International Relations scenario during the Cold War dynamics when deterrence theory was well received. In the regional context, despite decades of relatively calm, the importance of reassessing current deterrence confrontations has reappeared since the latest Iranian nuclear negotiations.

Historically, nuclear weapons in the Middle East gained both military and political significance instead of having diminished its initial momentum. The reliability of WMD as a stability mean for the region remains as deterrence theory itself, unclear. In this context, a parallel trend since decades is promoting the so called alternatives to WMD and the proposal to create a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. Probably the most solid proposal and alternative to end with the regional nuclear deterrence logics, at least on a theoretical level.

For decades, WMD have had a central point in the defense strategy of most countries of the region, according to the extended belief that nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence can achieve stability and avoid conflicts.

This comes along with the unique deterrence concept that the Middle East seems to embrace and takes it to its maximal form. Per norm, in classical deterrence theories, states have sought nuclear capabilities as a mean of avoiding a threat from other states.

The possession of nuclear weapons has been believed to offer the capability to respond to first strike attacks with nuclear weapons or in case of existential threats by

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32   SOKOLSKI, Henry D. Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, its origins and practice, SSI, 2004, V.

other states, a strike capability that would assure a MAD situation, which at last term its believed to refrain and contain a nuclear war.[33]

In the Middle East case, the fact that Israel has for decades been the only assumed nuclear power in the region has been translated into a particular regional deterrence logic. Nevertheless, this has been moving on different occasions from a nuclear assumed monopoly to a complex multipolar system, where different nuclear aspirations by Arab States and more recently by Iran, have created a different model of non-stable deterrence. In the case of the Cold War period, despite it is difficult to find empirical proofs, it could be stated that a MAD situation did avoid a nuclear war between the two main superpowers. However, in the Middle East the current situation is much more complex to predict.

On one hand, it's unclear if the break of the assumed Israeli nuclear monopoly could make the region much more stable. On the other hand, the continuity of the Israeli deterrence policy has not proven that besides from an Israeli security point of view, regional calm has been achieved through its particular and almost monolithic policy.

By not declaring or denying its capabilities, Israel has indirectly avoided that the legal instruments on arms controls could advance in its regional process, not being the only factor to blame for the current stagnant situation. Additionally, the fact that until recently, nuclear deterrence was attached to just one state, in this case, Israel, differs from the US-USSR mutual status. This promoted a regional point of view, mostly dominated by Arab and Muslim countries, where in order for deterrence to succeed, nuclear capabilities should be mutual, in any other case; there isn't a balance of power.[34] This situation is what has been already introduced and refers to the complex process behind the difficulties of transforming a MAD situation into a balance of power and regional equilibrium. The dilemma of reaching a balance of power through a MAD situation, already from a theoretical point, remains unclear if looking into the current Middle East dynamics.

Thus, the deterrence debate in the region has for decades, focused on the particularities of Israel's policy of ambiguity. However, due to the ongoing Middle East politics it seems by far arguable to state that the WMD and conventional arms race are exclusively related to the existence of the Israeli policy. The Arab-Iranian and interArab conflict dynamics have also reshaped the complexity of the region[35] and

33   SOKOLSKI, Henry D. Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, its origins and practice. SSI, 2004.

34   ELDEN ALY, Hossam. The deterrence potential of Weapons of Mass destruction (WMD) in the Arab-Israeli enduring rivalry, Vienna: Dissertation, Uni Wien, 1999, p. 9.

35   JONES, Peter. New directions in Middle East deterrence: Implications for Arms Controls, Middle East Review of International Affairs, v.1, n.4, December 1997.

http://revista.ieee.es/index.php/ieee

promoted it's deeply rooted nuclear deterrence reliance. One example of this regional belief and mistrust can be found in the Iranian, Saudi or Egyptian interventions during the latest's Non Proliferation Treaty review conferences or more recently, in the Iranian and Saudi concerns during the latest negotiations of the Syrian crisis. Overall and if his is the case, WMD relate to different regional purposes far from just the Arab-Israeli conflict, therefore an effective arms control process in the Middle East requires of a further logic of negotiation that goes beyond from just the Arab-Israeli conflict as a departing point.[36] Lastly, without being the objective of this piece, the appearance of non-state actors as ISIS could expand even more the regional deterrence complexity.

In addition to this inherent Middle East rivalry, complexity escalates to a more extended grade as there are different existing geographical alliances as well as dependencies to extraregional powers. The extended deterrence and non-aligned movements in the region complicate even more any necessary dialogue on arms control process.

There fore, from a regional point of view, most of the belief in WMD remains as means of assurance in front of not just regional mistrusts, but from an always possible international deterrence alliance. This sets the attention on the compulsory security assurances that a NWFZ or any specific arms control treaty, already from a theoretical point of view, should contain.

Any alternative to WMD should as deterrence itself, take into account the particularity of the Middle East context. Historically, deterrence in the region has been much attached to the nuclear ambiguity of Israel and not considering most of the regional complexities. However, the current deterrence model in the Middle East has started to decline into a new much more unstable period. The possible disruption of a new Middle Eastern nuclear scenario challenges more than never, the lasting but fragile deterrence regional balance.

As far as any arms control and a proper security framework for the whole region does not exist, feasible alternatives to WMD will not emerge. Since then, the existence of WMD will be assured behind the regional belief that nuclear deterrence can bring stability to the complex logics of the Middle East and its current conflicts.

This has also been seen during the recent Iranian nuclear aspirations and its respective negotiations with the international community. Considering the moral dilemmas that relying on nuclear weapons pose for humanity, even with the latest announcements of a new diplomatic deal with Iran, a NWFZ appears to be a solid, but not easy, long term alternative to decrease the broad Middle Eastern belief on nuclear deterrence. Into last extent, the new security outbreak in Syria, Iraq and the renewal of the Israeli-

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36   Ibid.

Palestinian conflict mount the pressure on Israel and its neighbors on the need of the desecuritization of their politics in order to avoid an acceleration of the Middle East nuclear race.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to understand the limitations of the deterrence theory overall, the Middle East case will be gradually introduced while exploring the more concrete critics and the wide moral dilemmas that deterrence theory and nuclear deterrence possess. The challenge to credit deterrence theory has appeared several times in International Relations history, when in different particular moments, advocates and detractors have shown their arguments in favoring or against the deterrence theory, especially since the appearance of arms control and disarmament alternatives.

In addition, even in a situation with nuclear arms, some negotiation achievements have been reached in order to seek a limitation effect on already existing arsenals. In that aspect, the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) and START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) already on the 70's represented a great advancement in the arms control between the USA and the USSR, establishing some kind of coexistence between nuclear arms and deterrence.[37]

On the other hand, due to the own historical evolution of nuclear proliferation, it was not until the 1995 Non Proliferation Treaty review conference, that the current nuclear proliferation situation was readdressed as a deeper international concern on nuclear deterrence as a worldwide problem which has been further approached during the recent nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Generally, one of the main criticisms to the deterrence theory is its relevance in today's world. Deterrence theory paid a major role during the Cold War period after WWII within the USA and the USSR confrontation. As Morgan states, "without nuclear weapons and the Cold War, deterrence would have remained an 'occasional stratagem.' After World War II, for the first time, deterrence evolved into an elaborate strategy".[38] However, the conditions and actors that were prevailing on that bipolar world have today radically changed. In this sense, some of the most important policy

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37   GÄRTNER, Heinz. Deterrence, disarmament and arms control, OIIP working paper, no. 68, May 2013.

38   KOTARSI, Kris. Quoting Patrick M. Morgan in "Deterring the undeterrable? Proliferation concerns in a world of "Rogue states" and non-state actors. " Chapter IV in Wilner, Alexandre. Revolution or evolution: emerging threats to security in the 21st century. Dalhousie: University Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2006, pp. 67-69.

makers who were behind the deterrence theory reframed its views after the 11th September 2001 attacks, which meant a turning point in International Relations and deterrence theory itself.

From a theoretical point of view, a comfortable nuclear deterrence power could exist when there is a case of nuclear hegemony in the hands of one state. In that sense, the nuclear country could survive surrounded by enemies that surpass it in the conventional arms balance, but they lack of nuclear capacity. This could be compared to the situation that has traditionally marked the Israeli-Middle East deterrence relations and behind the deterrence logic that Israeli policymakers have intended to maintain for decades. However, as any based deterrence policy, the scenarios where other states get different nuclear capabilities are also contained and envisioned under the MAD scenario from different policy makers.

This is where the difficulty of matching rationalities of the two states probably brings the biggest weakness of deterrence theory. Deterrence theory is based on assumptions, which in some extent, are based on rational calculations. Theories of rational choice assume that people maximize utility. But rational choice theories argue that this can be calculated by different but equally rational actors.[39] This brings to a situation, where depending on the actor; this will give more importance to risks or gains of initiating an action, even in a preemptive or offensive strategy. The same deciding process happens on the adversary side, making the overall deterrence system a theory difficult to operate into real situations.

Besides calculations, it should be discussed what rationality means, is not always considered to be the same by the different administrations or military elites. Deterrence theory does not predict if the actors that would initiate an action are rational and if they finally do it, if they would do it in the same foreseen way. What deterrence theory does, it specifies under which conditions the country will not attack. Deterrence theory derives its rigor and predictive character from its specification of the interrelationship among the critical variables that already shape an initiator's calculation. The problem in this process is when the initiator bases its actions on alliances or other domestic policies not included in the theory.[40] This makes the deterrence equation much more complex as the theory presents it.

Therefore a first general critic is related to the rationality concept; its definition and into which conditions of operability could be considered and consequently not always predicted. This leads to the conclusion that deterrence theory presents a model with certain rationalchoice conditions where deterrence may work; but where some other

39   ZAGARE, Frank C. The dynamics of deterrence, Chicago: Chicago, University of Press, 1987, pp. 2-6.

40   NED LEBOW, Richard and GROSS STEIN, Janice. Rational deterrence theory: I think, therefore I deter. World politics, vol. 41, No. 2, Jan.1989, p. 212.

disturbing factors may disable the result of deterrence. As far as deterrence theory has been built on tracking different crisis cases, is difficult that a theory made by empirical cases will always be able to fit into new and different challenging situations.[41]

A second general critic goes with the linkage of deterrence theory and nuclear deterrence, as is assumed under the well extended belief that nuclear arms give superiority. This foresees that actors having nuclear armament will automatically gain military superiority, based on the fact that they will automatically deter all opponents. In this sense, nuclear capabilities do not prevent conventional wars. Nuclear powers were involved in conventional wars. In Korea the Chinese, in Vietnam the Vietcong, and the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq did not care about the American nuclear bomb.[42]

Going further, from a theoretical point of view, there are two other arguable arguments which are considered that would immediately avoid confrontation on a MAD scenario: first, collateral effects from using nuclear arms would be so high that could not had not been conceived when planning rationality costs models. Second, the limited use of nuclear strategies even if limited, due to its own nature and few control mechanisms would lead to a total nuclear confrontation.[43] This is internationally assumed as the basis that would lead to the already introduced mutual fear of war. As seen, both can easily be challenged with two counterarguments; first the presumed idea that nuclear armament is the most deterrent capability and second, that the whole deterrence theory is based in difficult and complex measurable rationality parameters.

To sum up, several situations have led to a mandatory review of nuclear deterrence and deterrence theory, also in the Middle East. Deterrence was sought in order to give the countries stability in front of existential threats, however the appearance of the Iranian challenge started to decline this assumption. Further, present International Relations have shown that non-state actors or some states can decide to play outside the theory framework that was conceived during the Cold War, bounder that is considered to be the guarantee of the success of the contingency of the USSR-USA nuclear escalation.

In this aspect, the development of deterrence theory remained quite attached to the policy view that each of the US administration had, including Obama's current intention to shift nuclear deterrence towards a new minimal deterrence capability strategy. Historically, "US policy makers seem to be employing several assumptions

41   ACHEN, Christopher H and SNIDAL, Duncan. Rational deterrence theory and comparative case studies, World politics, vol. 41, Issue 2, Jan. 1989, p. 150.

42   GÄRTNER, Heinz. Deterrence, disarmament and arms control, OIIP working paper, no. 68, May 2013, p. 14.

43   SODUPE, Keppa. La teoría de la disuasión: un análisis de las debilidades del paradigma estatocéntrico. Àfers Internacionals, núm. 22, CIDOB, 1991, p. 70.

when it comes to determining when rogue actors will be constrained by the logic of deterrence, when compellence is likely to work, and when dissuasion will turn potential foes toward less confrontational paths".[44] Nevertheless, this American deterrence disengagement attempt, without being complete, has been important when assessing for example, John Kerry's, USA State's Secretary, negotiations with Iran.

Being the ultimate goal of this paper to promote a review of the Middle East deterrence belief and its future paths, the relevance of the United States and the West in deciding the international trends of nuclear deterrence is assessed on the general framework of this article. On the same time, in a parallel exercise, when exploring the different critics that nuclear capabilities and deterrence might entitle for Israel and the region, a local and regional level should be taken.

In this process, some strong moral confrontation appears. As in any administration, already in a theoretical level, there are specific cases where deterrence could be justified from a national point of view. This is included for example, in the main policy guideline of the whole Israeli deterrence policy: the nation survival, nevertheless, that brings to the moral dimension of deterrence as a practice, not just in the Israeli and the Middle East case. This is where; again this article should be taken further and when assessing such a possible use, frame it into a worldwide extended dilemma, not exclusive to Israel or Iran. In that sense, there is an immense moral presumption against the use of nuclear weapons where it cannot be established in any circumstances where the use of deterrence could be even considered as licit.[45]

In this sense, after having introduced the theory and its critics, taking into consideration the current Middle East unrest in Syria, Iraq or the new Iranian nuclear program acceptance, a need to find an alternative path to avoid deterrence based policies is mandatory. This is the case of the so called alternatives to WMD and the disarmament processes, which should not be regarded as exclusively arms control processes, but intermediate steps towards a more deep and ideological concept of global disarmament.

This entire political context has created in the international scenario as well as in the Middle East case, two main positions: those still favorable to use deterrence as means of stability, and does who on the contrary, believe that deterrence does not work anymore, and therefore nuclear deterrence has not achieved its ultimate sought equilibrium.

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44   MORGAN, Patrick M. and Wirtz, James J., edited by TV. Paul, Complex Deterrence, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 1.

45   FISHER, David. Morality and the bomb. An ethnical assessment of nuclear deterrence, Croom Helm Ltd, 1985, p. 104.

The international nuclear arms control process is going to be a long journey; nuclear weapons cannot be erased, and international security will for a long time remain faced with the need to live with them.[46]

Meanwhile, the inherent instability of nuclear weapons has in the lack of an imperative and efficient arms control system, reintroduced the possibility of a nuclear war, even if limited.[47]

The current contradiction between nuclear deterrence and arms control processes is the most lasting academic debate that deterrence theory is and will face. The Middle East and the West are also confronting this contradiction. In this context, the possible alternatives to the nuclear policy of Israel or nowadays the Iranian nuclear ambitions, present both an act of extensive review of deterrence strategies and a chance to look for alternatives to WMD as a NWFZ for the Middle East. A complicated and complex costgains scenario, where nuclear deterrence and its possible failures should be equally weighted, leading to a long term feasible guideline for future policymakers to achieve global stability.

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46 SUR, Serge. Nuclear Deterrence Revisited, Chapter 1. Nuclear Deterrence: Problems and Perspectives in the 1990's. New York: UNIDIR Publication, 1993, p. 5.

47 Ibid.

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