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## CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

### Abstract

The term deterrence is often used in official documents related to security policy. However, these documents rarely provide a detailed insight into the deterrence model intended to be implemented or, consequently, provide guidelines that would enable the organisation of the military resources needed to implement it.

This paper aims to provide a precise definition of the concept of deterrence, explain the models that currently exist in classical deterrence theory, their strengths and weaknesses, and describe the main military and political implications of adopting one or other of these models.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of studies on deterrence focus on nuclear deterrence, this paper concentrates on conventional deterrence because it is the type of deterrence that applies to Spain.

### Keywords

Deterrence, dissuasion, conventional deterrence, nuclear deterrence, deterrence by punishment, deterrence by denial, tailored deterrence, general deterrence, extended deterrence, counter-force, counter-value.

## INTRODUCTION

Legislation on National Security, both Spanish and foreign, makes frequent references to deterrence. However, it is rarely accompanied by a coherent articulation of the concept, much less, specific measures on how to achieve it. Nevertheless, the social sciences have had a predilection for the study of deterrence, and it has probably been the focus of one of the more elaborate attempts at rigorous theory in the social sciences.

As a result of the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that deterrence is a process characterised by a series of rules and distinctive features. Within the general concept of deterrence, there are different models depending on their internal operation mechanism and the means by which they are to be implemented. However, the «classical theory» of deterrence was born and developed primarily within the framework of nuclear deterrence and the rivalry between the two superpowers of the Cold War. Therefore, studies on deterrence have generally focused on the deterrence that can be achieved with nuclear weapons. Indeed, it is for this very reason that conventional deterrence has been afforded less attention, and has generally been treated as a complement to nuclear deterrence. This is particularly true in the case of conventional deterrence that is within the reach of the major powers.

This article aims to present some of the ideas of the classical deterrence theory, but applied in such a way that it is achievable using conventional means, given that this is the one best suited to the situation in Spain and Europe.

## DEFINITION

There is no single definition of deterrence, but all the definitions that exist share common elements. The first is that the goal of deterrence is to «avoid actions»: it is action aimed at maintaining the status quo, not changing it.

An intuitive definition of deterrence would be:

«The prevention from action by fear of the consequences. Deterrence is a state of mind brought about by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction.»<sup>1</sup>

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1 MORGAN, Patrick M. *Deterrence, A Conceptual Analysis*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publishers 2nd ed., 1983, p. 27.

2 GOLDSTEIN, Avery. *Deterrence and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 26 and 27.

3 Joint Publication 1-02 *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/>.

A distinction should be drawn between deterrence and «compellence» which, in a parallel definition, could be defined as «the threat of force as persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits»<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, «compellence» would be an action intended to change the status quo. In reality, the proposed definition of «deterrence» refers more to the effect of successful deterrence than the way this is to be achieved. On this point, an alternative definition of deterrence might be: «the threat of force intended to convince a potential aggressor not to undertake a particular action because the costs will be unacceptable or the probability of success extremely low».

This definition encapsulates the two basic models or types of deterrence, which are «deterrence by punishment» and «deterrence by denial».

Deterrence is not confined to the military field, but includes the use of all tools of state power, including the use of diplomatic actions, economic sanctions, and military force<sup>5</sup>. Adhering to this broad definition of deterrence, it could be described as... «the attempt to restructure the set of options offered to the leaders of a country or group of countries by the leaders of another nation or group of nations in the form of a threat to their vital interests. The aim of this restructuring is to exclude the consideration of an armed aggression».

This definition introduces a number of basic aspects:

- It suggests that it is a contrived, not coincidental, effect; it requires effort (intellectual and material) to achieve it;
- It gives the adversary alternatives, i.e., whether it works will depend largely on the willingness of the adversary.
- This willingness is manifested in people (who, being human, have strengths and weaknesses), not abstract bodies.
- The ultimate goal is to prevent an armed attack.

There is a central premise in the previous definitions that often goes unnoticed, and this is that deterrence is a communication mechanism that aims to convey a message to potential adversaries<sup>6</sup> and thus trigger «a sentiment» in the latter. Consequently, equally or even more important than the actual capability to implement coercive actions is

4 Ibid, p. 31.

5 GERSON, Michael S. *Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age*, Parameters Journal by the U.S. Army War College, fall 2009 issue, pp. 32-48, p. 34.

6 ANDERSON, Justin V. and LARSEN, Jeffrey A. *Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance: Key Concepts and Current Challenges for U.S. Policy*. INSS Occasional Paper 69, USAF Institute for National Security Studies, Colorado Springs: USAF Academy, September 2013, p. 4.

7 Enciclopedia de las Ciencias Sociales. Madrid: Aguilar, 1974, Vol. 3, p. 775.

8 MORGAN. Op. cit., p. 34.

the adversary's perception of a real intention to do so and his clear knowledge of what actions on his part will lead to this. Therefore, the adoption of different deterrents should be seen as «warning signals» sent to the adversary to dissuade him from acting in a way that is considered contrary to one's own interests, thus creating a sentiment or conviction in the adversary. Therefore, deterrence is not without its risks, given that there is no way of predicting how the adversary will interpret these «signals».

Military force can play a role in deterrence. Its mere existence (irrespective of its actual use) is a deterrent in itself<sup>9</sup>, given that it conveys a message, even if only part of one. Therefore, if the adversary does not perceive a real willingness to use military force, its existence alone will not serve as a deterrent.

Deterrence ultimately stems from the beliefs, fears and other psychological and/or internal processes of the party being deterred<sup>10</sup>. And these psychological or internal processes become a huge obstacle to assessing the effectiveness of deterrence. While we can see a certain correlation between the deterrent measures and the adversary's behaviour, it is very difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship between the two<sup>11</sup>. In other words, there is no definite way of knowing whether the adversary refrained from taking the action he was being deterred from because of the threats made, or whether he did so for other reasons (a lack of willingness to follow it through, a lack of capacity, ideology, etc.). Therefore, while it is usually obvious when deterrents fail, it is much harder to measure their success.

One premise of deterrence theories is the assumption that the actors are *rational* and that all political decisions depend on a cost-benefit analysis. However, experience has shown that this *rationality* does not always exist and that there are many more factors involved. When under pressure, decision-makers can make *irrational* decisions (one of the main criticisms of the deterrence theory<sup>12</sup>), or they may have an erroneous perception of the cost of their action, or underestimate their adversary's willingness to use military force.

Similarly, the deterring country's calculation of the benefits that the adversary expects to obtain with an action (and which allows the former to adjust the level of threat required, i.e., the cost of the action) could be wrong, as non-explicit benefits may be concealed or the goals might not be directly linked to the action taken. Many international crises are due to political leaders' perceptions of *future* changes in the situation (i.e., that are not apparent at the present moment). In other cases, they are

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9 ART, Robert J. The Fungibility of Force, in ART, Robert J. and WALTZ Kenneth N. (Eds.). *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Boulder: Rowman and Littleman, 1999 (5th edition), p. 113.

10 ANDERSON and LARSEN. Op. cit., p. 4.

11 ADAMSKY, Dmitry. The 1983 Nuclear Crisis – Lessons for Deterrence Theory and Practice, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, no. 36, vol. 1, 2013, pp. 4-41, p. 32.

12 GEORGE, Alexander L. and SMOKE, Richard. *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.

attempts to divert public attention away from domestic political instability<sup>13</sup> towards foreign crises, which might have very little to do with the real crisis created (a classic example is the Argentinian occupation of the Falkland Islands in 1982). The more alien and different the culture, history, language and values of the states involved, the easier it is to misinterpret the cost-benefit analysis<sup>14</sup>.

It is equally important to bear in mind that, from the perspective of the actor we want to deter, both action and inaction involve costs. Consequently, any deterrent strategy should take account of the consequences for the adversary both if the action being deterred is carried out as well as if it is not carried out. Hence, it can be concluded that, in the case of a particular action, some states will be motivated by necessity, while others will be motivated by opportunity<sup>15</sup>. States motivated by necessity are those for whom the costs of inaction outweigh the cost of taking the action being deterred. On the other hand, states motivated by opportunity are those who anticipate a favourable cost-benefit outcome from the action, given that the costs are expected to be lower than the benefit that will be obtained in the present circumstances, there being no significant cost-benefit to be obtained through inaction<sup>16</sup>. States driven by necessity will be much more difficult to deter, while those motivated by opportunity only require that the perceived cost of the action not be very high. This difference influences the effectiveness and choice of the deterrence model used in each case.

## General and tailored deterrence

A distinction can be drawn between immediate or tailored deterrence, which aims to prevent a specific behaviour<sup>17</sup>, and general deterrence, which aims to avoid aggression in a broad sense<sup>18</sup>.

13 LEBOW, Richard N. *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University, 1981, pp. 61-69.

14 ARREGUÍN-TOFT, Ivan. *Unconventional Deterrence: How the Weak Deter the Strong*, in PAUL, T.V. et al. *Complex Deterrence. Strategy in the Global Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 204-221, p. 209.

15 KUPCHAN, Charles A. *The End of the American Era*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002, p. 206.

16 The discussion about the cost of *action* and the cost of *inaction* is a central theme of the Prospect Theory, which looks at the greater tendency and efforts made to avoid losses compared to those invested in obtaining advantages. A summary can be found in KAHNEMAN, Daniel and TVERSKY, Amos. *Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk*. Article published in *Econometrica*, Vol. no. 47 March 1979, pp. 263-91.

17 FREEDMAN, Lawrence. *Disarmament and Other Nuclear Norms*, *The Washington Quarterly*, no. 36, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 93-108.

18 MORGAN. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

General deterrence does not involve specific reactions to specific actions taken by the adversary, nor is the enemy necessarily identified<sup>19</sup>. Tailored deterrence, on the other hand, requires conducting a detailed analysis of the adversary, including his motivations, so as to be able to set specific deterrence actions for concrete actions. However, it is sometimes necessary to introduce a degree of ambiguity into the threats in order to maintain the flexibility and freedom of action of the deterring country, despite the risk of allowing the adversary to have doubts as to whether the threats made will actually be carried out<sup>20</sup>. In a practical example, the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy<sup>21</sup> of the Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, in 1970 analysed the vulnerabilities of the senior leaders of the USSR's Communist Party - not actually those of the USSR - in order to be able to adapt the nuclear threats of the U.S. to these vulnerabilities<sup>22</sup>. An example of tailored deterrence with ambiguity would be the U.S. Guarantees to protect Taiwan against China. The U.S. stated that «it would oppose the use of military force against Taiwan», but did not specify how it intended to do this<sup>23</sup>.

The tailored deterrence process is developed in three stages: the first one entails design/planning to analyse the adversary's perceptions of the threat and to determine his priority interests. In the second stage, measures are set to exploit the adversary's fears and potential threats to its vital interests and, in the third stage, the adversary is clearly informed about what behaviour is to be avoided and what the consequences will be should it ignore the threats, and, finally, the effectiveness of the strategy is evaluated<sup>24</sup>. One of the most common threats in this type of deterrence is the threat of freezing the (personal and institutional) foreign financial assets of rival political leaders.

In general deterrence, the threat is vague and the measures to be adopted are not specific. The armed forces responsible for implementing it have not received specific training for a particular adversary and must therefore spread their efforts and have a wide range of capabilities. As a result, general deterrence is less effective and more costly than tailored deterrence.

The distinction between general and tailored deterrence also requires drawing a distinction between a deterrence situation and a deterrence strategy. The first is the situation created as a result of a general deterrence, without the need to target it at

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19 PAYNE, Keith B. and WALTON C. Dale. *Deterrence in the Post-Cold War World*, in BAYLIS, John et al., *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 161-182, p. 163.

20 PAYNE and WALTON. *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

21 U.S. Department of Defense. *Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy*. 10 April 1970. At <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB173/SIOP-25.pdf>

22 PAYNE, Keith. *Understanding Deterrence*, *Comparative Strategy* no. 30, 2011, pp. 393-427, pp. 415-416.

23 PAYNE and WALTON. *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

24 ADAMSKY. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.



any particular adversary. Current military capabilities and the willingness to use them would suffice to deter a wide range of potential adversaries. The second, on the other hand, requires the implementation of specific measures tailored to specific adversaries and the goal is to achieve tailored deterrence<sup>25</sup>.

### National deterrence and extended deterrence

Another interesting distinction is national or «passive» deterrence (also known as core, national or central deterrence) versus «extended» or «active» deterrence<sup>26</sup>.

National deterrence would be the one used in the event of a direct attack. Extended deterrence, on the other hand, uses all the instruments at the disposal of a state to protect a third country, be it an ally, a neutral nation or even another adversary<sup>27</sup>. An example of extended deterrence would be how the U.S. forces deterred the USSR from attacking the nascent (and anti-North American) Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. The beneficiary of extended deterrence can therefore be passive, indifferent or even ignorant of the fact that a deterrent action is being carried out on its behalf<sup>28</sup>. The word active implies a voluntary act, not carried out solely in self-defence, and involving a state that is willing to respond to an attack on another state.

The difference between «national» deterrence and «extended» deterrence lies in credibility<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, with extended deterrence there is always the possibility that, in the event of a crisis, the state will give priority to its own interests and may choose to abandon its allies before taking the risk of suffering damage on behalf of other states' interests<sup>30</sup>.

## DETERRENCE BY DENIAL AND DETERRENCE BY PUNISHMENT

In order to be able to carry out any action, one must have the capability and willingness to do it. Consequently, to prevent a specific actor from taking a particular

25 PAUL, T.V. *Op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

26 ANDERSON and LARSEN. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

27 PIFER, Steven et al. *U.S. Nuclear and Extended Deterrence*, Washington: Brookings Arms Control Series, Paper no. 3. Brookings Institution, May 2010, p. 1.

28 ANDERSON and LARSEN. *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

29 SCHELLING, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966, p. 36.

30 GOLDSTEIN. *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

course of action, we can act on one, the other, or both of these elements. Thus, deterrence can be implemented via two models, which can be used simultaneously<sup>31</sup>:

- Deterrence by denial means *the threat to deny an adversary the ability to achieve its military and political objectives through aggression, i.e., you act on capability, and*
- Deterrence by punishment, which is *the threat to impose unacceptable costs in response to unwanted actions<sup>32</sup>*, where you act on will.

Of the two models, deterrence by denial is the most effective, with deterrence by punishment being a complementary method. The U.S. Department of Defense believes that<sup>33</sup>

«Credible deterrence results from both the capabilities to deny an aggressor the prospect of achieving his objectives and from the complementary capability to impose unacceptable costs on the aggressor».

Deterrence by denial aims to deny the adversary the «capability» to successfully achieve its goals. This form of deterrence is based, in turn, on two arguments: firstly, this type of deterrence can be used to prevent a swift and easy victory by the aggressor, i.e., by convincing him that his goals will require a long and costly conflict (in this case, it is linked with «deterrence by punishment») and, secondly, this type of deterrence can be used to convince the adversary that you have the capability to defeat its forces.

In principle, in the first case, it would not be necessary to guarantee victory through military force, it may suffice to raise the cost of enemy action enough to act as a deterrent<sup>34</sup>. In reality, in this case the enemy is not being denied the actual objective it wishes to achieve, but the cost of achieving it is raised, which is the rationale behind «deterrence by punishment». It is only when the cost of achieving the objective is so high (in economic, human and political terms) that it could result in the defeat of the enemy, and this is when the «deterrence by denial» model is at work.

In principle «deterrence by denial» may have the advantage that it is not the will of the potential aggressor that determines the outcome of the conflict, but that military capability suffices to deter the enemy. This occurs when the military capability of the deterring country is sufficient to guarantee the defeat of the adversary, irrespective of the action taken by the latter. In this case, the will of the adversary is only relevant in

31 ANDERSON and LARSEN. Op. cit., p. 4.

32 SNYDER, Glenn, *Deterrence and Defense. Towards a Theory of National Security*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 14-16.

33 U.S. Department of Defense. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*. Washington, January 2012, p. 4.

34 MEARSHEIMER, John J., *Conventional Deterrence*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 24.



relation to the duration of the conflict, not the outcome». This form of deterrence can only be used by the stronger state in a conflict between two adversaries.

As mentioned previously, if the force of the deterring state is not enough to ensure victory, «deterrence by denial» will not work. In this case, what would actually be used is «deterrence by punishment», not «deterrence by denial», given that the deterring state is not capable of denying the adversary its objectives, it can only raise the cost of achieving them.

«Deterrence by denial» is the most common form of deterrence achieved through conventional means<sup>35</sup>. In this case, the comparison between the offensive capabilities of a potential aggressor and the defensive capabilities of the aggrieved state will be the decisive factor<sup>36</sup>.

When selecting targets for destruction under «deterrence by denial», counter-force actions are primarily used in an endeavour to destroy the military power of the adversary.

On the other hand, «deterrence by punishment» involves acting on the «willingness» of the adversary. Unlike «deterrence by denial», in this case it is assumed that the adversary has the military capability to successfully implement the action the aggrieved state is trying to deter; therefore, this form of deterrence focuses on convincing the adversary that the cost-benefit outcome will be unfavourable. Hence, this form of deterrence aims to raise the adversary's perceived cost of taking the action he is being deterred from until it reaches a point where it is no longer worthwhile. In principle, in «deterrence by punishment» it is the adversary who decides how much damage it is willing to sustain (and, consequently, it is the state that has the last word when it comes to ending the conflict).

There are three ways of raising this cost:

- By convincing the potential aggressor that a lengthy and/or costly conflict is unavoidable; a concept known as «internalised deterrence»<sup>37</sup>. In general, aggressors aim to achieve their objectives in a short and, therefore, inexpensive conflict<sup>38</sup>. To quote Mearsheimer<sup>39</sup>:

35 FREEDMAN, Lawrence, *Deterrence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 39.

36 GERSON. *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

37 VAN EVERA, Stephen. *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 114.

38 FREEDMAN. *Op. cit.*, pp. 29-32.

39 MEARSHEIMER, John J. *Conventional Deterrence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 30, 53-54.

40 *Ibid*, pp. 64, 206-07.

«... (Deterrence) is best served when the attacker believes that his only alternative is a protracted war: The threat of a war of attrition is the bedrock of conventional deterrence’

- Using what is known as «asymmetric deterrence»<sup>41</sup>: the capability to respond with hostile actions in areas beyond the strictly military realm (support for terrorist movements, promotion of insurgencies in other states, actions in the economic field, etc.).
- The development of sufficient military capability so as to be able to inflict a level of damage on a potential aggressor that cancels out the perceived «profitability» of an attack.

The first of the three options can be developed using regular or irregular (insurrection, guerilla warfare, terrorism, etc.) conventional means. The use of conventional military force requires being able to maintain a level of force that is capable of confronting the enemy and preventing a swift victory, thus giving rise to a lengthy and costly conflict (if the forces in question were capable of defeating the enemy, it would not be «deterrence by punishment», but «deterrence by denial»). In any event, when a weaker adversary confronts a more powerful one, the weaker one almost always swaps territory for time, that is to say, it protracts the conflict in exchange for the cession of territory through defensive operations. This situation harms relatively small states and compromises their economic base if industrially important areas are lost<sup>42</sup>.

The threat of an insurgency can be a very effective deterrent (especially against the West, following the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan), but it poses credibility problems: the adversary can always assume that it will secure internal support in the aggrieved state, which has sufficient measures to quash a possible insurgency<sup>43</sup> or, that, especially in the case of relatively rich countries, the local population will not be willing to suffer the consequences of this type of conflict<sup>44</sup>. In any event, this type of deterrence only works if the objectives of the potential aggressor include an invasion, which is a very extreme case in state relations.

«Asymmetric deterrence» is rarely able to achieve decisive results, except in isolated cases. However, one (successful) example of this form of deterrence would be the case of North Korea: the risk of an implosion of the regime would plunge the country into chaos and lead to massive and uncontrolled emigration towards China and South

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41 PAUL. Op. cit. p. 15.

42 GOLDSTEIN. Op. cit., p. 37.

43 Ibid, p. 36.

44 LUTTWAK, Edward N. Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 131-140.

Korea<sup>45</sup>; this could be a more effective deterrent than any military reaction to Chinese and South Korean pressure on Kim-Jong-un's regime.

The last option described - the development of sufficient military capability so as to be able to inflict an unacceptable level of damage on any potential aggressor - is the one in which nuclear weapons play the most prominent role. Nevertheless, the growing capabilities of conventional weapons equipped with precision-guided munition has led some academics to believe that it is now possible to attain a level of deterrence similar to that of nuclear weapons using conventional means<sup>46</sup>. In the present day, however, only the United States has this capacity (and to a limited degree), and it would only be effective when used against relatively developed states whose economies rely on the proper functioning of critical and vulnerable industries and infrastructure.

In general, in «deterrence by punishment», the targets for destruction are counter-value targets, i.e., elements that are essential for the functioning of society (industrial centres, infrastructure and large population centres).

It should be borne in mind that, while the level of damage that can be inflicted on a particular adversary using conventional weapons may be huge, it is always going to be limited. Consequently, in certain cases, it cannot be guaranteed that the adversary will not be willing to pay the cost of obtaining a benefit, no matter how high the price. This would be the case when what the adversary regards as vital interests are at stake. Therefore, with «deterrence by punishment» using conventional means, it will always be necessary to assess not only the price you are willing to make the adversary pay for taking a particular course of action, but also the perceived benefits of the action it is being deterred from and the costs arising from the inaction it is intended to impose on the adversary. This cost-benefit analysis is a way of determining the importance the adversary attaches to the cause he is defending in a conflict.

The relative importance that western societies attach to potential conflicts where their survival is not at stake is an issue that has been addressed again and again when studying why superpowers repeatedly fail in counterinsurgency campaigns.

A study on this difference in interests can be found in Andrew Mack's article, *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars*<sup>47</sup>. Mack essentially argues that the greater the interests at stake, the greater the commitment, in application of Clausewitz's axiom that «war is a

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45 PLANT, Thomas and RHODE, Ben. China, North Korea and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons, *Survival journal*, vol. 55, no. 2, pp. 61-80, p. 62.

46 WOOLF, Amy F. Conventional Prompt Global Strike and Long-Range Ballistic Missiles: Background and Issues, Washington, Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, 6 July 2012, pp. 2-4. At <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R41464.pdf>, 12 March 2014.

47 MACK, Andrew. *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*, *World Politics journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, January 1975, pp. 175-200.

clash of wills»<sup>48</sup>. In confrontations between major powers and weaker enemies, the former lose because public opinion (in the case of democratic regimes) or the ruling elite (in the case of authoritarian regimes) becomes fed up with lengthy conflicts that call for important sacrifices that are considered disproportionate to the potential gains. Mack's argument is basically in line with that of Snyder and Diesing: strong actors have less of an interest in winning because their survival is not at stake. Weak actors, on the other hand, have a high interest in winning because only victory ensures their survival<sup>49</sup>.

For his part, Ivan Arreguín-Toft, in his article *How the Weak Win Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*<sup>50</sup> defends the argument that the final result is not determined by the difference in interests, but by the difference in the strategic models chosen by each opponent. The author divides the strategies of major powers into two types, which he calls «direct attack» and «barbarism» and the strategies of weaker powers also into two categories, which he calls «direct defence» and «guerilla warfare»<sup>51</sup>. Direct attacks aim to destroy the weaker adversary's armed forces (destroy their *capacity* to continue the fight), while «barbarism» is the systematic violation of the laws of war to reach military and/or political targets» (destroy their *will* to fight). On the other hand, direct defence uses classical military means (although it may include pre-emptive strikes), while guerilla warfare basically involves the use of existing military capabilities in fights where direct confrontation with enemy forces is avoided and the idea is to debilitate them. Arreguín-Toft believes that when direct strategies (i.e., direct attack and direct defence) are used against indirect strategies (barbarism and guerilla warfare), the advantages of the stronger opponent are cancelled out, to the weaker opponent's advantage<sup>52</sup>.

In reality, the importance western societies attach to this type of conflicts is a reflection of the motivations of their states. For western states, a stabilisation operation in a colony or developing country does not jeopardise their existence: it is a conflict of choice, it is optional; while it may have international, humanitarian and security implications and responsibilities for the state involved, the direct consequences for that country's national security are limited or, at least, not immediate<sup>53</sup>. On the other hand, conflicts of necessity, which are not optional, have a direct impact and potentially

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48 «War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will». CLAUSEWITZ, Karl von. *On War*. Book I, Chapter 1, Section 2.

49 SNYDER, Glenn H. and DIESING, Paul. *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 190.

50 ARREGUÍN-TOFT, Ivan. *How the Weak Win Wars. The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*, *World Politics journal*, vol. 26, no. 1, summer 2001, pp. 93-128.

51 *Ibid*, p. 100.

52 *Ibid*, p. 105.

53 Adapted from the definition provided in DIBB, Paul. *The Importance of the Inner Arc to Australian Defence Policy and Planning*, *Australian Security Challenges journal*, Vol. 8, no. 4, summer 2012, pp. 13-31, p. 15.

serious and immediate implications for a country's national security<sup>54</sup>. In conflicts of choice, states are *motivated by opportunity*. In conflicts of necessity, states are *driven by necessity*. In stabilisation/counterinsurgency operations abroad, western intervention is motivated by opportunity; therefore the prospect of a lengthy and costly conflict may be a very effective deterrent. On the other hand, rebellious factions are driven by necessity, and their willingness to make sacrifices is therefore very high.

The less importance the state being deterred attaches to the action the opponent is trying to prevent, the more effective deterrence by punishment is likely to be, i.e., this type of deterrence works best when used against states that are motivated *by opportunity*. It is important to point out that most of the U.S.'s interventions in its capacity as 'global policeman' (given that it is the sole remaining superpower) are operations that the U.S. Government chooses, but which it is not actually forced to undertake. In these operations, the U.S. (and its western allies) are states *motivated by opportunity*. Therefore, in these cases, deterrence by punishment is likely to work against the United States if the adversary has the capacity required to sufficiently raise the cost of the action being deterred. Furthermore, in these types of conflicts, the potential adversaries of the U.S. (and the West in general) may assume that their actual willingness to take deterrence measures (such as the use of nuclear weapons or mass reprisals against the population) is reduced or non-existent (because they are rejected by western public opinion) and deterrence will therefore be ineffective.

On the other hand, in the case of states *motivated by necessity*, it is quite possible that no level of damage that can be inflicted by conventional means will suffice to deter them from taking a particular course of action (a good example would be the debilitation of North Vietnam in the war with the United States). Consequently, these states will be very difficult to deter using punishment. In reality, the arguments of Mack and of Snyder and Diesing suggest that in the event of a conflict where one of the *states is motivated by opportunity* and the other *by necessity*, the latter will be able to assume a much greater level of sacrifice than the former, to the extent that the latter will have a much greater chance of winning.

This is because, as mentioned previously, the level of damage that can be inflicted by conventional means is limited (and, for this very reason, it is acceptable if the expected benefit is worthwhile) in the case of deterrence by punishment, and the success or failure of the deterrence strategy will ultimately be determined by the will of the enemy. It once seemed that this dependency on the willingness of the anniversary, which is inevitable in terms of conventional strategy, could be overcome thanks to the power of nuclear weapons. Thus, the concept of unacceptable damage emerged. This concept is based on the idea that the level of destruction that can be inflicted by nuclear weapons is such that it would break the will of even the strongest adversary. Therefore, the general limitations of deterrence by punishment would not apply to a

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54 Ibid.

nuclear conflict, provided the adversary has sufficient arsenal to cause this unacceptable damage.

## CREDIBILITY AND DETERRENCE

The main requirement for deterrence is credibility: deterrence depends more on credibility than the existence of sufficient military capability<sup>55</sup>.

Tang defines credibility as<sup>56</sup>:

«Perception of capability, the perception of interest, and a reputation for resolve. In any given situation, an actor's credibility is other actors' combined assessment of these three factors».

The quality and quantity of the military resources available will usually be enough proof of a state's capability.

The influence of reputation in the behaviour of states often results in states accepting higher costs or risks than are warranted by the actual interests at stake in order to avoid the value of their commitments in future crises being called into question<sup>57</sup>. Tang believes that reputation is<sup>58</sup> others states' perception of that state's willingness to risk war in certain circumstances.

Consequently, reputation is a factor that predicts future behaviour<sup>59</sup>. In Boulding's opinion<sup>60</sup>:

«If threats are not carried out their credibility gradually declines. Credibility, as it were, is a commodity which depreciates with the mere passage of time».

Reputation seeks to avoid this depreciation of credibility by creating in the mind of potential adversaries the feeling that a particular state *always* carries out its threats. Reputation is therefore costly to build (it has to be maintained over a considerable period of time and in very varied circumstances) and very easy to destroy (one situation when it does not carry out its threats will suffice to raise doubts).

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55 KAHN, Herman. *Thinking About the Unthinkable*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 89.

56 TANG, Shiping. Reputation, Cult of Reputation and International Conflict, *Security Studies* journal, vol. 14, no. 1, January-March 2005, pp. 34-62, p. 38.

57 JERVIS, Robert. Deterrence and Perception, *International Security* journal, vol. 7, no. 3 winter 1982, pp. 8-13.

58 TANG. Op. cit., p. 38.

59 MERCER, Jonathan. Op. cit., p. 6.

60 BOULDING, Kenneth. *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 81.



Many authors therefore believe that reputation plays an important role in deterrence. To quote Herman Kahn, sometimes U.S. security depends on<sup>61</sup>:

«...a willingness to incur casualties in limited wars just to improve our bargaining position (with the Soviet Union)».

Kahn is of the same opinion as Thomas C. Schelling<sup>62</sup>:

«We lost thirty thousand dead in Korea to save face for the United States, not to save South Korea for the South Koreans, and it was undoubtedly worth it».

However, both Tang<sup>63</sup> and Mercer<sup>64</sup> believe that the reputation a state earns as a result of its behaviour in past conflicts has no real influence on the strategic calculations other states make in current conflicts.

The reasons put forward by Tang are the anarchic nature of the international system, which forces states to always consider the worst case scenario where adversaries are concerned. As a result, in each conflict, states expect that their rivals will confront them, and that their allies will not support them as they should, regardless of the past behaviour of both the adversaries and allies.<sup>65</sup>

Mercer argues that the actions that build a reputation may be the result of very specific circumstances that might not occur again (consequently generating different responses) and that, moreover, governments change (and reputations can change with them<sup>66</sup>) and that because reputation is a perception by third countries, the actions taken to establish or maintain a reputation are not always interpreted correctly by the intended targets of the message<sup>67</sup>.

Consequently, it can be concluded that of the three elements that help build credibility (military capability, interests and reputation), reputation is much less influential than one might think.

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61 KAHN, Herman. *On Thermonuclear War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 566.

62 SCHELLING, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966, p. 124-125.

63 TANG, Shiping. *Op. cit.* (2005), p. 49.

64 MERCER, Jonathan. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

65 TANG, Shiping. *Op. cit.* (2005), p. 50.

66 An example of this would be the poor impression the U.S. President John F. Kennedy made on Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev as a result of his interview in Vienna in June 1961. This impression may have influenced his decision to deploy ballistic missiles in Cuba, with the ensuing crisis. In this case, the «thirty thousand dead» Schelling mentions did not serve to establish a strong reputation. Source: THRALL, Nathan and WILKINS, Jesse James. *Kennedy Talked, Khrushchev Triumphed*, article published in the digital version of the *New York Times* on 22 May 2008, at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/opinion/22thrall.html>.

67 MERCER, Jonathan. *Op. cit.*, pp. 6-II.

Where interests are concerned, the conclusions reached after studying the characteristics of deterrence by punishment and the cost-benefit analyses of states would apply, i.e., in the event of a conflict where one of the *states is motivated by opportunity* and the other *by necessity*, the latter will be able to assume a much greater level of sacrifice than the former, to the extent that the latter will have a much greater chance of winning.

One factor in which interests play a key role in the credibility of a deterrence strategy is proportionality: if the deterrent is not rational, i.e., if the magnitude of the threat is not proportional to the scale of the action being deterred (that is, to the interests at stake), there will be significant credibility issues<sup>68</sup>. The problem of proportionality has historically been an «Achilles'heel» of nuclear deterrence, especially where the West is concerned. As early as 1958, British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery (the NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander for Europe at the time) wondered if, in the event of minor Russian aggression with conventional forces, it was realistic to expect that<sup>69</sup>:

«The West would use its nuclear deterrent as weapons against the cities of Russia and receive in return Russian retaliation which would put the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. out of business? For us (the British) to act in this way would be to commit national suicide. I do not believe it will happen. When both sides have nuclear sufficiency, the deterrent will merely serve to deter each side from using it as a weapon».

Montgomery's criticism was in response to the adoption by NATO, in 1957, of the *Massive Retaliation* doctrine<sup>70</sup>. This doctrine advocated that the protection of European NATO territory would require the «immediate exploitation of (this tactical) nuclear capability whether or not the Soviets used nuclear weapons»<sup>71</sup>. In reality, if the only possible response in the event of an aggression was a full-on thermonuclear war, deterrence in itself would lose credibility in the eyes of the adversary, and it would be difficult for the European allies, who were allegedly protected by U.S. nuclear deterrence, to consider this guarantee to be better than any other solution to a crisis that would at least ensure their survival.

The credibility issue with deterrence is not confined to an assessment of the proportionality of the behaviour that is to be deterred and the response designed; a much more direct and immediate problem is to have the capability to follow through on the threats made. In the case of conventional deterrence, the quality and quantity of the military resources available will usually be enough proof of this capability or lack thereof, bearing in mind that the complete destruction of conventional military capability is a difficult process and not easy to achieve in a short period of time. Nevertheless,

68 MORGAN, Patrick M. Op. cit., pp. 87-88.

69 POWASKI, Robert E. *The entangling alliance: The United States and European security, 1950-1993*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 39.

70 National Atlantic Treaty Organization. *NATO's Strategic Concept MC 14/2*.

71 Ibid.

it is possible to destroy key elements of conventional capability using surprise attacks such as the Israelis did during the Six-Day War (1967), which began with a surprise air strike of the air force bases in Arab countries, and left Israel in almost complete control of the skies, a move that was decisive for its overwhelming victory<sup>72</sup>.

## ESCALATION

While deterrence primarily aims to avoid a conflict, it can also play a pivotal role in controlling the level of violence in a conflict that has already begun. Kahn called this type of deterrence *intra-war deterrence*<sup>73</sup>. It entails the implementation of military measures that become progressively more intense and/or more violent (a process known as *escalation*).

In a typical escalation situation, the opponents compete when implementing military measures, each assuming greater risks and showing increased determination to achieve their goals. Escalation is therefore a conflict characterised by the progressive use of violence, whereby each opponent tries, by stepping up the measures taken, to get the other side to give up on its goals.

Escalation, like all forms of deterrence, is an exchange of information between two adversaries, in that the measures taken are messages, and because these messages are conveyed in their own unique language, the risk of their being misinterpreted is very high. Consequently, the main risk with escalation is that the adversary might overreact<sup>74</sup> after misinterpreting a particular message. Therefore, a key issue when designing successive deterrence measures in an escalation campaign is to estimate the importance the adversary will attach to each measure: it is very hard to know with sufficient precision the other state's cost-benefit calculations and, consequently, determine the retaliatory measures capable of changing the adversary's political priorities<sup>75</sup>. In terms of conventional (not nuclear) confrontations, moving from one step to the next in the ladder of escalation is most effective when it is massive and sudden<sup>76</sup>.

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72 BAR-ON, Mordechai, *A Never-ending Conflict: A Guide to Israeli Military History*, Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2006.

73 KAHN, Herman. *On Escalation. Metaphors and Scenarios*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 3.

74 *Ibid.*

75 MORGAN, Patrick M. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

76 HAMMES, T. X. *Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict*, Washington: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum, June 2012, p. 4.

## CONCLUSIONS

As the Latin adage *Si vis pacem, para bellum* goes (if you want peace, prepare for war), deterrence is the peacekeeping tool par excellence. It is based on three key premises<sup>77</sup>:

- For it to succeed, the deterring state must have sufficient military capability.
- The threats made must be credible and
- It must be able to clearly convey this threat to the opponent.

The main problem with deterrence is always going to be credibility: everything else hinges on this. Insufficient military force results in a lack of credibility; a lack of political willingness to use the military capabilities available results in a lack of credibility. Because credibility is a perception, the inability to convey the military capability available to the adversary, or the reluctance to use it, can also result in a lack of credibility.

Since 1945, European security has relied on U.S. extended deterrence. If the general problem with deterrence is credibility, in the case of extended deterrence, the problem becomes even more acute because, in addition to the three uncertainties mentioned previously, we have the ally's assessment of the security guarantee being offered. In the case of Europe, U.S. guarantees are a legacy of the Cold War, born out of common vital interests (the need to combat a Soviet threat that was considered existential by both sides of the Atlantic). However, following the demise of the USSR, these common interests disappeared, leaving only a small commonality of interests between Europe and the U.S. (the existence of common interests), meaning that the credibility of U.S. defence guarantees depends on the quantity and importance of the common interests in each crisis. Despite one-off episodes such as the crisis in Ukraine, the shift in U.S. strategy towards Asia-Pacific will further weaken this guarantee because it will reduce - mainly on the part of the U.S. - these common interests.

This progressive decline in the U.S.'s defence commitment to Europe forces the Europeans to build their own deterrence tools. In the absence of a military threat that could be considered existential for Europe (and in which nuclear weapons might play a role), the deterrence tools will necessarily be conventional.

Conventional deterrence is based on three interrelated circumstances<sup>78</sup>:

- The aggressor is normally aiming for a swift and inexpensive victory.
- It is based more on deterrence by denial than on deterrence by punishment.
- The local balance of military power is often key in the aggressor's calculations as to the likelihood of a swift victory.

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77 Ibid, p. 3.

78 GERSON. Op. cit., pp. 37-38.

Conventional deterrence requires significant military capabilities. Depending on the choice of deterrence model (by punishment or by denial), the forces needed will vary. In the case of deterrence by punishment, one must have the political and moral strength to attack primarily civilian targets, for which purpose strong public support is required, and this cannot be improvised. And, in any event, deterrence by punishment leaves the decision to accept the expected punishment in exchange for achieving its objectives in the hands of the enemy.

In addition to the common European problem, in Spain's case, a threat that is not shared forces it to define, in the country's (public and reserved) Security and Defence regulations, our interests, what behaviour we want to deter, what deterrence model to implement, and to design, deploy, train and equip the forces required to implement it, with credibility and to be able to convey this to our potential adversaries. Without this, deterrence will be reduced to ambiguous general deterrence which, unless we have can achieve the military capabilities that are as yet beyond our reach, is the least effective way of applying this concept, and, therefore, unlikely to guarantee peace.

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