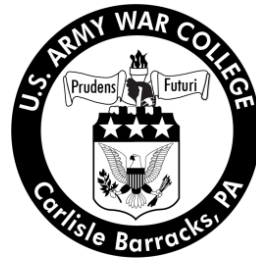# Deterring Non-State Threats in the Strategic Environment of 2035

by

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Highly empowered individuals and non-state groups and expanded access to lethal technologies shape the strategic environment of 2035. These trends, combined with a perception that the United States is a less willing and financially capable global security guarantor, may create conditions where non-state actors may choose to use violence to achieve ends counter to U.S. interests. This project identifies and assesses a strategy the United States may use to deter violent non-state actors. This analysis concludes that a cumulative deterrence strategy that combines denial and punitive concepts may deter violent non-state actors within certain limitations. Denial concepts alone are insufficient to deter all violence and requisite punitive measures are only acceptable against groups that pose significant risk to survival or vital U.S. interests. Collective-actor concepts may deter regional threats through the actions of regional partners and enable the United States to influence the behavior of groups that threaten peripheral interests. This strategy may reduce U.S. control over regional issues, but increased reliance on international partners will ultimately increase the ability of the United States to deter threats to vital and survival interests.

Deterring Non-State Threats in the Strategic Environment of 2035

Numerous studies and documents identify trends affecting the future. The increasing empowerment of individuals and non-state actors and expanded access to lethal and disruptive technologies are common trends amongst many of these studies. These trends, combined with a perception that the United States is a less willing and financially capable global security guarantor, may create conditions where non-state actors, with or without state sponsors, might choose to use violence to achieve ends counter to U.S. interests. As none of these entities can defeat the United States militarily, they will seek to achieve their objectives by raising the costs of U.S. intercession beyond the potential political benefit to the United States.[1]

To protect its interests, the United States should develop deterrence strategies that convince these potential adversaries that they will not succeed or that the cost ratio of conflict is not in their favor.[2] This paper identifies and assesses a strategy the United States may pursue to deter future violent non-state actors. This examination concludes that deterrence by punishment will only be effective in situations where the perceived threat is sufficient enough for the American public to accept the punitive measures required, such as in the employment of weapons of mass destruction. For this reason, the United States should pursue a strategy of cumulative deterrence that not only threatens to punish adversaries, but also reduces the anticipated benefit and likelihood of success of a violent act. This analysis also concludes that to maintain credibility the United States can only deter groups and actions that pose a risk to survival and vital U.S. interests. As a result, the nation must ultimately accept a state of "tolerable instability" in which it acts to deter select groups and actions, and relies on international partners to address instability outside these circumstances. In so doing, the United

States will increase the credibility of deterrent threats and best pursue its national interests.

The examination begins with a description of the pertinent factors of the future strategic environment, describing the actors, risks, trends and interests that shape the complex deterrent challenges in the future. A brief explanation of deterrence follows, providing a working definition and a review of select aspects of deterrence applicable to the forecasted strategic environment. The paper then outlines a strategy for deterring non-state actors. This strategy identifies broad deterrence objectives supported by concepts and resources. Acknowledging that the nature of the adversary shapes the nuance of deterrence, this strategy addresses multiple concepts encompassing deterrence by denial and punishment that states may tailor to specific threat groups. The final portion of the paper assesses the feasibility, acceptability, suitability, and risk of the identified strategy.

<p align="center">The Future Strategic environment</p>

<u>Trends</u>

Three trends shape the strategic environment of 2035 as it relates to non-state actors. The first trend is the empowerment of individuals and groups, which stems from the growth of a global middle class combined with communications technologies. The growing middle class allows for greater educational attainment that creates increasing expectations for participation in and representation from government entities. Communications technologies allow these individuals to coalesce into like-minded groups to influence the state. The Arab Spring is an example of the beginning of this trend, and this type of phenomenon is likely to accelerate with continued improvements in networking and communications technologies. These individuals and groups also

may have greater access to lethal and disruptive technologies, particularly in areas such as precision-strike, cyber warfare and bio-terrorism.[3]

The second trend is a shifting demographic from rural to urban populations. A disproportionate number of people are migrating to urban areas in an effort to participate in the global economy and secure their position in the rising middle class. For instance, since 1970, the population of the Asia-Pacific region almost doubled; however, the number of people living in Asian urban areas grew from 17 percent to 44 percent.[4] This rapid urbanization in some of the world's poorest countries is already outpacing infrastructure development, making these areas extremely resource sensitive due to overcrowding and lack of basic infrastructure. As a result, a minor disaster or disruption of a fragile urban system could destabilize and lead to conflict over scarce resources.[5]

The final trend affecting the future strategic environment is an inward-focused United States that is less willing or capable of serving as the global security guarantor. This trend stems from potential ground-combat weariness following a prolonged conflict from 2002 to 2014 and a fiscally constrained U.S. economy. This fatigue is evident in a survey released by the Pew Research Center on March 11, 2014 that assessed public opinion on U.S. involvement in the Ukraine situation. Of the 1,003 individuals surveyed, 29 percent indicated the United States should take a firm stand against Russia and only eight percent thought the country should consider military options.[6] While the nation's war-weariness may disappear by 2035, fiscal challenges will likely remain, constraining the size and capabilities of the U.S. military. These funding constraints, coupled with the U.S. penchant for technology, likely will manifest in a reduced force structure. As a

result, the United States probably will secure its interests through offshore balancing, relying on local allies and partners to maintain security and advance U.S. interests in a region.[7]

Risks

The above trends combine to produce multiple risks; two of which highlight the increasing importance of non-state actors. The first risk is that individuals and groups with greater access to lethal technologies may rapidly coalesce using social networking and challenge the state. As states seek to suppress these groups, intrastate conflict may ensue, oftentimes with destabilizing results. Increasing urbanization compounds this risk. Groups may quickly form in a resource-sensitive urban area, disrupting the flow of already limited necessities, creating competition over scarcity.[8] Non-state groups then leverage the collapse of legitimate governance in the urban area or portion of a state to establish a safe-haven for operations and secure arms, resources, funding, and legitimacy such as occurred in northern Mali in 2012.[9] In these cases, the non-state group's ability to rapidly form and threaten the state or its populace with violence marginalizes the influence of the state.

The second risk is an increase in interstate conflict due to the growth of powerful non-state groups combined with a retrenched United States. In the absence of a global power or multilateral institutions capable of influencing violent organizations, states may increasingly rely on private organizations to contain violent groups in other countries. States may choose to fight conflicts using proxy organizations as a cost-effective alternative to standing armies. Additionally, the use of proxy organizations allows states to secure peripheral interests without becoming directly involved, providing a level of deniability should intervention fail. Increased use of private security organizations by

states may ultimately change the character of conflict, making it no longer a state-centric enterprise. State sponsorship may provide non-state groups with access to extremely lethal technologies and a level of autonomy that ultimately allows these organizations to employ violence in pursuit of the group's own interests.[10] The conflict in Syria demonstrates this changing character with multiple non-state groups pursuing their objectives through violence. Saudi Arabia's support of Sunni rebel groups in this same conflict highlights the use of a proxy in a peripheral interest.[11]

The Future Character of Conflict

As the character of conflict changes, states may increasingly rely on violent non-state groups to achieve their interests. As evidenced by Iran's sponsorship of Hezbollah, violent non-state groups increasingly serve as an extension of foreign policy, augmenting shortages in traditional military capabilities and extending the operational reach beyond a state's conventional capabilities.[12] Further, weaker states may augment conventional forces with violent, non-state groups to achieve asymmetric advantages as a hedge against intervention by more dominant states.[13]

These groups, which provide an inexpensive, effective, and deniable way for weaker states to influence international affairs, have one additional advantage: the state can separate from them if no longer required. Unfortunately, these groups tend to remain upon withdrawal of state support, morphing into hybrid groups that secure resources through criminal enterprises and employment in other conflicts. Consequently, the rising power of violent non-state groups privatizes conflict, resulting in a proliferation of private militaries with no allegiance to any particular state.[14] In this environment, "the point of war may not be to actually win it, but to engage in profitable crime under the cover of warfare."[15]

U.S. Interests

The United States has four enduring national interests. Broadly, these interests are the security of the United States, its citizens, and allies; a stable international order advanced by U.S. leadership; respect for universal values; and a strong, growing economy.[16] The character of conflict forecasted above runs counter to U.S. interests in several ways. The rise of private organizations with increasingly violent capabilities endangers U.S. citizens. Violent non-state groups benefit from instability and disrupt a stable, state-centric international order. The asymmetric nature of these group's violent capabilities provides niche advantages over traditional U.S. military capabilities, raising the potential cost of U.S. intervention to restore stability.[17] These groups are not beholden to laws of armed conflict and may seek to advance their interests in inhumane manners. Finally, they may impede access to the global commons to include the disruption of the cyber environment with impact on the global economy. Thus, it is in U.S. interests to deter the rise and reach of these groups.

An Overview of Deterrence

What is Deterrence

Deterrence is not new or novel. In broad terms, deterrence is the practice of persuading a challenger that it is in his best interest not to do something by threatening some sort of punishment.[18] Indeed, the logic of deterrence influences individuals' daily choices. We may determine how fast we drive based on the costs of violating the law or we may influence our children based on the threat of some kind of punishment.

During the Cold War, states and militaries tended to limit deterrence to "the threat of military retaliation to forestall a military attack."[19] This narrow definition is not useful in light of the strategic environment described above because it excludes non-military

options and ignores many of the future threats. This paper, therefore examines

deterrence from a wider perspective that explores a broader range of deterrent methods

to include those used in contexts ranging from crime to war.[20] To that end, deterrence

is "anything that prevents (or attempts to prevent) an actor from taking an action by

influencing its decision making through its anticipation that the action will lead to a

negative result for its own interest or objectives."[21]

Why Deter

Deterrence fell out of favor after the Cold War. The United States found its

interests threatened by asymmetric adversaries that were unaffected by traditional U.S.

deterrence strategies. In the absence of an effective deterrent, the United States sought

to deny these adversaries access to force by means of preventive war. The wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan sought to reduce the power of violent actors by denying them access

to means of force. However, power is a combination of force and will. As evidenced by

the duration of both Iraq and Afghanistan, the ability to eliminate an actor's means of

force is limited and most adversaries will adapt their means to continue conflict as long

as they retain the will to do so. Through deterrence, defenders target the other variable

in the power equation, an adversary's will. The adversary retains the ability to make a

choice, but costs and punishment influence those choices.[22]

This contrast between preventive war and deterrence leads to two reasons why

the United States should continue to examine deterrence strategies for non-state actors.

First, preventive war is cost prohibitive. The United States may incur "potentially high

and avoidable costs in blood, treasure, and diplomatic friction" if it invades a country to

control a deterrable actor.[23] Second, the United States may lack the military resources

to pursue preventive war strategies against the forecasted number of violent, non-state

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actors in the future. For these reasons, it is important that the United States explore strategies to deter violent non-state organizations and actors. This dichotomous contrast does not imply that these are the only options for addressing non-state groups. Punitive expeditions and precision strikes may eliminate an actor's access to force; however, this strategy includes these types of actions as punitive deterrence measures for a more holistic effect.

Types of Deterrence

Five types of deterrence are pertinent with respect to non-state actors. Prior to developing a strategy to deter non-state actors, it is useful to understand these types. The first is deterrence by punishment, which focuses on deterring an adversary by threatening to hurt something it values. This contrasts to deterrence by denial, which seeks to influence an actor by eliminating the potential gain of an action. Punishment strategies affect behavior by increasing the costs of an action and denial strategies do so by eliminating the anticipated benefit. Cumulative deterrence combines elements of both of these strategies to achieve the desired effect on behavior.[24] Collective-actor deterrence involves states and international institutions, and functions through the fear of international reproach or collective punishment by intervention of sanction. Self-deterrence occurs when a state is unable to create a credible counter-threat for a variety of reasons including moral and legal issues, a lack of capability, or an absence of international sanction.[25]

Deterrence Assumptions and Challenges

Despite an analytical preference for deterrence, largely due to the cost prohibitive nature of preventive war, there are instances when deterrence is not an appropriate solution. Prior to examining a strategy for deterring non-state actors, therefore it is

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useful to examine the assumptions that underpin deterrence and the particular challenges associated with applying this strategy to non-state actors.

Three assumptions that underpin deterrence are pertinent to this analysis. The first assumption underpinning traditional deterrence is that states are the primary actors in the international system. This paper discounts this assumption, but acknowledges that doing so is problematic. Limiting deterrence to states simplifies strategies by assuming that there is a hierarchical structure with which to communicate threats, that the state has control of the military apparatus and can prevent those actions the defender seeks to deter, and that the leaders of the state will act rationally in pursuit of the state's national interests. For example, over time, the Soviet Union and the United States developed clear lines of communication between each other and had similar understandings of deterrence, which contributed to its effectiveness in the cold war.

This level of understanding will rarely exist between state and non-state actors, making deterrence more challenging. Indeed, applying deterrence beyond state actors creates challenges in identifying who to communicate with, who to target deterrent efforts toward, and what interests to target. More stakeholders are involved and the risk of miscommunication is higher as there may be little shared communication between the parties. Further, deterring non-state groups may require influencing multiple organizations and actors with widely disparate goals, such as myriad of non-state actors involved in Syria. Some of these widely differing goals may run counter to others and some groups may be only tangentially involved in violent behavior. Each group may require a unique deterrence approach or a determination on who to deter in the event of

conflicting adversary objectives. Additionally, actions against those not physically involved in violence may raise complex legal questions.[26]

The second assumption is that the actors involved are rational. Following 9/11, many pundits and U.S. government leaders asserted that deterrence could not apply to non-state actors, particularly religiously motivated terrorists, because their behavior was irrational. This may be true for some actors, but subsequent studies indicate that terrorists are generally rational and susceptible to the logic of deterrence as long as defenders adequately understand the terrorists' objectives. Similarly, criminal organizations pursuing wealth behave in a rational manner. This analysis, therefore, concludes that non-state organizations generally are rational actors.[27]

The final assumption applicable to this analysis is that varied classes of weapons have different levels of deterrence calculus. For example, the United States used a concept of mutually assured destruction to deter the nuclear-capable Soviet Union. The threat of total destruction would be ineffective for a lesser-armed adversary. Public perception would likely constrain the state's ability to respond as threatened, questioning the credibility of the threat. In the feasibility, acceptability, and suitability analysis of deterrent strategies, this paper postulates that some of the concepts or ways required to deter non-state actors are morally unacceptable to some states except under the auspices of significant threat to the state. This assumption holds equally true for violent non-state actors. In line with this assumption, states will tailor their deterrence strategies to the perceived level of threat posed by the non-state actor. Failing to do so would call into question the credibility of the deterrent threat.[28]

Strategies for Deterring Non-State Actors

<u>National Objectives</u>

The first step in developing a strategy to deter non-state threats is to define the objectives the strategy seeks to achieve. Recognizing that eliminating all violence is an unrealistic goal, this strategy pursues two objectives. The first is to deter non-state groups from using violent means against the United States and its citizens. The second is to deter non-state actors from achieving the collapse of another state through violent means. The first objective links directly to the enduring national interest of the security of the United States and its citizens. The second ties to a stable world order and economic prosperity. Both objectives link to a respect for universal values through the notion that deterrence of violence promotes resolution through non-violent means.

<u>A Strategy of Cumulative Deterrence</u>

This strategy seeks to achieve the above objectives through cumulative deterrence. Denial concepts within the strategy focus on deterring violent actions by any actor in general and seek to communicate that these types of attacks will ultimately fail. In contrast, the punitive concepts within the strategy are actor specific and tailored to the specific interests, objectives, and structure of adversarial groups. For this reason, successful punitive actions require knowledge of the composition and goals of the target groups and the ability to tailor and communicate punitive threats to them.[29] This strategy promotes deterrence by denial through two ways, countering proliferation of violent means and building resilience.

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<u>Deterrence by Denial</u>

Countering Proliferation

Countering proliferation of violent technologies supports deterrence by denial by decreasing the violent actor's likelihood of success. The United States may achieve this in three ways. First, it may do so by disrupting illicit supply chains. These illegal operations run on trust within the seller-buyer relationship. By clandestinely entering these illicit markets and introducing mistrust into the system, the United States may disrupt the flow of illegal arms. Second, the United States can influence producers of key dual-use technologies, such as global positioning systems and communication encryption devices to restrict distribution and include technical markers that enhance tracking and targeting of illicit distribution.[30]

Finally, the United States must continue to restrict access to fissile material. Currently, states retain a monopoly on the production of nuclear material required to manufacture a nuclear weapon. Some researchers indicate that non-state groups may achieve this capability in the future, but these assessments are mixed and this author assumes that a non-state actor attempting to produce such material would be immediately subject to a preventive strategy. Given this condition, the key to denying distribution of nuclear material is to continue to influence states not to provide material and ensure that all states, to include adversarial ones, have access to effective safeguard technology. Rogue states, such as North Korea, must understand that they remain responsible for control of their nuclear arsenals and that they are accountable for any nuclear incidents occurring because of the illicit distribution of nuclear material. Finally, the United States must retain the capability to secure nuclear stockpiles in the event of nuclear state's collapse.[31] States such as Pakistan that are developing smaller,

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tactical nuclear weapons pose significant risk in this area and the United States must retain the ability to intercede to secure these stockpiles if required.[32]

Building Resilience

Resilience reduces motivations for revolt, hardens a state's defenses to attacks, and increases an adversary's risk of capture or intervention. National and multinational governance training programs increase a state's ability to collaborate with its population to address issues prior to the eruption of violence. Such measures increase satisfaction with the state and strengthen legitimate governments and multinational institutions. Additionally, international efforts such as U.N. initiatives that promote sustainable development in urban areas reduce the risk of conflict over resource scarcity in the wake of an urban disaster. Cumulatively, these efforts deter violence by denying non-state actors the incentives required to foment rebellion and incite violent activity.[33]

The second component of building resilience is making it more difficult for adversaries to achieve their desired effect. The United States may accomplish this by hardening key infrastructure, increasing its ability to detect weapons and explosives, enhancing intelligence collection, and increasing covert and overt interdiction efforts. The first action forces adversaries to employ more resources or effort to achieve the desired effect while the latter ones make detection easier and smuggling harder. Cumulatively, these actions increase the risk of failure, which contributes to deterrence by denial by convincing violent non-state actors that their actions will be unsuccessful.[34]

The third component of resilience is building policing and response capacity in other states. Building the capacity of military forces, border and interior police forces and first responders increases the amount of violence the state can withstand and the risk of failure for the violent non-state actor. Capacity building efforts also promote

information sharing, enhancing our own intelligence collection.[35] Finally, increasing the capacity of other states expands the scope of violence that partner states can quell without U.S. assistance.

Deterrence by Punishment

As mentioned in the assumptions above, it is more challenging to deter non-state actors than state ones. States possess defined territory, populations and national interests to threaten. Non-state groups lack these well-defined assets, but their members and supporters have interests. Thus, deterring non-state actors through punishment requires threatening the interests of the group and its wider support network. This can be problematic; interests will vary across the network and defenders must tailor punitive threats to different components. This analysis addresses punitive concepts that target four members of a violent organization's network based on entities commonly associated with terrorist operations: state sponsors, societal supporters, specific violent groups, and individuals involved in violence.[36]

State Sponsors

The United States may influence state sponsors of violent groups through many actions ranging from traditional methods such as threats of military intervention and diplomatic or economic punishment to positive economic or military incentives including loan guarantees and military assistance. The ability of the United States to influence non-state actors through state sponsors is dependent upon the extent of the relationship between the state sponsor and the group. In situations where the affinity between the state and the group is high, deterrence strategies through the state are less likely to achieve the desired result. For instance, ideology, goals, and interests inextricably

linked Al Qaeda and the Taliban. As a result, U.S. efforts to influence Al Qaeda through the Taliban in the wake of 9/11 were unsuccessful.[37]

The level of effectiveness also depends on the efficacy of the state and the dependency of the non-state actor on the state. Weak or failing states may want to intervene but lack the ability or capacity to do so. Further, the state may withdraw support, but if the group is able to replace that support through other methods such as expanded criminal enterprise, the actions of the state will have limited influence on the violent organization. Thus, traditional deterrence strategies may work on state sponsors, but may have limited influence on their ability to influence violent organizations, depending on the relationship between the state and the group.[38]

Societal Sponsors

Implementing punitive actions against societal sponsors of violent groups is a challenging and ethically questionable concept; however, Israeli experience in 2008 and 2009 indicates that it may be effective. Punitive actions against societal sponsors target supporters and financiers, as well as communities and individuals with wealth and reputation who support the violent group in secrecy by commission or omission. The United States may influence these individuals in multiple ways, to include threats of arrest, exposure, shaming, and seizure or destruction of assets. In theory, punitive actions against societal sponsors erode support and force the violent organization to change due to public pressure. Research indicates that this is difficult in reality because populations misperceive punitive actions as vengeance if the linkage to adversary violence is unclear.[39] For instance, when the Israeli military punitively demolished homes of the relatives of suicide attackers in 2008-9, attacks launched from these areas

diminished. However, when the Israeli government attempted to deter through preemptive demolitions, actual attacks increased.[40]

Punitive deterrence actions against societal sponsors also may require levels of state-sponsored violence that run counter to the ethical and legal views of the United States and most of its allies. [41] Pursuing such strategies may place so much internal and external pressure on the United States that it chooses not to follow through on threats, thus reducing its credibility and creating a propaganda victory for the adversary.[42] For this reason, the U.S. Government should communicate punitive threats against societal sponsors of those groups only when they present such a threat to the United States that the U.S. public would actually allow such a punishment. The United States should avoid threats of heavy-handed methods outside of such situations, as the threats might be unbelievable.

Specific Violent Groups

The United States can threaten specific violent groups by applying targeted pressure on group leaders by diplomatic, economic, and military methods. Such pressure could be either non-violent or violent. The United State may seize assets and work with international partners to revoke citizenship or discredit reputations to manipulate organization morale and reduce its recruiting base. From a violent perspective, credibly threatening and conducting precision strikes against the leaders of violent groups adversely affects the group's professionalism and morale and reduces its ability to plan and execute acts of violence. Precision is the key aspect here. Collateral civilian casualties can erode U.S. public support for military action, raising questions as to the credibility of future threats. Further, civilian casualties may increase local support for violent actors.[43]

The Israeli response to the terrorist attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games

is an example of punitive action with long-term deterrent effects. In this instance, Israel

conducted multiple assassinations over several years against Palestine Liberation

Organization and Black September operatives in response to the Munich incident,

temporarily diminishing attacks against Israel and Jews. The killings were precise, but

widespread and of such magnitude that terrorist groups hesitated to employ additional

violence out of fear of further mass retaliation.[44] The response also highlights the

importance of minimizing collateral damage. In one instance, Israeli operatives

mistakenly killed an innocent civilian in Lillehammer, Norway. International pressure

over the mistaken murder influenced the Israeli Prime Minister to suspend the

assassination campaign.[45] The Israeli approach demonstrates both an effective

response that served to deter other actors and the importance of limiting collateral

damage.

Individuals Involved in Violence

The preferred method for deterring individuals is to shape the environment so

that they never choose a violent path. The previous section on deterrence by denial

already captured these methods. Once individuals choose to pursue their interests

through violence, the most effective deterrent concept is to threaten them with the risk

of failure and arrest. Individuals may reconsider their actions if faced with failure and

extended prison terms.[46] As RAND terrorism expert, Brian Michael Jenkins explains

> The message to would-be terrorists should be…they will fail. They will be
> detected and apprehended. They will be treated as criminals and will
> spend a long time in a prison cell. They will receive no applause. They will
> disgrace their families and their communities. They will be labeled fools.
> Their lives will be wasted. There will be no glory.[47]

Jenkins' conclusion underscores the importance of a cumulative approach to deterrence. Punitive measures alone are insufficient to deter non-state actors. Effective deterrent strategies require investment in capacity building to eliminate the conditions that drive actors to violence and create legitimate security and police institutions capable of enforcing laws. These legitimate security institutions add credibility to the state's threats of failure and life imprisonment.

Feasibility, Acceptability, Suitability, and Risk Analyses

<u>Feasibility</u>

Feasibility analysis assesses if the United States possesses the resources or means required to execute the concepts identified in the deterrent strategy. Resources required for deterrence by denial include police and military partnership capabilities, governance development programs, international frameworks to shape sustainable development, and intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination capabilities. The structure of these resources and efficiency will change over the next twenty years, particularly in intelligence collection and analysis leveraging advanced information and communications technology and the role of big data analytics; however, most changes will be evolutionary improvements in capability. Deterrence by denial is feasible with current resources and will remain so in the future.

Resources required for punitive deterrence include those necessary for collecting and analyzing intelligence information; countering anti-access and aerial denial strategies; deploying globally; engaging hardened, urban or deeply buried targets with precision; protecting forces from rockets, mortars, and explosive devices; and identifying sources of nuclear material. These resources come from multiple organizations within the U.S. Government. Examining the Army as a representative

sample of this broader community indicates that the United States has considerable existing capabilities in this area and will expand them. For instance, the Army's 2013 Strategic Planning Guidance (ASPG) highlights modernization imperatives that include increasing the integration of conventional and special operations forces "to execute 'small footprint' operations," ensuring forces are capable of joint entry operations in non-permissive environments, and expanding the ability to detect, identify, and eliminate weapons of mass destruction.[48] These modernization imperatives indicate that the military will have the requisite capabilities to support punitive deterrence strategies in the future. In fact, the ASPG explicitly states that "the Army prevents conflict and destabilizing activities through its credibility as a modern, combat-ready, globally deployable force."[49]

The feasibility challenge lies in the impacts of fiscal constraints on capacity. The United States military, particularly the Army, must have the ability to fight and win the nation's wars against a high-end, military adversary. As fiscal constraints impose reductions in force structure, the services must retain the capability for high intensity combat, potentially at the expense of capabilities required to deter violent non-state groups. This optimization for high-intensity conflict may limit strategic options at lower levels of conflict and become self-deterring. Even if the capability remains, reduced operations funding may result in readiness shortfalls that similarly constrain options. The perception of reduced capability could actually undercut deterrent concepts by promoting miscalculation or inviting opportunism by potential adversaries.[50]

Acceptability

Acceptability assesses whether concepts are legal and appropriate. Two factors shape acceptability. The first factor is the type, nature, and violent activity of the non-

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state actor the defender seeks to deter. An ideologically motivated, international organization seeking access to nuclear weapons requires a different approach than a regional threat employing conventional violence for limited purposes. In the former, it would be acceptable and credible for the U.S. Government to threaten supporters and state sponsors with violent repercussions because of the potential risks to the United States. Heavy-handed tactics like this would be inappropriate in the latter case, however, and would work against a defender that employed them. In the event that the adversary committed a limited violent act, the defender might lack sufficient public sanction to commit the threatened punishment and would thus lose credibility in future deterrent threats.[51]

The second factor is similar, but centers on the level of value the defender places upon the interest it seeks to protect. States have much more deterrent credibility when they are protecting a vital national interest. If a violent organization threatens a state's survival or vital interests, it is much more reasonable for a defender to employ strong punitive measures to protect them. Therefore, adversaries generally perceive threats of harsh, punitive retaliation as credible in these cases. Conversely, the United States may have limited influence in a situation where it is attempting to deter violence for only a peripheral interest. However, that peripheral interest may be a vital interest for another state. In this situation, the United States may achieve its deterrent objectives by increasing the credibility and capability of the ally for whom the interest is vital.[52]

These two factors indicate that the United States may suffer a credibility gap if it seeks to deter violent groups that are not affecting its vital interests. The U.S. Government may seek to deter violent actions by threatening retaliation and it may have

the capability to respond appropriately. The United States, however, may lack the political, public or international support to carry out such threats if national or international opinion finds these actions unacceptable. To sustain credibility, the United States should employ punitive deterrence concepts only against those non-state actors that can affect U.S. vital or survival interests, and should rely instead on denial concepts and collective-actor deterrence for important or peripheral interests. Building partner capacity and the legitimacy of international organizations also would expand the deterrent influence of the United States.

<u>Suitability</u>

Suitability analysis assesses whether the identified strategy will achieve the desired objectives. Two issues affect suitability in this case: the assumption of rationality and the linkage of acceptability to risk. While previous evidence and analysis led this examination to conclude that non-violent organizations act rationally, other research indicates that actors committed to ideological or psychological goals may act rationally within their own value-driven frameworks. Actors in this situation place tremendous value on intangible goals and may be willing to pay significant costs to achieve them. In this case, punitive deterrence concepts that focus on the specific violent group and the individuals involved in the violence would be ineffective within a value-driven framework. At the same time, while deterrence by denial and punitive concepts focused on state sponsors and societal supporters would make it harder for the organization to achieve its goals, the organization would remain committed to using any means necessary to pursue its ends.[53] In this case, preventive measures such as precision strikes that eliminate organization leadership would be required. The purpose of the punitive actions in such cases, therefore, is on eliminating the target organization's access to means of

force, not deterrence. The difference is subtle, but emphasizes that punitive concepts may have limited deterrent value against an adversary motivated solely by values. Preventive strategies may be more applicable against these types of organizations.

The interplay of risk and acceptability also affects suitability. As highlighted under the acceptability analysis, some punitive concepts are only viable for select adversaries depending on the perceived level of risk. There may be violent groups whose activities never rise to the level where punitive actions are acceptable to the U.S. population. Denial concepts will thwart some of these groups' attacks and minimize the effectiveness of others and the use of punitive actions by U.S. allies and partners may deter still more. Despite these efforts, the United States may not be able to deter all groups. This conclusion could question the suitability of the entire strategy.

Rather than void the entire strategy, this conclusion requires the deterring state to clarify the strategy's objectives. Ending all violence is an unattainable objective. Instead, the strategy should seek to control the scope and spread of violence so that it remains at a level manageable by states and does not expand into a regional or international threat.[54] In addition, the requirement for the use of military force in a situation or the use of violence by an adversary does not necessarily indicate a failure of deterrence. The occasional requirement to use military force is an opportunity to reinforce acceptable norms of behavior that underpin broader deterrence relationships elsewhere. Moreover, an occasional violent episode is not an indicator of an overall deterrence failure. Defenders must view outcomes in comparison with the potential consequences of preemptive strategies. Both have costs and risks.[55]

<u>Risk</u>

The primary risk associated with the punitive concepts within this strategy is that adversaries take action to garner a specific punitive response and then use that response to further their own interests. Titled the "deterrence trap," a weaker adversary creates a situation in which there is no acceptable choice available to the defender. If the defender takes action, the weaker adversary exploits the violence to strengthen its message. If the defender abstains from action, the adversary group portrays the inaction as weakness and uses the lack of response to question the defender's credibility. In this situation, deterrence becomes a tool used by the adversary against the defender. The defender then seeks to regain its deterrent reputation through violent means, which only serves to strengthen the weaker adversary. Collective-actor deterrent concepts may help mitigate this risk by demonstrating widespread condemnation of the group. This serves to delegitimize the actor, build credibility for punitive actions, and spread risk among the collective group of deterring states. [56]

Conclusion

Diffusion of power from states to individuals and groups will shape the strategic environment in 2035. Information and communications technologies will allow like-minded individuals to coalesce quickly into groups to pursue common interests. Increased access to violent technologies, particularly in areas such as precision strike, cyber attack, and bio-terrorism further complicates this environment. These trends, combined with a perception that the United States is potentially less willing and financially capable of serving as the global security guarantor, may create conditions where non-state actors, with or without state sponsors, choose to employ violence to achieve ends counter to U.S. interests.

The United States is capable of deterring these groups using a strategy of cumulative deterrence; however, this strategy has limitations. Unilaterally, the United States can only be successful in deterring groups that pose significant risk to survival or vital U.S. interests. Punitive actions required to deter actors posing less risk than this may be politically or publically unacceptable and thus pose a risk to overall credibility. Concepts that focus on deterrence by denial will hamper the activities of less threatening groups, but will be inadequate by themselves to deter violent activity completely. Collective-actor deterrent concepts supported by U.S. capacity building efforts may deter regional threats through the actions of regional partners and enable the United States to influence the behavior of groups that threaten peripheral interests. While this strategy may reduce direct U.S. control over regional issues, increasing reliance on international partners will ultimately increase the ability of the United States to deter threats to vital and survival interests and contribute to stronger overall deterrent capability.

Endnotes

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