



Conceptualizing Deterrence of Terrorism in the Era of Strategic Competition



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Conceptualizing Deterrence of Terrorism in the Era of Strategic Competition

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Deterring terrorism literature began as a reaction following the events of September 11, 2001. Since that time, there has been fairly robust research that applied deterrence theory to terrorism, terrorists, and violent non-state actors in general. This paper explores both the innovations and pitfalls of deterring terrorism scholarship while arguing for conceptual precision in defining levels of analysis as well as the alignment of influence mechanisms and desired outcomes when thinking about deterrence as applied to countering terrorism. This paper begins with a summary of the existent literature on deterring terrorism, focused on theoretical reconceptualization and expansion of deterrence theory as scholars attempted to apply the deterrence framework to terrorism. The paper then discusses four deterrence models — triadic deterrence, deterrence by delegitimization, deterrence by punishment and by denial, and cumulative deterrence — developed that differ significantly from those traditionally associated with deterrence theory. Finally, the paper proposes that one must be precise in conceptualizing at what level one seeks to deter terrorism, what is/are the desired outcome(s), and what are the influence mechanisms available (and how do they contribute to achieving the desired outcome(s)) when applying deterrence theory in the context of terrorism. The paper asserts that when one insists on conceptual precision in these areas, deterrence theory, as applied to terrorism, can not only be a fruitful tool for scholars and practitioners alike to dissect and understand terrorism, but it can also provide practitioners the foundations to develop strategic analytical tools that can aid in countering terrorism in the era of strategic competition.

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Introduction

Following a period of approximately two decades of relative lull subsequent to the conclusion of the Cold War, the concept of deterrence underwent a revival from approximately the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s. Termed the "fourth wave" of deterrence scholarship, scholarly efforts during this epoch aimed to employ the framework of deterrence theory in addressing an array of "new" and "emerging" threats, including domains such as terrorism, rogue states, and ethnic conflicts. Today, with integrated deterrence featured prominently as a centerpiece of the 2022 National Defense Strategy (Austin III, 2022, pp. 8-11), the concept of deterrence is once again at the forefront of discussion. Consequently, it is appropriate to reassess the applicability of deterrence to terrorism.² Specifically, it is worthwhile to critically examine how we should conceptualize deterrence of terrorism as we navigate the era marked by strategic competition.

The primary objective of this paper is to elucidate the advancements and shortcomings within scholarly and practitioner endeavors that employ deterrence principles in the context of terrorism and counterterrorism. This exploration also underscores the imperative for meticulously defined levels of analytical frameworks, coupled with the synchronization of influence mechanisms and intended outcomes, when contemplating the application of deterrence in the context of countering terrorism.

Commencing with an overview of existing literature on the deterrence of terrorism, the paper primarily focuses on the theoretical redefinition and broadening of deterrence theory beyond its original scope in the Cold War era as academics endeavored to adapt this framework to the domain of terrorism. Subsequently, the discussion centers on the necessity for meticulous precision in our contemplations regarding deterrence, the selection of appropriate influence mechanisms, and the intended outcome.

Deterring Terrorism: State of the Field

Literature on deterring terrorism is relatively limited compared to the extensive body of work on deterrence theory writ large. The study of deterring terrorism emerged just over two decades ago, whereas research on deterrence within international relations has been ongoing since the 1940s. A notable example of work on deterrence within international relations that demonstrates the field's evolution is Robert Jervis's 1979 article, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," which examines the evolution of deterrence theory during its third wave of scholarship. The genesis of literature on deterring terrorism can be traced back to the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Since then, there has been substantial research applying deterrence theory to terrorism, terrorists, and broader categories of violent non-state actors. This research has yielded new theoretical frameworks and models specific to deterrence of terrorism, as well as empirical insights and strategic policy recommendations.³

The literature on deterring terrorism, emerging in the post-9/11 era, significantly broadened the scope of traditional Cold War-era deterrence theory. This expansion involved shifting the focus from states and superpowers to include violent non-state actors, their sub-groups, and individual supporters. Scholars

adapting deterrence theory to terrorism had to consider different influence mechanisms and high payoff targets (HPTs)⁴ beyond those typically associated with interstate conflict management. Unlike traditional state-centric deterrence, which revolves around territorial integrity, political and economic stability, military strike capabilities, and regional/global spheres of influence, deterring violent non-state actors involves leveraging HPTs such as popularity; social, political, and religious legitimacy; prestige; group cohesiveness; leadership; and safe haven (see for example, Davis & Jenkins, 2002). This shift necessitates a move away from conventional interstate threats of punishment, especially those backed by military force, to non-kinetic methods tailored to these non-traditional HPTs.

For instance, when aiming to deter a violent non-state actor, rather than using the threat of military force (a traditional kinetic deterrence approach used against state actors), non-kinetic strategies targeting high value targets that are crucial to the violent non-state actor's operation could be employed. An example of such a non-kinetic strategy would be a coordinated offensive information operation designed to alter public perceptions of the violent non-state actor, thereby undermining the violent non-state actor's legitimacy in the eyes of the public (whose support is crucial to its operational success), which would lead to influencing its decision-making calculus. This approach represents a broader concept of deterrence, focusing on non-kinetic rather than kinetic means of deterrence. This evolution in deterrence theory reflects a more nuanced understanding of the HPTs and strategies effective against those we aim to deter (see for example, Davis & Jenkins, 2002; Benard, 2011; Dunn, 2008; Kamolnick, 2012; Long & Wilner, 2014; Waller, 2007; Wilner, 2011, 2015).

A natural outgrowth of the evolution of deterrence theory to encompass non-traditional HPTs, particularly those valued by violent non-state actors, and an increased emphasis on non-kinetic methods, naturally led to a closer association between deterrence and influence strategies. This conceptual connection is quite

² For the purpose of this paper, I adopt the definition of terrorism used in the Global Terrorism Database, which states, "...threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (START, 2021).

³ See for example, Almog, D. (2004). Cumulative deterrence and the war on terrorism; Braithwaite, J. (2005). Pre-empting terrorism; Klein, J. J. (2012). Deterring and dissuading nuclear terrorism; Knopf, J. W. (2008). Wrestling with deterrence; Knopf, J. W. (2010). The fourth wave in deterrence research; Lebovic, J. H. (2007). *Deterring international terrorism and rogue states*; Lieberman, E. (Ed.). (2018). *Deterring terrorism*; Long, J. M., & Wilner, A. S. (2014). Delegitimizing al-Qaida; Lupovici, A. (2010). The emerging fourth wave of deterrence theory; Morral, A. R., & Jackson, B. A. (2014). *Understanding the role of deterrence in counterterrorism security*; Rid, T. (2012). Deterrence beyond the state; Stein, J., & Levi, R. (2015). The social psychology of denial; Ünal, M. C., & Cafnik Uludağ, P. (2022). Eradicating Terrorism in Asymmetric Conflict; Wenger, A., & Wilner, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Deterring terrorism*; Wilner, A. S. (2011). Deterring the undeterrable; Wilner, A. S. (2015). *Deterring Rational Fanatics*; Wolfowicz, M., Campedelli, G. M., Seaward, A., & Gill, P. (2023). Not so different after all: Increased arrests and convictions (but not sentence length) deter terrorism.

⁴ Joint Publication 3-60, *Joint Targeting* (2013, revised 2018), defines *high payoff target (HPT)* as "a target whose loss to the enemy will significantly contribute to the success of a friendly course of action," and I chose to use this term in this passage to convey to the readers to that when we think about "what can we do to deter someone or some action," we should think about it in terms of "what HPTs will best lead us to the desired outcome(s)."

straightforward. Fundamentally, deterrence is a form of influence, where the defender (the one who is doing the deterring) seeks to modify the behavior of the challenger (the one who is being deterred; the intended target of the deterrence action). This is achieved by influencing the challenger's cost-benefit analysis, signaling that their actions will likely fail or, at least, result in undesirable consequences.

Although integrating this broader view of deterrence with the concept of influence presents some theoretical challenges, it opened new perspectives for scholars and practitioners. This expanded framework enhances the understanding of not only deterring terrorism but also addressing broader issues related to insurgency and political violence. This approach also shifts the focus from merely threatening retaliation against specific actions to strategically influencing adversaries' perceptions and decisions.

Another innovation that came out of the expansion of deterrence theory beyond its traditional Cold War-era model was that it allowed scholars and practitioners to disaggregate terrorism into component parts (such as recruitment, financing, training, weapons acquisition, attack planning, and attack execution), which led to significant advancements in our understanding of terrorism. This shift enabled scholars and practitioners to break down terrorism into its various elements and sub elements, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of how to influence the decision-making of terrorists. In line with the concept of tailored deterrence described in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006, pp. 49-51), this detailed dissection of terrorism allows for the customization of deterrence strategies.

Such an approach allowed scholars and practitioners to consider, in component parts, different terrorism strategies (like provocation, attrition, outbidding, and intimidation), types of terrorist attacks (such as suicide bombings, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks, or armed assaults), and various stages of terrorist activities (including recruitment, material procurement, planning, and execution of attacks). It also allowed us to examine more closely different individuals and groups involved in or relevant to terrorism, ranging from terrorist leaders and financiers to religious ideologues and supportive societal or community members. By understanding these components in depth, deterrence can be more effectively "tailored" to address the specific dynamics of each aspect of terrorism.

Finally, as a result of the developments in deterrence studies, both broadly and specifically in deterring terrorism, scholars and practitioners have come to explore a range of deterrence models. These models, which involve various processes of influence, differ significantly from those traditionally associated with deterrence theory.

The first of these distinctions came in the form of deterrence thinkers taking a page out of Keck and Sikkink's (1998) boomerang model. Traditional deterrence between states typically involves a dyadic model, with a defender and a challenger. With the expansion of the concept of deterrence and the nuanced understanding of terrorism, however, scholars have explored a more complex, triadic model of deterrence dubbed triangular or indirect deterrence. This concept, initially proposed by Harkavy in 1998, involves the defender

exerting pressure on a third, indirectly related party. This third party, then in turn, influences the challenger, thus influencing its behavior. This approach is especially relevant in the counterterrorism context, as seen in Knopf's 2010 work. For example, a state might deter a terrorist group by threatening retaliation against a different state that harbors the terrorists, thereby indirectly influencing the terrorist group's actions—consider a potential real-world example where the United States might desire to indirectly influence Hezbollah's future actions. In this scenario, the United States communicates to a third party (for example, Iran) that the United States will hold it accountable if Hezbollah carries out an operation against the United States' interests. By doing so, the United States exerts pressure on a third party (in this case, Iran), expecting the third party to subsequently exert its influence on Hezbollah. This indirect approach leverages a third party's relationship with Hezbollah to modify Hezbollah's decision-making and behavior without the United States engaging directly with Hezbollah. This strategy is an illustration of indirect deterrence achieved through a third party to obtain a specific behavioral outcome from the target. Extending beyond the simple dyadic framework of traditional state-on-state deterrence, the indirect deterrence model better reflects the complexity of contemporary global security challenges and conflict dynamics.⁵

The second distinctive departure was the formulation of deterrence by delegitimization (Wilner, 2011). Given that the goal is for the defender to shape and change the challenger's behavior by manipulating the rationale that informs its cost-benefit calculus, and that deterring violent non-state actors involves leveraging HPTs such as popularity—as well as social, political, and religious legitimacy—the goal of this approach would be to *influence* the violent non-state actor's decision-making and behaviors through the delegitimization of violence, which in turn would threaten the violent non-state actor's legitimacy among the local population. (See for example, Benard, 2011; Dunn, 2008; Kamolnick, 2012; Long & Wilner, 2014; Waller, 2007; Wilner, 2011, 2015).

The third distinction was the reframing of the concept of deterrence by punishment and by denial⁶ to focus on below the state actor levels of analyses (e.g., organizational, and individual levels). This reframing resulted in discussion that focused on whether using methods like leadership decapitation and targeted killings is an effective way to deter terrorism as a concept of deterrence by punishment (see, for example, Carvin, 2012; Jordan, 2009; Price, 2012). As with the expansion of deterrence by punishment, deterrence by denial was also expanded conceptually to include concepts such as behavioral denial, which prevents specific actions; defensive denial, which strengthens defenses; and resilience or mitigation, which reduces the impact of attacks (see, for example, Smith & Talbot 2008; Stein & Levi, 2023; Wilner, 2011). The concept of intrawar deterrence in the context of deterring terrorism, however, mirrors that of the inter-state model of intrawar deterrence. It suggests that a defender can deter pursuit of specific goals or deter a particular

⁵ For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Fraiman (2018).

⁶ Deterrence by punishment and by denial are still hot topics of discussion in the state-to-state context (see for example, Gallagher, 2019; Lupovici, 2023; Noll et al., 2021).

aspect(s) of the violent non-state actor's behavior, such as the pursuit and acquisition of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, while also actively attempting to defeat the violent non-state actor through conventional military means (see, for example, Shamir, 2021, p. 275; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005; Wilner, 2013).⁷

Finally, the cumulative deterrence model was developed. The cumulative deterrence model is a long-term approach to deterrence, characterized by ongoing interactions between a defending state and a challenging violent non-state actor, typically in an extended conflict. In this model, deterrence is achieved by systematically teaching the challenger lessons through successful campaigns. This process aims to alter the perceptions of the challenger regarding its likelihood of success (see, for example, Almog, 2004; Brym & Andersen, 2009; Kirchofer, 2017).

In sum, approximately twenty years of research has resulted in significant innovation in how we think about and approach deterrence in the context of terrorism and how these concepts can be used in counterterrorism; and they have also contributed to the advancement of deterrence studies writ large. Disaggregating terrorism into its component parts and treating them both as separate and interlinked processes, along with broadening the understanding of deterrence, has enabled scholars and practitioners to pinpoint which elements and processes are most susceptible to specific deterrence strategies. Put simply, viewing terrorism as a series of connected parts and processes has clarified where and how targeted deterrence measures can be most effectively applied to deter terrorism.

Application of Deterrence in Countering Terrorism: A Need for Precision

Over the past two decades, research on deterring terrorism has broken important new ground that contributed to the advancement of deterrence as a theoretical enterprise. This progress involved expanding the traditional concept of deterrence and connecting it with other previously distinct theories. This expansion and integration of concepts, however, introduced various dilemmas, paradoxes, and challenges. Critics of this approach to terrorism argue that deterrence is an inappropriate framework for addressing the issue. Yet, existing literature refutes these criticisms, offering scholars and practitioners solid foundations for developing strategic tools for countering terrorism in the long term. The effectiveness of applying deterrence in the context of terrorism hinges on the conceptual precision at different levels as one seeks to apply the theory into practice, what level of terrorism is being targeted for deterrence, which mechanisms of influence are available, and what outcomes are desired. Following is a discussion of the need for this conceptual precision to ensure rigorous application of deterrence in the context of countering terrorism. Figure 1, below, provides a graphic illustration of the discussion to follow.

⁷ An important point to make here is that the actions taken to defeat the violent non-state actor themselves do not constitute deterrence; however, the actions taken to prevent the pursuit and acquisition of CBRN constitute deterrence.

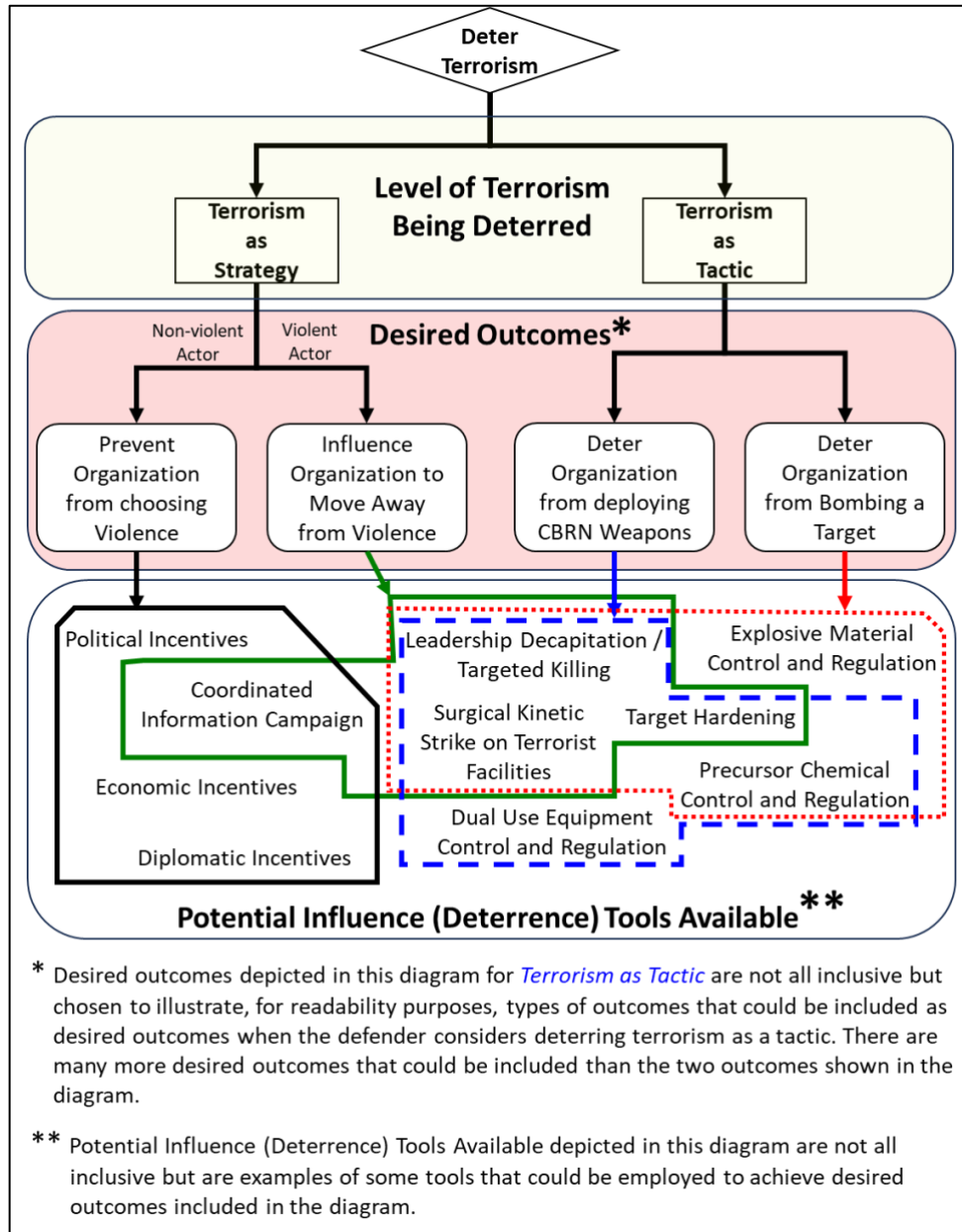


Figure 1: Illustrative Example of Conceptualizing Deterrence in Countering Terrorism Context

Deterring Terrorism as a Tactic or Terrorism as a Strategy?

The first concept one needs to precisely define is at what level one is seeking to deter terrorism. Is one interested in deterring terrorism as a tactic, or is one interested in deterring terrorism as a strategy? Interestingly, the outwardly visible influence mechanism employed by the defender to achieve deterrence of *terrorism as a tactic* and *terrorism as a strategy* may look exactly the same to an outside observer; however, it certainly functions very differently as a part of the complex causal chain designed to achieve deterrence depending on the level at which the defender intends to deter terrorism. Deterring *terrorism as a tactic* involves manipulating a challenger’s decision and/or capability to engage in specific terrorist

activities, while deterring *terrorism as a strategy*⁸ involves manipulating a challenger's decision on continued employment of terrorism as its primary means to achieve its goals, or better yet, manipulating a challenger's decision to choose non-violent methods rather than violent ones (i.e., terrorism) to achieve its goals in the first place. The distinction between deterring *terrorism as a tactic* and *terrorism as a strategy* seems subtle but significant, especially as we have expanded the concept of deterrence to include a much broader concept of influence and as we consider the paradigm of integrated deterrence moving forward.

Take targeted killing used as an influence mechanism for example. What is the intention of the defender behind the decision to carry out a targeted killing? Is it to simply degrade the violent non-state actor's capabilities? Is it intended to send the non-state actor a message to convey the defender's resolve and capability to retaliate with overwhelming force, thus manipulating the violent non-state actor's tactical choices in its targeting or attack methods? Is it intended to send a message to the violent non-state actor that it should consider walking away from using terrorism as a strategy to achieve its overall goals? Is it intended to send a message to third parties who may be considering the use of terrorism for the achievement of their goals? Depending on the defender's intention(s), the choice to use targeted killing, as well as other activities undertaken by the defender in coordination with the kinetic action, may or may not be the appropriate tool needed to influence the violent non-state actor and achieve the defender's desired outcome. (See Figure 1 above for a graphic illustration)

For instance, if the goal of the defender is to convey a message that it is willing to retaliate with overwhelming force and go after those responsible when a terrorist organization conducts an attack, then the defender must correctly conceptualize the purpose of its actions. Is it attempting to deter *terrorism as a tactic*, or to *deter terrorism as a strategy*? If the goal is to manipulate the terrorist organization's tactical choices, such as target selection and attack methods, then the defender is attempting to deter *terrorism as a tactic*, and a relatively straightforward retaliation strike—for example, a missile strike using an unmanned aerial vehicle—may be enough to achieve the defender's goal. If, however, the defender's goal is to influence the terrorist organization to abandon the path of political violence altogether, then its goal is to deter *terrorism as a strategy*, and that will require the defender to implement a complex integrated deterrence strategy—where a relatively straightforward missile strike may be a component of the overall

⁸ Theoretically, for a violent non-state actor currently employing terrorism (i.e., a terrorist organization), there are two important alternatives to its current path: 1) use of non-violence to achieve its goals, and 2) use of violence that does not meet the definition of terrorism—namely, engaging in “pure insurgency” against legitimate military targets. Given this, while the defender's goal would be to influence the violent non-state actor to choose option 1 described above over the status quo (use of terrorism), it is important for the defender to consider the possibility of violent non-state actor turning to option 2 rather than option 1 as an unintended consequence of the defender's deterrence strategy. Because, however, this paper does not deal with unintended consequences in general, for the purposes of this paper, I mean deterring *terrorism as a strategy* to be those actions a defender could take to discourage the use of violence, whether the violence meets the definition of terrorism or not, by currently violent non-state actor. Of course, if the non-state actor who is challenging the defender is only employing non-violent means to achieve its goals, then the desired outcome of deterring *terrorism as a strategy* would be to maintain the status quo by preventing it from turning to violence.

strategy but not the only (and certainly not the primary) component of the overall deterrence strategy. Finally, if the defender's intention is to send a message to third parties who may be considering the use of terrorism to achieve their goals, then a kinetic strike may very well be a very powerful tool to demonstrate to those third parties the consequences of choosing the path of terrorism. This kinetic influence tool (stick) would be more powerful when reserved for those using terrorist violence and contrasted clearly with the non-kinetic *carrots* such as economic, political, or diplomatic incentives for those who elect a non-violent path. In other words, the defender must show the challenger and/or would-be challenger a clear and better (from the perspective of the target) alternative to the punishment it will receive if it chooses the path of violence. (See Figure 1 above for a graphic illustration)

It is in this way that the defender must have a clear and precise conceptualization at what level it is seeking to deter terrorism. As illustrated above, if one intends to deter *terrorism as a tactic*, a more straightforward, or dare I say more familiar, influence mechanism of deterrence by punishment may be appropriate. If, however, one intends to deter *terrorism as a strategy*, it may be more appropriate to influence the challenger(s) and/or would-be challengers through the use of several coordinated non-kinetic influence mechanisms packaged in the form of incentives (carrots) accented with hints of an "appropriate" amount of potential punishments (sticks) should the challenger(s) and/or would-be-challenger(s) choose "unwisely." In order to apply the framework of deterrence to countering terrorism—to take advantage of all the theoretical innovations the field has made in this area—and to develop a strategy that will provide an opportunity for the defender to achieve its goals, it is critical that the defender first clearly and precisely conceptualizes whether the problem it desires to resolve is to deter *terrorism as a tactic* or to deter *terrorism as a strategy*.

Alignment of Desired Outcome and Influence Mechanism

Once the defender first clearly and precisely conceptualizes whether it desires to deter terrorism as a tactic or as a strategy, the defender must ensure that the influence mechanisms it chooses to employ are aligned with its desired outcomes. This is the second area where we must have conceptual precision to ensure rigorous application of deterrence in the context of countering terrorism. Before moving further into the discussion, however, it is worth explicitly noting that eliminating (defeating) terrorists is not actually the desired outcome the defender is pursuing when it comes to deterring terrorism. Rather, the desired outcome is either preventing a terrorist organization from conducting a specific type of terrorist attack against a specific type of target or influencing the organization to abandon its violent methods and choose a path of non-violence. As such, the success and failure of the influence tool selected for deterrence does not depend on the first order physical outcome. Take the example of targeted killing discussed above. If the defender targeted and eliminated a terrorist organization's bombmaker, that could result in a change in that terrorist organization's attack modality—from bombings to direct assaults using small arms, for example. If, on the other hand, the defender targeted and eliminated one of the hardline leaders of a terrorist organization who advocates for continued use of violence for the organization to achieve its goals, that could result in the remaining leaders of that organization entertaining the possibility of choosing a different

strategy for the organization. In this example, the first order physical outcomes were the same for both scenarios—the defender employed an unmanned aircraft to target and eliminate a terrorist of some significance to a specific terrorist organization, and the influence mechanism employed to achieve the desired outcomes was also the same. However, the desired outcomes for the defender were different for each scenario of this example. In this instance, the influence mechanism employed happened to be the same (and perhaps the best option available to the defender) and could potentially achieve the desired outcomes the defender was seeking. One could, however, imagine other influence mechanisms that potentially could be better suited to achieve the desired outcomes being sought by the defender, which illustrates the need to align one’s influence mechanism to one’s desired outcome.

The first step of this, as discussed previously, is the conceptual precision of deterrence against terrorism as a tactic vs. terrorism as a strategy. Once that is accomplished, then one must think through what the desired outcome(s) is/are given the decision to deter terrorism as a tactic or as a strategy, and what the most appropriate influence mechanisms are to achieve that/those desired outcome(s). If the goal is to deter terrorism as a tactic, and the desired outcome is to deter the terrorist organization from targeting similar targets for attacks in the future, a missile strike in retaliation for past terrorist attacks, with a promise of more to come (deterrence by punishment), is certainly an influence tool available to the defender (assuming that the defender possesses such a capability); however, an influence tool that is also available to the defender is to harden the remaining potential targets to decrease the probability of future attacks, as well as the probability of success, if attacks were to occur in the future (deterrence by denial). Understanding that the defender has two potential influence tools⁹ it can choose from, given its desired outcome, will allow the defender to assess the situation accordingly and develop the most appropriate courses of action. For example, the defender could decide that employment of the kinetic influence tool alone is the most favorable method to achieve its desired outcome. Conversely, it could decide target hardening is the most practical and favorable method available to it. Finally, it may decide on employing both the kinetic and target hardening options. No matter what it decides, the defender would have arrived at its decision after a careful analysis of the particular situation it is facing as well as the influence tools available to it based on clear and precise conceptualization of its desired outcomes, which are in turn tied to its decision to deter terrorism as a tactic or as a strategy. Following the logic illustrated above, it is not too difficult to imagine how one might be able to approach the problem using the concept of deterrence (to include the concept of integrated deterrence) in the context of countering terrorism as a strategic tool to analyze the situation and develop courses of action if the decision was to deter terrorism as a strategy and the desired outcome is to influence a challenger to abandon its strategy of political violence altogether, or to influence a potential challenger to not even consider terrorism as a viable strategy to achieve its goals from the start.

⁹ I have chosen to use only two influence tools for illustration purposes only here. In a real situation, there will most certainly be more than simply two influence tools available to the defender to consider.

Concluding Thought

This paper explored the significant innovations in the conceptualization and application of deterrence theory in the field of terrorism and counterterrorism that occurred as a result of approximately two decades of research. It also explored the conceptual expansions of deterrence beyond the traditional Cold War era deterrence concepts, as well as newly formed theoretical linkages between concepts that previously were treated as distinctly separate, that accompanied these innovations. These innovations naturally presented challenges, and there were some questions as to whether deterrence is even an appropriate paradigm to apply in the context of terrorism. While these theoretical challenges are real, all is not lost. In fact, I have devoted the second half of this paper to arguing that deterrence is still absolutely a useful paradigm to apply to terrorism. The argument is that the issue is not how we conceptualize deterrence as a theory, but it is how we apply the theory in the context of terrorism. The key to a successful application of deterrence theory in the context of terrorism lies in the precise conceptualization of the level of terrorism one seeks to deter; one's desired outcomes; and the alignment of influence tools available to contribute to the achievement of one's desired outcomes.

In conceptualizing the level of terrorism to be deterred, the defender must correctly conceptualize whether it seeks to deter *terrorism as a tactic* or *terrorism as a strategy*. If the defender's goal is to manipulate the terrorist organization's tactical choices—such as its target selection or attack modalities—the defender is attempting to deter *terrorism as a tactic*. If, on the other hand, the defender's goal is to influence the terrorist organization to abandon the use of terrorism altogether, then its goal is to deter *terrorism as a strategy*. Clearly conceptualizing the level of terrorism to be deterred would then allow the defender to clearly set desired outcome(s) and identify appropriate potential influence tools available for it to employ to achieve its desired outcome(s).

In conceptualizing desired outcome(s) one must be cautious not to conflate defeat¹⁰ with deterrence. In short, one must remember that eliminating (or defeating) terrorists is never the desired outcome of the defender (or at least should not be one that the defender is pursuing) if the defender aims to deter terrorism. Rather, the desired outcome should always be either preventing a terrorist organization from conducting a specific type of terrorist attack against a specific type of target or influencing the organization to abandon its violent methods and choose a path of non-violence. In pursuing these desired outcomes, the defender might very well have to eliminate terrorist personnel, equipment, facilities, and/or infrastructure. However, one must always remember that these actions should always be carried out in concert with other applicable influence mechanisms available and should always directly connect to the achievement of the overall desired outcome.

The final point in the key to successful application of deterrence theory in the context of terrorism is the alignment of influence mechanisms to the desired outcome(s). If the goal is to deter terrorism as a tactic, and the desired outcome is to deter the terrorist organization from targeting similar targets for attacks in

the future, an influence mechanism that shows the defender's resolve and promises a certain future punishment—conceptualized as deterrence by punishment—is certainly an appropriate influence tool the defender could choose. If the goal of the defender is to deter terrorism as a strategy, and the desired outcome is to influence the terrorist organization to abandon its use of terrorism altogether, a coordinated employment of several influence mechanisms packaged in the form of incentives (carrots)—accented with hints of “appropriate” amounts of potential punishments (sticks), should the terrorist organization choose “unwisely”—may be a more effective tool for achieving the defender's desired outcome.

When conceptual precision in these areas is rigorously applied, deterrence theory, in the context of terrorism, can not only be a fruitful tool for scholars and practitioners alike to dissect and understand terrorism, but it can also provide practitioners the foundations to develop strategic analytical tools that can aid in countering terrorism over the long run.

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¹⁰ I do not actively discuss defeating terrorists or terrorism in this paper because these are theoretically distinct concepts from deterrence. As such, this paper also does not touch on the concept of actor-death and the mechanisms a defender could employ to degrade a challenger's sustainability.

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