Diplomatic Counterterrorist Deterrence

Moving beyond Military Means

SSgt Megan J. Munoz, USAF
Dr. Matthew Crosston

Deterrence is an ancient concept, common to nearly all human interactions. At its core, deterrence involves the act of influencing behavior by manipulating an adversary's cost-benefit analysis. Still, following the attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11), many policy makers and academics were quick to dismiss

the strategic role that deterrence could play in counterterrorism policy. This lack of confidence has been continually echoed by policy makers and scholars alike. Chiefly, former president George W. Bush concluded that the traditional concepts of deterrence were meaningless in dealing with terrorist networks, which had no nation to claim as their own and whose members were willing to die for their cause.[1] As a result, policy makers, military officials, and US allies have focused instead on militaristic, preemptive strategies for counterterrorism operations.[2] The purpose of this research is to examine critically the role of deterrence theory and analyze whether it can be applied to counterterrorism operations as a means of increasing international security and realizing national objectives with minimal military investment.

Alternatively, many people contend that the road to real success in foreign policy entails hard power alone, often in the form of military strength. However, we believe that it is not solely military power that leads to successful deterrence but the calculated and complementary application of each instrument of power.[3] The principal instrument of this complementary power should be diplomacy. Military strength is still necessary, particularly following a large-scale terrorist attack such as 9/11, but to truly deter terrorism, one must take many other actions. The lessons learned by the international community after more than a decade of fighting this threat teach us that simply targeting individual terrorists and their networks is temporarily effective at quelling activities but ultimately leads to greater resolve in terrorist organizations and legitimizes their actions to local populations. We are now witnessing this phenomenon across Iraq and Syria with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or DAESH). Establishing counterterrorism deterrence will require much more than simply targeted strikes: it will involve greater emphasis on diplomacy, nation building, and local cultural/political partnerships, which would allow a legitimate vision and alternative to terrorist pathways. Terrorist operations also need to be locally delegitimized rather than strengthening said organizations when the sole emphasis is on foreign military might.

The War on Terror and Counterterrorist Deterrence: Fighting for Space

Initial responses to deterrence strategies in the war on terror labeled them relics of the Cold War era, considering them "too limiting and too naïve" to be applicable for this type of warfare.[4] Consequently, the White House moved forward with strategies that paid little mind to the potential of deterrence.[5] Opposed were many commentators and researchers, particularly in the field of political science, who considered deterrence policies a viable tool for US policy makers in combatting terrorism. Their commentaries, however, did not carry the day and have since received little attention.[6] Counterterrorist deterrence strategies are often unpopular because of their perceived heavy-handedness and a lack of confidence that the strategy can be used against a nonstate actor. Such deterrence options, however, remain necessary for meaningful peace negotiations, and therefore US agencies require more resolve, perseverance, and commitment.[7] At the same time, deterrence cannot mirror Cold

War strategy because the threat has fundamentally changed. If the United States continues to emphasize only military strength and pass up new opportunities to deter by other means, then such a decision would invite future challenges and adversely affect long-term American security.[8]

Diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence—especially in weak and failing nations currently inundated with terrorists, such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, and Afghanistan—must remain a priority for policy innovation. Such deterrence is particularly relevant in Afghanistan, which is confronting significant changes to its political future with new leadership, the removal of troops from the country, and the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement. Although this agreement allows for the continued presence of certain US troops and facilities in-country, bitter lessons from Iraq prove that relying on military power alone ultimately leaves deterrence efforts weakened and with little influence.

The lack of diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence became widely evident following the declared success in Iraq and victory over al-Qaeda. Unfortunately, the re-branding of al-Qaeda and the emergence of ISIL/DAESH have led many analysts to believe that the withdrawal from Iraq was premature and that the lack of diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence in-country precipitated the rise of this new, more dangerous threat. This unexpected emergence resulted in the resumption of operations (i.e., Operation Inherent Resolve) in the region as a means to destroy the threat and deny regional influence. To ensure that a similar unraveling of achievements in Afghanistan does not occur, we must put careful thought into counterterrorist deterrence strategies. These should continue to delegitimize terrorist organizations that threaten to undermine regional and global security, while simultaneously offering to citizens alternative pathways that carry local legitimacy.

One of the major issues with counterterrorist deterrence strategies is the presence of differentiated goals that accompany power changes. The confrontational approach of former president Hamid Karzai and diplomatic quarrels with the West, along with a regional war of rhetoric with Pakistan, proved costly to his previously earned goodwill with America.[9] New president Ashraf Ghani and the international community must work together to revive the efforts of various strategic partnerships and exploit opportunities not only for economic development but also for counterterrorist deterrence.[10] This revival leads to another argument for significant counterterrorist deterrence strategy: the simple, proactive attempt to prevent non-state actors from perpetrating terrorist events. Traditionally, their motivation was perceived to be so extreme and their level of resolve so high that deterrence seemed futile.[11] Still, if one is to consider terrorist leaders on the whole to be rational players (and many of them often give this impression), then the use of local leaders who employ diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence becomes critical. This scenario would involve strategies that involve disrupting and destabilizing the legitimacy of terrorist organizations' capabilities and confronting their threat of mass-casualty terrorism at the local level in a nonmilitary manner.[12]

Wyn Q. Bowen, professor of nonproliferation and international security and director of the Centre for Science and Security Studies in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, researches nonproliferation, terrorism, and US security policy. He observes that deterrence strategies with the goal of counter-

terrorism would need to involve three identifiable phases: (1) the "pre-event," whose goals are to deter, protect, and prepare; (2) the "trans-event," whose goals are to deter, attribute, and interdict; and (3) the "post-event," involving investigation, prosecution, retaliation, and recovery. Problems with these dimensions of counter-terrorist deterrence, however, involve the possible existence of political, economic, social, and cultural dissimilarities between enemies.[13] We see such a situation today in the war against ISIL/DAESH, whose center of intellectual gravity is an idealized narrative of a unified caliphate that is strengthened, not weakened, by Western intrusion and resistance.[14]

Indeed, deterring a terrorist organization like al-Qaeda or ISIL/DAESH is a complex endeavor for a number of reasons, and any policy aimed at eliminating this threat must reflect such complexity. Thus, prior to creating such policies, one must understand the conditions that gave rise to the terrorist group in the first place. Comprehending the cultural, economic, historical, and political conditions of the nation in which a nonstate terrorist actor develops provides a clear sense of the potential appeal, strength, and longevity of the group or organization.[15] This aspect is critical to the implementation of any counterterrorist deterrence policy and helps clarify its value far beyond the sledgehammer strength of military might.

After all, terrorists are highly motivated and willing to risk nearly anything for their goal. The political objectives of these groups must be acknowledged and examined in detail, for they are often broad, idealistic, unclear, and/or ambiguous. These groups and their members are also difficult to locate, operating transnationally with little central control. Additionally, this threat is supported by many different entities, both passive and active, and can even include the support of US allies (e.g., Pakistan's intelligence services and military). This fact complicates the ability to effectively use traditional deterrence strategies like the ones from the Cold War era. Besides state supporters, a number of other elements comprise a terrorist organization, including recruiters, religious leaders, financiers, and other levels of leadership. Ultimately and ideally, all must be deterred.[16]

If deterrence mechanisms in the traditional sense were put into place against such terrorist networks, the United States would have to explore a number of extremely harsh policy options, including regime change, retaliation against supporters of the networks, and expansion of targeted killing operations. That reality is basically untenable. Therefore it is encouraging that there has been some movement towards counterterrorist deterrence strategy as a new priority, laid out in the United States' 2012 defense strategy. This document gave priority to developing US forces capable of deterring and defeating aggression by any potential adversary, anywhere.[17] To do so, the United States must be able to deny an aggressor the prospect of reaching his objective by imposing unacceptable costs on him *before* he acts.

New strategies like this work more effectively at deterring terrorist organizations because they not only affect their support structures within the nation but also hinder strategic interactions at the international level.[18] Regardless of the intended outcome, policies like these continue to come under attack for their supposed heavy-handedness with international values such as civility, idealism, and human rights. Israel is an example of such a nation that has taken an extremely proactive but harsh approach to deter terrorism. It has carried out targeted killings since the be-

ginning of the second intifada in September 2000, using a variety of tactics (e.g., car bombs, snipers, booby traps, and helicopter gunship attacks) to strike individual members of Hamas and Hezbollah. Following 9/11, US policy has largely followed suit in that it targets individual terrorist leaders and operatives through the use of ground operations and drone strikes. The latter have succeeded in decentralizing many key al-Qaeda and Taliban networks at the expense of widespread unrest and discord from citizens both domestically and internationally, particularly after civilian casualties came to light.[19]

Another argument for the superiority of diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence strategy involves how Israel adapted its drone policy—namely, by ensuring that the targeted individuals were aware of the threat they faced. Israel published the names of individuals wanted as targets and disseminated them within the community where they were suspected to be hiding. Thus, Israel not only targeted individuals with precision (showing capability) and demonstrated its resolve to do so repeatedly (gaining credibility) but also showed those individuals its intention and desires (communication).[20] This scheme proved effective in deterring the behavior of some terrorists since they were ostracized from communities because of citizens' fears that they would inadvertently become victims of an Israeli attack. Since terrorism is a global threat that knows no exclusive religion, nationality, or border, counterterrorist deterrence strategies need to extend beyond the boundaries of pure military strikes. Consequently, to deter terrorism, one must assure that collaboration, cooperation, and strict communication take place among the various members of the international community. The ultimate goal of defeating terrorism should involve deterring these attacks before they occur rather than simply having confidence that severe military consequences can be levied after the fact.

Terrorists have crossed international borders, attacked from within, established cells, chosen targets, and executed attacks with ease. This ability has become apparent in the last few months when the world witnessed terrorist activities by Boko Haram in Nigeria, where hundreds of thousands of citizens are at risk; strikes on innocent civilians and businesses in Paris; the kidnapping and execution of Japanese and Jordanian citizens by ISIL/DAESH; an attack against Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada, and a comparable strike in Sydney, Australia; "lone wolf" attacks in New York City and Copenhagen; and the continuation of tensions in Egypt, Mali, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It is incredibly difficult to prevent these attacks when the most explicit strategies are reactive ex post facto military responses rather than preemptive counterterrorist deterrence strategies that seek to enlist local populations and co-opt them positively to the antiterrorist agenda and interests of global peace.

Grounding the Idea: Differing Schools of Thought

Many differing opinions and schools of thought exist regarding the deterrence of terrorism. A number of individuals believe that such deterrence is simply not possible, concentrating instead on degrading terrorist capability after the fact. They consider deterring terrorism in any form a waste of valuable resources and a fruit-

less effort. Others think it possible to use classical deterrence theory against terrorism, and still others maintain that although it is feasible to deter terrorism, the strategy must be modified significantly to have any chance of success. This article finds itself squarely in the latter camp.

People who claim that deterrence is either ineffective or impossible against terrorists have the idea that counterterrorism campaigns depend on three main beliefs: (1) that terrorists are irrational and therefore unresponsive to the cost-benefit calculation required for deterrence; (2) that because some terrorists are willing to die for their cause, they cannot be deterred by any means, even if rational; and (3) that even if terrorists were afraid of punishment, they cannot be deterred because after they have carried out an attack (most notably with suicide bombers), there is no physical location subject to retaliation.[21] John Klein argues against this belief by noting that counterterrorist deterrence remains a critical element of US national strategy. He believes that combining deterrence with dissuasion will be effective against the likelihood of a terror attack. Klein further states that although a number of terrorist organizations do not necessarily act uniformly or according to the same underlying beliefs, many leaders in even the most aggressive organizations are motivated by an ideology that embraces martyrdom and an apocalyptic vision. Often this ideology is based on religion or the desire to overthrow a government. Thus, he maintains that this aspect is the very key to deterrence and that the leadership of the organization must be deterred.[22] Ultimately, Klein's point is that because the leaders often function strategically and rationally *even while espousing supposedly irrational goals*, they can be deterred.

Another school of thought—cumulative deterrence—is not the deterrence utilized during the Cold War but a hybrid form whose success does not depend on an all-or-nothing approach. Rather, it considers the overall impact of the threat and allows for some failings against terrorist activity. This strategy is utilized through the considered application of threats and military force, along with a range of assorted incentives. It relies on the belief that the war on terrorism will not be decided with a single overwhelming blow and that deterrence efforts will not fail if terrorist activity takes place. Instead, it acknowledges that deterrence requires extreme patience, unshakable resolve, international cooperation, and a creative, harmonized mix of defensive and offensive measures *with an acceptance of occasional "failures."*[23]

Cumulative deterrence is close to our diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence because it works to improve the economic, social, and political aspects of countries where terrorism flourishes. These locations must be altered so that they prevent terrorists from operating unimpeded, instead driving would-be terrorist recruits away from their destructive impulses and towards the creation of productive, prosperous, and secure societies. These deterrence strategies are designed to gradually wear down the enemy from within by undermining his local arena. They involve a multilayered effort that creates the greatest number of obstacles for the terrorists and their infrastructure, support networks, financial flows, and other means of support over the long term. The strategies call for excellent intelligence, broad coalition planning, and a globalized network that would facilitate the exchange of vital information while encouraging transparency with cutting-edge technology and highly trained military forces.[24]

The intensive actions necessary for such innovative deterrence lead to another school of thought that highlights the costs required and questions whether or not it is worth the attempt at all. Cost-benefit analysis conducted on this topic leads some individuals to believe that enhanced expenditures will always be excessive. By 2011 federal expenditures on domestic homeland security had increased by some $360 billion over those in place in 2001. Furthermore, the federal and national intelligence expenses aimed specifically at defeating terrorism have risen by $110 billion while state, local, and private-sector costs increased by $100 billion.[25]

The skepticism about whether or not deterring terrorism is worth the expense was echoed by Glenn Carle, a 23-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency and former deputy of national intelligence for transnational threats: "We must not take fright at the specter our leaders have exaggerated. In fact, we must see jihadists for the small, lethal, disjointed and miserable opponents that they are [and that] al-Qaeda has only a handful of individuals capable of planning, organizing and leading a terrorist organization [and that] although they have threatened attacks, its capabilities are far inferior to its desires."[26] This idea of the lack of a credible threat is supported by Marc Sageman, another "former intelligence officer" who "systematically combed through both open and classified data on jihadists and would-be jihadists around the world," concluding that "al-Qaeda central . . . consist[ed] of a cluster [of] less than 150 actual people."[27]

On this same topic, one should note that the events of 9/11 massively heightened the awareness of the public to the threat of terrorism, resulting in extreme vigilance and leading to tip-offs that often either sent terrorists to jail or foiled their attempts. This information from the public has proven to be a key element of prosecutions in many of the terrorism cases in the United States since 9/11. The frequency and severity of terrorist attacks are also extremely low, making the benefits of enhanced counterterrorism expenditures of nearly a trillion dollars supposedly small by many standard cost-benefit analyses.[28] But this only explains why deterrence policy as it was during the Cold War will not be successful in the fight against terror. Cold War deterrence strategies would legitimize terrorist organizations and thus lend themselves to the creation of more terrorists in the long term, subsequently adding to greater reactive cost. Strategies that legitimize the governments of afflicted nations and build societies that no longer allow freedom of movement to terrorist groups offer long-term success that will reduce the cost over time.

New Ideas, New Rules, New Deterrence

The United States must take a step back in the push towards democracy in terrorist-harboring states in favor of strengthening moderate Muslims in these regions by continuing homeland deterrence strategies and reallocating resources for multinational partnerships that aid in building the legitimacy of local governments. Finally, the effective deterrence of terrorists demands a significant change in the media's portrayal of these groups and their attacks. This deterrence strategy is by no means quick and depends on taking stock in short-, medium-, and long-term trajectories.

To legitimize governments where terror groups operate, one must offer alternatives to terrorism—for instance, the enactment of robust programs that run parallel to schools, hospitals, and mosques run by Islamic extremists. The programs will work in much the same way that after-school programs provide legal alternatives to crime in the United States. Small movements elsewhere around the globe have enjoyed success of this kind, including establishment of the Basque Autonomous Community in the post-Franco Spanish constitution and the Turkish army, which attempted to eliminate extremist recruitment among Turkish Kurds in the mid-1990s by opening health and educational facilities.[29]

Efforts should also be made to facilitate increasingly open economies and political systems while offering career opportunities for people who neither support nor allow extremists to operate in or run their communities. Flooding such communities with legitimate alternatives would ostracize extremist groups and make those who join them the outcasts of society. These programs will require the governmental sector to work alongside elements of civil society to ensure that they provide more benefits and safety to the population. They must also partner with the international community to give these governments proper mentorship and support. Partnering with local governments rather than establishing a stern, unilateral, in-country military presence will expend fewer resources, legitimize the local government, cause less friction among allies, and quiet the spread of extremism that criticizes an intrusive US presence abroad.[30] Furthermore, instead of allocating resources to military goals, those resources can be put towards projects designed to build up civil society, transparent government, and other legitimate alternatives to terrorist recruitment.

These governments should also consider deradicalization/rehabilitation programs for recruited terrorists and offer assistance to their families, allowing them to reenter society. Such programs will need financial support, education, and job training for women and children. The reintroduction of detainees into the community must be accompanied by strict oversight and opportunities for them to succeed. There were similarly successful programs in Europe during the 1980s when Spain pardoned members of the ETA Basque separatist organization and again when the Italian government offered leniency to members of the Red Brigades in exchange for information that led to the apprehension of nonreformed members.[31]

The criminalizing of terrorist acts must also be standardized across international judicial institutions. States will be obligated to do so under international law and to create legitimate judicial institutions, thus slowly but fundamentally addressing worldwide terrorism effectively. Furthermore, it is not enough that the "international community . . . make abstract pronouncements condemning terrorism as an international crime. Instead, [it] must . . . [explicitly develop an] encompassing definition of terrorism and grant the necessary jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court to try those alleged . . . [as terrorists]."[32] This legal aspect of diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence does not lie only with the international community. It is another way to legitimize a local government by having national prosecutors on the international court try terrorists. Creating a hybrid tribunal with states that diligently suppress terrorism creates partnerships that place peer pressure on those nations that openly allow such criminal activities.[33]

One must also concentrate on deterrence efforts at home. Deterring the home-grown threat calls for many different methods but should focus heavily on intelligence-driven policing and law-enforcement measures. A combination of counter-capability and countermotivational measures will have to take place to tackle these threats over the long term, utilizing a combination of diplomatic, defensive, and developmental strategies determined by the specific threat confronted.[34] To spot signs of terrorist activity, one must also take deterrence-through-denial measures and continue to educate the local population.

All of these deterrence measures must occur in tandem with a removal of the global media's focus on terrorists, which fuels and/or glorifies their actions. Global media and local governments must work together towards the common interest of deterring terrorism. Terrorists need publicity to gain attention, inspire fear, and secure a favorable community standing for their cause, all of which the media tends to offer unwittingly. Any publicity of their capabilities alerts the world to the existence of a problem that cannot be ignored, leading to the legitimizing of their group and/or the romanticizing of their cause. Terrorists also need this coverage to amplify panic, spread fear, and facilitate economic loss, such as a decline in investment and tourism, causing members of the local population to lose faith in their government and the latter's ability to protect them.[35] Changing this dynamic will prove difficult because of the very nature of journalism. Media outlets, on the one hand, wish to be the first with the story, making it as timely and dramatic as possible while protecting society's right to know even if such knowledge is damaging in the long run. Government, on the other hand, would like media coverage to advance its agenda instead of the terrorists' and include an understanding of policy objectives, hopefully bolstering the image of government agencies. Moreover, the government wishes to deny terrorists a platform for their ideology by not allowing interviews and presenting them as criminals instead of glamorizing their operations or cause with extensive coverage. So far, an understanding and alliance between the global media and government have been tenuous and spotty at best. But diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence will markedly improve if such an alliance can emerge and if there are fewer cries of co-opted media or manipulative government.[36]

Policy recommendations for the media could include limiting information on hostages that could harm those victims; curtailing information on the movement of police or military operations; restricting or not agreeing to show interviews with terrorists or propaganda videos; waiting to release information to ensure that it is factual and does not lead to unfounded speculation or misinformation; and focusing less on the capabilities of terrorist groups, thus minimizing local panic or agitation. The media and the government must work together towards the common interest of not being unwittingly manipulated into promoting the cause of terrorists while simultaneously ensuring that no one's constitutional and civil rights are infringed upon.[37] Maintaining such a balance will be a delicate task—one that demands major effort and, no doubt, some expected backlash. Nevertheless, open and cooperative communication between the government and global media is a critical element in any counterterrorist deterrence strategy used to delegitimize terrorist operations.

Conclusion

Diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence strategies that rely less on reactive military force and more on preemptive intelligence gathering, the rule of law, cooperation with the media, and promotion of domestic security—alongside the building of civil society alternatives to terrorist organizations—will diminish the widespread appeal of terror organizations. This strategy is far from the all-or-nothing, do-or-die approach to deterrence during the Cold War and is more efficient and oriented towards the long term than today's militaristic, reactionary strategies to terrorist acts. This approach builds on victories achieved over the short, medium, and long term, designed to wear down the resolve of the enemy and to develop fully functional societies with an actively included citizenry. Such a deterrence strategy requires multilayered processes structured to create the greatest number of obstacles to terrorist organizations, making it too formidable a challenge to carry out operations, severely undermining recruiting opportunities, and ultimately destroying terrorists' ability to survive by depriving them of operational and personnel assets. Diplomatic counterterrorist deterrence does not eliminate the need for a strong military capability, but it does go a long way in reclaiming deterrence as a concept and a policy for an area that sorely needs new ideas and innovation. ✪

Notes

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SSgt Megan J. Munoz, USAF

Sergeant Munoz (BA, American Military University) is currently a graduate student at Bellevue University, Bellevue, Nebraska, where she is earning a master of science degree in international security and intelligence studies. She has served as an intelligence analyst for the US Air Force and section chief of the Expeditionary Intelligence Support program for the 423rd Mobility Training Squadron, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Having accumulated more than 1,000 teaching hours, she is also a key instructor at the US Air Force Expeditionary Center, providing instruction and intelligence support for individuals, courses, and customers dealing with combat, mobility, and counterterrorism operations. She previously served as an analyst at the National Air and Space Intelligence Center, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, where she collected, managed, analyzed, authored, and briefed critical intelligence. Furthermore, she issued products that offered predictive analysis for threats faced by US Department of Defense missions taking place in the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asian regions. Additionally, Sergeant Munoz has served on multiple deployments to Afghanistan as an intelligence analyst and a regional counterterrorism/political analyst.

Dr. Matthew Crosston

Dr. Crosston (BA, Colgate University; MA, University of London; PhD, Brown University) is a professor of political science, holder of the Miller Chair for Industrial and International Security, and director of the International Security and Intelligence Studies program at Bellevue University, Bellevue, Nebraska. He has authored two well-received books, several book chapters, and over 20 peer-reviewed articles in numerous peer-reviewed journals. His research agenda continues to address counterterrorism, intelligence analysis, failed democratization, and cyber war / ethics. His works have been translated into Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Spanish, and Uzbek. He has worked across the globe promoting interaction between intelligence agencies that share common interests but have trouble overcoming ideological, cultural, and historical obstacles; further, he has tried to foster improved collaboration between the academic and intelligence communities. In 2013 Professor Crosston was named Outstanding Instructor by the International Association for Intelligence Education and received the Commander's Coin for Integrity, Service, and Excellence from the 97th Intelligence Squadron for facilitating foreign language study for Airmen at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. In 2014 he was invited to be a key speaker on "intelligence student best practices" at the Defense Intelligence Agency for the Intelligence Community's Centers for Academic Excellence Senior Advisory Board.

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