

## **REDISCOVERING DETERRENCE AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

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*Deterrence During the Cold War / New Dangers in the Post-Cold War Era / How to Deter Terrorists / Israel's Traditional Deterrence Policy / The Erosion of Israeli Deterrence / Restoring Israeli Deterrence and the Role of the U.S. / The Lessons of History*

### **Deterrence During the Cold War**

As the military and political leaders of the Roman Empire understood, in a hostile and anarchic world, in order to preserve the peace, it is often necessary to prepare for war (*Qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum*). The promise of unacceptable consequences and retaliation following an attack may not be politically correct, but in the face of deep-seated hatred and hostility, there is often no realistic alternative. Deterrence, on its own, is not always sufficient to prevent conflict, but it is still a necessary condition for creating and maintaining stability.

Indeed, during the Cold War, in the first four decades following the introduction of nuclear weapons, deterrence and the fear of destruction were central in preventing a direct military clash -- nuclear or conventional -- between the two superpowers. The threat of mutual assured destruction was essential in creating the conditions for the survival of the U.S. and the USSR during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, as well as during confrontations in Berlin, and a nuclear alert during the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Given the huge costs of a mistake, even at the height of the Cold War, the leaders in Moscow or Washington (or Beijing) were careful not to push the other side too far.

Toward the end of the Cold War, deterrence, and terms such as "massive retaliation" and "assured destruction," lost respectability and became politically incorrect. The idea that the survival of the United States and Europe depended on threats to destroy dozens of Soviet cities in retaliation for a nuclear attack was seen by many as immoral and not credible. Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative reflected the efforts to replace deterrence with an alternative strategy based on defensive umbrellas.

## **New Dangers in the Post-Cold War Era**

The rejection of deterrence was reinforced following the end of the Cold War, and this strategy has been largely neglected, both in confronting the state-terrorism of Saddam Hussein, and also in response to threats from non-state terrorists such as Osama bin Laden (as well as the regimes that give them sanctuary). In 1990, by failing to clearly and credibly communicate the consequences of an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. allowed Saddam Hussein to believe that he could get away with annexation.

Saddam Hussein's behavior once the U.S.-led war began in 1991 provides some important insights into the nature of deterrence in this and similar cases of regional confrontations. His narrowly-based regime proved impervious to Western attacks against the Shia population in the south and against the Kurds in the north. Indeed, the intensive bombing campaign at the opening of the Gulf War had little impact until members of Saddam's circle from the area of Tikrit, and the Republican Guard, began to be targeted, particularly once ground operations began. At that point, the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait started, and Saddam maneuvered for a ceasefire under terms designed to save his own skin and power. Thus, threats to the survival of the regime were seen to provide leverage and the basis for future deterrence. Since then, the Iraqi dictator has acted more cautiously, but he continued to push the envelope, testing American intentions and expanding his actions when responses are weak. By the end of 1998, he had succeeded in terminating UN weapons inspections in Iraq and had successfully eroded the UN sanctions regime.

In the confrontation against radical Islamic terror and "asymmetric warfare," the role of deterrence has been largely neglected. In part, this reflects the continuation of the distaste for policies based on retaliation and the use of hostages, but it is also the result of the mistaken belief that terrorists such as bin Laden and members of groups such as Hamas, Hizbullah, and Islamic Jihad are suicidal and cannot be deterred. After the mass terror attacks on New York and Washington, and given the difficulties inherent in alternative strategies based on defense and pursuit of such elusive and invisible enemies, it is necessary to introduce concepts based on deterrence and assured destruction in these conflicts as well.

Indeed, the growth in the ambitions of the new global terrorism, like that of bin Laden, can be directly tied to the erosion of Western, and even Russian, deterrence as perceived by militant Islamists over the last two decades. The evidence shows that such groups and their supporters see Russia and the U.S. in retreat against challenges from the Muslim world. Bin Laden, himself, has made reference to the withdrawal of the U.S. Marines from Beirut in 1983 after the Marine Corps barracks were struck by a Hizbullah suicide truck-bomb. He also noted a second American retreat in the case of Somalia in 1993. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988 as a result of the military pressure of the Mujahiddin, from the Islamist viewpoint, foreshadowed and even brought about the collapse of the USSR itself.

## How to Deter Terrorists

The first step in developing effective deterrence against terrorists is to stop this pattern of Western retreat that has only emboldened militant Islamic terrorist groups. Next, with respect to the terrorists themselves, it is important to identify high-value targets, including family and supporters, that will cause even the most radical leaders to weigh the costs and benefits of their actions very carefully.

However, the area where deterrence can be most effective is with respect to states and regimes that give haven and support to terrorist organizations, from the Taliban in Afghanistan to Hizbullah's patrons in Damascus and Teheran. Ultimately, the world is divided into states, and all terrorist groups need territory from which to operate, controlled by states. Indeed, UN Security Council Resolution 1373, adopted on September 28, 2001, focuses on *state responsibility* in refraining from "providing any form of support, active or passive, to entities or persons involved in terrorist acts." It is certainly preferable for the U.S. and the UK to persuade states to patrol their own territories rather than to deploy overextended American and British forces all over the globe in order to find terrorist cells.

Thus, even in cases of non-state terrorism, the chain of responsibility leads to identifiable and vulnerable regimes and political leaders that can be deterred by threatening their own survival. Had the costs of hosting Al Qaida been made clear to the leaders of the Taliban over the past few years, they would have acted to evict bin Laden and his Arab brigade from Afghanistan. Now, of course, the price has become clear, but it is too late for deterrence, and the war must run its course.

In addition, while clearly willing to send others on suicide missions, terrorist leaders are not so quick to give up their own lives and risk the destruction of their supporters and the end of any legacy. Analysts and policy-makers attempting to develop effective deterrence policies must assess the degree to which these leaders will respond to retaliatory threats against themselves, as well as to their lieutenants and supporters. Also, just as the twin towers of the World Trade Center represented important symbols in the terror attack on the U.S., targets that are of central importance to the terrorists must be identified and threatened with destruction.

Once the appropriate targets are identified, successful deterrence requires the transmission of credible threats to destroy them, if terror attacks are carried out. The credibility of the American response was certainly not enhanced by sending a few cruise missiles against empty buildings and deserted training camps in Afghanistan a few years ago, following the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Africa that killed hundreds of people. Sometimes, as decades of Israeli experience has shown, military responses to terror attacks must be repeated many times, and appear to be "excessive," in order to exact costs that are high enough to deter future assaults. The evidence demonstrates that

in 1991, the credibility of the Israeli threat of massive retaliation and assured destruction dissuaded Saddam Hussein from using the chemical warheads in his arsenal.

## **Israel's Traditional Deterrence Policy**

In the Israeli case, deterrence has been an important component of security policy for the past fifty years. For decades, Israel responded to terrorism and infiltration by inflicting powerful and painful responses against host countries, including Egyptian forces and interests in Gaza during the 1950s and 1960s when Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip. Similarly, Palestinian terror from Jordanian-controlled territory led to counterattacks that continuously increased the cost, until the Jordanian authorities took action to prevent and contain these attacks against Israel from the West Bank. At the same time, strategic deterrence capabilities were developed during the 1950s and 1960s to prevent large-scale attacks that threatened national survival. After 1973, recognition of the powerful Israeli deterrent led Egyptian President Sadat to abandon the strategy of military confrontation with Israel, and to seek a negotiated peace. Similarly, the Israeli deterrence force was a major factor in paving the way for the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians in 1993.

## **The Erosion of Israeli Deterrence**

However, between 1993 and 1996, the Israeli deterrent posture and image vis-à-vis the Palestinians eroded, and terrorist attacks did not elicit the disproportionate responses necessary to maintain credibility. Unlike the situation in the 1950s, the PLO was not held accountable for the escalating terrorist attacks, even though they emanated from territories under the jurisdiction of PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Israel was widely perceived as divided, politically weak, and afraid to respond and thereby create friction with the Clinton administration, that had also abandoned deterrence as the core of its security posture. The Israeli decision to act with restraint during the 1991 Gulf War and the Iraqi missile attacks was also seen by some as a sign of weakness in terms of deterrence (although Saddam Hussein's decision against using chemical and biological warheads indicated that, at this level, Israeli deterrence remained effective).

More recently, this image was reinforced by Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, which was widely interpreted in the Arab and Moslem world, and especially among the Palestinians, as a further sign of weakness. If the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan sparked a new militant Islamic insurgency against the U.S. in the Middle East, the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon equally contributed to the powerful reaction among Palestinian Islamists that came to the fore in the campaign of violence and terror that began at the end of September 2000.

## **Restoring Israeli Deterrence and the Role of the U.S.**

The policies of the United States often serve as a critical factor in *enhancing* or *undermining* Israeli deterrence. For example, while Israel chose a low-profile policy during the 1991 Gulf War, U.S. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney told CNN in an interview on February 2, 1991, that Saddam Hussein had not used his non-conventional weapons against Israel because "I assume that he (Saddam) knows that if he were to resort to chemical weapons -- that would be an escalation to weapons of mass destruction and that the possibility would then exist -- certainly with respect to the Israelis, for example -- that they might retaliate with unconventional weapons, as well." Rather than disapproving Israel's deterrent capabilities, Cheney simply acknowledged their existence and implicitly granted them a degree of legitimacy that undoubtedly enhanced Israel's deterrence of Iraq.

Following the decade of the 1990s and the outbreak of the conflict with the Palestinians in September 2000, Israeli leaders began to act consistently to repair the damage and restore deterrence. Gradually, Israeli military responses to Palestinian terror attacks have escalated, including ground actions within Area A (under Palestinian control) and a prolonged presence in such areas. Initially, U.S. policy, motivated by consideration of diplomatic "evenhandedness," criticized Palestinian terrorist provocations and Israeli military responses equally, thereby weakening Israeli efforts to restore deterrence. But over time, American pressure did not produce immediate Israeli withdrawals from Area A, especially after the murder of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, thereby illustrating that the credibility of Israeli military responses was not decreased by external factors. On the Lebanese front, following continuing attacks by Hizbullah, Israel has responded by destroying Syrian radar stations on Lebanese territory, which also has had an important impact on restoring deterrence. Syria, as the state sponsor of Hizbullah, is being held accountable and must either pay the price of further attacks or force Hizbullah to end such actions.

## **The Lessons of History**

The importance of deterrence, and the costs that follow from the neglect of the basic principles involved, were highlighted in the 1930s during the rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany. During this period, England was in the thrall of pacifism, and mass marches in the name of peace and against war were frequent and broadly supported. The pacifist movement was born out of the ashes and devastation of World War I, which took millions of lives, disrupted nations and peoples, and was widely viewed as entirely without purpose. When Hitler's Germany arose to resume the confrontation and take human brutality to unimaginable levels, England's pacifist elite was unable to recognize the evil that stood at its doorstep. Appeasement, and the avoidance

of war at any cost, was the order of the day, and nothing was done to deter Hitler.

Only seven decades have passed since then, and the lessons are clear. Developing an effective deterrence strategy against terrorism is not going to be a quick or easy process, but it is vitally necessary. The failure to destroy or deter the masterminds of the terror attacks on New York and Washington, and their support networks, has already cost the lives of thousands of innocent people. Additional attacks are planned, and may involve the use of weapons of mass destruction. Deterrence strategies based on punishment and massive retaliation may not be seen as humanitarian in the narrow and doctrinaire sense, but as long as the principles of democracy and freedom and the societies that espouse them are under attack, such strategies remain essential.

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