DETERRENCE

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Deterrence is defined as "**the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits**." Deterrence is critical to US national security efforts. Both nuclear and conventional operations contribute to the effect. Although nuclear forces are not the only factor in the deterrence equation, our nuclear capability underpins all other elements of deterrence.

> The first Gulf War also offers evidence of the value of nuclear deterrence. It appears that the US nuclear deterrence strategy was key to deterring the Iraqi use of WMD in the war. In August 1995, the former Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, said that Iraq was deterred from using its WMD because the Iraqi leadership had interpreted Washington's threats of grievous retaliation as meaning nuclear retaliation.
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> In January 1996, former head of Iraqi military intelligence Gen Wafic al Sammarai said: "Some of the Scud missiles were loaded with chemical warheads, but they were not used . . . the warning was quite severe, and quite effective. The allied troops were certain to use nuclear arms, and the price will be too dear and too high."
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> -- Keith B. Payne, *"Maintaining Flexible and Resilient Capabilities for Nuclear Deterrence,"* Strategic Studies Quarterly, Summer 2011

Deterrence requires US nuclear operations to be visible to the target audience. To have credibility, an adversary must believe that the Air Force has the capability to act quickly, decisively and successfully. The cumulative effects of deterrence and assurance stem from the credibility of nuclear capabilities in the minds of those we seek to deter, assure, or dissuade. This credibility is attained through activities such as day-to-day training, periodic exercises, and regular inspections which demonstrate Air Force nuclear force capability and readiness.

Global Thunder and Global Lightning, annual command-level exercises sponsored by US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) in cooperation with Air Force Global Strike Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, are key demonstrations of the Air Force's ability to test and validate nuclear command and control and execution procedures. Exercise objectives typically include live communications and the participation of units assigned or attached to USSTRATCOM during wartime, including USSTRATCOM's airborne command post and external participation from national-level organizations and other combatant commands.

Nuclear delivery system testing and treaty inspections are distinct messaging opportunities. Both are highly visible examples of strategic messaging. Successful capability testing and treaty inspections provide the world evidence of the credibility of the US' safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent.

Nuclear operations can also be used to deter conventional threats. Nuclear operations in the 21st century may be tied to more complex situations, combining both conventional and nuclear operations. Today's Air Force recognizes that many adversaries are willing to employ nuclear operations under many different circumstances.

The notion of countries escalating conflict to avoid conventional defeat may sound far-fetched, but it is well grounded in history. When nuclear-armed states face overwhelming conventional threats -- or worry about the possibility of catastrophic conventional defeat -- they often adopt coercive escalatory doctrines to deter war or stalemate a conflict that erupts. Pakistan openly intends to use nuclear weapons to counter an overwhelming conventional Indian invasion. Russia claims it needs theater nuclear weapons to counter NATO's conventional advantages. Israel expects to win its conventional wars but retains the capability for nuclear escalation to prevent conquest in case its conventional forces suffer a catastrophic defeat.

The discussion of coercive nuclear escalation should sound familiar to Western analysts, as it was NATO's strategy for three decades. From the mid-1960s until the end of the Cold War, NATO planned to deter war, and stalemate it if necessary, through coercive nuclear escalation. NATO understood that -- by the mid-1960s -- it could no longer win a nuclear war against the Soviet Union, but it still based its national security strategy on coercive escalation because it believed Warsaw Pact conventional forces were overwhelming.

-- Keir A. Lieber, "*The New Era of Nuclear Weapons, Deterrence, and Conflict*," Strategic Studies Quarterly, Spring 2013.

For additional discussion on effects, see "Practical Design: The Coercion Continuum" in Annex 3-0, *Operations and Planning*.