

NATO and Tailored Deterrence: Key Workshop Findings in 2007-2008

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Thanks to the sponsorship and guidance of the NATO Nuclear Policy Directorate and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (DTRA/ASCO), three workshops dealing with NATO and the concept of "tailored deterrence" were convened in 2007-2008. The first workshop, entitled "NATO and Tailored Deterrence: Understanding and Communication in Deterrence," was convened in Brussels on 16-17 October 2007. The second workshop, entitled "Tailored Deterrence in the Transatlantic Alliance: Nuclear, Conventional and Non-Military Strategies," took place at Wilton Park, Steyning, England, on 16-19 March 2008. The third workshop, entitled "NATO and 21st Century Deterrence: New Concepts, Capabilities, and Challenges for Deterrence," was held at the NATO Defense College in Rome on 29-30 April 2008.^[1] This paper briefly discusses the concept of "tailored deterrence" and its relevance to NATO before reviewing some of the key findings from the three workshops in 2007-2008.

Tailored Deterrence

According to the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, it is important to shift attention away "From 'one size fits all' deterrence—to tailored deterrence for rogue powers, terrorist networks and near-peer competitors." The 2006 QDR also referred to the need for "more tailorable capabilities to deter advanced military powers, regional WMD states, or non-state terrorists."^[2] The 2006 QDR did not, however, offer a definition of tailored deterrence, nor did it analyze the various organizational and operational challenges it presents.

The essential idea in tailored deterrence is the ancient "know the enemy" principle. Tailored deterrence calls for detailed knowledge of particular adversaries and their decision-making patterns and priorities. An empirical focus on specific potential adversaries and contingencies seems novel only because of the apparent success of U.S. and NATO policies based on general assumptions about deterrence requirements during the Cold War. In 2001 Keith Payne proposed a framework for "tailoring U.S. deterrence policies" to particular challengers.^[3] In 2007 Elaine Bunn adapted and extended the framework proposed by Payne, and suggested a checklist of questions for "the calculus of tailored deterrence."^[4] As she pointed out, the concept of "tailored deterrence" encompasses three key facets of tailoring: (a) specific actors in particular situations, (b) capabilities, and (c) communications.

The "tailored deterrence" approach differs from the outlook predominant in NATO during the Cold War because it is not focused on a single adversary (the Soviet Union) or nuclear capabilities, but considers a wide range of threats and the full spectrum of capabilities that may contribute to

deterrence, including robust consequence management capabilities, conventional forces, missile defenses and air defenses, and—for some observers—non-military instruments such as the threat of economic and diplomatic sanctions or prosecution for war crimes. The extent to which these non-military or “soft” instruments can contribute to deterrence, notably when they involve cooperation with private sector partners, is nonetheless a contested point.

Moreover, the “tailored deterrence” approach shifts attention away from abstract models of nuclear deterrence, primarily conceived with the Soviet Union in mind, to an analysis of what specific adversaries today might find credible and deterring in particular contexts. The point is to study, among other things, the behavior, strategies, decision-making, and interests of the specific adversary—above all, the interests as the adversary defines them. The NATO Allies may then be able to make informed decisions in pursuit of effective deterrence and crisis management.

Key Findings from the October 2007 Workshop

Participants in the October 2007 workshop considered the challenges of understanding specific adversaries, communication, and strategy definition and management in the Alliance.

Challenges of understanding and deterring specific adversaries. Some participants highlighted the magnitude of the challenge of correctly understanding specific adversaries. Most state adversaries, it was noted, are not “simple unitary actors” but collections of agencies and power centers; and the outcome of their future interactions in a specific contingency “may be a mystery, not a secret.”

Moreover, some participants argued that “true believers” convinced of their ideology and historical destiny are not subject to deterrence, however elaborate and seemingly astute the deterrence postures tailored to fit them. Napoleon, Hitler, and Ahmadinejad were cited as examples. However, other participants disagreed, and held that everyone must fear something and thus be subject to deterrence.

Skeptics about tailored deterrence pointed out that even the successful communication of a message “tailored” to a specific rational recipient and intended to have a deterrent effect may not have the desired result. For example, a participant noted, in 1967 Israel warned the King of Jordan that in going to war he would lose Jerusalem and the West Bank. King Hussein received and understood the message, but he evidently regarded these penalties of action as less grave than the risks of inaction for his regime and his life.

In contrast, some participants found the concept of tailored deterrence meritorious and gave examples of success. Some participants said that perhaps the clearest-cut successes for “tailored deterrence” were the U.S. and coalition warnings to lower-level commanders in the Iraqi military—sometimes called “trigger-pullers”—that they would be held personally responsible for any use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These warnings were highly specific and “tailored” to the situation; and they appear to have influenced the decision-making of individual Iraqi commanders in 1991.

Communication challenges. One participant asked, how can governments know that their deterrence warnings have been heard by the right recipients and interpreted as intended? How can they tailor their messages to maximize prospects for successful communication? What channels in addition to public declarations of policy might be employed? Given the fact that there may be competing agencies and power centers in a particular government, how can one formulate a message that will not be subject to distortion and misunderstanding and differences in interpretation?

Efforts to communicate deterrence messages may have complex and unexpected consequences. The message may be received by multiple parties in addition to the intended recipient, including other adversaries and domestic publics in NATO nations. The message may therefore provoke unanticipated and counterproductive reactions. Some adversaries might try to exploit the message to send countervailing messages—that is, warnings of possible responses—to influence public opinion in NATO nations; and this might in some circumstances make it more difficult for NATO governments to uphold their deterrence policies.

Communicating messages via actions. A participant pointed out that the Alliance's current operations are important for deterrence—above all, the Alliance's most demanding operation at present, that in Afghanistan. NATO is shaping its reputation in combat and in its struggle to establish security in Afghanistan. If the Alliance fails to meet its objectives in Afghanistan, he said, that will undermine its capacity for deterrence—at least in relation to some types of threats—and this will severely damage its ability to extend assurances to security partners.

Another participant pursued the “actions speak louder than words” theme by noting that nuclear proliferants probably derive impressions about acceptable boundaries from the treatment received by their counterparts. The participant noted that in 1994 the U.S. “red line” for North Korea was the production of plutonium. After North Korea crossed this “red line,” new “red lines” emerged concerning the production and testing of nuclear weapons. After the North Korean nuclear explosive test in October 2006, the new “red line” became the transfer of nuclear weapons.

Strategy definition and management challenges in NATO. If it is difficult for national governments—including the United States—acting alone to succeed in getting the deterrence effects they want, a participant observed, what are the problems of doing so in a 26-nation Alliance?^[5] A participant said that it would be “extremely difficult” for the North Atlantic Council to define and manage a strategy of “tailored deterrence” because of the differing interests and viewpoints of the Allies. The Allies have been able to agree on the vague and flexible principles of the 1999 Strategic Concept, but in Afghanistan specific Allies have established different “caveats” on the usability of their forces. In his view, a coherent deterrence strategy can only be forged by the Alliance with strong U.S. leadership, as at key junctures during the Cold War. At present, he argued, the Alliance is in “a chaotic situation,” with—for example—threat assessments in the Baltic area sharply at variance with those in southern Europe.

The major challenges with the “tailored deterrence” approach, one participant noted, include not only gathering and analyzing intelligence about specific adversaries, but also getting NATO governments to use the intelligence. Because the available facts may be consistent with different models of the adversary's motivations and decision-making, a government should ideally maintain “multiple models of what is possibly the case” and be open to modifying them, if necessary, on the basis of new information. This would be difficult to do on a national basis, and all the more so in the Alliance. Debate and negotiations in the Alliance about modifying its deterrence posture could lead to counterproductive controversy, “posturing” about the right posture, and a loss of cohesion at a time when the Allies will need political will to take risks and make sacrifices.

Key Findings from the March 2008 Conference

The March 2008 conference participants devoted further attention to the problems of formulating and implementing deterrence strategies in the Alliance—above all, the challenges of specificity in declaratory policy and of capability improvement. The conference also critically examined the concepts of strategic culture and reward deterrence.

The challenge of specificity in declaratory policy. The concept of “tailored deterrence” calls for specificity in identifying potential threats. However, in the post-Soviet period the NATO Allies have justified their deterrence posture—particularly its nuclear elements—as “a general insurance policy” against various unspecified threats. While the Allies have been willing to express concern about abstract threat categories—terrorists and WMD proliferants—they have been reluctant to name specific countries as potential threats, at least in public documents. No “tailoring” to specific potential adversaries will be possible in national or NATO declaratory policy as long as this reticence persists, a participant said. As a result, another workshop participant concluded, “constructive ambiguity” will probably gain leverage over “tailored deterrence.” Ambiguity may be preferred because, a participant observed, “it avoids the problem of sending messages that might be misunderstood by multiple recipients and/or irritate one’s own populations.”

The challenge of capability procurement. Some conference participants noted that the NATO Allies may find it difficult to surmount internal “sensitivities” about acquiring and improving their capabilities. For example, some Allies may be reluctant to obtain and employ counterinsurgency capabilities that would enhance the Alliance’s overall deterrence posture. Conventional deterrence capabilities may, one participant suggested, require “a demonstration effect at some kind of regular interval.” There may be, another participant observed, a tension between meeting security imperatives and satisfying the Alliance’s internal political requirements. Moreover, the Alliance’s procurement processes have historically been ponderous. As a participant said, “Don’t look to NATO to do fast acquisition.” To a considerable extent, capability acquisition and doctrinal development in NATO have been “tailored” to fit political requirements internal to the Alliance rather than to deter and counter external threats. One participant ventured the judgment that—in the absence of external threats that would compel cooperation—coalitions of the willing within the Alliance might be more effective at developing tailored deterrence strategies than NATO as a whole.

Since deterrence requirements will depend on specific adversaries in particular contingencies, the United States and its NATO Allies will need “portfolios” or “suites” of capabilities. Political and financial constraints will bound procurement of new capabilities, however. As a result, an unlimited suite of capabilities will not be available in practice, even for the United States. The Alliance’s deterrence posture will therefore depend on forces in being that might be augmented by adaptable prototypes. If the scientific and industrial infrastructures of the United States and other NATO nations could be made more responsive than they are today, a participant said, their capacity to transform virtual systems into operational assets might reinforce deterrence.

Strategic culture. Another important insight from the March 2008 workshop is that the leading focus of the debate should not be refining the Alliance’s capabilities, but deepening understanding of the political, strategic, and cultural issues in deterrence.

To this end, the March 2008 event devoted considerable attention to “strategic culture.” Some participants argued that a nation’s strategic culture does not determine its choices but influences its approach to security challenges. Knowledge of an adversary’s strategic culture may therefore enable one to define a deterrence posture with a greater likelihood of success. For example, one participant said, Iran seems not to care about threats of punishment and to be indifferent to offers of rewards. If this is indeed a fundamental finding about Iran’s strategic culture, he argued, it implies that the only deterrence strategy that might work vis à vis Tehran would be deterrence by denial. That is, Iran would be most effectively deterred by threats of defeat in military operations. This could be seen as an argument for missile defenses to defend NATO forces, territory, and population centers.

Some workshop participants nonetheless expressed caution about “strategic culture” approaches and noted that some questions about this analytical model have yet to be fully answered—for instance, the problems of formulating and testing hypotheses with precision, making predictions, accounting for changes in strategic culture, and distinguishing strategic culture from other

causative factors, such as perceived national interests and resource constraints. Moreover, some participants questioned the extent to which strategic culture is a policy determinant in cases in which power is highly concentrated in a single person, such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Kim Jong Il in North Korea. Other participants replied that, while “the psychosis of a single person” at the top may indeed be relevant in decision-making, that person must nonetheless act within a framework of cultural tendencies built up through the history of a society.

Reward deterrence. Some participants at the March 2008 workshop argued that, in addition to deterrence by denial and deterrence by threat of punishment, NATO governments should give greater attention to what one called “reward deterrence.” As one participant noted, the United States has offered oil supplies and other rewards to Pyongyang in an attempt to deter the North Koreans from violating their commitments. To what extent, he asked, is there a role for reward forms of deterrence in “tailored deterrence”?

The general principle of inducing restraint by highlighting the positive consequences of inaction has long been part of deterrence, one participant noted. In this sense, the deterring power has been offering the “deterree” a reward—that is, in return for restraint, no punishment and no defeat in the field. Setting up a relationship of rewards that could be withdrawn as a form of leverage would go beyond refraining from punishment and military counter-action. Elements of Russian energy policy may constitute a form of “tailored reward deterrence,” one participant observed. If Moscow could use Gazprom and other suppliers to promote a situation of dependence on the part of key NATO European countries, the Russian government might be able to deter them from opposing Russian aspirations by subtly threatening to withdraw the “reward” of reliable energy supplies.

Key Findings from the April 2008 Conference

Participants in the April 2008 conference examined deterrence concepts as well as capability and communication challenges.

Concepts. Two participants said that NATO would be well-advised to devote more attention to Timothy Crawford’s concept of “pivotal deterrence.”^[6] Pivotal deterrence differs from “direct” (or “central”) deterrence and “extended” deterrence in that its focus is not on deterring attack against oneself or one’s allies, but on deterring two third parties from engaging in conflict with each other. In theory a major power’s ability to align with either of the third parties might be exploited to deter them from fighting each other. The concept is relevant to NATO in that the Allies have tried unsuccessfully, notably in the Balkans, to prevent local antagonists from engaging in combat.^[7]

A participant said that the United States clearly does not want a relationship of mutual vulnerability with China or Iran on the model of the Washington-Moscow relationship. Washington would prefer a posture of “Western unilateral advantage,” he said. The challenge is organizing what might be called “collective actor deterrence” through NATO and other alliances. It is hard, he said, to get the component nations of a collective actor to agree on the seriousness of a threat and the proper response, and then to send a coherent message and act in a coordinated fashion.

Capabilities. While the “New Triad” term introduced in the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review may be replaced by another phrase after a new U.S. administration takes office in January 2009, a participant said, thinking along the lines outlined in the “New Triad” concept will almost certainly persist. The “shift away from nuclear deterrence” as being central to U.S. policy will therefore probably continue.

The tendency to rely more on non-nuclear capabilities for deterrence is significant in light of the U.S. and NATO tendency during the Cold War to depend heavily on nuclear forces for deterrence. While nuclear forces have historically backed up deterrence by threats of

punishment, non-nuclear capabilities are likely to be more useful for deterrence by denial—that is, deterrence by credibly degrading the enemy’s prospects of conducting a successful attack.

According to one participant, the historical record is “not encouraging” with regard to the effective use of non-nuclear capabilities for deterrence by threat of punishment. This may change with some new types of non-nuclear capabilities, including non-kinetic cyberwarfare assets and novel conventional means, such as the proposed Prompt Global Strike system.

A participant drew a contrast between the positive impression of NATO’s conventional force transformation efforts conveyed by the April 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration and the more critical assessment offered by General Klaus Naumann, the former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, and other retired general officers in a recent report.^[8] The essence of the “Naumann report” is that, while the non-nuclear capabilities of the United States and its allies are significant, they are not optimal for meeting future deterrence and operational requirements. Greater conventional force development investments within NATO and the European Union are therefore required.

It is paradoxical, a participant said, that new interest in “adapted” or “tailored” deterrence has emerged in Britain, France, and the United States after these countries have substantially reduced their nuclear warhead numbers and have eliminated various delivery systems that might have provided more flexibility and greater options for visible crisis management maneuvers to demonstrate will and determination. Further reductions in nuclear forces may lead NATO’s nuclear weapon states back to “countervalue” or “anti-cities” strategies, he said.

Communication. To formulate communication and deterrence strategies, a participant stated, one needs to know about the values, beliefs, attitudes, cultures, and motivations of one’s adversaries. Trend extrapolation, this participant argued, is “the least reliable form of forecasting,” and much less dependable than knowledge of an adversary’s values, motivations, and priorities. In order to avoid self-centered mirror-imaging and the projection of one’s own values onto others, it was suggested, one should ask, “Are we appealing to their values or thinking of our own values?”

Some of the principles of strategic communication seem self-evident, a participant said. For example, one should use the information channels that the target audience regards as credible. However, such self-evident principles have sometimes not been followed, and huge investments have been made in information efforts with little or no positive impact.

Sometimes, a participant observed, it is easier to identify errors and counterproductive approaches than to define an effective positive strategy. As examples of blunders, he cited “simplistic” concepts such as “crusaders” and “the war on terror,” and the ill-conceived proposal to put verses from the Koran on footballs.

Strategic communication has become so important, one participant declared, that “everything is an information campaign.” As a result, information operations should not be seen as a support function but as a fundamental element of the overall mission. A participant quoted David Kilcullen, the author of *Countering the Terrorist Mentality* and other works, in this regard: “We typically design physical operations first, then craft supporting information operations to explain our actions. This is the reverse of al-Qaida’s approach. For all our professionalism, compared to the enemy’s, our public information is an afterthought. In military terms, for al-Qaida the ‘main effort’ is information; for us, information is a ‘supporting effort.’”^[9]

Some participants questioned whether meaningful generalizations could be made about “Arab” or “Muslim” or “Western” worldviews. Some described this approach as “simplistic” and liable to

produce “stereotypes” and “misunderstandings.” Some drew attention to differences within and among groups in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and other countries.

Next Steps

The workshops in 2007-2008 identified several topics for further investigation and dialogue in the Alliance. Three examples stand out. First, certain aspects of “tailored deterrence” warrant further attention, including the possible contribution of non-nuclear and non-military instruments of deterrence as well as the problems of effectively communicating deterrence messages. Second, in the new security environment, new questions have been raised regarding risk- and responsibility-sharing arrangements in Europe for nuclear forces and missile defenses. The Allies have yet to determine what new arrangements might be substantive and advantageous. Third, the Allies continue to face the challenge of satisfying competing imperatives: demonstrating political commitment to nuclear disarmament and maintaining nuclear deterrence capabilities. How can the Alliance reconcile (a) the need to pursue visible and substantive measures in the domain of arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament and (b) the requirement to maintain and adapt its arrangements for extended deterrence? These questions and others are timely because the Allies agreed at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April 2009 to commission a new Strategic Concept review, and the next NPT Review Conference will take place in May 2010. Some of these issues were discussed at a subsequent workshop, convened in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 10-12 May 2009.

Additional Resources

Papers from the April 2008 workshop at the NATO Defense College have been published in the following book:

- Karl-Heinz Kamp and David S. Yost, eds., *NATO and 21st Century Deterrence*, Forum Paper No. 8 (Rome: NATO Defense College, May 2009).

This book includes the following chapters:

- NATO and 21st Century Deterrence, by Karl-Heinz Kamp
- NATO and Tailored Deterrence: Surveying the Challenges, by David S. Yost
- Evaluating Tailored Deterrence, by Patrick M. Morgan
- Tailored Deterrence — A French Perspective, by Bruno Tertrais
- Non-Nuclear Capabilities in Tailored Deterrence, by Joseph F. Pilat
- Capabilities for Deterrence: Nuclear Forces, by Victor Utgoff
- Great Power Deterrence Relationships: Russia, the United States and Europe, by Isabelle Facon
- Great Power Deterrence Relationships in the Early 21st Century, by Brad Roberts
- Waging Deterrence Against Iran, by Gregory F. Giles
- Influencing Terrorists' Acquisition and Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction – Exploring a Possible Strategy, by Lewis A. Dunn
- Emerging Concepts of Deterrence in the 21st Century, by Joachim Krause
- Concepts of Deterrence in the 21st Century: Some Things Old, Some Things New, by Michael S. Gerson
- How to Link Deterrence Theory to Strategic Planning, by Jean Bétermier
- NATO, Nuclear Deterrence, and Public Diplomacy: Factors Shaping a New Strategic Concept, by Michael Rühle
- Concepts for Deterrence Operations, by Jonathan Trexel

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References

1. The first workshop was co-sponsored by the NATO Nuclear Policy Directorate and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (DTRA/ASCO). The second was co-sponsored by Wilton Park and the NATO Nuclear Policy Directorate. The third was co-sponsored by the NATO Nuclear Policy Directorate, the NATO Defense College, and DTRA/ASCO. In accordance with the Chatham House rule, no views are attributed to specific individuals in this report.
2. [Quadrennial Defense Review Report](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 6 February 2006), vi, 4. See also 49.
3. Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 103-114.
4. M. Elaine Bunn, "[Can Deterrence Be Tailored?](#)" *Strategic Forum*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, no. 225, January 2007, 3.
5. In April 2009, with the accessions of Albania and Croatia, NATO became a 28-member alliance.
6. Timothy W. Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).
7. Timothy W. Crawford, "Pivotal Deterrence and the Kosovo War: Why the Holbrooke Agreement Failed," *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (Winter 2001-2002): 499-523.
8. General Klaus Naumann, General John Shalikashvili, Field Marshal The Lord Inge, Admiral Jacques Lanxade, and General Henk van den Breemen, *Towards a Grand Strategy in an Uncertain World: Renewing Transatlantic Partnership* (Lunteren, The Netherlands: Noaber Foundation, 2007).
9. David J. Kilcullen, "[New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict](#)," *eJournalUSA* 12 (May 2007): 40-46.