

Deterrence Theory in Arab and Muslim Thought

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Preface

The possibility of current efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capability has raised debate in the academic and strategic communities regarding the applicability of modern theories of deterrence to the parties and relationships in that region of the world. The key questions in this context are: how will state and non-state actors in the region attempt to deter each other and external powers (e.g. the United States, Israel); what level of brinkmanship will such deterrence entail; how will these actors receive and interpret corresponding deterrent messages from their adversaries, how do they perceive both the means by which they can deter adversaries; and the legitimacy of restraint or relinquishing declared goals in the face of deterrent signals; and can we identify precursor components of a nuclear deterrence doctrine that may take shape when these entities acquire a nuclear capability.

Deterrence of collective entities (i.e. states as opposed to individuals) is heavily laden with cultural overtones. Messages are read through prisms of the language and culture of the recipient, social psychology, history, religious and ideological axioms, political structures and leadership paradigms, images of the adversary, and other culture-specific elements. To develop a doctrine of “tailored deterrence” it is necessary to understand these factors along with the psyche of the leadership of the party to be deterred, identification of the decision makers with the interests which are threatened, and the dynamics of threat assessment within that leadership.

This study has approached the concept of deterrence in the Muslim and Arab spaces from the vantage point of the mythology, traditions, historiography, contemporary case studies, and current political and strategic thinking on issues relating to deterrence and compellence. This summary brings together the key findings of a number of studies on the attitudes towards deterrence of a number of relevant political or ideological parties in the region. These include studies of ideological perceptions relating to deterrence in classical Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the Jihadi stream of the Muslim Brotherhood, modern Jihadi-Salafi movements and chosen modern case studies: Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

Deterrence in Sunni Islam

A key finding of the project relates to the influence of classical Islamic narratives on modern strategic thought of Islamist movements. The linchpin of the Islamist narrative is the principle of emulation of the Prophet Muhammad in all aspects. This principle is based on the axiom of the

Prophet's "infallibility" and the consequent conclusion that a Muslim individual or group which emulates his behavior will not only be doing the correct thing religiously, but will win divine support and victory. This assumption is, of course, more pervasive in the attitudes of Islamist movements, however the historic narrative of the early conquests of Islam appears as a worthy guideline in other contexts as well.

According to Islamic historiography, after the *hijrah* of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD, he was in need of security to consolidate and build his nascent Muslim community. Punitive measures against enemies were meant to deter them from disturbing this process. A number of key examples from this period may be seen as a doctrine of deterrence aimed at gaining time for social, ideological and military consolidation of the besieged community. Muhammad countered offensive counter-propaganda or military measures with punitive actions that were meant to deter his enemies from hostile actions. Islamic historiography of the first three generations of Muhammad's followers may also be seen as alluding to principles of deterrence by recounting numerous cases in which the battle spirit and resolve of Muslim fighters was so overwhelming that it deterred the enemy during battle.¹ These are raised in contemporary Islamic legal justification of suicide attacks, and as sound asymmetric deterrence paradigms.

Another historiographic strand that is characteristic of the Islamic establishments (before the "Arab Spring") presents the cases of Muslim offensive initiatives in the early days of Islam not as an offensive doctrine imposed by Islamic theology, per se, but as the result of military and political exigencies: provocative actions on the part of the enemy or the need to remove obstacles in the path of the *da'wa*. This strand in Islamic historiography suggests that if the enemy does not interfere with what the Muslims define as their own interests, he will not be attacked. However, since these interests include active and militant proselytization, such a distinction has little relevance.

In Sunni Islamist writings, the formal modern Arabic term for deterrence, *rad'a*, is used to convey a number of ideas. From the viewpoint of the actions that the deterrent signals intend to influence, the term *rad'a* is used in two meanings:

1. As in the Western concept of deterrence (or the French *persuasion*), the threat of the use of force by one party to convince another party to refrain from a certain action because of the consequences of taking said action. Deterrence in this sense is defensive and passive—it seeks to prevent an adversary from militarily attacking the Muslims, their assets or allies.

¹ One such instance is the battle of Constantinople under the caliphate of Mu'awiyya in 668 AD. The single attack of a Muslim fighter who threw himself into the rows of the enemy (*inghimas*; *iqtiham*) is said to have had a destructive effect on the Byzantines' fighting moral.

2. In a sense that is close to the concept of “Compellence” (or the French *disuasion*), bringing the adversary to desist from actions that it is already taking or to roll back its actions by threats of retaliation.

In terms of the military content of deterrence, Sunni Islamist writers use the term *rad'a* in a way that goes beyond the Western concept. Based on military strategies of the prophet,² it deals not only with signaling the threat of use of military force if the enemy does certain things, but actual use of military force in advance of and in lieu of total confrontation in order to “strike terror” (*ra'b*)³ in the hearts of the enemy, weaken his resolve, and destroy his capability to resist, hence bringing him to capitulate without war. The hidden assumption is that the enemy will not believe in the Muslims’ capability to induce harm and willpower to do so unless he has already tasted it. In this sense, *rad'a* can be defined as “pre-emptive deterrence.” This concept of “preemptive deterrence” is ubiquitous in the writings of both the Muslim Brotherhood and its Jihadi-Salafi offshoots. Projecting determination to respond to the enemy after an attack is not deemed sufficient for real deterrence and classical deterrence by punishment will not be credible unless the enemy has previously experienced Muslim force, at least to a certain degree, and a display of force must serve as a preview for the enemy of what his fate will be if he harms Muslim interests. This may be seen as a form of “deterrence by preemption.” Such strategies included denying the enemy the initiative, disrupting his preparations, stripping him of allies, pressuring him economically, and killing influential figures in the enemy's camp.

The evolution of concepts related to deterrence in modern Islamist thought may be ascribed to a line of Muslim Brotherhood affiliated authorities. Sheikh Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, made the practice of jihad as actual fighting a key pillar of faith, as essential an individual religious obligation as prayer and fasting. Moreover, he sought to neutralize deterrence by turning death from a threat to a hope. Al-Banna extolled death and martyrdom as an important end of jihad. He taught that the Qur'an has commanded people to love death more than life and that martyrdom is the shortest and easiest step from this life to the life hereafter. This has evolved into the al-Qaeda slogan that the Muslims “love death and abhor life.”

Following up on Hasan al-Banna's teachings regarding building the Islamic society until it reaches the stage of “capability” (*tamkin*) when it can take control of the state, Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden's mentor,

² There is a widely quoted saying by the Prophet Muhammad about this strategy, “I was given victory by fear from me which spread as far away as one month's journey” (“*nusirtu bi-al-ru'b masirat shahr*”). Thus, one can win the war just by sufficiently frightening the enemy.

³ Surat al-Imran 3:15: “Soon shall we cast terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers, for that they joined companions with Allah, for which He had sent no authority: their abode will be the Fire: And evil is the home of the wrong-doers!”

recommended the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood's Sheikh Munir Al-Ghadban (currently participating in the uprising against Bashar Assad) as the preferred operational doctrine for the mujahideen. Al-Ghadban presents a diachronic model for gradual implementation according to actual needs. This doctrine stresses offense and achievement of deterrence primarily by punishment through projecting an image of Muslim willingness to respond disproportionately to aggression. Al-Ghadban also distinguishes between different states of Muslim power in regards to the use of such power. This distinction presents two “defensive” and two “offensive” stages of power in which the role of deterrence differs:

1. The First Stage: *da'wa* and Secrecy, the defensive approach of response and restraint. This stage provides a high degree of susceptibility to deterrence and compliance with superior force of the enemy.
2. The Second Stage: Immigration (*hijra*) and the incipient Islamic State – in this stage there exists justification of initiatives on the part of the Muslims for use of force and manipulation to preserve the status quo. This is the stage in which there is justification for pre-emptive action as a means to “deter” the enemy from interfering in the project of building the Islamic State.
3. The Third Stage: establishment of the Islamic State and moving from defensive to offensive action.
4. The Fourth Stage: Defeat of the enemy and Spread the *da'wa* through force.

During the “defensive” stages, the military prowess of the Muslim community is directed towards building itself, deterring outsiders from interfering in the community, and protecting the mission of promulgation of Islam (*da'wa*). Patience in the light of enemy superiority is advised and legitimized by the tradition of the Prophet himself; his restraint during the early Meccan period (defined as ‘the period of weakness – *‘ahd al-istida’f*’) and verses from the Qur’an extolling the virtues of restraint and preparation of military strength in order to deter the enemy (not necessarily its application).⁴ This stage is characterized by a low profile and minimal friction with potential rivals coupled with deterrence that is achieved by projecting determination to respond to an aggressor who initiates an action against Muslims. The objective however is not only to deter the specific aggressor but also any future potential aggressor or anyone who might interfere with Muslims' acquisition of power. At this stage the emerging Muslim state should preserve

⁴ Surat al-Baqara 2:194: “*But fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves.*” Surat al-Anfal 8:60 “*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.*”

its deterrent reputation, which is still based on being perceived as defensive. In its response to aggression it is characterized not only by punishment, but by immediate, pointed revenge, and by action exemplifying the greater value given to Muslim than to infidel blood. By projecting an image of Muslim willingness to respond disproportionately to aggression, deterrence by punishment is projected. This is also expressed in the concept of exemplary punishment (*tankil*). This obliges the Muslim to deal extremely disproportionate punishment to anyone who harms the interests of the Muslim community in order to deter other potential offenders. According to interpretations of this principle, the Muslims need not fear retaliation of the enemy because "It may be that Allah will restrain the fury of the Unbelievers; for Allah is the strongest in might and in punishment."⁵

Concurrently, the emerging Islamic state gathers a cadre of jihad fighters, a hard core of offensive military capabilities, which is focused at this stage on defense. It is, however, the foundation of a future aggressive offensive approach, both as part of a concept of "defensive" deterrence and as a precursor of a doctrine of offensive preemption, and an overall offensive concept of spreading Islam. The hard core deals mainly in responding to challenges during the process of founding of the state and its institutions (micro-power). At a later stage, however, once the Islamic state is founded, the hard core initiates preemptive deterrent actions when in possession of information about the enemy's possible plans (operational preemption). Hence, deterrence during the "micro-power" stage is a combination of a psychological effect of projecting willingness to respond on one hand, and the actual response on the other. The transition from the end of that stage to an aggressive offensive stage expresses an increase in self confidence, the transition which leads to initiating attacks against a rival rather than defense. These include: assassination of enemy commanders "in their own camps," bloody revenge for Muslim deaths and, striking at enemy's forces, economy, and infrastructure.

The next stages of the Islamic operational code in amassing power deal with establishing the state's institution and turning it into an established, powerful military state (macro-power). The situation changes, and from protecting the emerging community through defensive deterrence, Muslims now take the initiative with the intention of attacking and deterring to enforce Islam's agenda on the enemy. At that stage the Islamic project undertakes a series of military raids, targeting killings, attacks and acts of revenge as preemption to frighten and convince the immediate population to convert to Islam, or to forcefully prevent the enemy from planning attacks in the future, or by using punishment as an additional element to deter hostile intentions. All of these are meant to influence the adversary, reinforce alliances, weaken hostile

⁵ Surat al- al-Nisa'

coalitions, strengthen morale within the Islamic state as an element of power and deterrence, and to expand the influence of the *da'wah*. For macro-power, as for micro-power, deterrence relies on the psychological element of proven readiness to take risks, change, respond and inflict pain, anchored in activities on the ground and the reputation acquired by Islam by previous harm done to the enemy by Muslims.

The transition from micro-power to macro-power is characterized by repeated assaults initiated by Muslims that reinforce their reputation and deterrent image. The transition is meant to support the aspiration of the Islamic state to a quasi "super-power" status with the goal of weakening the enemy and "striking terror" in its hearts in order to achieve an image of deterrence based on proven power and past experience, and to cause the enemy to surrender even before he reaches the battlefield. At this stage, the goal of planting deterrence in the hearts of the enemy is never totally achieved but calls for continuous and reiterative operations to demonstrate to the enemy the military prowess of the Muslims and thus reinforce and maintain deterrence. Despite the emphasis on religious authority and motivation, the radical Islamic ideologues present considerations relating to power and deterrence, offense and defense, which are similar to western concepts (in many instances they make use of modern terminology translated into Arabic). Since their strategy is aimed at reinforcing the deterrent image and reputation of the Islamic state, it is legitimate to refrain from actions that may result in defeat and would impair the deterrent reputation. Hence, while the image building calls for actions that may seem "irrational" in order to project an impression of willingness to sacrifice, the Islamic actor remains susceptible to considerations of loss of reputation and manpower that may damage the long-term deterrent reputation of the Muslims.

Deterrence in Shiite Islam

The Shiite narrative of the death of the Imam Hussein seems to convey a message of resilience to deterrence. Since the Imam Hussein is deemed infallible and omniscient, he is assumed to have had precognition of his defeat and death, and hence to have chosen to go the path of martyrdom. Ayatollah Misbah e Yazdi – the most influential of the Iranian Shiite clerics among the IRGC and the mentor of Ahmadinejad – argued that any outcome of war would be a victory for the Muslims; either the enemy is defeated or the Muslim side achieves martyrdom.

Notwithstanding, it seems that these elements of Shiite religious thought will affect the development of the deterrence theory in Shiite led countries as cultural patterns of mentality, but not as overtly hard-core religious motivation to discard conventional costs and benefits calculi. The Shiite religious establishments in both Iraq and Iran are still dominated by the

“quietest” school that eschews politics and offers their flock a policy of self-preservation until the salvation by the advent of the Hidden Imam. In light of this, the leading clerics will not be those who will be able to exert deep influence on the deterrence doctrine development. The impact of Shiite religious thought on the future deterrence doctrine therefore does not seem to be articulated through explicit reference to historic narratives or religious texts, but rather through the footprint of a “Manichean-like” worldview that demonizes the enemy and attributes extreme conspiratorial schemes to him. This in turn may lead to failure of a Shiite-oriented leadership (and most specifically Iran) to correctly hear and interpret highly nuanced deterrent signals.

References to Nuclear Deterrence

There is no coherent Islamist view of nuclear deterrence. However, various Sunni and Shiite clerics have referred to the issue. The main analogies and principles they reference are:

1. The question of Islamic legitimacy of methods of killing the enemy. The Islamic discourse on nuclear weapons points at the analogy between nuclear weapons and the ancient use of catapults.⁶
2. The question of permissibility of indiscriminate killing of the enemy. In this context, the Islamic discourse deals with the fact that while modern war of law deals with the inviolability of “non-combatants,” such a distinction does not exist in Islamic law of war. Instead, Islamic laws of Jihad distinguish between categories such as women, minors, aged, invalids and monks in their cloisters (all of whom fit the definition of non-combatants), who should not be intentionally targeted, but not all non-combatants are immune from harm.
3. The criterion of the benefit gained or harm inflicted on the Muslim cause as the result of such killing. In this context, Islamic discussions of use of WMD point at the acceptability of “collateral damage” to non-combatants in cases such as night attacks (*tabiyt*) in which there is no way to distinguish between the combatant and civilians, use of catapults (*manjanik*), flooding and other methods in which the operator of the weapon does not see the target and therefore, non-combatants may be killed.
4. The duty of the Muslims not only to “defend one’s soul” by all means, but to achieve military superiority over the enemy, or at least to parity in types of weapons, leading to the permissibility of any weapon which is found in

⁶ Al-Qa'ida's justifies the September 11, 2011 attacks as an attack with heavy weaponry with no possibility to distinguish between enemy civilians and combatants similar to the use of catapults (*manjaniqat*) by Muslim armies against fortified enemy cities in early Islamic warfare. The concept of *manjaniq* can be found in numerous Islamic traditions, for example, in Malik bin Anas, when at the siege of Taif in 630 AD Muhammad used catapults against the city and “it was said to him, ‘Messenger of God, there are women and youth inside,’ and the messenger of God said, peace be upon him, ‘they belong to their fathers.’” Since then, the catapult case has been applied to numerous battle situations in Muslim history. Nuclear weapons are also analogized to catapults.

- the hands of the enemy, superseding the Islamic objection to “innovation” (*bid’a*) of ideas which were not in existence in the times of the Prophet.
5. The duty of the Muslims to “make the enemies of the Ummah or the enemies of Allah tremble” (*irhab a’ada al-Ummah/ a’ada Allah*).
 6. The principle of reciprocity of damages (*mu’amila bilmithl*) and punishment (*qisas*) as expressed in the Islamic rule of torts. According to this principle, the compensation for the death of a Muslim is ten times that for the death of a non-Muslim. Hence the number of “infidels” who should be killed as revenge for the deaths of Muslims is ten times. Given the number of Muslims who have been killed according to the radical Islamic narrative, there is no other way to balance the account without use of nuclear weapons.

An example of this thinking can be found in the fatwa of the Egyptian “al-Azhar Fatwas Committee,” which determines that as long as nuclear weapons are held by the “enemies” of the Muslims or by any other nation at all, it is the Islamic duty of all Muslim countries to acquire such weapons. A Muslim regime which does not fulfill this duty is a sinner and may be guilty of “corruption (*fassad*) on earth.”⁷ Similarly, the prominent Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Egyptian Sheikh Qaradawi, views it as a “religious duty” for Muslims to acquire nuclear weapons but ruled that they should be used only as a deterrent and actually using them is forbidden.⁸

The debate regarding use of nuclear weapons (as opposed to the religious duty to acquire such weapons) relates to the question whether they may be “used” in order to deter enemies alone, or during conflict either as “first strike” or in retaliation. This discussion also deals with the strategic justification for use of nuclear weapons: only in retaliation, in pre-emptive strike if the enemy is expected to use such weapons against the Muslims, as the only way to achieve victory or – in the more extreme case – even if victory can be achieved in other ways but the goal of “terrifying the enemies of Allah” is achieved. Thus, al-Qaradawi permits use of nuclear weapons in the case of necessity (*darurah*). Such necessity exists when Muslims are exposed to an existential danger, or if the enemy possesses such weapons and threatens to use them against the Muslims. The Muslims then are permitted to take the initiative (i.e. “first strike”) and deal the fatal blow in self-defence. Al-Qaradawi, though, qualifies that permission, however, by restricting it to defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf’*), and not to offensive jihad (*jihad al-talab*), in which Muslims seek to conquer new lands from the infidels. This begs the question of the definition of existential danger (and of who should define it). It also implies that Muslims should use nuclear weapons against Israel the moment they possess

⁷ *Fatwa* by the al-Azhar *Fatwas* Committee headed by Sheikh ‘Ali Abu al-Hassan . The *fatwa* was written by Sheikh ‘alla al-Shanawi. <http://www.islamonline.net/Arabic/news/2002-12/23/article06.shtml>. A similar *fatwa* was issued (21 July 2002) by Dr. ‘Abd al-Mo’az Hariz from Jordan, also on the basis of the duty to “awaken fear in the land of kufr.”

⁸ Qaradawi to Qatari TV, 18 October 2002.

them because, according to al-Qaradawi and the prevalent Islamist thinking, Israel is an occupying power, the struggle for the liberation of Palestine is a defensive jihad, and Israel is believed to possess nuclear weapons.

An even more radical attitude was expressed by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani, the founder of the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrir*), 1909-1997. Al-Nabhani argued that Muslims are permitted to use nuclear weapons in their wars even if the enemy did not use them against them first. His argument was based on the fact that the Koran did not rule out any particular weapon to be used by the Muslims when it called them to fight (for example: "Fight for Allah's sake," 2:190; "Fight them wherever you find them," 2:191). Since there is no prohibition in the Koran of any weapon, then all weapons are permissible, and this is so even if the enemy did not use those weapons first and if victory can be achieved without recourse to the most dangerous weapons.⁹

This position is echoed by the Sheikh of al-Azhar Muhammad Tantawi, who drew an analogy from the ruling of the Caliph Abu Bakr "to fight the enemy with a sword if he fights with a sword and ... with a spear if he fights with a spear." Therefore, if the enemy uses a nuclear bomb, it is the duty of the Muslims to use it.¹⁰

In an unusually long (25 pages) *fatwa* by the Saudi Sheikh Nasser bin Hamid al Fahd in May 2003, Sheikh al-Fahd struggles with the legal ramifications of use of WMD even if children and other Muslims are killed and he reaches the conclusion that use of such weapons against the United States is obligatory. The basic justification for al-Fahd is also reciprocity; the behavior of the United States against the Muslims is such that it warrants use of weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, a high ranking al-Qa'ida commander in Pakistan, Mustapha Abu-l-Yazid (killed 2010), said in an interview with al-Jazeera Channel in 2009 that nuclear bombs obtained in case of a Pakistani regime breakdown should be used against the United States.

On the other hand, a number of *fatwas* outlaw weapons of mass destruction in general, based on their inherent indiscriminate nature, killing "souls that Allah has forbidden to kill" along with the guilty. According to a *fatwa* by Sheikh Taher Jaber Alwani, the use of weapons of mass destruction is "not permissible" (not "*haram*" but not "*ja'iz*") since by nature they do not differentiate between the innocent and the criminal. Sheikh Alwani also offers a practical objection to use of WMD; Islamic law obliges *lex talionis* (*qissas*) by the kin of a person who is wrongly killed. Since in the case of WMD, there

⁹ Ibid, pp. 616-620.

¹⁰ <http://www.islamonline.net/iol-arabic/dowalia/alhadath-17-11/alhadath2.asp>, November 17, 1999.

is no doubt that the innocent will be taken with the guilty, it opens the door for an endless cycle of legally justified revenge.

The Shiite principles of legal and theological jurisprudence have wider leeway for extracting practical guidelines for modern situations on the basis of general principles, without the need for recourse to classical legal decisions. The Islamic legality of nuclear weapons became an issue in Shiite Iran as far back as the early 1980s.¹¹ Upon his accession to power in 1979, Khomeini ordered the suspension of the Shah's nuclear program and issued a *fatwa* that nuclear weapons are "from the Satan." This position was temporary, however, and the nuclear program was revived while Khomeini was still alive. Nevertheless, this position remains in force among many of the traditional "quietist" clerics who claim that a consensus (*ijma'*) exists among the senior clerics that the prohibition on nuclear weapons (or WMD in general) is "self-evident in Islam" and an "eternal law" that cannot be reversed, since the basic function of these weapons is to kill innocent people.¹² This ruling was behind the Iranian decision not to make use of chemical weapons against Iraq during the war.¹³ In September 2003 an additional *fatwa* was issued by the scholars of Qom stating that "Nuclear weapons are un-Islamic because they are inhumane."¹⁴ While there is no official record of a ruling by Khomeini on this matter, the power structure of Iran at the time of the renewal of the Iranian program precludes the possibility that the program was initiated without his legal and moral dispensation. The nature of this legal dispensation though is unknown. Similar to *fatwas* of other Shiite and Sunni scholars on the question of WMD, it may have been limited to addressing the need to develop a nuclear military capability to counter the Iraqi nuclear efforts, or it may have extended to questions relating to the Islamic legality of use of nuclear weapons. If and when Iran achieves a military nuclear potential, Khomeini's unpublished rulings may emerge both as a key element in the internal debate within the regime and in order to provide Islamic justification of the highest level to whatever decision is made. A number of radical clerics such as Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, Ayatollah Janati, and others have gone on record as justifying acquisition and even use in certain circumstances of nuclear weapons. For example, Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Gharavian ruled that "when the entire world is armed with nuclear weapons, it is only natural that, as a counter-measure, it is necessary to be able to use these weapons. However, what is important is what goal they may be used for."¹⁵

¹¹ Shmuel Bar, Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making, Institute for Policy and Strategy, October, 2004, p. 51.

¹² Interview of Montazeri to *Die Welt*, 9 Nov. 2003.

¹³ Interview of Saanei with Robert Collier, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 31 Oct. 2003: A-1.

¹⁴ Mustafa al-Labbad, "Pressuring Tehran," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 656 2003.

¹⁵ Safa Haeri and Shahram Rafizadeh, "Iranian Cleric Okays Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Iran Press Service*, 20 February 2006, http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2006/february-2006/iran_nuke_20206.shtml.

Case Studies

Iran

Thus far, Iran does not have a clearly developed conventional doctrine of deterrence. In Iranian political discourse the most prominent term employed that is vaguely equivalent to the meaning of “deterrence” is “*bazbarandegi*.” However, the use of this word reveals that it tends to be ambiguous and interchangeable with the concept of “defense” on one hand, and “retaliation” on the other hand.

Iranian military leaders have alluded from time to time to a doctrine of “Strategic Deterrent Defense” that is supposed to deal with a whole range of threats from domestic unrest and counter-revolution supported by foreign powers, terrorism and border conflicts, to military action by the United States or by a neighboring country. The first line of defense in this doctrine is “soft security means,” i.e., international legitimacy, good foreign relations as well as multilateral regional security arrangements, and support of the Iranian people (unlike the lack of support for the Iraqi regime which was, in Iranian eyes, the cause of its downfall). These measures are augmented by “hard security means”: paramount among them long-range (SSM) capabilities and allusions to Iran’s ability to unleash “Muslim wrath” against an aggressor. In its deterrent messages, Iran signals the potential “aggressor” that Iran has the capability to withstand a “first strike” (of course not in the nuclear sense) and to deliver not merely a “like for like” retaliatory strike, but a non-proportional response coupled with a willingness to escalate the conflict by prolonging it, absorbing immense casualties, closure of the Persian Gulf to shipping of all countries, extending the conflict to other theaters, using long range missiles, and drawing in the Gulf states and Israel. Terrorism (“export of the Islamic revolution”) has been a staple tool in Iran’s political arsenal since the Revolution. Despite formal denials of involvement in terrorism, Iran’s reputation also serves as part of its deterrent image.

The above however does not amount to an elaborated doctrine of conventional deterrence. This appears to be due to certain cultural, political and institutional obstacles that will persist in the Islamic republic of Iran for the foreseeable future. By a coherent deterrence doctrine we mean here an elaborated set of deductions based on a rational comprehensive assessment of the country’s resources and capacities, and on an equally rational coherent evaluation of an adversary’s faculties and intentions. American political scientists created and elaborated deterrence theory during the Cold War. In contrast, the USSR did not elaborate or operate according to any similar theory. Construction of such a theory is a highly sophisticated institutional process that requires very qualified academic staff, as well as a dialogue between military and academia. No such elements existed in the USSR, nor do

they exist in Iran today. This is yet another “technical” factor preventing Iran from developing its own deterrence theory.

Another reason for the absence of a coherent deterrence doctrine in Iran is the Iranian structure of intelligence gathering and analysis. Within Iranian intelligence agencies, there is no clear distinction between collection and assessment bodies. Moreover, there is always a huge gap between collection capabilities and strategic intelligence assessments. Collection tends to be influenced by the ideologically formulated strategic assessment and not vice versa. This can be compared to the drawbacks of the intelligence systems of the USSR and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Those who are in charge of the intelligence assessment in Iran would be hard-pressed to introduce viewpoints contrary to the official ideological stances of the regime. As a result, the assessment of an adversary’s intentions and capacities will not differ from the official propaganda. As such, Iranian intelligence’s assessment of a rival’s intentions would plausibly be globally alarmist and locally unconcerned. On the one hand, according to the official Iranian ideology, Iran is surrounded by enemies, who incessantly hatch plots and conspire against it; on the other hand, official propaganda of the regime promotes the idea that “all is well”—claiming that the intelligence agencies of Iran are always alert, ready to disrupt every enemy plot. Thus, their insecurity, fed by conspiratorial worldviews, intertwines with projection of confidence in their ability to thwart enemy designs and deter a rival. This mindset is likely to result in their failure to adequately assess a rival’s intentions and actions outside of their ideological confines.

The achievement of a nuclear capability is perceived in Iran as both a strategic exigency and a well-deserved membership card in a select club to which Iran ought to belong. The fact that the United States attacked Iraq despite its having chemical and biological weapons only strengthens the Iranian resolve to achieve a nuclear capability, which is the only non-conventional capability that can effectively deter the United States.

It may be assumed that as Iran comes nearer to acquisition of nuclear weapons, there will be voices in the Iranian strategic community calling for formulation of a doctrine of deterrence. However, underlying characteristics of the Iranian military and political structure along with the regime’s ideological reluctance to adopt concepts that are imported from the Western world (deemed as a form of “west-toxication” – *gharbzadegi*) will probably encumber the development of a coherent doctrine. The hypothesis that possession of nuclear arms forces the possessor to formulate a comprehensive nuclear doctrine ignores the Western experience – that it took several years from the acquisition of nuclear weapons until the formulation of coherent deterrence doctrines based on the reality of those weapons. It should not be assumed that Iranian doctrine of deterrence would adopt existing concepts

that are imported from the Western world. In addition, the Iranian ruling bodies suffer from chronic mismanagement and lack of long term planning; even if a concrete doctrine is formulated, it would be hard to foresee it being thoroughly implemented.

As noted above, the clerics will not be the main formulators of an Iranian deterrence doctrine. The rhetoric of the most extremist Iranian hardliners does have a dimension of what could be considered as irrational religious motivation that can affect the principles of deterrence. However, crafting a deterrence doctrine on the basis of religious principles requires the highest degree of political and religious credentials that neither the current Iranian clerical leadership nor its potential successors possess. To be credible, the leader who adopts this should have credentials that the current Iranian leaders don't have. Thus, the Hidden Imam may be believed to visit great ayatollahs with proven spiritual authority but the credentials of a president like Ahmadinejad without any religious authority are not sufficient to overrule the inherent caution of traditional Shiite Islam.

It is also plausible that the future Iranian deterrence doctrine will be reactive in nature: it may represent menaces, understating use of nuclear weapons, but without a realistic assessment of how all potential rivals might understand this menace. For that purpose, it is highly unclear whether the Iranian regime will be able to realize that a declared threat addressed to a rival (while the challenger already has nuclear capacity) is sharply different from a "usual" exchange of bellicose declarations. While current bellicose rhetoric of Iran might be ignored, it is likely to change when Iran will have a nuclear capacity. This is because bellicose declarations when coupled with a real capacity cannot be treated only as rhetoric.

Historical evidence does not affirm the image of Iran as an un-deterrable martyr state, insensitive to casualties and irrational. However, some characteristics such as their Manichean worldview, the demonization of their adversaries, and conspiracy theories, are likely to manifest themselves in inadequate assessments of an adversary's intentions and capacities. As the history of the IRI shows, the Iranian leadership might make bad calculations, but it is far from suicidal. Coupled with the flaws in the functionality of the intelligence bodies, their largest vulnerability is a miscalculation based on an incorrect assessment of the rival, rather than the Ahmadinejad-like apocalyptic posture that the Iranian regime could adopt. Iran is not irrational. However, its leadership might be unaware of or wrongly assess their adversary's intentions and capacities. Under such circumstances, the risk of a miscalculation and of a gradual escalation is very high. Thus, the deterrence strategy must minimize the possibility of an Iranian misreading of its adversaries' intentions.

Pakistan

The Pakistani doctrine of nuclear deterrence is of particular interest as Pakistan is – to date – the only Muslim country with a strong Islamist influence in possession of nuclear weapons. The Pakistani state nuclear deterrence posture was born as – and ostensibly remains - one of minimum deterrence coupled with a doctrine of declared first-use of nuclear weapons in case of an overwhelming conventional onslaught that cannot be defeated conventionally. The principle of minimum deterrence, however, is tailored to a state that does not have the resources, or nuclear wherewithal, to establish first strike or survivable assured destruction second strike capabilities against its enemy of reference. In spite of lacking such assured destruction second strike assets, minimum deterrence still establishes the essential level of retaliatory capability sufficient to dissuade the potential adversary from considering striking first or creating an intolerable threat level, if the punishment expected, while not constituting assured destruction, nevertheless more than nullifies any rational gain ventured.

Additionally, Pakistan's motives have included the element of Islamic prestige, as it remains the only Islamic nuclear weapons power to date (until Iran goes nuclear openly). As such, fierce nationalistic, perhaps fired by religious, emotions regarding India, and particularly its nuclearization, have clearly driven Pakistani actions, and serve to reinforce the credibility of deterrence threats so that use may be expected at thresholds not far removed from posturing to do so. While the official line rarely makes outright reference to the Islamic dimension of the nuclear posture, public implication of its importance is often highlighted in Pakistan in academia, media or public opinion discussions of the significance of Pakistan's nuclear standing and capabilities.

However, Pakistan's nuclear deterrence posture seems to be shifting away from minimum deterrence towards one that suggests a willingness to threaten an enemy with a second strike: the expansion of Pakistan's arsenal together with the intensive development, testing, production and deployment of nuclear-enabled tactical and strategic range ballistic missiles and rockets.

Thus Pakistan is in the process of establishing deterrence across the entire spectrum, from first strike to survivable assured destruction second strike, and theater or tactical nuclear strike capabilities, including against limited conventional war such as the reputed Indian "Cold Start" strategy, backed up by deterrence against Indian retaliation and escalation beyond theater use.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

Any deterrence scenario associated with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States must take into account the view from the Gulf of sources of legitimacy and power: tribal kinship, religion (Sunni Islam), and material power (wealth and armed forces).

Saudi Arabia is viewed, implicitly as much as explicitly, as first among equals among the Gulf States. It may be assumed that Saudi Arabia will decide to obtain nuclear weapons capability if Iran obtains a nuclear weapon capability. It is unlikely that the Kingdom – or other Gulf parties – would accept U.S. extended deterrence as a solution. This is, in part, due to its desire to avoid provoking the most radical religious elements in Saudi society. The radical doctrine of *al-isti'ana bi-l-kuffar*, which refers to showing non-believers loyalty by asking them for help, is one example of a radical doctrine the Saudi regime may be seeking to mitigate. Hence, it is conceivable that Saudi Arabia will turn to Pakistan for extended deterrence in the short term, including offering Pakistan deployment of its nuclear weapons in Saudi Arabia. In the medium to long-term Saudi Arabia will turn to China, Pakistan, South Korea, and France to develop its own indigenous nuclear supply chain and weapons program.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia appears to be pushing its neighboring monarchs toward a consensus for a more robust GCC union. Therefore, a future Middle East deterrence scenario must consider the strong possibility that there will be joint-GCC nuclear weapons capability. This raises a critical series of questions regarding how such a joint GCC capability will be deployed, defended, staffed, and, most important, jointly managed.

Conclusions

Religion can affect deterrence in a multitude of ways both in its influence on the religiously motivated party and on its adversary. It can reduce susceptibility to enemy signals of deterrence by inspiring the forces with a sense of divine immunity and guaranteed victory. It may install a sense of deterrence in the enemy by projecting an image of willingness to risk total annihilation. Even if it is not fully believed, it can restrict the independence of more pragmatic commanders who may be influenced by conventional deterrent signals by constraining them to act according to the dictates of religious authorities. The question then arises: Can an Islamist government in possession of nuclear weapons be deterred from using them in a conflict that is – in its eyes - decreed by Heaven? If one seeks death for Allah's sake as the way to salvation and eternal happiness in the hereafter, can one be deterred by the threat of death in what is defined as holy jihad? It may be concluded from the above that Islamic belief paradigms are not "deterrence-proof." There exists in the Islamist narrative - and certainly in the totality of Islamic historiography and culture - elements that can be leveraged to justify deterrence in the face of superior force. The "Achilles' heel" of these elements is their reliance on either a strong religious authority who can provide such an interpretation on one hand, or on a strong legitimization of rational decision making on the other hand. The structure of Islamic authority in this era of collapse of authority reduces the prospects for either of these to materialize.

The second question that this project has tried to answer is: are there particular Islamic concepts of deterrence that either are already formulated as a doctrine or may be so formulated at a later stage? It would seem that the Islamic narratives provide a framework for a deterrence doctrine that is far more “proactive” than the corresponding Western doctrines. It does not rely on the fact that the enemy is aware of the Muslim capability, but draws on the narrative of the early history of Islam to produce a paradigm of show of force in order to “strike fear” in the hearts of the enemy. This will not be due to a mere proclivity towards bellicosity, but to a rational assessment based on history that only by actual projection of force will the enemy be deterred. This will surely be true in the face of a balance of power in which the Muslim side remains inferior and must compensate for such inferiority by shows of force. The paradigm of “preemptive deterrence” may, therefore, be the basis for policies of brinkmanship with the aim of deterrence of the enemy, but without a capacity to control spirals of escalation.

The history of the Islamic Republic of Iran shows that the Iranian leadership tends to make wrong calculations but it is far from being suicidal. Coupled with the flaws of the intelligence bodies’ functionality, the biggest danger of a nuclear Iran may derive from miscalculation based on incorrect assessment of the rival. In other words, a deterrence doctrine directed against Iran must leave no room for ambiguity. The signals transmitted to Iran should focus first on minimizing the probability that Iran misreads them, irrespectively if the signals are defensive or offensive towards the Iranian regime. For that purpose, messages or direct threats could be transmitted to as many Iranian leaders as possible. The messages ought to be as clear as possible, concluding a detailed description of immediate responses to Iranian moves. The transmission of deterrent signals has to be followed in the short-term by concrete actions. Though such measures are not a “formula” for success to deter Iran, they are likely to minimize the inclination of the Iranian leadership to miscalculate, discard them as bluff or impossible according to the Iranian assessment.

After Iran, the behavior of a nuclear-armed Islamist Egypt should be examined. The record of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood during the last four decades demonstrates that the movement has been thinking in pragmatic terms about the balance of powers, avoiding making moves that could put its existence at risk, even for the sake of advancing its Islamist objectives. This pragmatism grew out of the fact that its actions against the Nasser regime in the 1960's led it to the verge of extinction. As such, when it is in power, the MB will not initiate the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict. However, a Muslim Brotherhood ruled Egypt will almost certainly strive to acquire nuclear arms, and will not be satisfied with a “threshold” capability. It will see the need to brandish such capabilities for deterrence in the classical sense of the term, to dissuade its enemy from attacking it. However, it is also likely to

rely on its possession of those weapons or capabilities to produce compellence, or to oblige its adversary to take or to avoid taking certain actions for fear of the consequences. Theoretically, it may even consider using such arms in a preemptive strike against Israel. It will not be deterred merely by a threat of casualties on a large scale among the country's population, but by a threat to the movement's very existence. Yet these observations do not reflect the thinking of a political organization in power. Once in power, the MB's thinking with regard to the nuclear issue and to deterrence will be influenced not only by religious edicts, interpretations of Islam's history and the organization's own historical experience, but also by a host of other factors, like the positions of other domestic actors, domestic economic constraints, and external constraints. Still, the elements mentioned above will serve as the foundation on which the strategic thinking of the Islamists in power will develop.