

11-1-2023

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Recommended Citation

Schnauffer, Tad, "GNSI Decision Brief: Integrated Deterrence: What is it Good For?" (2023). *GNSI Decision Briefs*. 8.

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GNSI DECISION BRIEF

Integrated Deterrence: What is it Good For?

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November 1, 2023



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Integrated Deterrence: What is it Good For?

Introduction

The Biden administration introduced the concept of Integrated Deterrence (ID) in its 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS). As the report, *No I in Team*, states, “Integrated deterrence seeks to integrate all tools of national power across domains, geography, and spectrum of conflict, while working with allies and partners.” The Department of Defense’s (DoD) National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s National Military Strategy (NMS) further defined the military’s role in this concept. Critics have noted deficiencies with the whole-of-government approach that ID demands while failing to specify coordination methods across agencies. That same report notes, “what integrated deterrence entails in practical terms remains unclear... This ambiguity raises the risk that integrated deterrence may find itself dead on arrival.” Could this new initiative fail before ever getting off the ground? Another analyst declared, “Integrated Deterrence... is not a bad idea. In fact, it is a good one. But it’s not a strategy.” With these concerns in mind, this brief will explore what ID entails and assess its possible effectiveness.

Integrated Deterrence’s Rough Start

The NSS highlights ID as the strategy to further, “The United States... vital interest in deterring aggression by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and other states.” ID appears in the NSS under the military subsection and seems to place the onus on the DoD to lead this coordination effort across the government. The NDS complements the NSS in explaining that ID, “entails working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, all instruments of U.S. national power, and our network of alliances and partnerships. Tailored to specific circumstances, it applies a coordinated, multifaceted approach to reducing competitors’ perceptions of the net benefits of aggression relative to restraint.” The NMS states that, “The Joint Force’s contribution to Integrated Deterrence is combat-credible forces, backstopped by a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent.” To summarize, ID aims to integrate everyone in the government and interagency space across all domains, places, and partners to deter aggression and maintain the status quo. This deterrence approach through ‘Everyone, Everywhere using Every means’ presents an immense challenge to coordinate and develop, requiring buy-in from the numerous government agencies involved and realistically taking years to effectively implement. To have the DoD lead the effort likely undercuts the ability for ID to gain acceptance across these entities as agencies have differing approaches and methods. The implementation and lead for such a comprehensive approach would better come from the White House where it can resolve the bureaucratic friction that has kept government departments from working together in

the past. The lack of the application of ID across the government shows the need for a top-down approach. The term integrated deterrence is not yet mentioned in the State Department’s Joint Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026 or the Treasury Department’s Strategic Plan. The terms deter, or deterrence are mentioned only eleven times in State Department’s plan with no direct mention of cooperation with the DoD.

Whole-of-Government Approaches in Iraq and Afghanistan

The United States has learned countless lessons about the of whole-of-government approach and the many challenges that come with it. The breakdown of the interagency process in Iraq and Afghanistan provides stark examples of the struggle to get agencies to coordinate efforts to achieve a mutual goal. The difficulties of unity of effort across the governmental sphere caused the Joint Staff to produce a *Unity of Effort Framework Pamphlet* in 2013. The Joint Staff aimed to break down the bureaucratic silos of agencies and get everyone working in a mutually supporting way. Despite over a decade of attempts to get the Departments of Defense and State along with others to support common means and methods to reach political objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, the results were lackluster. The implementation of the unity of effort in this way did not achieve victory in either conflict. What can ID accomplish through this approach in strategic competition?

What Victory does Deterrence Bring?

The NSS notes, “Our defense strategy must sustain and strengthen deterrence, with the PRC as our pacing challenge.” As one analyst questioned about the strategy’s goals, “...beyond the absence of war” what does victory look like? All four defense priorities in the NDS focus on strengthening deterrence. Should deterrence succeed, it only maintains the status quo and stops undesired behavior. Deterrence does not address the tensions that cause adversarial conditions in the first place. In this way, the best deterrence can deliver is a prolonged standoff. When using deterrence as a strategy, success is hard to measure while failure is painfully clear.

How will the whole-of-government coordinate ID strategy and to what end? The current rollout of ID lacks a desired end state other than the inferred need to maintain the status quo. It also fails to address the primary threat defined by the NSS which states, “Of all of the shared problems we face, climate change is the greatest and potentially existential for all nations.” China is a pacing threat, Russia an acute threat and climate change the greatest threat. Reconciling the coordination efforts and goals of the ID strategy needs to take on a primary role in future planning should it remain the main U.S. strategy.

Deterrence as a Strategy

To better examine ID as a strategy, Joint Doctrine advises, “Grand strategy aims to secure and advance a nation’s long-term, enduring, core interests over time. At the grand strategic level, the ways and means to achieve U.S. core national interests are based on the national leadership’s strategic vision of America’s role in the world.” It further outlines that “Strategy is a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater or multinational objectives” At first glance, this definition of strategy seems to support the use of ID as both note the need to use national power in an integrated manner. Yet, issues arise with the limitations that an overall deterrence strategy places on its users. Deterrence only maintains the situation as is and aims to prevent unwanted actions by adversaries.

The NSS and NDS fail to expand upon what happens if deterrence fails without leading to war. As one analyst notes about adversaries operating below the threshold of war, “China is using economic competition and coercion through tools like the One Belt, One Road Initiative and quietly annexing its neighbor’s territory... Russia has used just about every information tool at its disposal to sow political discord... across NATO and Western publics.” In theory, the best ID can do in response to these types of operations is deter future encroachments and operations, but does nothing to remedy gains already made. Deterrence will not pressure Russia to return Crimea to Ukraine or China to demilitarize its artificial islands in the South China Sea or relinquish the land it already seized from Bhutan. In this case, “deterrence is a strategy to defend the status quo. But if the status quo is being altered then deterrence has already failed.”

Deterrence offers only a stagnant approach to address an actively changing world. As described by a deterrence theorist, “deterrence says little about how to change the other’s motives... deterrence theorists are concerned with the danger that states will become more aggressive... But much less is said about transforming hostile relations into peaceful ones... The problems increase when we consider deterrence theory as a guide for statesmen. At best, it tells them how to maintain a hostile and dangerous relationship.” What happens when the situation changes? Deterrence typically relies on punishment or threat thereof to stop behavior. Typically explained as deterrence by denial or deterrence by punishment. This strategy does not encompass the ability to provide incentives or flexibility while dealing with adversaries. It also leads decisionmakers into a provocative security dilemma instead of attempting to solve underlining political issues between nations. Deterrence continues a perpetual hostile cycle with target nations. Additionally, as the main strategy, when new crises or threats emerge, decisionmakers will default to deterrence as the answer, when other diplomatic or political solutions could better resolve a situation. Also, a deterrence approach must consider the adversaries’ strategy and values. “Deterrence is a form of high-stakes political communication. Deterrence is therefore psychological as much as anything else. It requires clearly signaling political

will and intent to act decisively if an adversary crosses a red line.” Signals depend on how the other powers view the use of force and their threat perceptions. The NMS explains how, “Integrated Deterrence influences adversary decision calculus by affecting perception of costs, benefits, and consequences of restraint...” The United States’ deterrence approach toward Russia in 2021 and early 2022 composed of economic sanctions, military assistance, and intelligence sharing aimed at increasing the perceived costs of invasion. This effort came from several government agencies yet failed to prevent Russia’s February invasion. How did the signaling get misinterpreted and why was the message not strong enough?

Lessons from Cold War Strategies

The Truman and Eisenhower administrations used strategic nuclear deterrence, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), as their main strategy to contain the Soviet Union. This reliance on strategic deterrence did deter war, but did not deter the Soviets from operating below the threshold of war. Following one such action, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Kennedy administration started the implementation of a new strategy of Flexible Response to better counter operations other than war. Nixon and Ford’s Détente strategy with the Soviets tried to cool off relations and limit the hostile cycle between the two powers. This generally worked until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This Cold War experience exemplifies the need for strategy to evolve and remain dynamic as the United States started with deterrence, but expanded it strategy.

Beyond Deterrence

As the Cold War has shown, deterrence has a role in national strategy but not as the primary strategy. ID may work better at the strategic level in deterring nuclear exchanges or war, but it will struggle to deter across all domains. Deterrence does not allow a nation to further its interests and instead stagnates them. A more positive and active strategy is necessary to address the dynamic international environment. The United States should work with allies and partners not only to deter, but also to engage more partners to address the competing interests of other great powers. One expert proposed strategy of persuasion, “U.S. leaders need to sharpen their statecraft... the comparative advantage in U.S. soft power can help temper and win the competition against its authoritarian rivals... A force designed to persuade would prioritize influence operations, invest in “brains, not metal,” and contain more formations like the Army’s Security Force Assistance Brigades... [or] the UK’s new “audience-centric” defense doctrine, which “is founded on a forward deployed posture to assure influence, to deter and to reassure.” ID will unlikely influence strategic competitors in ways that benefit U.S. interests. ID has a place in deterring war, but as seen in the Cold War, the United States needs an adaptive strategy that can further its interests, build partnerships, and provide guidance when deterrence fails.

Decision Points

- Does the implementation of Integrated Deterrence using the whole-of-government approach need an office of coordination directed from the White House?
- What limitations are placed on U.S. decisionmakers when the primary security strategy is deterrence?
- What is the U.S. strategy if deterrence fails?
- How does the U.S. plan to react to a dynamic international environment despite its desire to maintain the status quo?
- Is a deterrence strategy through ‘Everyone, Everywhere using Every means’ even feasible given the level of coordination necessary across such a broad spectrum?
- If implemented at the time, would Integrated Deterrence have deterred the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine?

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