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Deterrence Now

Patrick Morgan's authoritative study revisits the place of deterrence after the Cold War. By assessing and questioning the state of modern deterrence theory, particularly under conditions of nuclear proliferation, Morgan argues that there are basic flaws in the design of the theory that ultimately limit its utility. Given the probable patterns of future international politics, he suggests that greater attention be paid to "general" deterrence as opposed to "immediate" deterrence and to examining the deterrent capabilities of collective actors such as NATO and the UN Security Council. Finally, he contends that the revolution in military affairs can promote less reliance on deterrence by retaliatory threats, support better collective management of peace and security and permit us to outgrow nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. This new major work builds upon Patrick Morgan's landmark book, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (1983).

PATRICK M. MORGAN holds the Thomas and Elizabeth Tierney Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies and Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine. His published books include *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (1983), *Strategic Military Surprise* (with Klaus Knorr), *Regional Orders* (with David Lake), *Security and Arms Control*, Vols. I and II (with Edward Kolodziej) and *Theories and Approaches to International Politics*.

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To Thomas and Elizabeth Tierney,
whose heads and hearts are both in the right place

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Acknowledgments

As the words pile up so do the debts. To start with, I must thank Thomas and Elizabeth Tierney. I wallow in the luxury of an endowed chair they created at the University of California, Irvine, and its resources were crucial in sustaining me on the sabbatical leave during which the initial work on the book was completed and over the rest of time it was refined. They made this book possible. Their extraordinary generosity sustains many people at my institution and the surrounding community and it is always a great pleasure for me to say so.

That year on leave was spent primarily as a visiting faculty member at the Department of War Studies at King's College London. It was a great treat intellectually and personally. When the department was designated as the strongest in international relations research in the nation by finishing first in the quadrennial competition for government research funds, I even imbibed a memorable amount of free champagne. Especially helpful in all things was the head of the department, Professor Lawrence Freedman. A better scholar and friend could not be found, particularly on anything to do with deterrence. I learned much from others in the department: Jan Willem Honig, Jo Spear, James Gow, Beatrice Heuser, and some outstanding graduate students.

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Christopher Jones – and at the Battelle National Laboratory in Richland, Washington.

Much of the initial writing was completed at the Rockefeller Center at Bellagio, a place which offers an extraordinary experience. Charming and indefatigable hosts seat you in the lap of luxury, catering to every need and confident that you will feel driven, out of quiet guilt feelings that you can't possibly deserve such treatment, to push resolutely through the task at hand. It is a winning concept applied with brio in a setting of unparalleled beauty.

At home, graduate students who worked on library materials in my behalf included Mark Bretches and Brenda Seaver. They alerted me to sources I should have known about, and tracked down ones especially hard to obtain, working pleasantly for a pittance. I am steadily grateful, and happy they have gone on to good things. Ted Gaulin generously offered to tackle the index and did a fine job – as a graduate student, he could have found better things to do with his time.

John Haslam, one of the finest of editors, was commendably patient with my delays. Trevor Horwood, my copy-editor, was excellence personified.

I make the usual apologies to my wife for uncivilized behavior in getting the damn thing done and taking too long at it, but also note that anglophile Marilyn had wonderful fun in Britain and that there are worse places to be dragged off to for a summer month than the Italian Alps.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BMD	Ballistic missile defense
CFE	Conventional forces in Europe
C^3I	Command-control-communication-intelligence
DEFCON	Defense condition
EMP	Electro-magnetic pulse
EU	European Union
ExCom	Executive Committee (of the President)
GPS	Global positioning system
GRIT	Graduated reduction in tension
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LOW	Launch on warning
MAD	Mutually assured destruction
MID	Militarized international dispute
MIRV	Multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-proliferation Treaty
NSC	National Security Council
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PGM	Precision guided munition
R&D	Research and development
RMA	Revolution in military affairs
RoK	Republic of Korea
RV	Reentry vehicle
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitations Talks

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SAM	Surface-to-air Missile
SIOP	Single Integrated Operations Plan
SOP	Standard operating procedure
START	Strategic Arms Reductions Talks
WEU	Western European Union
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Preface

I wanted to write this book because of several developments in the wake of the Cold War. First, the end of that era produced a profound adjustment in political relations among great states with nuclear arsenals, in spite of the continued existence of reciprocal threats of vast magnitude. They began to act, in many ways, as if those arsenals did not exist and in other ways as if those arsenals permitted relations on a friendlier basis than would otherwise have been possible. Thus most of them announced that they were significantly reducing their strategic nuclear arsenals and their nonstrategic nuclear forces and, on the other, that they had no intention – for the time being at least – of eliminating nuclear weapons because they remained important for security. I hope to show how this indicates that a number of things often taken for granted about nuclear weapons – and thus about nuclear deterrence and often about deterrence without nuclear weapons – are not necessarily true, and that certain other things that have been asserted about nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence (and deterrence at other levels) are indeed correct. The end of the Cold War and the years since have been very illuminating and it is instructive to consider how.

Second, debate about deterrence, and related things such as threats, continues to churn in the academic and policy oriented literature, and it seems appropriate to reconsider the issues involved.[1] The debate is often about fundamental matters: whether deterrence works, how it works (if it does), and how to find out. With such basic questions still on the agenda we don't seem, at first glance, to have learned much. After more

[1] Examples, not always cited in the rest of the book, include Bracken 1991 (on coming threats to American deterrence from the Far East); Manwaring 2001; several articles in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2000; Freedman 1996; Cimbala 2000; Joseph and Reichart 1998; Payne 1996, 2001; Huth 1999.

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than five decades of experience with, and thinking intensively about, deterrence in the shadow of nuclear weapons, these are the same questions we faced when we started. Surely we ought to have answered at least some of them or the worth of the enterprise is in question. I first wrote about these sorts of questions years ago and I wanted to see how the subject had turned out – to do an update on deterrence and deterrence theory as the best way to tackle the current questions/debates about deterrence now. I attempt to assess what we know and, where there are significant limitations along those lines, try to explain why progress is slow. An underlying question is: how useful is deterrence theory? Since the theory, from its inception, was meant to shape the development of effective strategy in the practice of deterrence, conclusions on the utility of the theory are highly pertinent. Even if we don't have reliable conclusions about the utility of the theory, that would be important.

Third, some years ago I introduced the distinction between "general" and "immediate" deterrence and I wanted to examine general deterrence more closely in view of the altered international situation after the Cold War. An immediate deterrence situation is one in which an actor realizes that another specific actor is seriously contemplating attacking and undertakes to deter that attack. During the Cold War the study and the practice of deterrence was dominated by the image of immediate deterrence, by the conception of deterrence as designed to cope with a pressing threat or one that could become pressing at almost any time. I suggested that this was not altogether wise, that immediate deterrence was relatively rare and that more attention be paid to general deterrence in theoretical and strategic analysis. That had almost no impact, and general deterrence has received little attention down to the present day. General deterrence has to do with anticipating possible or potential threats, often hypothetical and from an unspecified attacker, and adopting a posture designed to deter other actors from ever beginning to think about launching an attack and becoming the "potential" or "would-be" challengers so prominent in deterrence theory. In theory, general deterrence has been given little systematic attention by me or anyone else, but it is where most of the practice of deterrence is lodged most of the time. It is worth trying to remedy this. The end of the Cold War eliminated the urgency and intensity from deterrence among the great powers, placing them more clearly in a general deterrence posture vis-à-vis each other. For many other states now immediate deterrence is less relevant than it was, and general deterrence considerations dominate security planning. At the same time, many states now frequently confront

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issues of broad security management in a regional or the global system – issues pertaining to conflict prevention, peace enforcement, and collective security which require taking general deterrence considerations into account. This is worth exploring too.

Fourth, the end of the Cold War led to considerable speculation about the utility of deterrence, literature on how the US or the West now has to confront opponents not easily deterred – terrorists, rogue states, fanatical ethnic or religious movements, intensely insecure smaller states. The fear is that these opponents will be difficult to understand, inclined to be uncompromising, likely to take high risks and pay a high price in pursuit of their goals, and possibly irrational; as a result deterrence will not work well, if at all. There is a related concern that the US or the West will not be able to deter these actors and others effectively because Western states will not accept the associated costs. They might be unhappy about maintaining the necessary forces without a clear and compelling threat. Or the level of effort and related costs they are willing to bear in specific confrontations is declining so that, having forces for a militarily effective response, they won't use them. Or the ability of potential attackers to inflict harm, such as via weapons of mass destruction, will rise to where they deter the deterrers. And in all these situations Western states, even if willing to act, would have a serious credibility problem, the bane of any deterrence policy.

There is also the suggestion, widespread in discussions on nuclear proliferation, that regardless of the future effectiveness of American or Western deterrence there will soon be confrontations between other actors in which deterrence will fail. There is fear of confrontations between nuclear-armed states quite inexperienced in managing nuclear deterrence postures – in comparison with the Cold War superpowers – and concern about a breakdown or failure of deterrence at a crucial point. A related worry is that a confrontation will involve nuclear-armed states with unstable deterrence postures in that they actually increase the incentives to resort to force. (This might be due to inexperience or the result of other factors, so this is not the same concern as the previous one.) Also noteworthy is uneasiness about confrontations between governments, leaders, and movements that are irrational, leading to failures of deterrence. This is exacerbated by the prospect that one or both parties will be armed with weapons of mass destruction.

The burden of these views is that if deterrence is less reliable then the international system, or its subsystems or regional systems, are much less safe. A standard theme is that at least the Cold War, whatever its

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deficiencies, imposed a degree of stability and prevented warfare between the two blocs while curbing their appetites elsewhere and prevented, repressed, or contained violent conflicts among other states, while providing a framework within which the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons was contained. When examined closely, these assertions almost always ascribe this stability to deterrence and trace the coming decline in stability to the deficiencies in deterrence that are emerging. If deterrence is less reliable international politics is less safe. That is certainly not a comforting prospect. The traditional concept of security, which highlights clashing human values pressed to extremes and the deliberate harm done as a result, remains relevant. Military threats are still important, as are military responses to them. Military capabilities remain vital in any current or prospective international security arrangement. Deterrence needs tending and maybe pruning, especially nuclear deterrence. One study cites some thirteen schools of thought now about how to ease our reliance on nuclear weapons (Howlett et al. 1999).

Fifth, concerns about the usefulness of deterrence feed directly into a subject that is already a major element in international politics, will be more so in the years ahead, and thus deserves greater attention: how collective actors, representing our interest in the stability and security of an international system (regional or global), practice deterrence. Actors such as NATO when conducting peacekeeping or peace enforcement or peace imposition, or the UN Security Council, or an ad hoc coalition. We have seen several relevant instances – Bosnia, the Gulf War, Kosovo – and it is appropriate to ask whether the theory and strategy of deterrence need adjusting to encompass such actors. After all, the theory developed, and the variants of deterrence strategy were designed, with individual states or traditional alliances doing the deterrence. The theory and strategy were also conceived with individual governments as targets, not a collective actor. Does it make a difference to shift the nature of the deterrer or the target in this fashion?

Still another impetus for the book is the surging interest in the "revolution in military affairs," as already upon us or as something that has not yet fully taken hold but is on the horizon. Revolutions in military affairs do not come along often so it is important to ask whether one is indeed brewing now. More important, however, is the impact such a revolution might have on deterrence. After all, the last revolution – the coming of nuclear weapons – generated successive waves of deterrence thinking during the Cold War and was the primary preoccupation in the variants on deterrence strategy that emerged. It seems reasonable to

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suppose that a new revolution could have major implications for deterrence in theory and practice so an investigation, however speculative it must be, of the possible implications is in order.

Finally, it should now be apparent that deterrence is not going to disappear just because the Cold War is gone. It is the underlying basis of most prospective or plausible regimes for the management of regional or global security. This includes regimes for preventing proliferation and upholding arms control agreements, so the impact of deterence reaches far beyond prevention of military attacks and war. We continue to have much at stake in deterrence. It is not simply a way of trying to force others to behave; it is woven into many elements of foreign and national security policy. For instance, deterrence in place remains a political prerequisite for *cooperation with adversaries or potential adversaries* – for making meaningful and risky concessions, pursuing "engagement," and reaching many types of agreements. (Everyone wants to negotiate from at least this much strength.) And if we are to build successful international communities, general deterrence will play a role comparable to police protection in fostering domestic society.

Yet deterrence remains an important tool for *failed* relationships and communities – it is not ideally our first choice, but more like a recourse. And it remains a flawed policy instrument, often uncertain or unreliable in its effects. Having to use it is always somewhat tragic. It should be used only with care, with ample appreciation that it is shot through with limitations. We must understand it as best we can, therefore, and that is what I have tried to do.

The book has the following plan. It opens by reviewing our Cold War experience with deterrence, setting off a discussion that is theoretical in nature and requires linking ruminations about the key elements of deterrence theory and how they developed to the theoretical problems that emerged years ago and still persist in the analysis of deterrence today. The idea is to see what can be said about those problems in the light of, on the one hand, our experience with deterrence in practice and, on the other, the work that has been done on them and on this basis to offer suggestions on how to think about them now. Added to this are theoretical reflections, and practical observations, on the nature of general deterrence in contemporary international politics. All this takes several chapters.

Then there is a review of empirical findings about deterrence in practice, complete with a discussion of the problems in such studies – deterrence is devilishly difficult to study. But the studies continue to pile up

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and no book like this would be complete without at least an attempt to assess them. There is also a chapter on collective actor deterrence which cites recent experience in constructing hypotheses for shaping future studies on how this sort of deterrence will go. Left until late in the book is discussion of the "revolution in military affairs." While there are concrete things to say about what makes a revolution like this and the new and prospective developments that are shaping it, the core of what is offered is very speculative – musings about the probable impact of these developments on the nature of future warfare and how changes of that sort will affect deterrence as a tool of statecraft.

Then the last lengthy chapter turns to the concern about whether deterrence will remain reliable or is increasingly unlikely to work. This involves bringing considerations raised and findings elaborated in the rest of the book to bear on the question of how useful deterrence is now and will be in the future. A brief concluding chapter summarizes the others.

All this makes for a lengthy and complicated book. My thanks to you in advance for proposing to wade through it.

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