

The Power of Deterrence

Why do actors persist in using force to enhance their deterrent posture, even though it is far from clear that it works? To answer this question, this book develops an innovative framework that views deterrence as an idea. This approach clarifies how countries institutionalize deterrence strategy, and how this internalization affects policy. The United States and Israel have both internalized deterrence ideas and become attached to these practices. For them, deterrence is not just a means to advance “physical” security, but it constitutes their very *selves* as deterring actors. As a result, being unable to deter becomes a threat to their identity, evoking strong emotional responses. This book, in recognizing these dynamics, provides a fresh perspective on the American war in Iraq (2003) and the Israeli war in Lebanon (2006), both of which can be seen as attempts to repair the respective state’s shaken sense of self.

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The Power of Deterrence

*Emotions, Identity, and American and Israeli
Wars of Resolve*

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For Michal and Boaz

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page viii</i>
1 Introduction	1
2 The Constitution of the Deterrer Identity	18
3 Ontological Security, Deterrence, and the Use of Force	59
4 The United States and the War on Terror	87
5 Israel and the Lebanon War	122
6 Conclusion	176
<i>References</i>	193
<i>Index</i>	224

Acknowledgments

Living in Israel it is quite hard to ignore the discourse of deterrence. It is so prominent that even sport reporters often refer to how a team “enhanced its deterrent posture” after a victory, or, following a loss, saw its “deterrent posture eroded.” This clearly illustrates how attached Israel and the Israelis are to this strategy – many even obsessed with it. Constant references to deterrence made me intrigued as to how actors become attached to this strategy. In fact, I became obsessed myself with this strategy in studying it. I began working on deterrence more than a decade ago when I started my doctoral thesis at the Hebrew University, and since then have examined the issue on a number of projects. I also developed the somewhat odd instinct of looking for “deterrence” conjugations, basically in almost everything I read: articles, news, tweets, and even sports reports. The first thing I usually do after opening a new book is to search in the index for “deterrence.” I hope this project will help to free me from this habit – although I can think of more dangerous ones.

While I had been thinking of writing this book for a long time, the project only came to maturity in 2012. From the beginning it was clear to me that I wanted to contrast the Israeli practices of deterrence with the American ones, and particularly the war in Iraq (2003) with the Israeli war in Lebanon (2006) and its war with Hamas in the winter of 2008–9. However, since 2012 I have closely traced two additional meaningful episodes of violence between Israel and Hamas. Not only did I feel that these episodes needed to be addressed in the book, but these unfortunate events also allowed me to sharpen my arguments. This is because, overall, the level of violence between Israel and Hamas had increased from operation to operation. Although Israel aimed to deter Hamas and create a cumulative deterrent effect, Hamas not only increased the number of rockets it launched over Israel, but also increased their range, targeting more parts of the country. This was especially noticeable in the last round with Hamas in the summer of 2014. As I was finalizing the manuscript before the initial submission to the publisher, about 150 rockets targeted

Tel Aviv and the area, and people were often instructed to take shelter – sometimes more than a few times a day. While the situation in Gaza was much worse for the people there, it was somewhat ironic to be writing a book on the discourse and attachment to deterrence, consuming the declarations of senior Israeli officials about the deterrent effects of the actual use of force, and at the same time having to repeatedly halt the intellectual activity in order to go down to the shelter with my pregnant wife and my five-year-old daughter. There we met the neighbors and discussed with them, based on the sounds of the explosions, whether they were rockets or the intercepting missiles of Iron Dome, and how close they were. The declarations of senior Israeli officials about the deterrent effects of this operation would have been much more convincing if they hadn't voiced the very same messages in the previous rounds of violence.

At the end of that summer I became even more determined to address this pattern of behavior of attachment to deterrence. Toward this aim I developed a theoretical framework that integrates strategic studies with scholarship on emotions and identity. I suggest that for some actors that have been attached to the practices of deterrence, inability to deter is not just about physical insecurity, but a threat to their very self – that is their ontological security – and it is therefore a very emotional situation they need to repair. In such situations, the internalization of the ideas and practices of deterrence is a powerful tool that affects the usage of force.

My attempt to take this book and specifically connect security studies, emotions, and identity could have not been fulfilled without the invaluable assistance I received from so many on this long road. My friends Nahshon Perez and Ilan Danjoux implanted in my mind the need to pursue this project. Others provided me with excellent feedback, suggestions, and advice on different parts of the manuscript, including on very preliminary drafts I presented over the years in different forums: Janice Stein, Brent Steele, Vincent Pouliot, Pertti Joenniemi, Mira Sucharov, Brent Sasley, Christopher Twomey, Galia Press-Barnathan, Tal Dingott Alkopher, Piki Ish-Shalom, Arie Kacowicz, Oren Barak, and Oded Löwenheim.

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Acknowledgments

xi

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