

III. Book Reviews

Andreas Wenger and Alex Wilner (Eds.). *Detering Terrorism: Theory and Practice*

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Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

Can terrorist groups (or lone wolves) be deterred and can deterrence theory be systematically applied to upgrading the capability of governments' combating terrorism campaigns? During the Cold War, after all, deterrence theory formed the cornerstone of the United States government's national security and proved highly effective in deterring the Soviet Union from launching nuclear weapons attacks against the U.S. and its allies. Can the same theoretical principals be applied to deterring terrorism? Following Al-Qaeda's 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, as Alex Wilner and Andreas Wenger, the editors of this important volume point out, it was generally believed that terrorist organizations and extremist fanatics could not be deterred, with governments shifting their focus to "combating" terrorism rather than "detering" it (p. 3).

This highly important question in combating terrorism studies forms the basis for this innovative collection of papers. Together, they represent a significant contribution not only to the discipline of deterrence theory in international relations, but also to the theoretical literature on "combating" terrorism as well (with "combating terrorism" serving as an umbrella concept for defensive "anti-terrorism" and offensive "counter-terrorism").

Why is a deterrent capability important? As Wilner and Wenger point out in the volume's introduction, if it can become possible to "deter" terrorists from embarking on their attacks in the first place, governments will then be able to embark on "pragmatic strategies for confronting and containing the threat of terrorism" (p. 3), for instance, by blending coercive and conciliatory response measures against their terrorist adversaries that are able to resolve such conflicts for long term peace and stability.

What is deterrence? In its dictionary definition, it is process in which a state possesses the overwhelming determination and destructive capability to inhibit an adversary's behaviors and activities through the threatened use of punishment and reprisal in order to *discourage* it from carrying out potential attacks. It relies on two basic conditions: (i) the ability of a state to retaliate after a surprise attack against it must be perceived by the aggressive adversary as credible, and (ii) such retaliation must be perceived as an imminent possibility, if not a certainty.

Successful deterrence, as explained by Wilner and Wenger, "is a bargaining tactic that emphasizes the use of threats to manipulate an adversary's behavior and hinges on offering an adversary a way out." (p. 4) In the case of terrorist groups, they point out, their warfare calculations will be influenced by whether they assume that their government adversaries are seeking their "eventual annihilation" or granting them "survival." (p. 4)

This edited volume is the product of a conference organized in November 2009 by the Center for Security Studies (CSS) of the ETH Zurich (Federal Institute of Technology), in Switzerland, which brought together leading experts on the study of terrorism and deterrence to discuss theoretical and empirical issues involved in deterring terrorism. Specifically, they sought to investigate two themes: (i) can the traditional tenets of deterrence theory be applied to counterterrorism and (ii) what is the role of deterrence in counterterrorism strategy? This was further broken down into investigating whether some terrorist organizations are more predisposed than others to deterrence, are there “stages within the terrorism process [that] are most susceptible to deterrence and compellence,” is it possible to distinguish between offensive and defensive counter-terrorism measures, and are there metrics “for measuring the success and failure of... counterterrorism deterrent policies and strategies?” (p. 7)

To investigate these issues, the book’s twelve chapters are organized in three parts. The first section assesses the feasibility of linking deterrence theory to the terrorism threat environment, including whether the “absolute deterrence success” expected during the Cold War’s nuclear strike confrontation could be replaced by expectations of “marginal success” in deterring terrorism. Here, of particular interest is Jeremy W. Knopf’s discussion of three approaches to deterring terrorism. These involve (1) deterrence that is “indirect in nature, intended to pressure third parties who facilitate terrorism rather than terrorist operatives themselves,” (2) “deterrence by denial,” in which terrorists are denied the opportunity and capability to carry out attacks, and (3) deterrence that is “nonmilitary in nature, such as ‘deterrence by delegitimization’” of one’s adversary. (p. 22)

Also especially noteworthy is Paul K. Davis’s discussion of influence strategies in counterterrorism, which is accompanied by highly useful diagrams. One diagram, for example, examines the root causes of terrorism, where the author points out that deterrence can be used to influence terrorists’ motivations “positively.”

Frank Harvey and Alex Wilner’s chapter on counter-coercion raises the important theoretical prerequisite of deterrence/compellence by governments in the form of “defining and communicating unwanted behavior in a credible and resolute manner” to the terrorist adversaries that identifies “relevant capabilities” that “terrorists fear most.” (page. 110)

The book’s second section focuses on the feasibility of deterring terrorism employing chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons. Brian Michael Jenkins’s chapter, in particular, discusses how deterrence can be employed to prevent nuclear terrorism. To acquire such a deterrent capability, Jenkins observes, it is important to understand how terrorists “perceive the utility and risks of acquiring and using nuclear weapons,” with such insights likely to be “gained from captured documents and interrogations and also... from what they do *not* say.” (p. 119) Finally, to deter terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons, Jenkins points out that the actors that might provide terrorists with such a capability, such as state sponsors, corrupt

officials, criminal syndicates, weapons dealers, and smugglers, are most vulnerable to be deterred since they desire to survive and avoid retaliation. (p. 130)

The final section presents case studies that attempt to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of certain governments' deterring terrorism campaigns. In his chapter on Israel's campaign to deter Palestinian terrorism, Shmuel Bar discusses how Fatah and Hamas, in particular, threaten Israel, whether Israel has a clear policy of deterrence against them, including how such policies were communicated to the terrorist organizations, and how the Palestinian groups interpreted Israel's deterrent capability and willingness to retaliate against such threats. Bar finds that while Israel achieved a *strategic* deterrence vis-à-vis its hostile neighboring Arab states through its high-end conventional military capabilities on the ground and the air and with its possession of [perceived] nuclear capabilities, it is a completely different matter to deter its terrorist organization adversaries. This is due to the fact that while Israel's strategic interstate deterrence is based on the *perception* of its military capabilities rather than the actual use of these capabilities, since, for example, no full-scale interstate war has occurred since the October 1973 Arab-Israel War. In deterring terrorist organization adversaries, on the other hand, response measures are generally *tactical* in nature, taking the form of "day-to-day actions" against them. (p. 207) These include preventive security measures such as impeding terrorist movement and communications in their areas of operation, bolstering defensive security at potential target sites in Israel, imposing travel restrictions on Palestinians, closing passages to Gaza, erecting roadblocks between Palestinian and Israeli crossings, and the construction of the extensive security fence between the Palestinian communities and Israel. (p. 209) The second component of deterrence includes proactive security measures, such as targeted killings of key Palestinian terrorist leaders and operational planners, arresting terrorist suspects within their communities, and large-scale military actions against terrorist strongholds. (p. 210). These deterrence measures, the author concludes, succeeded in substantially reducing the frequency and lethality of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israel.

While Bar's examination of Israeli deterrence against Palestinian terrorism is comprehensive and detailed, it misses several important issues. First, while it is true that Palestinian terrorist attacks have been substantially reduced, they have merely shifted their tactics and weaponry to firing rockets and mortars from Gaza against Israeli communities. Second, effective deterrence is also dependent on a government's capability to address and resolve a conflict's underlying root causes, but Israeli decision-making is stalemated over the measures that would be required to reach a political settlement with its Palestinian adversaries (although the Palestinians themselves are also stalemated over their commitment to reaching a peaceful accommodation with Israel).

The other empirical case studies (all excellently written) cover the Turkish and Iranian campaigns to deter Kurdish terrorist attacks, the efforts by the U.S. military to deter Al-Qaeda's chlorine attacks in Iraq, and the U.S.-led efforts to deter Iranian and Libyan sponsorship of terrorism. The efforts to curtail Libya's sponsorship of terrorism, however, were also linked to

curtailing its WMD program, which is not discussed by the chapter's author, including the successful penetration of the AQ Khan nuclear smuggling network, which at the time was considered crucial in persuading Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi to give up terrorism and WMD and enter into diplomatic relations with the U.S.

In conclusion, the contributors to this important volume highlight the role of deterrence as a precursor to the need by governments to embark on the defensive and offensive components of a combating terrorism campaign, although the relationship between these elements still needs to be better clarified and delineated in the theoretical literature. This volume, as its editors acknowledge, is a first step in building the theoretical literature on this important subject.

About the Reviewer: Dr. Joshua Sinai is a Washington, DC-based consultant and educator on counterterrorism studies. His latest publication "Active Shooter – Handbook on Prevention" was published by ASIS International in December 2012.