

# **MULTI-ACTOR DETERRENCE: DEFINING THE CONCEPT**

**Dr. Michelle Black**

**Assistant Professor, Political Science Department  
University of Nebraska at Omaha**

**Dr. Lana Obradovic**

**Assistant Professor, Political Science Department  
University of Nebraska at Omaha**



# THE QUESTION

- Deterrence was commonly known as a strategy where a state actor, mostly in a nuclear domain, used credible threats against another actor to persuade them not to take a specific action, either through imposition of cost or denial of benefit
- Today, our deterrence policies and strategies seek to use tailored approaches to deterrence, outlying a dyadic scenario based on two different set of interests even when there are multiple actors involved.
- We argue it is time to update our concepts to expand beyond dyadic deterrence scenarios to include multiple actors.
- The deterrence equation is no longer 'state actor A' versus 'state actor B'. Instead, we need to discuss how to deter Actor B and possibly actors C and D



# THE QUESTION

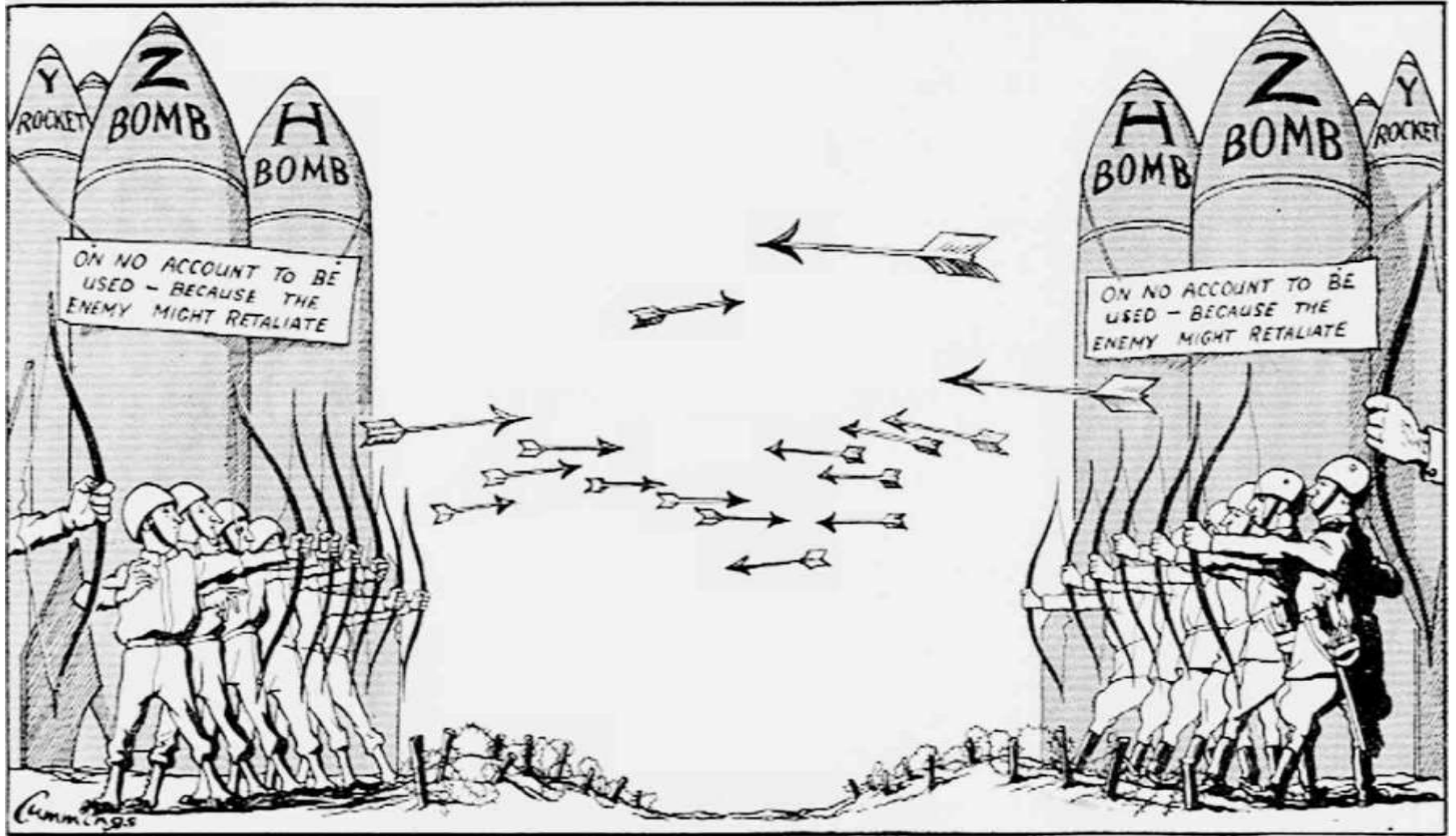
- We argue that the problem with our current strategies and plans is the lack of working within a complex, multiplayer scenario that demands a multi-actor deterrence strategy.
- Neglecting 'multi-actors' interests during operational planning, or negotiations, could offer serious consequences in either the short or long-term security environment.



# DETERRENCE TODAY

- Past theories and strategies only focused on the nuclear capability and its impact on the target
- Today, deterrence is focusing more on the perception of the target/adversary and their understanding of what we wish to influence combined with our capabilities





# THEORIES OF DETERRENCE

- **First Wave of Deterrence Theory (1940s)**
  - Bernard Brodie, Arnold Wolfers, Jacob Viner
  - Focused on implications of nuclear weapons
- **Second Wave of Deterrence Theory (1950-1960s)**
  - Brodie, Schelling, Snyder, and Wohlstetter
  - Focused on both sides standing firm, but in which both prefer retreating and letting the other side win to a mutually disastrous confrontation
  - Bargaining techniques (Game Theory)
  - Each side hopes to gain security, not by being able to protect itself, but by threatening to influence unacceptable damage on the other



# THEORIES OF DETERRENCE

- Third Wave of Deterrence Theory (1970s – 2000s)
  - Jervis, Kahn, Morgan, Hutt 1999
    - Empirical findings of deterrence (real-world events)
    - Questioned the rational actor assumption and began to develop decision-making approach drawn from psychology and organization theory
    - Introduced statistically oriented research
    - Focused on methodological contributions
      - Rational Choice – Powell 1990
      - Statistical - Huth and Russett 1984
      - Case study – Lebow 1981, Crawford, 2003
      - Formal methods - Sartori, 2005
      - Prospect theory to the analysis of deterrence - Davis, 2000; Berejikian, 2002



# THEORIES OF DETERRENCE

- **Forth Wave of Deterrence Theory (2000s- Current)**
  - **US cannot afford to reduce nuclear arsenal to maintain the ability to respond to threats**
    - Bracken 2012, Payne 2015, Roberts 2015
  - **Limited nuclear war**
    - Kroening 2014, Colby 2018
  - **Cross-national studies of nuclear doctrines and force structure**
    - Fravel and Medeiros 2010, Narange 2015, Zysk 2017
  - **Deterrence in new domains**
    - **Cyberspace:** Nye 2011, Cooper 2012, Libicki 2017, Nye 2017
    - **NC3:** Cimbala 2014, Gartzke and Lindsay 2017
    - **Space:** Bormann and Sheehan 2009; Coletta 2009, Johnson-Freese 2016
  - **Role of non-state actors in the proliferation of WMDs and asymmetric threats**
    - Allison 2004, Bowen 2006, Lieber and Press 2013





# DETERRENCE IS...

- **“The person to be deterred comprehends the risks, weighs the potential costs and benefits, judges the potential costs to be greater than the benefits, and therefore decides against the unwanted behavior in question” -Keith Payne**
- **“The prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.”—DoD Dictionary”**



# DETERRENCE IS...

- **“Deterrence works best when the targets are able to act rationally, and when the deterrer and the deterred are working within a sufficiently shared normative framework so that it is possible to inculcate a sense of appropriate behavior in defined situations that can be reinforced by a combination of social pressure and a sense of fair and effective punishment.” -Lawrence Freedman**



# MULTI-ACTOR DETERRENCE

- The multi-actor deterrence concept problem can be illustrated by using the classical example of game theory, specifically the 'Prisoners Dilemma'.
- The Prisoner's Dilemma, a classic game theory, has been used numerous times to explain how two actors presented with options rationalize their choices based on their interests and how their partner may or may not cooperate.
- Where it becomes complicated, but necessary in the context of international security, is when a third or fourth actor is introduced.



# TAXONOMY – STILL DEVELOPING

| Concept                           | Definition  | Empirical Example                   | Authors   |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Deterrence</b>                 | The prevention from action by fear of the consequences. Deterrence is a state of mind brought about by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction.                        |                                     | Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms   |
| <b>General/Central Deterrence</b> | Balance of power is stable  |                                     | Anderson and Larson 2013  |
| <b>Credible Deterrence</b>        | Influence achieved from both the capabilities to deny an aggressor the prospect of achieving his objectives and from the complementary capability to impose unacceptable costs on the aggressor |                                     | Department of Defense “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Defense (Washington D.C., January 2012) |
| <b>Immediate Deterrence</b>       | The attack has made threats and the defender counter threats, so the deterrence attempt takes place in a crisis atmosphere in which the use of force may be imminent                            |                                     | Signorino and Tarar 2006  |
| <b>Extended Deterrence</b>        | Actor provides the threat of force to another state rather than itself, usually in the assistance to allies to prevent proliferation  |                                     | Anderson and Larson 2013  |
| <b>Minimal Deterrence</b>         | Possessing no more nuclear weapons than is necessary to deter an adversary from attacking   | China’s Nuclear Deterrence Doctrine | Kristensen, Norris, Oelrich, 2009   |



| Concept                       | Definition   | Empirical Example                                  | Authors   |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Self-Deterrence</b>        | The unwillingness to use coercive military power, despite a declaratory threat to do so, due to self-imposed constraints   |  | Delpech 2012  |
| <b>Indirect Deterrence</b>    | Related to extended deterrence in the sense that it may be brought into play by the failure of extended deterrence. Therein, a regional nuclear power unable to counter-deter (conventional or nuclear) threats by a major power because of technological incapacity and distance factors, may attempt to achieve deterrence vis-a-vis that power with the threat to 'strike neighboring or nearby states, whether or not they are directly engaged in the ongoing conflict. |  | Harkavy 2007  |
| <b>Tailored Deterrence</b>    | Actor-specific set of deterrence capabilities designed to influence a specific leader or leader's group.   |  | Bunn 2007; Post 2011; Johnson and Kelly 2014; Lantis 2009; Payne 2018 |
| <b>Triadic Deterrence</b>     | One state uses threats and/or punishments against another state to coerce it to prevent non-state actors from conducting attacks from its territory.   | Israel, Palestinian groups, and Egypt (1949-1979)  | Atzili & Pearlman 2012  |
| <b>Multi-Actor Deterrence</b> | (Developing) A complex, multi-actor deterrence scenario where multiple actors have various conflicting self-interests.   | U.S., Iran with JCPOA; China, North Korea and U.S. | Black and Obradovic   |



**THANK YOU....**

**.... Questions or Suggestions?**

