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Strategic Deterrence and Russia's National Security Today

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Abstract. The authors use their analysis of trends in the current military and political situation in the world and interstate relations as a basis for discussion of various options for strategic deterrence of the start and escalation of military conflicts, and offer their recommendations on ways to make strategic deterrence work.

Keywords: deterrence, nuclear deterrence, strategic deterrence, strategic stability, proportioned damage, restraining damage, unacceptability levels, assured levels of unacceptable damage.

The gathering globalization of international political and economic relations and the countries' natural interdependence motivate military and political leaders in technologically advanced foreign countries to take unprecedented steps, not without U.S. urging, to adapt their armed forces to the specific circumstances of the early 21st century. Actually, these countries have effected a breakthrough in military technologies to create a large number of new threats to Russia's national security. Strategic deterrence becomes, therefore, a vital task for the Russian Armed Forces to fulfill.

In its most general sense, deterrence, or containment, is understood as a combination of the state's coordinated political, diplomatic, economic, military, nonmilitary, and other measures taken to convince a potential aggressor of the futility of military action he wants to undertake to achieve his political goals because of retaliation that could be too much for him to accept. With international relations growing more complex today under the effect of globalization, it is reasonable to see deterrence as containment of both the threat of military conflicts breaking out and escalation of military conflicts going on.

Deterrence is one of the traditional fundamental principles on which systems of different nature – political, economic, social, informational, and any other – operate. In international relations, for that matter, this principle materializes in a situation when the threat of negative consequences serves as a political and diplomatic instrument one state uses to deter another state from taking steps the first state does not want to be taken.

Deterrence of all types of conflicts has a personified mechanism. Strategy depends, in the first place, on a state's interests that come under a specific external threat. Accordingly, a body existing to identify all the interests averaged by categories (the public, parties, social groups, and so on) and giving an explicit form to national interests is central to the organizational deterrence management

system. The national interests defended in a conflict must be formulated and registered fully and clearly at the state level.

Deterrence is specific in the sense that it is not aimed at seizing another state's territory or destroying its industrial potential. As a rule, the deterring party does not seek to defeat its adversary or change the opponent's ruling regime, but it has to show resolve in defending its own interests. It is necessary, and sufficient, for this purpose to convince an adversary, before a military conflict flares up, that he cannot achieve his political objectives by military action he plans for the future. Deterrence does not imply overpowering the adversary on the battlefield, but rather it is intended to impress a vision of defeat on his mind. In fact, deterrence is a reflexive game in visions of victory, defeat, and unacceptable (restraining) damage, among others. Uncertainty created in the minds of members of the adversary's armed forces by imaginary scenarios replacing the real events is largely the influence behind the risk the military and political leaders are taking in making an erroneous decision despite the deterrence factor.

The state's steps to hold off external military aggression (now called containment of military conflicts) has always been a key built-in element of national policy. Accordingly, the different aspects of containment have always been under the scrutiny of state figures and military theorists. Still, the rigid academic tenets of the deterrence policy were only framed in the nuclear age by the efforts of foreign experts, in the first place, most of them proponents of the Anglo-Saxon school of military strategic thought.¹

Deterrence theory was developed by George Kennan, an American diplomat of the 1940s, and in later years, with the emergence of nuclear weapons, it was linked closely to the concept of mutual assured destruction (MAD) that helped maintain peace by the prospect of inevitable total retaliation from the adversary in response to a first nuclear strike at him. This theory lay at the foundations of Soviet-American relations and international policy in general in the second half of the 20th century. Still, the deterrence concept was associated with nuclear weapons, and the term "nuclear deterrence" was used appropriately by tradition.

Significantly, the term "nuclear deterrence" was used during the arms race the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. were running in the past century until each of them had stockpiled thousands of nuclear warheads. The arms race led to the existing stockpiles being much greater than was really needed. In an attempt to close the gap between what they had and what was sensible, foreign and Soviet experts seized on the McNamara criterion against which the scale of "assured destruction" of the adversary by a retaliatory strike was assessed.

In the 1960s, a group of systems analysis experts at the U.S. Department of Defense used the law of diminishing growth in the nuclear forces' combat capabilities, yet another contribution from American researchers, to strike at the Soviet Union's administrative centers (cities that were large area targets), to assess

“unacceptable” damage as that caused by the delivery of 400 warheads of a megaton TNT equivalent each. Their assessment was accepted as a benchmark for any other similar criteria to fluctuate about or be measured against.

A decade on, in the late 1980s, the Pentagon abandoned the McNamara criterion for one put forward by Harold Brown, a celebrated physicist and Secretary of Defense in the Carter administration. According to the Brown criterion, the unacceptable damage measure was halved, with many factors counted in, to 200 megaton class warheads. Many experts, though, consider this criterion overly too high as well. The choice of this threshold, they say, ignores a great variety of secondary and tertiary effects of nuclear explosions first spoken of by researchers, followed by politicians sometime later, in the 1980s.

Studies undertaken in this country in the early 1990s, when the deterrence theory gained full legitimacy, could make, and indeed made, attempts in good faith to review the unacceptable damage threshold and reduce it drastically. They were motivated mostly, as analysts agreed, by military, political, engineering, socioeconomic, cultural, and certainly methodological factors that added up to set off transformation of unacceptable damage levels in terms of both quality and quantity.

Admittedly, experts in nuclear weapon uses distinguished between “objective” and “subjective” **unacceptability levels**. “Objective” levels were obtained by complex analysis of areas of state involvement under the constraints of various forces, warfare, in the first place. The “subjective” level was measured by an analysis of the way in which the unacceptability level was perceived (fixed). In turn, this approach required comprehensive research to be undertaken into the political system of the state deterred, or the state structure that generates and ultimately makes the state’s domestic and foreign policy decisions binding at law. Structurally, this system comprises both the “central government body,” which is the supreme and ultimate authority, and the general public, nongovernmental organizations, political parties, religious institutions, social groups, and acknowledged social, political, and religious figures.²

It is appropriate here to recall, in support of our preceding arguments, that the American military urged President Kennedy at the height of the Caribbean Crisis to order a preemptive strike at all nuclear weapons in the U.S.S.R. No one could give him the assurances, though, that the U.S.S.R. would not have at least one or two nuclear weapons and carriers surviving to deliver the nuclear warheads to U.S. territory and wipe out New York or Washington in retaliation. The lack of assurances was enough for the U.S. president to reject plans of attacking the U.S.S.R. with nuclear weapons, even though history gave the U.S. a chance, probably the last, to leave the U.S.S.R. without a nuclear capability. With reference to the U.S. president’s decision in the context of nuclear deterrence that worked at the time, some speak now of the “Kennedy Criterion.”³ Shortly after all ended well, RAND analysts suggested that the loss of 15 to 20 million people (around 11% of the U.S. population at the time) was acceptable damage.⁴

It has been shown by retrospective analysis that the deterrence theory has always been trailing nuclear weapons in development rates. In the late 20th century, though, new technologies were used to develop efficient high-precision weapons launched from a variety of platforms, followed closely by other high-tech nonnuclear weapons that can fulfill strategic tasks, including strategic deterrence.

A broader term, **strategic deterrence**, was then introduced to cover a series of related measures taken by the armed forces under a single concept and plan consecutively or simultaneously in politics, economics, ideology, information, technological science, military and nonmilitary steps, and direct and other moves to stabilize the military and political situation by dissuading the military and political leaders and public in a country (a coalition of countries) viewed as a potential adversary (aggressor) from attempting vainly to achieve their military and political goals by force.

A state's moves to exercise strategic deterrence include the show of readiness to use both nuclear and conventional forces, and its ability and resolve to conduct special, asymmetric, indirect, and other containing operations.

The set of measures taken to provide a **strategic** deterrent is to include preventing aggression, discouraging attempts to put pressure on the Russian Federation and its allies, and, in the event of aggression, deescalating it and ceasing the military operations on terms acceptable for Russia and its allies by bringing up a threat of unacceptable damage being delivered to the adversary.

Strategic deterrence is based on the capability of peacetime armed forces groups to put the country on a war footing in the shortest possible time and deploy the army and navy on a strategic scale to beat off aggression in a military conflict of any dimensions in any strategic area, and on their capability to cause damage to the aggressor far greater than the objectives he sought to achieve.

Availability of combat-ready conventional and nuclear forces having an efficient system of combat control, logistics, and supervision over their status is an **essential** condition for maintaining a strategic deterrent, and the armed forces' potential capabilities to inflict crippling damage to any aggressor's military and economic potential in any circumstances are a **sufficient** criterion.

Strategic deterrence is assured by the *conventional forces deterrent* and *nuclear deterrent*. It is practiced in peacetime and in periods of threat, and also with the outbreak of war before nuclear weapons are used on a massive scale. For strategic deterrence to serve its purpose, the country's state and military control bodies take appropriate measures, including military (power) and nonmilitary (nonpower) steps.

Nonmilitary (nonpower) measures include *political, economic, diplomatic, ideological, informational, and other moves*. These measures are pursued by the federal bodies of the country's executive government jointly with international institutions and are intensified on early signs of a brewing conflict (at the time of a direct threat of aggression).

For nonmilitary measures to be effected, the Russian Federation's military and political leaders are to make firm decisions to prevent and resolve conflicts, engage in negotiations through diplomatic channels, take measures to cultivate closer interstate relations, undertake economic measures, step up efforts in information warfare, act promptly to stabilize the political situation in Russia, fortify national borders, and have its vital facilities guarded more vigilantly. The state's withdrawal from binding international treaties is a specific case of nonmilitary restraint.

Military (power) measures include placing units of the Armed Forces' branches and arms on combat alert; show of force by firing high-precision weapons and involving nuclear forces; the forces' demonstrative moves to regroup and be poised to use nuclear weapons; and their practical steps to safeguard Russia's national borders in the air and underwater.

Military (power) strategic containment measures are effected by the Armed Forces' military control bodies and units assigned to fill the strategic deterrent role.

Strategic deterrence is also exercised by the country's defensive capabilities. **Systemic and mixed** measures combining political, diplomatic, informational, and nonmilitary approaches are also effected to contain and prevent aggression by any state (a coalition of states) and to tighten up the Russian Federation's military security. Judging from the experience of interstate relations, nonmilitary approaches have been used most frequently in interstate confrontations in the last few decades to end armed conflicts and local wars and their role and significance keep growing. To draw on the lessons and conclusions made from the five-day war in the Caucasus in 2008, there is an urgent need to make these measures more efficient.

The state (its federal and regional bodies of government in particular) is to *use nonmilitary measures* to:

- build up the country's defense capabilities by exploiting the growing economic opportunities and high-tech capabilities of the country's defense industry to provide the Armed Forces and other troops within its military organization with modern weapons and specialized military equipment;
- impress on the public minds the need for the country's defense capacity to be developed to protect its national interests, wide public support to be mobilized for the state's defense efforts, and the younger generation to be encouraged to sign up for military service; and
- conduct political, diplomatic, and informational policies at the federal and regional government levels to prevent and settle conflict situations by peaceful political methods and organize efficient information warfare.

Commitment of the Armed Forces and other armed troops to contain and prevent aggression by any state is *intended to*:

- back up political, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other moves to maintain the country's defense security by nonmilitary methods (and, in need, by military presence and show of armed strength);
- conduct reconnaissance, counterintelligence, and informational operations to detect threats and possible aggressive acts of terrorism against this country in good time;
- maintain an adequate combat capacity and combat and mobilization readiness of the Armed Forces and other troops of the country's military organization to take on assigned and unexpected tasks;
- develop close military collaboration with other countries interested in having likely conflicts in interstate relations resolved, undertake peace-keeping missions, and conduct counterterrorist operations;
- organize an effective aerospace defense of the country, guard and defend the country's borders in the air, underwater, on land, and at sea by armed force;
- help the control bodies, troops, and military units of the country's military organization (Interior Ministry, Federal Security Service, and Ministry of Emergencies) to neutralize internal conflicts, and guard and defend key military and political centers and the country's national border; and
- develop the country's infrastructure and possible theaters of military operations and prepare them for the country's defense, including territorial and civil defense.

For a more flexible response to be given to changes in the military, political, and strategic situation, **strategic deterrence is exercised** at the *global* and *regional* levels (global and regional deterrence, respectively). Regional deterrence can be viewed within the general strategic deterrence system as a sublevel of global deterrence. Deterrence at the **global level** is basically the threat of massive employment of strategic conventional (high-precision) and nuclear weapons that will deliver damage in excess of the benefit the aggressor expects to gain by using military force, and at the **regional level**, it is the threat of conventional and, in contingencies, nuclear weapons, nonstrategic, in the first place, in any regional wars started against the Russian Federation and its allies.

In the case of global deterrence, the efficiency of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces (conventional and nuclear forces given the deterrent role) is quantified in the estimates of restraining damage that can be inflicted to the eventual adversary's military and economic potential by retaliatory (massive) strikes. Restraining damage is assessed in terms of loss caused to fixed assets (buildings and equipment) by destruction (breakdown). A nuclear strike may have collateral damage, such as loss of human life and the time for the country's economy to recover after the war.

The *efficiency of strategic deterrence* depends on how effective its mechanism, or the system of the state's related power (military) and nonpower measures falling into a rigid sequence of stages, is in instilling in the minds of the aggressor's military and political leaders the futility of their attempts to attain their goals by force because of unacceptable consequences they would have to take through the defender's restraining efforts.

Assured damage of a *measured* magnitude unacceptable objectively for the aggressor, his economy in the first place, caused by the defender's strategic operations is a general *criterion of strategic deterrence*.

The contributing factors of *strategic deterrence* are the Russian Federation's Armed Forces (conventional and nuclear forces used in the deterrent role); survivability of their groups; and their combat capabilities.

The first two factors carry the greatest weight for the adversary who can quantify them to assess the size of the deterrent. The third factor, not as impressive as the first two, is what really accounts for the actual measure of deterrence and is used to justify the standards the Russian Armed Forces' combat capabilities are to meet.

Power measures are phased in successively, beginning with the threat of the use of weapons, followed by the actual use of conventional (high-precision) weapons, and ending with nuclear weapons.

Conventional weapons are used to deter aggression beginning with the threat to inflict sufficient damage to the adversary's forces and military and economic potential, and ending with the threat of nuclear escalation of the conflict to the extent of a massive nuclear exchange.

Nuclear aggression is contained by nuclear retaliation strategy in which strategic nuclear forces have a central role. Containment of nuclear aggression restrains aggression with the use of conventional weapons. There is a feedback as well.

Now that the combat potential of the conventional forces declines because of cuts in the size of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces and growing shortages of modern efficient conventional weapons that could be an alternative to nuclear weapons, nuclear containment has to bear the burden of strategic deterrence and the Russian Federation's military security maintenance in the short term.

In the past, and today as well, the opponents' aggressive moves were (and are now) contained by the threat of nuclear attack and unacceptable damage to be caused to either of them. Besides, nuclear weapons are restraining the conventional arms race. With a great lead in economic power, NATO countries "could outplay the Soviet Union in the conventional arms race, but were restrained from trying by nuclear deterrent."

These authors discussed elsewhere in detail the forms and methods in which nonmilitary tactics and nonmilitary measures were used to expand the opportunities for defense goals being reached in wartime and allow the country to develop in peace without fear.⁵

The significance of nonmilitary tactics and nonmilitary measures rises greatly today, as has been confirmed by the events unfolding in Libya in our day. "This is truly a unique conflict," writes A. Grigoryev in his article. "Pervasive psychological and informational propaganda is maintained in Libya round the clock. Bribery and desertion of Libya's high-ranking military and political figures are the most widespread nonmilitary method and nonmilitary measure in a modern-day conflict. U.S. propaganda planes overflying its territory day and night are pouring down a rain of leaflets. Al-Jazira, BBC, CNN, Reuters, and other stations are airing TV and radio reports from NATO's news coordination center."⁶

Evolution of a new system of interstate relations, geostrategic changes, and the breakthrough in information media in our day have contributed to the emergence of a worldwide financial and economic environment that experiences radical changes in the approaches to the use of political, economic, and indirect and nonmilitary measures to resolve differences arising between states today. These changes have resulted in a new worldwide economic order that enhances the importance of economic, scientific, technological, and informational factors in ending wars and military conflicts breaking out or going on these days, in making society more secure, and in raising the prestige of the state in the world and the efficacy of its policies. The **new economic order** is an array of tactics related to one another and to other indirect moves and nonmilitary methods government bodies and nongovernmental organizations use in economics to neutralize or foreclose the possibility of damage being inflicted to the country by armed violence.⁷

Attainment of a reasonable financial and economic stability; support for the defense industry in its efforts to meet the country's defense needs in full; pragmatism in international economic operations and approaches to the more significant problems of the national economy; and timely fulfillment of all the needs of the nation's Armed Forces, among other objectives, are the principal guidelines for wars and armed conflicts to be resolved by economic instruments today.

Strategic military (power) deterrence is provided by the restraining actions of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces. Its mechanism is built on the basis of the country's current military doctrine of its Armed Forces' employment that is spelt out in key documents on the maintenance of Russia's military security and is assessed in terms of the Armed Forces' size and structure, the forms and methods of army and navy employment, and the combat capability of their weapons systems and military equipment.

Strategic military (power) deterrence must be just as effective in wartime as it is in peacetime, a time that is broken down into a period of peaceful coexistence (peaceful interstate relations) and a period of threat (when relations with potential aggressors take a turn for the worse rapidly).

Restraining moves in peacetime are taken to prevent possible aggression against the Russian Federation and its allies by lowering the threshold of proba-

bility and severity of military threats being fulfilled; and *in wartime*, to deescalate the ongoing military operations and to end them on terms acceptable for the Russian Federation, or, as an extreme, to defeat the aggressor.

Power measures are *coordinated steps taken by the Russian Armed Forces and other troops under overall, direct control of the Armed Forces' General Staff*. Strategic containment measures are effected by military control bodies and Armed Forces units assigned to fulfill the role of strategic deterrent.⁸

Strategic deterrence of military (power) type frequently involves the **show of force**, or coordinated operations undertaken by the Armed Forces to back up the efficiency of political, economic, diplomatic, ideological, and other measures effected by the Russian Federation's military and political leaders to resolve international differences and to put psychological pressure on the opponent.

The *show of force includes* widely publicized elevation of the forces' status from peacetime to wartime (elevation of combat alert); buildup (deployment) of groups of forces; publicized preparations of the forces and weapons (including nuclear weapons) for delivering single and/or multiple strikes; and patrolling flights by individual nuclear-armed warplanes or groups of warplanes.⁹

These operations may be carried out by limited forces, from big to small units, and in some cases involve operational groups of forces.

These measures may pursue the following goals: in peacetime, deterring any type of aggression against (attempts to put pressure on) the Russian Federation and its allies; and *in wartime*, preventing the aggressor from using nuclear weapons and other WMD, limiting the scale and intensity of military operations, and compelling the adversary to discontinue them, possibly in their early phase, on terms meeting the Russian Federation's interests.

The Armed Forces are maintained in a state of readiness to fulfill their strategic deterrent role through operational, combat, and mobilization training of control bodies and forces; practicing of measures under the strategic deterrence plan; and combat alert and patrolling. Commanders exercise direct control, at their respective levels, over formations of the Armed Forces' branches and arms, groups of forces, and formations and units that do not belong to any branch or arm of the service, which are assigned strategic deterrence tasks.

New elements (resources) giving added strength to the country's muscle for preventing external military aggression, above all in containing military conflicts, are coming up in the current situation. The warfare environments where the opponents can use force are changing and expanding as well.

- **First**, this is the **aerospace** as a warfare environment. Aerospace defense forces make the geostrategic picture of the world significantly more difficult to unravel and are capable of turning global power relations into their regional variety and applying pressure on military conflict deterrence.

- **Second, widespread access to information in all segments of society and state** gives a new slant to modern geopolitics – rivalry for winning and keeping strategic stability is spilling over into an entirely new medium of competition for possession of information, and making weapons dependent on information is becoming increasingly a dominant trend.

In practical terms, a global intelligence information system has been put in place, with the ground, air, and space intelligence subsystems brought together into a single automated system collecting and processing intelligence information and delivering it to consumers. Development of space intelligence, communications, and navigation receives more than its share of attention.

This trend is most dangerous not so much because it has to do with weapons as with the possible results of reflexive control by the opponent through development of the theory and practice of information rivalry. Like aggression deterrence by force, information rivalry has become a key component of modern geopolitics.

- **Third. International covenant law** that seeks to prevent war or, when war is impossible to avert, limit and mitigate its consequences to a maximum possible extent. The mechanism of international law has necessarily and reasonably to be used in full and be improved and developed. Under the UN Charter, though, international law does not in any way infringe upon the right of states to individual or collective self-defense, if an armed attack is launched against them.

Deterrence of aggression by force acquires extreme urgency today, and its various aspects are very complex and dynamic, and always open to question. The world is ablaze with change, and a new system of interstate relations is emerging, to be exposed to new threats and to new opportunities that are opening up to neutralize them.

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