Deterrence depth and breath: literature and evidence

This paper focuses on the analyses of three readings on the literature and evidence of deterrence theory. The literature covers essential events in world history, such as the fall of the Berlin wall, 9/11, and the reemerging Great power competition. One of the most significant consequences of these events is the question of whether classical deterrence theory still serves nations today. It is, therefore, critical to understanding the deterrence dynamics of today's world. This paper begins with summaries and analyses of each article, then goes on to illustrate a real-world example, and ends with a conclusion. Based on these given works of literature and evidence of deterrence theory, this paper will determine if existing literature is enough to understand current deterrence dynamics.

Summary of Literatures

The summaries of the given literature were ordered based on publication date. Starting with the earliest publication, deterrence theory has a military view from a defender's standpoint, but that this should be complemented with a diplomatic lens and taken from both parties' perspectives.[1]The author states that a military force comes at a high cost, whereas diplomacy may occur with acceptable political costs. The author also contends that delicate combination of taking a stance through military capabilities, and bargaining behavior that can provide minimal leeway to bring parties closer to each other by which both can potentially get away without losing face, can lead to successful deterrence.[2]

In the second reading, there is not yet a perfect deterrence theory that truly helps understand the dynamics of deterrence, so perhaps research and

policy are building on the wrong fundamentals.[3]Classical deterrence is badly flawed, perfect deterrence theory is the basis. Classical deterrence is mutual destruction. Perfect deterrence theory rules out threats that are not credible and capable. Moreover, the author claims that classical deterrence theory assumes that war is the worst that could happen, but according to him, this assumption is not supported by evidence. He concludes that good theory should lead to an understanding of deterrence and that perfect deterrence theory is a better springboard in pushing the development of deterrence theories[4].

In the last reading, deterrence is not only about the nuclear threat from states, but should also involve conventional attacks and non-state actors, and other domains such as space and cyber.[5]The authors question the assumption in extant literature that conventional weapons cannot deter nuclear threats. They also argue that there is a need to test theories so that they can validate our current understanding.[6]

Analysis of Articles

In the first article, Huth effectively called for an *expansion* of deterrence theory that incorporates both parties' perspectives, including a diplomatic lens.[7]In our opinion, Huth did a commendable job in integrating empirical data in this study case, because he analyzed 58 cases of attempted extended immediate deterrence between 1885-1984. However, the extended deterrent cases were conventional in form. We think that the nuclear element in deterrence also plays an important role. Of the 58 cases recorded, we suspect at least 15 of them have the nuclear capability to add

credence to the extended deterrence effect. On the other hand, the conventional element may play a role in current deterrence dynamics and could, therefore, be valuable. Our suggestion for improvement is that the author should also explicitly illuminate the conventional and nuclear deterrence in his conclusions. Furthermore, looking at the context, the author published his work in the *American Political Science Review* a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. There is a possibility that the author may have represented the American perspective in the Cold war and consider this perspective as the defender's side. We think that this implicit assumption might easily lead to confirmation bias. Also, based on the readings, extended deterrence seems to focus on nations only. With the current world trend, there might be a need to widen the scope of extended deterrence towards non-sate actors like major ethnic groups, revolutionary groups and probably even private corporations.

In the second article, Quackenbush questions the underlying *assumption* that war is the worst that could happen.[8]According to him, such an assumption may result in a theory that should not be used to build on research and policy.[9]We could not find a definition of war in his article so we suggest that the scope could have been made clearer. It also appears to us that unless an individual has been in a war, the thought that war might not be the worst thing that could happen may be right. Quackenbush also describes distinctions between classical and perfect deterrence theory which are based on different assumptions and abstract theoretical constructs.[10]The words ' perfect' and ' theory' in one title sounds like a contradiction because theories only explain parts of a phenomenon. We suggest that using words like good,

excellent, or contemporary theory instead of perfect. To conclude, Quackenbush conducted an interesting thought experience, but it could have been made more specific regarding the scope and setting of war, and wording used in conjunction with theory.

In the third article, Carcelli and Gartzke illustrate the need for *diversification* in deterrence theory, including conventional threat, nonstate actors, space, and cyber domain.[11]The title of their article includes the phrase ' new data and novel realities.' We initially thought that the authors were going to present new data, but quickly found out that they were calling for new data. Furthermore, we agree with the authors that deterrence theory needs to diversify towards other domains, especially in a time where Great power competition seem to reemerge. Regarding the incorporation of conventional deterrence, we suggest that the authors may want to shine their light on the numerous examples of conventional deterrence found in the case study of Huth.[12]

Real-World Example

Although there is not enough evidence to bring criminal charges, it is suspected that the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) interfered in the US presidential election campaign in 2016. Although the actions of the IRA had arguable results, we argue that the subsequent perceived capabilities to influence a democratic process on a national level has potential deterrent effects depending upon what the objective is. Besides, deterrence tends to be more prominent in settings in which capabilities are readily observable such as election manipulation in this case. Connected to this is a perceived

tangible consequence and that is influencing the outcome of the election. By doing so, the IRA seems to have diversified the deterrence theory into the cyber domain as predicted by Carcelli and Gartzke.[13]

In this situation, we agree with Huth that the deterrence theory needs to include both parties' perspectives and the diplomatic lens.[14]The difficulty in this situation is that there are speculations that Trump campaign associates have had numerous ties with the Russian government. Although these ties do not represent the official diplomatic channels between the US and Russia, they may still serve as communication between leadership at the highest levels.

When we regard this IRA example as war, Quackenbush may be right by questioning the assumption that conflict is not the worst thing that could happen as seen in his perfect deterrence theory.[15]However, due to the absence of a definition of war, it is unclear whether this IRA example fits in the scope.

Conclusion

The readings have provided vital revelations on deterrence theory. Each one contributing to the theoretical development of deterrence. Some theoretical elements in each reading are readily observable in our real-world example. However, the readings are still not enough to understand the deterrence dynamics of current times. They can explain bits and pieces of deterrence situations but not as a whole. With new factors coming in such as non-state actors and cyber domain, there is a need to develop a more solid theory that

has empirical data to back it up which in turn can be translated into policies in the future.

Whether classical deterrence theory still serves nations today depends on the deterrence dynamics in the current world. The real-world example of the Russian IRA case illustrated how their perceived capabilities in the cyber domain might lead to deterrence. This example also supports the appeal for expansion of theory by Huth and the call for diversification by Carcelli and Gartzke. We, therefore, conclude that extant deterrence literature may not be sufficient to understand current deterrence dynamics.

Bibliography

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[1]Paul K. Huth, " Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (June 1988): 423–43, https://doi. org/10. 2307/1957394.

[2]Huth.

[3]Stephen L. Quackenbush, " Deterrence Theory: Where Do We Stand?," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 741–62.

[4]Quackenbush.

[5]Shannon Carcelli and Erik A. Gartzke, " The Diversification of Deterrence: New Data and Novel Realities," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* , by Shannon Carcelli and Erik A. Gartzke (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi. org/10. 1093/acrefore/9780190228637. 013. 745.

[6]Carcelli and Gartzke.

[7]Huth, " Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War."

[8]Quackenbush, " Deterrence Theory: Where Do We Stand?"

[9]Quackenbush.

[10]Quackenbush.

[11]Carcelli and Gartzke, " The Diversification of Deterrence."

[12]Huth, " Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War."

[13]Carcelli and Gartzke, " The Diversification of Deterrence."

[14]Huth, " Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War."

[15]Quackenbush, " Deterrence Theory: Where Do We Stand?"