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## How to Deter Terrorism

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### Abstract

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many analysts argued that terrorists were undeterrable. Early U.S. government counterterrorism efforts concurred with this assessment and eschewed deterrence as a strategy for combating terrorism. In recent years, however, the U.S. government has begun to incorporate deterrence into its fight against international terrorism. Yet, academic research lags behind government action. Scholars have begun to explore how specific terrorist acts can be deterred, but have not yet articulated a broad-based approach for thinking about deterrence against terrorism. This article presents a comprehensive strategy for deterring terrorist networks. It begins by conceptualizing deterrence as it relates to the war on terror. It then details four categories of approaches (direct response, indirect response, direct denial, and indirect denial) that states can use to deter terrorist networks. Finally, it suggests a roadmap for improving future U.S. government efforts to deter terrorism. While deterrence has become a more important element in the U.S. government's counterterrorism strategy in recent years, much work remains to be done.

For over fifty years during the Cold War, deterrence was a cornerstone of U.S. national security strategy.<sup>1</sup> The United States aimed to prevent the Soviet Union from attacking the West by threatening to retaliate with a devastating nuclear response. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, many observers argued that deterrence was irrelevant to the U.S.-led war on terror.<sup>2</sup> Analysts claimed that unlike the Soviet Union's leadership, terrorists are irrational, willing to incur any cost (including death) to achieve their goals, and would be difficult to locate following an attack.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons and others, it was thought that threats to retaliate against terrorists would be inherently incredible and insufficient to deter terrorist action.

These early assessments exerted a heavy influence on the U.S. government as it formulated its initial strategy to deal with the terrorist threat. The 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, released roughly one year after 9/11, presented a new doctrine of "preemption" that was predicated in part on the undeterrability of terrorists. The document stated that "Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the

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<sup>1</sup> On U.S. security strategy during the Cold War, see, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Richard K. Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror," in Demetrios James Caraley, ed., *September 11, Terrorist Attacks, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Academy of Political Science, 2002), p. 46 and Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al-Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002), p. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> On the rationality of terrorists, see, for example, Max Abrahms, "Are Terrorists Really Rational? The Palestinian Example," *Orbis*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 533-549. On the argument that terrorists are willing to die for their cause and are therefore undeterrable, see, for example, Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 5 and Fareed Zakaria, "America's New World Order" *Newsweek*, (September 15, 2003). On the argument that terrorists lack a return address, see, for example, Richard Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy," p. 45.

United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture.”<sup>4</sup> The strategy elaborated, “The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.” The document continued to emphasize the undeterrability of terrorists, averring that “Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness.”

Shortly thereafter, however, policymakers began to think more seriously about the deterrability of terrorists. Indeed, in recent years, deterrence has come to play an increasingly important role in U.S. counterterrorism policy. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) announced the Pentagon’s intentions to shift “From a ‘one size fits all’ deterrence – to tailored deterrence for rogue powers, terrorist networks, and near-peer competitors.”<sup>5</sup> According to the important defense planning document, the Department of Defense must design its future forces to “provide a fully balanced, tailored capability to deter both state and non-state threats—including ... terrorist attacks in the physical and informational domains.”<sup>6</sup>

Deterrence has also informed counterterrorism policy at the national level. The 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States of America announced a new U.S. government-wide effort to deter terrorism. The document assesses that while “The hard

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<sup>4</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (September 2002), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> The United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (February 2006), p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> *Quadrennial Defense Review* (2006), p. 49.

core of the terrorists cannot be deterred or reformed,” terrorist “network(s) must in turn be deterred, disrupted, and disabled by using a broad range of tools.”<sup>7</sup> The document elaborates on this intention pointing out that “Both offenses and defenses are necessary to deter state and non-state actors, through denial of the objectives of their attacks and, if necessary, responding with overwhelming force.”<sup>8</sup>

Building on his predecessor’s efforts, President Barack Obama, in the 2010 QDR, has also vowed to deter terrorist networks.<sup>9</sup> These documents, far from empty statements of policy objectives, provide important guidance to U.S. government departments and agencies responsible for dealing with the terrorist threat.

Despite recent progress, however, efforts to incorporate deterrence into counterterrorism strategy are still at an early stage of development. After all, Thomas Schelling’s classic statement on nuclear deterrence policy, *Arms and Influence*, was published in 1966, roughly two decades after the advent of the nuclear era.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. war on international terrorism is still in its infancy and we are likely years away from settling on a long-term strategy for combating terrorist networks. For this reason, academic analysis of deterrence against terrorism can contribute to ongoing efforts to refine U.S. counterterrorism policy.

Yet, academic scholarship to date has lagged behind government action on the issue of deterring terrorism. Many scholars have analyzed terrorism, counterterrorism, and homeland security policy, but have not specifically examined deterrence against

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<sup>7</sup> *National Security Strategy* (2006), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> The United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (February 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

terrorism.<sup>11</sup> Other analysts have written specifically about deterring terrorist networks, but employ an overly broad definition of deterrence to mean influence in counterterrorism operations generally, and do not focus on deterrence as it is understood in the scholarly literature.<sup>12</sup> Finally, scholars have theorized ways to deter specific terrorist actions, such as deterring regional terrorist groups from cooperating with Al

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Erica Chenoweth, “Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity,” *Journal of Politics* (forthcoming, 2010); Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: Wiley, 2007); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Matthew Kroenig and Jay Stowsky, “War Makes the State, but Not As It Pleases: Homeland Security and American Anti-Statism,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April-June 2006), pp. 225-270; Peter Katzenstein, “Same War—Different Views: Germany, Japan, and Counterterrorism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Fall 2003), pp. 731-760; Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, “Politics and the Suboptimal Provision of Counterterror,” *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 9-36; Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Eric S. Dickson, “The Propaganda of the Deed: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Mobilization,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 2007), pp. 364-381; Jacob Shapiro and Dara K. Cohen, “*Color-Bind: Lessons from the Failed Homeland Security Advisory System*,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 121-154; Jacob Shapiro and David Siegel, “Is This Paper Dangerous? Balancing Secrecy and Openness in Counterterrorism,” *Security Studies*, forthcoming; Max Abrams, “Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April-June 2007), pp. 223-253; Daniel Byman, “U.S. Counterterrorism Options: A Taxonomy,” *Survival*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 2007), pp. 121-150; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Erica Chenoweth and Susan E. Clarke, “All Terrorism is Local: Constructing Urban Coalitions for Homeland Security in the American Federal System,” *Political Research Quarterly* (forthcoming 2010); and Erica Chenoweth and Susan E. Clarke, “The Politics of Vulnerability: Constructing Local Performance Regimes for Homeland Security,” *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January 2006), pp. 95-114.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Alexander L. George, “The Need for Influence Theory and Actor-Specific Behavioral Models of Adversaries,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (December 2003), pp. 463-487; Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on Terror* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002); and Doron Almog, “Cumulative Deterrence and the War on Terrorism,” *Parameters* Vol. 34, No. 4 (Winter 2004/05).

Qaeda, and deterring states from sponsoring WMD terrorism, but these scholars have not yet articulated an overarching approach to deterring terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

This paper presents a comprehensive approach for deterring terrorist networks. It argues that, unlike in state-to-state deterrence, deterrence against terrorism can only hope to be partially successful, and that deterrence will always be a component, and never a cornerstone, of national policy. Nevertheless, as long as states can deter some terrorists from engaging in certain types of terrorist activity, deterrence can contribute to a broader counterterrorism strategy. I maintain that states can use both deterrence-by-retaliation and deterrence-by-denial strategies to deter terrorism. While suicide bombers may not be

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<sup>13</sup> On deterring regional terrorist groups from cooperating with Al Qaeda, see Robert F. Traeger and Dessimslava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No 3, (Winter 2005/2006), pp. 87-123. On deterring the state sponsorship of WMD terrorism, see, for example, Caitlin Talmadge, "Deterring a Nuclear 9/11," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No 2. (Spring 2007), pp. 21-34; Robert L. Galucci, "Averting Nuclear Catastrophe: Contemplating Extreme Responses to U.S. Vulnerability," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 607, No. 1 (2006), pp. 51-58; Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); William Dunlop and Harold Smith, "Using International Nuclear Forensics to Detect and Deter Nuclear Terrorism," *Arms Control Today* (October 2006), available at [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006\\_10/CVRForensics](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_10/CVRForensics); Michael J. Powers, "Deterring Terrorism with CBRN Weapons: Developing a Conceptual Framework," Occasional Paper 2, The Chemical and Biological Weapons Arms Control Institute, Washington, DC, February 2001; Daniel Whiteneck, "Deterring Terrorists: Thoughts on a Framework," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 187-199; Wyn Q. Bowen, "Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (April 2004), pp. 54-70; Lewis A. Dunn, "Can al Qaeda Be Deterred from Using Nuclear Weapons?" Occasional Paper 3, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, July 2005), p. 11; James Lebovic, *Deterring International Terrorism and Rogue States: U.S. National Security Policy after 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael A. Levi, "Deterring State Sponsorship of Nuclear Terrorism," Council on Foreign Relations Special Report, No. 39 (September 2008); and Daniel H. Chivers, Bethany F. Lyles Goldblum, Brett H. Isselhardt, and Jonathan S. Snider, "Before the Day After: Using Pre-Detonation Nuclear Forensics to Improve Fissile Material Security," *Arms Control Today* (July/August 2008), available at [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2008\\_07-08/NuclearForensics](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2008_07-08/NuclearForensics).

swayed by threats of earthly punishment, other actors in a terrorist network, including radical clerics, financiers, and even terrorist leadership, will often act to avoid imprisonment and death. In addition, states can deter terrorists by threatening to hold at risk other targets, such as families and communities, which terrorists may hold dear. Furthermore, states can deter terrorism by credibly threatening to deny terrorists' tactical and strategic objectives. When terrorists believe that a specific attack is likely to be thwarted, or that a successful attack will not help them achieve their strategic goals, they can be deterred by the fear of failure. In sum, this paper provides an overarching conceptual framework for thinking about deterring terrorists that can be tailored to different types of terrorist groups and activities.

The rest of this paper continues in three parts. I begin by conceptualizing deterrence as it relates to the problem of terrorism. Next, I detail four broad approaches (direct response, indirect response, direct denial, and indirect denial) that states can use to deter terrorism. Finally, I conclude by laying out the necessary next steps in the development of effective strategy for deterring terrorism.

### **Conceptualizing Deterrence against Terrorism**

In this section, I conceptualize deterrence as it relates to counterterrorism. I begin by defining deterrence. Next, I discuss differences between deterrence as it was widely understood to have operated during the Cold War and its application to the war on terror. Finally, I emphasize the importance of breaking down a terrorist network into its component parts in order to devise an effective counterterrorism policy.

### *Defining Deterrence*

Deterrence is a strategic interaction in which an actor prevents an adversary from taking an action that the adversary otherwise would have taken by convincing the adversary that the cost of taking that action will outweigh any potential gains.<sup>14</sup> To achieve deterrence, therefore, an actor can manipulate the adversary's perception of the costs, or the adversary's perception of the benefits, of a particular course of action.

Cost imposition (also known as deterrence-by-retaliation, or deterrence-by-punishment) strategies seek to achieve deterrence by threatening to impose unacceptable costs on an adversary if the adversary takes a particular course of action. By raising the

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<sup>14</sup> This definition is similar to a definition provided by John Mearshimer, "Deterrence, in its broadest sense, means persuading an opponent not to initiate a specific action because the perceived benefits do not justify the estimated costs and risks, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 14. On deterrence theory, see for example, Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment* (Princeton University Center of International Studies, Research Monograph No. 1, 1959); Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York: Praeger, 1965); "The Rational Deterrence Debate: A Symposium," *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (January 1989); Charles L. Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Robert Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert Powell, "Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 86-118; Timothy Crawford, *Pivotal Deterrence: Third Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Keir A. Leiber and Daryl G. Press, "The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 7-44.



costs of a particular course of action, this approach aims to make that course of action less attractive than it otherwise would be. Deterrence by retaliation is the most commonly understood form of deterrence since the advent of the nuclear era. During the Cold War, for example, the United States attempted to deter Moscow from invading Western Europe by threatening to respond with a massive nuclear attack.<sup>15</sup>

When considering deterrence, many analysts think solely in terms of deterrence-by-retaliation, but deterrence theorists also advanced a second type of deterrence strategy. As John Mearsheimer argues, “there is a well-known distinction between deterrence based on punishment, which involves threatening to destroy...and deterrence based on denial, which requires convincing an opponent that he will not attain his goals.”<sup>16</sup> Benefit denial, or deterrence-by-denial, strategies contribute to deterrence by threatening to deny an adversary the benefits of a particular course of action. Whereas cost imposition strategies threaten retaliation, benefit denial strategies threaten failure. As Glenn Snyder argued “Denial capabilities...deter chiefly by their effect on...the aggressor’s...estimate of the probability of gaining his objective.”<sup>17</sup> By reducing the benefits to be reaped from a particular course of action, benefit denial strategies aim to make that course of action less attractive than it otherwise would be. If actors believe that they are unlikely to reap significant benefits from a certain course of action, they may be deterred from taking it. For example, in the nuclear realm, missile defenses are sometimes thought to contribute to deterrence by convincing the adversary that only a fraction of its nuclear warheads

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<sup>15</sup> On U.S. strategic nuclear policy, see, for example, Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*.

<sup>16</sup> Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, p. 15.

would reach their designated target, reducing the benefits of launching a nuclear strike.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, according to Snyder, a denial strategy may even “be the more powerful deterrent” because threats to attempt to deny an attack are inherently more credible than threats to retaliate in response to an attack.<sup>19</sup>

Deterrence is distinct from other counterterrorism tools such as defense. There is, however, a fine line between deterrence-by-denial and defense; defensive postures can have deterrent effects and deterrent capabilities can aid in a defensive operation. For example, a large conventional military may deter an enemy from attacking, but it may also be used to defend against the enemy in the event of an attack.<sup>20</sup> To distinguish between these two approaches, I follow previous scholarship in defining defensive policies as those that are designed primarily to fend off an opponent in the event of an attack, and deterrence policies as those that are primarily intended to convince an adversary not to attack in the first place.<sup>21</sup> Though this distinction may seem overly theoretical, it contains important practical implications that will be elaborated below.

### *Deterrence: Then and Now*

There are a number of key differences between our understanding of state-to-state deterrence as it developed during the Cold War and deterrence as it applies to the war on

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<sup>18</sup> See for example, Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*; and David S. Yost, “Debating Security Strategies,” *NATO Review* (Winter 2003), available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2003/issue4/english/art4.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.

<sup>21</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, pp. 3-5; Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.

terror.<sup>22</sup> A list of these dissimilarities is available in Table 1. This section highlights three of the most important differences.

First, there are many more adversaries to be deterred in the war on terror than during the Cold War. In the Cold War, U.S. deterrence policy aimed to influence the decision making of a single key adversary, the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> As long as U.S. leaders had a sufficient understanding of the policy-making process in the Kremlin, they could hope to design policies that could consistently deter the Soviet Union from taking grievous action against U.S. interests. In the war on terror, in contrast, the United States faces a variety of adversaries in the form of different terrorist networks.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, within each terrorist network there are a number of individuals and groups that possess independent decision-making authority and an ability to harm U.S. interests.<sup>25</sup> It is implausible to think, therefore, that U.S. foreign policymakers could accurately understand the decision-making calculus of all of these potential adversaries and design policies that would consistently deter all terrorist activity.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Of course it is the case that the United States still seeks to deter state adversaries. The deterrence of regional powers, including Iran and North Korea, and near-peer-competitors, such as China, are among the most important contemporary security challenges facing the United States. This paper focuses, however, on one important aspect of contemporary deterrence policy: deterring terrorist networks.

<sup>23</sup> On U.S. nuclear deterrence policy, see, for example, Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*.

<sup>24</sup> On terrorist networks, see, for example, Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*; and Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> On the U.S. understanding of Al Qaeda, see Daniel Byman, "Al Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?" *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (October 2003), pp. 139-163; Bruce Hoffman, "The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 6 (November-December 2004), pp. 549-560.

Second, and related, deterrence used to be absolute, but now it is partial. In the Cold War, deterrence either succeeded, or it failed. Of course, the Soviet Union engaged in proxy wars in peripheral geographic areas and analysts carefully scrutinized the logic of limited nuclear war, intra-war deterrence, escalation dominance, and the stability-instability paradox.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, if deterrent threats had been unsuccessful at the strategic level and the Soviet Union had launched an invasion of Western Europe, or a massive nuclear attack on the United States, U.S. interests, including perhaps its very existence, would have been severely threatened. In contrast, deterrence in the war on terror can only be partial at best. The United States cannot deter all terrorist activity, but it can deter certain types of terrorists from engaging in certain types of terrorist activity. In the war on terror, unlike in the Cold War, a partial record of deterrence success is acceptable. Indeed, as long as the United States can deter some types of threatening terrorist actions, deterrence can contribute to national security objectives.

This leads to the third point: deterrence used to be a cornerstone of U.S. national security strategy, but now it is only part of a broader counterterrorism strategy. During the Cold War, deterrence was a key pillar of the United States strategy against the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> In the war on terror, by contrast, deterrence plays a supporting role to the other elements of strategy. A comprehensive counterterrorism strategy requires offensive operations to attack and disrupt terrorist networks, effective defenses to protect the

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<sup>27</sup> On limited nuclear war and escalation dominance, see, for example, Robert Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For a recent discussion of the stability-instability paradox, see S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 127-152.

<sup>28</sup> On U.S. strategy during the Cold War, see, for example, Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*; Gaddis, *The Cold War*..

homeland, and efforts to counter the conditions and ideological support that give rise to terrorism.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, deterrence directly contributes to these other goals and, as we will see below, is a necessary component to an effective counterterrorism strategy in its own right.

(Insert Table 1 here)

### *Deconstructing Terrorist Networks*

To devise an appropriate deterrence strategy against terrorists, it is necessary to disaggregate a terrorist network into its component parts.<sup>30</sup> Although many observers think of terrorists solely as the foot soldiers who conduct attacks, there are many other actors in a terrorist network. Indeed, these actors fill functional roles that can be as important as carrying out the terrorist attacks themselves. For example, radical clerics preach incendiary sermons that incite terrorist violence, and the leadership of terrorist organization gives orders to carry out, or refrain from carrying out, attacks. Deterring these actions, therefore, can be as important as directly preventing attacks themselves. A comprehensive counterterrorism strategy aims to disrupt and deter the activities in all of the key parts of a terrorist network. An illustrative list of the various roles in a terrorist network and the associated actions to be deterred is available in Table 2.

(Insert Table 2 here)

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<sup>29</sup> For more on these other elements of counterterrorism strategy, see *Quadrennial Defense Review* (2006).

<sup>30</sup> For another argument about the value of disaggregating a terrorist network into its component parts, see, for example, Jacob Shapiro and David Siegel, "Underfunding in Terrorist Organizations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2007), pp. 405-429.

Moreover, in order to deter terrorist networks, we must adequately understand them.<sup>31</sup> Deterrence is a strategy that manipulates the cost/benefit calculation of an adversary. A successful deterrence strategy, therefore, relies on the ability to accurately understand how an enemy calculates the costs and benefits of participating in terrorist activity. Disaggregating a terrorist network into its component parts can help to shed light on how terrorists in different functional roles within a terrorist network calculate costs and benefits. First, individuals may select into roles based on their preferences. For example, a person who sympathizes with a terrorist movement, but highly values his or her own life may be less likely to volunteer to become a suicide bomber and be more likely to provide financing or ideological support. Moreover, the function that an individual fills in a terrorist network can, over time, shape his or her preferences. For example, a leader of a terrorist organization may place greater value on his own life as he comes to believe that his own survival is critical to sustaining the success of the terrorist movement. Deterrence strategies can be tailored to a particular adversary's preference structure. For example, traditional retaliatory threats will be more effective against those actors in a terrorist network who value their lives and property, whereas deterrence strategies that rely on threats of failure will be relatively more important against other types of actors.

In sum, deterrence's role and application is different than during the Cold War, but through a better understanding of terrorist networks, we can design deterrence policies that can contribute to a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

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<sup>31</sup> For the argument that reliably influencing an adversary requires a sophisticated understanding of them, see George "The Need for Influence Theory."

## **Strategies for Deterring Terrorism**

This section presents four strategies that states can use to deter terrorism. It begins with a discussion of cost imposition strategies, direct response and indirect response. These strategies aim to deter terrorist behavior through the threat of costly retaliation. The section then continues to consider direct and indirect benefit denial strategies. These strategies seek to deter terrorism by threatening failure. These four strategies are summarized in Table 3.

(Insert Table 3 here)

### *Direct Response*

Direct response strategies are those that aim to deter an adversary by threatening to impose a cost directly on the adversary taking hostile action. This type of strategy is probably the most widely understood form of deterrence. Direct response strategies were employed by the United States during the Cold War as Washington aimed to deter a Soviet attack by threatening massive nuclear retaliation in response.<sup>32</sup> By raising the cost of war to unacceptable levels, U.S. foreign policymakers hoped to deter a Soviet attack by convincing the Kremlin that a nuclear exchange would not serve its interests. These strategies are sometimes referred to as “retaliation” or “punishment” strategies, but given

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Glazer, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*.

concerns about international law and diplomacy, “response” is a preferable label for this category in a policy context.

Many analysts argue that direct response strategies are not appropriate for the war on terror because suicide bombers do not value their own lives.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, many terrorists actively seek death because they are motivated by a desire to achieve martyrdom.<sup>34</sup> According to this line of argument, therefore, threats to retaliate directly against terrorists will not only fail to deter terrorism, they may actually encourage would-be martyrs to participate in terrorist activity.<sup>35</sup>

While it may be true that it is difficult to deter suicide bombers with threats of retaliation, not all members of a terrorist network are suicide bombers. Many terrorist leaders, financiers, supporters, radical clerics, and other members of terrorist networks value their lives and possessions. Simple threats of imprisonment and death against these actors can deter terrorist activity.

For example, Great Britain has shown that the threat of imprisonment can deter radical clerics from preaching incendiary sermons. Before 2005, there were a number of radical clerics presiding over large congregations in mosques all over London. These clerics preached that terrorism was consistent with the tenets of Islam and openly

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 5 and Fareed Zakaria, “America’s New World Order” *Newsweek*, (September 15, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,” *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2008/2009), pp. 46-78; Bruce Hoffman, *Holy Terror: The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative* (Washington, DC: Rand, 1993); and Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Mike Vlahos, *Terror’s Mask: Insurgency within Islam*, Occasional Paper, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, available at <http://www.jhuapl.edu/POW/library/terrormask.htm#toc>



advocated the use of terrorism against Western powers.<sup>36</sup> For example, Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed, one of Britain's most prominent clerics, preached that Muslims will give the West "a 9/11 day, after day, after day" unless Western governments change their policies in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> These clerics also value their own lives and material possessions, making them vulnerable to cost imposition strategies. For example, many of them live in stately manors in upscale London neighborhoods and can sometimes be seen on the weekends with their families carrying large-shopping bags from fashionable department stores.<sup>38</sup> After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, however, British authorities began to crack down on radical clerics preaching hate. Most visibly, following the July 2005 terrorist bombings in London, Tony Blair announced his intention to pass legislation that would ban the "glorification of terrorism."<sup>39</sup> The proposed, and later to be passed, law had an immediate effect. Rather than face possible prosecution at the hands of British authorities, prominent clerics left Great Britain for other countries, or changed their tune nearly overnight, renouncing previous calls to incite violence and speaking out against terrorism.<sup>40</sup> While Britain's "glorification" law raises difficult civil liberty issues (many

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp.121-213.

<sup>37</sup> Elaine Sciolino and Don Van Natta, "For a Decade, London Thrived as a Busy Crossroads of Terror," *New York Times*, July 10, 2005, p. A1.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Jon Ronson, *Them: Adventures with Extremists* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), and "Abu Hamza Must pay £1 Million for Trial," BBC News, January 18, 2007, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/6276209.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6276209.stm).

<sup>39</sup> CNN, "Blair: World Slept After 9/11," CNN.com, July 26, 2005, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/07/26/london.politicians/index.html>.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Sarah Lyall, "Britain Bars Militant Cleric from Returning," *New York Times*, August 12, 2005; James Brandon, "The Next Generation of Radical Islamist Preachers in the UK," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 13 (June 2008).

critics describe it as a partial ban on free speech) it also demonstrates that radical clerics can be deterred from preaching incendiary sermons through the threat of imprisonment.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, other members of a terrorist organizations' support network can also be deterred by simple threats of retaliation. Terrorist financing laws in many countries, for example, have deterred individuals from contributing funds to terrorist front organizations. According to a 9/11 Commission Staff Report, for example, the Saudi government's enhanced scrutiny of donors after 9/11 appears to have had a deterrent effect on terrorist financing.<sup>42</sup>

The lesson for counterterrorism is clear. The simple threat to imprison individuals engaging in terrorist activity can have a significant deterrent effect.<sup>43</sup> While there are currently laws in many countries to incarcerate individuals participating in terrorist activity, more can be done. The United States can work with friends and allies to put laws in the books where they do not already exist, to expand the types of participation in terrorist groups that would result in punishment, and to enhance the ability of other countries to enforce existing laws against participation in terrorist networks.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For a critical assessment of the law, see, for example, David Edgar, "This Muddled Terror Law Limits Free Speech and Wrecks Innocent Lives," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> John Roth, Douglas Greenberg, and Serena Wille, "National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Against the United States: Monograph on Terrorist Financing," available at [http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff\\_statements/911\\_TerrFin\\_Monograph.pdf](http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> This line of argument draws on the large body of research on criminal deterrence. See, for example, Andrew Von Hirsch, Elizabeth Burney, and Per-Olof Wikstrom, *Criminal Deterrence and Sentence Severity: An Analysis of Recent Research* (Cambridge: Hart Publishing, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> On international counterterrorism cooperation, see, for example, Daniel Byman, "Remaking Alliances for the War on Terror," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (October 2006), pp. 767-811; Daniel Byman, "Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 79-115.

Moreover, the leaders of terrorist organizations may also be deterred by the threat of retaliation. While it has become cliché to point out that terrorists lack a return address, many successful organizations actually depend heavily on a geographical safe haven from which to conduct their operations. Hamas operates from Gaza, Hezbollah has Lebanon, and, before 9/11 Al Qaeda was extended a safe haven in Afghanistan. To the degree that a state can threaten to attack and revoke an important safe haven, terrorist leaders may be deterred.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, of course, it is also possible that terrorist leaders may sometimes wish to provoke a state to respond with a disproportionate level of force. Luring a state into baring its fangs with a violent response could generate considerable sympathy and support for the terrorist organization.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that leaders of terrorist organizations have been deterred by the threat of a devastating counterterrorism campaign. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines, for example, may have been deterred from cooperating with Jeemah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda by the threat of retaliation.<sup>47</sup> Members of the MILF may have believed that the United States and the Philippine governments were willing to extend them a partial accommodation, but that the governments would crack down if they cooperated with global terrorist networks.

Similarly, Israel has long employed a strategy of deterrence against its state and non-state adversaries in the Middle East.<sup>48</sup> Before 2006, Hezbollah conducted a series of

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<sup>45</sup> For more on this point, see, for example, Austin Long, *Deterrence—From Cold War to Long War: Lessons from Six Decades of RAND Research* (Washington, DC: Rand, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> See Vlahos, *Terror's Mask*.

<sup>47</sup> Traeger and Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done."

<sup>48</sup> For more on Israel's approach to deterrence, see Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Nonstate Terror Groups: The Case of Hizballah," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (2007), pp.

terrorist attacks against Northern Israel. In 2006 Israel responded with an invasion of Southern Lebanon. Although the invasion was poorly planned and executed, the Israeli Defense Forces were able to greatly disrupt Hezbollah's operations.<sup>49</sup> Since the invasion, the number of Hezbollah attacks against Israel has greatly diminished. This drastic change in Hezbollah's behavior toward Israel may be evidence that deterrence worked. It appears that Hezbollah has been reluctant to conduct another round of attacks that could provoke another devastating Israeli invasion.<sup>50</sup>

Even Al Qaeda may be vulnerable to direct response strategies. Before the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaeda's senior leadership debated about whether to carry out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.<sup>51</sup> Critics within Al Qaeda's leadership argued that the attacks may be too successful and could encourage the United States to invade Afghanistan and revoke Al Qaeda's safe haven. Even though Al Qaeda decided to carry out the attacks, the fact that its leadership even held the debate demonstrates that Al Qaeda is sensitive to the threat of direct retaliation. The U.S. decision to invade Afghanistan after 9/11 may have enhanced U.S. credibility in the eyes of some terrorist organizations, potentially increasing the effectiveness of U.S. deterrent threats to revoke a terrorist organization's safe haven in response to major terrorist attacks in the future.

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469-493; Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Terrorists: What Israel Has Learned," *Policy Review*, No. 149 (June-July 2008), pp. 29-42.

<sup>49</sup> On the 2006 war, see, for example, Greg Jaffe, "Short '06 Lebanon War Stokes Pentagon Debate," *Washington Post*, April 6, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> It may also be the case that Hezbollah is seeking to regain its strength for a future confrontation.

<sup>51</sup> On Al Qaeda's planning for 9/11, see for example, Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

Finally, and most obviously, state sponsors of terrorism are also vulnerable to direct response strategies.<sup>52</sup> Simple threats of retaliation may be able to deter states from transferring weapons of mass destruction to, or otherwise supporting, terrorist groups. For example, President Bush's threat after 9/11 that the United States does not distinguish between terrorists and states that sponsor them encouraged many states to reconsider their traditional ties with non-state militant groups.<sup>53</sup> The United States issued another round of threats from 2005 to 2009 aimed at deterring states from transferring sensitive nuclear materials and technology to terrorist organizations.<sup>54</sup> U.S. officials threatened to hold states fully accountable if they provided terrorists with materials that were used in a nuclear attack.<sup>55</sup> This type of threat, if made credible with enhanced nuclear attribution techniques, could deter states from transferring WMD to terrorist organizations.<sup>56</sup>

In sum, states can use direct response strategies to deter terrorism. Many actors in a terrorist network can be deterred by simple threats of death or imprisonment and terrorist leadership can, in some circumstances, be deterred by the threat of a devastating attack that could disrupt their operations or revoke their safe havens. A direct response

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<sup>52</sup> On deterring state sponsorship of terrorism, see, for example, Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Talmadge, "Deterring a Nuclear 9/11;" Galucci, "Averting Nuclear Catastrophe;" Byman, *Deadly Connections*; Lebovic, *Deterring International Terrorism and Rogue States*; and Levi, "Deterring State Sponsorship of Nuclear Terrorism."

<sup>53</sup> George W. Bush, "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation," The White House, September 11, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, "Remarks by the National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, to the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, February 8, 2008, available at <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/wmd/WH/20080211-6.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> On nuclear attribution as a means of deterrence, see for example, Dunlop and Smith, "Using International Nuclear Forensics to Detect and Deter Nuclear Terrorism;" Chivers, et al., "Before the Day After."

strategy is further strengthened by the fact that the political will for a tough counterterrorism response tends to be highest in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack. U.S. public opinion was in favor of a tough response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the American public's appetite for revenge would likely be larger following, for example, a nuclear terror attack. This fact, if understood by terrorist adversaries, could strengthen the credibility of U.S. retaliatory threats.

There are, of course, a number of potential limitations to a direct response strategy. First, the so-called "hard core" of terrorist networks, including suicide bombers, may not be deterred by threats of direct retaliation. For this type of terrorist adversary, other counterterrorism approaches, including other deterrent strategies, will likely prove more useful. Second, it will be difficult to retaliate against terrorists if they are dead, not locatable, or located in countries with which the United States is not at war. Third, and perhaps most important, direct response threats may not always pose an additional threat because the United States is already waging a war on terror. In order to be successful, a deterrent threat must be made conditional on an adversary's behavior. In other words, the threatened action must be held in reserve. If the United States is already doing everything it can to attack and disrupt terrorist networks, however, it will not be able to credibly threaten additional punishment. Washington, therefore, must complement its deterrence policies with policies of strategic reassurance. Officials must make a commitment to individuals and groups that they will not be punished if they refrain from engaging in terrorist activity.

### *Indirect Response*

Indirect response strategies are those that deter by threatening to retaliate, not against terrorists themselves, but against something else that terrorists hold dear. These strategies are designed to get around one of the primary problems of direct response strategies in the war on terror, namely that it is often difficult to retaliate against terrorists themselves. In the jargon of classic deterrence theory, they lack a return address. While it is sometimes difficult to retaliate against terrorists, states may be able to find the addresses of other potential targets that terrorists value, such as their families and communities. If states can hold these targets at risk, they may be able to deter terrorism.

An example of an indirect response strategy is Israel's past policy of demolishing the homes of suicide bombers' families.<sup>57</sup> Israel couldn't threaten to punish suicide bombers themselves because they were dead after a successful attack, but they did retaliate against their families. This policy forced would-be suicide bombers to trade off the benefits of personal glory and martyrdom for themselves against the cost of homelessness for their immediate family. There is reason to believe that this strategy bred resentment against Israel and may have provoked additional violence.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, this policy, while in place likely deterred many individuals from participating in suicide bombing and is evidence that terrorists can be deterred in an indirect response strategy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For a critique of Israel's home demolition policy, see [http://www.btselem.org/english/Punitive\\_Demolitions/Index.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Punitive_Demolitions/Index.asp)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> For evidence demonstrating that the policy provided an effective deterrent, see Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban Klor, "Counter-Suicide-Terrorism: Evidence from House Demolitions," working paper, presented at UCSD IGCC Terrorism Research Conference, San-Diego, CA, June 27, 2009.

A second example of a possible indirect response strategy is the call by some American leaders and strategists to hold Muslim holy sites at risk.<sup>60</sup> According to this approach, the United States would threaten to destroy Mecca, Medina, or other holy Muslim cities in exchange for any large terrorist attack conducted by a Muslim terrorist group (some have argued that the strategy should be reserved for a WMD attack) against the United States. Again, this strategy provides an indirect response. The strategy, in theory, would force potential terrorists to weigh the benefits of a successful terrorist attack against the cost of losing one of Islam's most sacred spaces.

A strategy of holding holy sites at risk presents a host of problems and has not been seriously considered at the highest levels of government. There is, of course, something very unsavory about purposely targeting sacred spaces. Although, it should be noted that during the Cold War, the United States openly targeted areas in Moscow and St. Petersburg that arguably contained just as much historical and religious significance as Islam's holy cities.<sup>61</sup> Rather, the primary problem with this strategy is its likely ineffectiveness. Unlike in the Cold War, we are not currently facing a unitary decision maker with the responsibility to protect important pieces of real estate. The Kremlin assiduously avoided action that would have brought about the destruction of Moscow or St. Petersburg.<sup>62</sup> In the war on terror, a threat to hold Mecca and Medina at risk would

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, "Trancredo: If They Bomb Us, Nuke Mecca," Fox News, July 18, 2005, available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,162795,00.html>

<sup>61</sup> On U.S. nuclear targeting plans during the Cold War, see, for example, David Alan Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Spring 1983), pp. 3-71.

<sup>62</sup> For the argument that Moscow was less risk averse during the Cold War than generally believed, see Keith B. Payne, *The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008).



likely deter many terrorist organizations from launching a major attack against the United States. The same threat, however, might very well entice other groups to strike the United States in order to force Washington into a difficult dilemma of backing down from its threat and thus undermining its credibility, or launching a heavy-handed response that would likely bring many more supporters to the terrorists' cause.

Although indirect response strategies, as they have been conceived so far, may be impracticable, there may be other more subtle methods that states could consider. For example, states could perhaps levy a terrorism tax on the families of terrorists. We know that terrorists have been motivated by the promise of financial reward to their families. Saddam Hussein's cash payments to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, for example, encouraged many Palestinians to turn to terrorism.<sup>63</sup> If the promise of financial reward to terrorists' families encouraged terrorism, the threat of financial penalties may deter it. We also know that some terrorists, while they themselves reject the West, value the ability of their family members to travel and pursue educational opportunities abroad. States could seek to deter terrorism by threatening to place travel restrictions or deny educational opportunities to the families of terrorists. Such an approach, however, also has its own practical difficulties. Legal systems in many countries are predicated on the notion of individual responsibility, placing collective punishment strategies on shaky moral and legal footing.<sup>64</sup>

Alternatively, states may be able to employ indirect response strategies that aim to shape terrorists' perceptions about how participation in terrorist activity could negatively

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<sup>63</sup> Ken Layne, "Saddam Pays 25k for Suicide Bombers," Fox News, March 23, 2002, available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,48822,00.html>.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Tai H. Park, "Morality, Individual Responsibility, and the Law," *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 1988), pp. 178-185.

affect their families and communities. These strategies would not depend on states threatening to take action themselves. Rather, these strategies would seek to communicate with terrorists in order to increase their subjective perceptions of the costs of certain types of terrorist activities. For example, Thomas Schelling has argued that terrorists may perhaps be deterred from conducting a biological attack if they become convinced that the outbreak of a communicable disease in the West, given the interconnectedness of the modern world, could make its way back to, and kill many Muslims in, the Middle East.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, according to Schelling, given that many countries in the Middle East have weak public health systems, a global pandemic ignited by biological terrorism could disproportionately harm the terrorists' own supporters.

In sum, states can deter terrorism with indirect response strategies. While states may not be able to respond against terrorists themselves, they can retaliate against other targets that terrorists hold dear. While indirect response strategies can, and indeed already have, deterred terrorism, they also come with a number of downsides. First, collective punishment strategies may be limited by legal and moral considerations. Second, and perhaps more importantly, indirect response strategies may be counterproductive. Threatening to hold Muslim holy places at risk, or punishing innocents for the behavior of their family members, would likely harm relations with the rest of the world and could encourage more terrorism than it deters. Nevertheless, thinking about these indirect response strategies, with all of their shortcomings, may provide insight into other more workable strategies in the future.

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Schelling, interview with the author, Zurich, Switzerland, November 2009.

### *Direct Denial*

Direct denial, or tactical denial, strategies are those that threaten failure at the tactical level. They deter terrorism by threatening to deny terrorists the ability to successfully conduct a terrorist attack.<sup>66</sup> If terrorists believe that an attack is likely to fail, they will prefer not to attempt the attack rather than waste time and resources on a botched operation.

We know that terrorist leadership and terrorist foot soldiers highly value operational success, but for different reasons. Leaders view successful attacks, in part, as large publicity stunts that can generate attention, fundraising, and recruits to the terrorist network.<sup>67</sup> A thwarted attack, on the other hand, can have the opposite effect, demoralizing and weakening the terrorist movement. After all, no one would want to sign up for the gang that can't shoot straight. As Osama Bin Laden himself argued, "when people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse."<sup>68</sup>

Foot soldiers also value operational success. Suicide bombers do not want to risk their martyrdom and glory on a botched operation. They are motivated by a desire to be heroes in their hometowns, or to reach the everlasting paradise promised to martyrs in the *Hadith*.<sup>69</sup> The last thing they want is to spend the rest of their lives in jail. Moreover, foot soldiers appear not only to worry about whether their attack will be successful or not, but also about *how* successful the attack will be. For example, before going on a suicide

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<sup>66</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*; Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, A.P. Schmid, "Terrorism and the Media: The Ethics of Publicity," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (October 1989), pp. 539-565.

<sup>68</sup> James Poniewozik, "The Banality of Bin Laden," *Time*, December 13, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Hoffman, *Holy Terror*; Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom;" Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.

mission, a young Iraqi said that he hoped that he would be able to kill enough Americans.<sup>70</sup> In his mind, his martyrdom could be jeopardized if his attack only killed a handful of soldiers.

Given the value that terrorists place on operational success, states can deter terrorism by convincing terrorists that operations are likely to fail. For this reason, simple homeland security measures can deter terrorist attacks.<sup>71</sup> Defending the homeland, improving domestic intelligence, and hardening key targets are strong deterrents to attack. Indeed, we know of many cases in which terrorists were deterred from carrying out an attack by the fear of failure. In these cases, terrorists had planned an attack, but after the defenses at the targeted site were hardened or otherwise altered, the terrorists called off the attack rather than risk failure. For example, an Al Qaeda affiliate planned to attack an American military base in Turkey in late 2003, but the United States improved its defenses at the site during the planning stages and the terrorists called off the attack.<sup>72</sup>

It is, of course, impossible to protect every conceivable target and terrorists will often substitute away from hardened targets toward softer ones.<sup>73</sup> This fact can be an

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<sup>70</sup> Bobby Ghosh, "Inside the Mind of an Iraqi Suicide Bomber," *Time*, June 26, 2005.

<sup>71</sup> On terrorism and deterrence by denial, see also James M. Smith and Brent J. Talbot, "Terrorism and Deterrence by Denial," in Paul R. Viotti, Michael Opheim, Nicholas Bowen, *Terrorism and Homeland Security: Thinking Strategically about Policy* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008) and Jonathan Steverson, "Terrorism and Deterrence: Review Essay," *Survival*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (February 2004), pp. 179-184.

<sup>72</sup> Lloyd De Vries, "Turks Bust Alleged Qaeda Plotter," *CBS News*, December 19, 2003, available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/12/17/terror/main588982.shtml>.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the logic of this point, see Robert Powell, "Defending against Terrorist Attacks with Limited Resources," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (2007), pp. 527-541.

asset as well as a liability in the war on terror, however. It is, after all, the counterterrorists' choice about which targets should be defended and at what cost.

Deploying effective homeland security measures may also deter WMD, as well as conventional, terrorism. In order to successfully conduct a WMD attack, terrorists would have to successfully complete a number of difficult steps.<sup>74</sup> A high possibility of failure at any one stage could deter an attack. Measures that the United States takes to reduce the probability that a WMD terror attack will succeed should have a deterrent effect. For example, as the United States improves its radiation detection capabilities at border crossings, the probability that a terrorist smuggling nuclear material across the border will be captured and the radioactive material will be confiscating increases. Given the value that terrorists might place on scarce and strategically important nuclear material, they may prefer not to even attempt to bring it in to the United States, given a sufficiently high risk of losing it.

A critic might counter that the United States is already improving homeland security and that this is being done for defensive, not deterrent purposes.<sup>75</sup> This critique, however, glosses over one of the most important questions of U.S. counterterrorism policy: should homeland security measures be intended primarily as a deterrent or as a defense? Indeed, as Glenn Snyder argued in 1961, “the central issue in national security policy (is) the choice between the deterrence of, and defense against, military attacks.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> On the steps required for a successful nuclear terror attack, see Michael Levi, *On Nuclear Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> On U.S. homeland security efforts in New York since 9/11 for example, see Christopher Dickey, *Securing the City* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, p. v.

I argue that homeland security policy should be designed primarily as a deterrent. The objective of homeland security should not be to fend off an endless number of terrorist attacks. In fact, if it gets to the point that U.S. forces have to thwart an attack at the last moment, homeland security has failed. Rather, the United States should aim to deter terrorism. Washington should send the message that it is ready and that it is not in terrorists' best interests to attempt an attack. For example, the point of building concrete barriers around the Washington Monument is not to have terrorist smash explosive-laden trucks into the barricades day after day. Rather, the hope is that terrorists will see the defenses and decide not to attack in the first place. The same is true for nearly all other homeland security measures, including: airport security, port security, cargo container security, border security, and the protection of critical infrastructure, government buildings, and national monuments.

This insight has important implications for the way we structure homeland security. First, homeland security should not be designed primarily as a defense. We cannot hope to thwart every kind of conceivable attack. Rather the goal should be to raise the perceived probability that an operation will be thwarted to convince terrorists that they should not attempt an attack. For this goal, a perfect defense is overkill. Homeland security measures can rely more heavily on measures such as randomized screening and periodic surges in defense levels at key sites.<sup>77</sup> Such measures keep terrorists off guard, are less costly than a watertight defense and, if designed well, are sufficient for deterring terrorist attacks.

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "U.S. Adapts Cold-War Idea to Fight Terrorists," *New York Times*, March 18, 2008.

In addition, apart from its objective level of defenses, the United States can take measures to shape terrorists' subjective perceptions of its counterterror capabilities. Deterrence is a psychological relation. If terrorists believe that Washington could thwart an attack, terrorists can be deterred whether or not Washington actually has the ability to do so. Therefore, states should adopt strategic communications policies to convince terrorists that attacks are likely to fail. The United States can, for example, publicize the extensiveness of its homeland security measures.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps, more importantly, the United States should put aside excessive concerns with secrecy and become more willing to publicize foiled attacks. Broadcasting examples of the terrorists who fail could encourage potential terrorist to recalculate whether their own plot is worth the effort.<sup>79</sup>

States may also be able to achieve deterrent effects by developing and publicizing adequate disaster planning and emergency response systems.<sup>80</sup> By adequately preparing domestic systems to mitigate the consequences of an attack, states can reduce the amount of disorder, and thus deny some of the benefits, that terrorists can hope to achieve. By doing more to publicize these efforts, states could amplify the deterrent effect of its preparations. If terrorists believe that the United States has a robust system in place for

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<sup>78</sup> Of course, broadcasting the details of U.S. homeland security measures could aid terrorist attempting to plan attacks. An effective strategic communications campaign, therefore, would attempt to amplify adversaries' impressions of U.S. capabilities without revealing operational details that could be exploited.

<sup>79</sup> It is also possible, although probably less likely, that publicizing a foiled attack could raise the perceived benefit of successfully conducting a similar attack. This is because it could increase the reputational benefits for the attacker to succeed where others had failed.

<sup>80</sup> U.S. Homeland Security Council, "National Planning Scenarios: Created for Use in National, Federal, State, and Local Homeland Security Preparedness Activities," April 2005, available at <http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/nationalsecurity/earlywarning/NationalPlanningScenariosApril2005.pdf>

mitigating the consequences of a radiological attack, for example, terrorists may be deterred from attempting this type of attack.

The United States has already issued some direct denial threats. For example, following the 9/11 attacks, the United States announced that it will shoot down hijacked airplanes.<sup>81</sup> If terrorists believe that the United States will destroy hijacked airplanes before they can reach their intended target, there is little remaining incentive for them to hijack airplanes for use as missiles. The new U.S. policy might have already deterred additional 9/11-style attacks. Following the U.S. announcement, terrorists have attempted to detonate planes in midair, rather than crash them into U.S. cities.<sup>82</sup> From Washington's perspective, this substitution is an improvement because the damage of a single downed airplane is much less than the destruction caused by an airplane crash in a major metropolitan area.<sup>83</sup>

In sum, states can deter terrorism by threatening failure at the tactical level. Terrorists value tactical success. If they fear that an attack will fail, they will be deterred from attempting it. Indeed, the United States should, design homeland security to serve

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<sup>81</sup> Andre Buncombe, "U.S. Pilots Trained to Shoot Down Hijacked Planes," *The Independent*, October 4, 2003, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-pilots-trained-to-shoot-down-hijacked-planes-582153.html>.

<sup>82</sup> On the 2006 airplane plot, for example, see Bruce Hoffman, "Radicalization and Subversion: Al Qaeda and the 7 July 2005 Bombings and the 2006 Airline Bombing Plot," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, forthcoming; On the Christmas day 2009 plot, see Scott Shane and Eric Lipton, "Passengers' Quick Action Halted Attack," *New York Times*, December 26, 2009.

<sup>83</sup> On substitution effects and terrorism, see, for example, Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "What Do We Know about the Substitution Effect in Transnational Terrorism," in Andrew Silke (ed.), *Researching Terrorism: Trends, Achievements, Failures* (Ilford, UK: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 119-137.



more as a deterrent and less as a defense. This could have the same strategic effect at a fraction of the cost to the American economy and way of life.

### *Indirect denial*

Indirect denial, or strategic denial, policies are those that threaten failure at the strategic level. They deter terrorism by threatening to deny terrorists strategic benefits, even in the face of successful terrorist attacks. In this way, indirect denial strategies seek to break the perceived link between successful terrorist operations and the strategic goals of terrorists groups. Terrorists may be deterred from engaging in terrorist attacks if they believe that even a string of highly successful attacks will not help them achieve their broader political goals.

Deterrence by indirect denial is a strategy that did not exist in classical deterrence theory. In the nuclear realm, the failure to deter an enemy attack would have automatically resulted in a strategic defeat. If the Soviet Union launched a massive nuclear strike against the United States, the United States would have incurred catastrophic losses. Deterrence against terrorism is different however. All but the most extreme forms of WMD terrorism would result in a level of damage that the United States could tolerate. If the United States fails to deter a terrorist attack, it still enjoys the option of whether or not to concede to terrorists' demands. Whether successful terrorist attacks result in only a tactical, or also a strategic, defeat, therefore, is in the hands of the counterterrorist. States can choose whether or not to concede to terrorist demands. States can deter terrorism by systematically identifying and denying terrorist objectives even in the face of successful attacks.

A strategy of systematically denying terrorists' strategic objectives begins with identifying those objectives. Many terrorist organizations share a basic strategy.<sup>84</sup> Their ultimate goal is to wring political concessions from a particular government. Terrorists attack civilian targets in order to terrorize the civilian population protected by that government. Terrorists hope that the terrorized populace will then pressure the government to take action to stop the mayhem. Finally, terrorists hope that, in response to popular pressure, governments will concede to the terrorists' political demands in exchange for a cessation of violence.

But, states can deter terrorism by identifying and denying, rather than granting, the objectives sought in the terror strategy. For example, some countries have learned to limit the media coverage of terror attacks in order to reduce the publicity and attention

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<sup>84</sup> On the strategic logic of terrorism, see, for example, Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer 2006), pp. 49-79; Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (July 1981), p. 379; Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, No. 120 (September–October 2000), p. 68; Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 13–14; Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), pp. 61, 75–76; Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002); David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century," *Dialogue-IO*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 2002), p. 15; Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 263; Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer 2006), p. 49; and Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, "The Psychology of Terrorism: 'Syndrome' versus 'Tool' Perspectives," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 2006), p. 207. For a debate about whether terrorism is an effective tactic for achieving strategic goals, see Max Abrams, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 42-78; Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Spring 2008), pp. 78-105; and Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, Elizabeth McClellan, Hillel Frisch, Paul Staniland, and Max Abrahms, "Correspondence: What Makes Terrorists Tick?" *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Spring 2009), pp. 180-202.

sought by terrorist organizations. In order to terrorize civilians, terrorist organizations rely on the media.<sup>85</sup> The media report on terrorist attacks, instantaneously and repeatedly broadcasting horrifying images around the target country and around the world. In this way, the media often play into the hands of terrorist organizations by amplifying the terror of each attack. Watching the footage of airplanes smashing into the World Trade Center a single time was terrifying enough, but major news organizations continually ran the images day after day, forcing viewers around the world to continually relive the horror. Simply limiting media coverage of terrorist attacks can reduce the publicity benefits sought by terrorist organizations. For example, following the terrorist attacks on a resort in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in the summer of 2005, the Egyptian authorities draped a giant white sheet over the damaged hotel.<sup>86</sup> When television crews arrived to get footage of a gaping, smoking hole in the side of the building, what they got instead was a blank white screen. While this strategy may be more difficult to implement in a society with protections for press freedom, there are other ways to limit the publicity benefit of terrorism consistent with democratic values. The Israeli government has, for example, established a voluntary private-public partnership with the Israeli media.<sup>87</sup> Media organizations in Israel agree to limit the amount of coverage they devote to each terrorist attack. This agreement attempts to balance the public's right to know with the

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<sup>85</sup> See, Paul Wilkinson, "The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 1997), pp. 51-64 and Raphael Perl, "Terrorism, the Media, and the Government: Perspectives, Trends, and Options for Policymakers," CRS Issue Brief, October 22, 1997, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/crs-terror.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Williams, "Egypt Gets Tough in Sinai in Wake of Resort Attacks," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2005.

<sup>87</sup> "Expert Workshop on Public-Private Partnerships: Engaging with the Media in Countering Terrorism," Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Vienna, Austria, October 19-20, 2009.

government's efforts to combat terrorism. Similarly, in its battle with the Irish Republic Army (IRA), the United Kingdom also passed laws prohibiting news agencies from carrying interviews of IRA members and established special private courts to prevent IRA defendants from using trials to gain publicity.<sup>88</sup> Of course, efforts to deny the publicity benefit of terrorism may be more difficult in the information age as terrorists become increasingly sophisticated at employing new media in propaganda campaigns. Still, governments can take measures that significantly reduce the mainstream exposure received by terrorist groups.<sup>89</sup>

States can also deter terrorism by denying terrorists the ability to cause panic in society. If terrorists are less able to sow chaos in a society, they will be less able to leverage a society-wide panic into political concessions. Israel, for example, attempts to quickly reopen bombed cafes in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. The ability to bounce back quickly signals to the population and to terrorist groups that terrorist attacks will not disrupt day-to-day life.

Scholars debate whether terrorism is driven more by strategy, organizational dynamics, or ideology.<sup>90</sup> Critics may argue that an indirect denial approach relies heavily

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<sup>88</sup> On Great Britain's special courts, see Laura Donohue, *Counter-Terrorist Law and Emergency Powers in the UK* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

<sup>89</sup> For an excellent discussion of the new media and terrorism, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>90</sup> For the argument that terrorists are primarily motivated by parochial political concerns, social competition with other groups, and internal leadership dynamics, see Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want;" Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 437-449; Mark Turner, "The Management of Violence in a Conflict Organization: The Case of the Abu Sayyef," *Public Organization Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 387-401; Gordon McCormick, "Terrorist Decision Making," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 6 (2003), pp. 473-507; Cyrus Zirakzadeh, "From Revolutionary Dreams to Organizational Fragmentation:

on the assumption that terrorists are rational actors and, to the degree that their behavior is the result of internal politics, or ideology, the above approach will be ineffective. While it is true that an indirect denial strategy is most compatible with the strategic approach to terrorism, it can also be applied to individuals or groups with alternative motivations. In such cases, governments must attempt to reformulate policy to deny organizational, ideological, or any other type of ultimate objective that encourages the terrorist activity of a particular group. For example, many suicide bombers participate in attacks to achieve personal glory and martyrdom.<sup>91</sup> These individuals could perhaps be deterred if states could deny them these nonmaterial objectives. For example, states could work with mainstream Muslim clerics to point out that suicide is contrary to the teachings of Islam.<sup>92</sup> Denying nonmaterial objectives may be difficult, of course, and visible U.S. interference in debates about Muslim theology should probably be avoided. Nevertheless, if done well, such efforts could deter terrorism. If individuals increasingly

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Disputes over Violence within ETA and Sendero Luminoso,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 66-92; James Ron, “Ideology in Context: Explaining Sendero Luminoso’s Tactical Escalation,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (2001), pp. 569-592; Kent Layne Oots, *A Political Organization Approach to Transnational Terrorism* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986). For the claim that terrorists are primarily motivated by ideological concerns, and that some ideologies will be more impervious to government intervention than others, see Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,” *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2008/2009), pp. 46-78; Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, “Dilettantes, Ideologues, and the Weak: Terrorists Who Don’t Kill,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2008), pp. 244-263; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Hoffman, *Holy Terror*; Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.

<sup>92</sup> Walter Pincus, “U.S. Military Uses Moderate Clerics to Try to Change Radical Minds,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2007.

have doubts about whether a suicide mission will lead to personal salvation, they may calculate that the costs of terrorist activity outweigh the benefits.

Radical Muslim terrorist operations also use terrorism as a method of winning the support of the broader Muslim community, or the *Umma*.<sup>93</sup> If terrorists can be persuaded, however, that certain activities are likely to undermine their support within the *Umma*, terrorists could perhaps be deterred. For example, in July 2005, Ayman Zawahiri, the second in command of Al Qaeda, sent a letter to Abu Musab Zarqawi, the head of Al Qaeda in Iraq, asking him to stop killing Muslims and beheading captured prisoners because it was provoking a backlash in the Muslim world.<sup>94</sup> U.S. efforts to carefully publicize the shameful acts of terrorists through intermediaries could perhaps deter certain types of terrorist activity.

Perhaps most importantly, however, states can deter terrorism by steadfastly refusing to grant terrorist organizations their ultimate political demands. If nonstate groups come to believe that a terror-based strategy will not help them to achieve their fundamental political goals, over time they may be deterred from choosing terrorism as a tactic.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.

<sup>94</sup> Susan B. Glaser and Walter Pincus, "Seized Letter Outlines Al Qaeda's Goals in Iraq," *Washington Post*, October 12, 2005.

<sup>95</sup> On the effectiveness of terrorism see for example, Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism;" Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics;" Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism;" Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*; and Lake, "Rational Extremism." For a debate about whether terrorism is an effective tactic, see Abrams, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work;" Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want;" and Chenoweth, Miller, McClellan, Frisch, Staniland, and Abrahms, "Correspondence: What Makes Terrorists Tick?"

It may be for this reason that many states have adopted an official policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists.<sup>96</sup> The policy is not driven by moral considerations, but rather by a strategic decision to deny terrorists the benefits of their actions. Israel, for example, has adopted a policy of refusing to participate in prisoner exchanges with Palestinian terrorist groups.<sup>97</sup> Israel has to date been inconsistent in its implementation of the policy, but a credible threat to deny prisoner exchanges could reduce the benefit that terror groups can receive for kidnapping Israeli soldiers, thus disincentivizing this type of terrorist behavior.

Similarly, the United States may be able to employ a strategy of indirect denial to deter its principal terrorist adversary, Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda's primary strategic objective is to reestablish a caliphate in the Middle East that will be ruled under *sharia* law.<sup>98</sup> In order to establish a caliphate, Al Qaeda first must topple the secular and apostate regimes in the region. Al Qaeda's leadership has determined, however, that these regimes, referred to by Al Qaeda as the "near enemy," are impossible to overthrow at present because of the overwhelming support that they receive from the United States. Therefore, Al Qaeda has decided that it must first weaken the "far enemy," the United States. By attacking U.S. interests, Al Qaeda hopes to force the United States to withdraw its military forces from the Middle East, allowing it to proceed toward its goal of reestablishing the caliphate.

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<sup>96</sup> For an analysis, see Daniel Byman, "The Decision to Begin Talks with Terrorists: Lessons for Policymakers," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (July-August 2006), pp. 403-414.

<sup>97</sup> Joshua Mitnick, "Israel's Prisoner Swap with Hezbollah: Too Risky?" *Christian Science Monitor*, June 30, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> On the ideology and strategy of Al Qaeda, see, for example, Wright, *The Looming Tower*.

The United States may be able to employ a strategy of indirect denial against Al Qaeda by credibly threatening to refuse to alter U.S. defense posture in the Middle East in response to terror attacks. If the United States can convince Al Qaeda that U.S. forces will be present in the Middle East for the foreseeable future regardless of the level of terrorist violence that Al Qaeda is able to inflict upon the United States, Washington will have reduced Al Qaeda's incentives to attack. Al Qaeda may eventually be deterred from attacking the United States out of the 'fear' of strategic failure. Of course, decisions about U.S. troop deployments in the Middle East must take many factors into consideration. A heavy U.S. military footprint also comes at a significant economic cost and it may also fuel anti-American sentiment in the region. Still, denying terrorists their strategic goals is a significant benefit to a continued U.S. force presence in the region, which must be weighed carefully when making force posture calculations.

In order to make threats of indirect denial credible, states must communicate through a variety of different channels. Leaders can verbally declare that they will not allow terrorism to affect national security decision making. Verbal statements can (and often should be) dismissed as cheap talk however.<sup>99</sup> Israel, for example, has frequently vacillated on its threat not to engage in prisoner swaps with terrorists.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, states must also communicate threats through action. Thomas Schelling discussed, for example, how states could take actions that tied their own hands in order to make threats more credible.<sup>101</sup> As Schelling argued, the best way to win a game of chicken is to throw

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<sup>99</sup> On the credibility of threats in international relations, see, for example, James Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands Versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (February 1997), pp. 68-90.

<sup>100</sup> Mitnick, "Israel's Prisoner Swap with Hezbollah."

<sup>101</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.



the steering wheel out the window.<sup>102</sup> Where possible, states should tie their own hands to make it difficult for them to concede to terrorist demands even in situations in which they might want to. For example, the United States could perhaps continue to build large-scale and expensive military infrastructure in the Middle East.<sup>103</sup> This would make it more difficult for Washington to pull out of the region in response to a string of successful terrorist attacks.

In addition, states may also be able to increase the credibility of their threats by developing a reputation for toughness.<sup>104</sup> Terrorist groups should be less likely to target states that have a reputation for steadfastly refusing to negotiate with terrorists. The United States at present, unfortunately, possesses a reputation for quickly capitulating to terrorist demands. Following Hezbollah's 1983 attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut, for example, the United States quickly pulled all of its forces out of Lebanon.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the United States' decision to redeploy troops out of Saudi Arabia was perceived by many as a concession to Al Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks.<sup>106</sup> In order to regain its credibility, the United States should adopt a policy that emphasizes Washington's intention to deny terrorists their strategic demands and then consistently

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> This strategy could also have the potential drawback of increasing the vulnerability of U.S. assets in the region.

<sup>104</sup> For the scholarly debate on the importance of reputation and deterrence, see, for example, Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>105</sup> Rick Hampson, "25 Years Later, Bombing in Beirut Still Resonates," *USA Today*, October 18, 2008, available at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-10-15-beirut-barracks\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-10-15-beirut-barracks_n.htm).

<sup>106</sup> Oliver Burkeman, "America Signals Withdrawal of Troops from Saudi Arabia," *The Guardian*, April 30, 2003, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/apr/30/usa.iraq>.

follows through on that intention.<sup>107</sup> Future U.S. force posture decisions should not be influenced by the demands of terrorist organizations. Indeed, standing firm in the face of terrorist attacks now may be the only way to rehabilitate Washington's credibility and discourage terrorism in the future.

According to recent security strategy documents, the United States will attempt to counter ideological support for terrorism, in part, by delegitimizing terrorism as a tactic.<sup>108</sup> But when dealing with a dangerous enemy it may be wiser to appeal to interests than to a moral compass. Many analysts argue that terrorism thrives, not because it is a virtuous strategy, but because it is brutally effective.<sup>109</sup> Levels of international terrorism may only recede if individuals come to believe that terrorism is no longer the best means of achieving their goals. States may only be able to defeat terrorism when they are able to shatter the widespread perception that terrorism is an effective strategy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper presented an overarching framework for thinking about deterring terrorist networks. I first demonstrated that deterrence is relevant to the war on terror, but that it functions differently than in a traditional, state-based deterrence policy. Deterrence

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<sup>107</sup> For the point of view that U.S. resolve is not critical to fighting the war on terror, see Christopher Fetweiss, "Credibility and the War on Terror," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 4 (winter 2007-2008), pp. 607-633.

<sup>108</sup> *National Security Strategy* (2002), p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> On the effectiveness of terrorism see for example, Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism;" Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics;" Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism;" Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*; Lake, "Rational Extremism." For a debate about whether terrorism is an effective tactic, see Abrams, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work;" Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want;" and Chenoweth, Miller, McClellan, Frisch, Staniland, and Abrahms, "Correspondence: What Makes Terrorists Tick?"

against terrorism can only hope for partial, not absolute, success and will only serve as a complement to, rather than as a cornerstone of, national strategy. Nevertheless, despite its more limited role, deterrence is an integral part of a comprehensive counterterrorism approach.

To elaborate this point, I presented four strategies that states can use to deter terrorist networks. First, I discussed direct response strategies that threaten retaliation against members of terrorist networks themselves. While suicide bombers may not fear earthly punishment, most members of a terrorist network will act to evade death, imprisonment, and other forms of retaliation. Second, a discussion of indirect response strategies suggested the possibility of threatening to retaliate against other targets, such as communities, families, or holy sites, which terrorists may hold dear. While the costs of these strategies appear to outweigh the benefits at present, recognizing this analytic category of strategies may lead to breakthroughs that could improve deterrence against terrorism in the future. Next, an analysis of direct denial strategies revealed that homeland security efforts may be improved if they are considered from the perspective of deterrence, rather than defense. The ultimate objective of homeland security should not be to thwart terrorist attacks, but to convince terrorists not to attack in the first place. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I presented indirect, or strategic denial policies. Identifying and denying terrorist organizations' political and strategic objectives, even in the face of successful terror attacks, should help to disincentivize terrorist activity. Indeed, the long war against terrorism may only be won if non-state groups come to believe that terrorism is an ineffective means of achieving their political goals.

This paper is more of a beginning than an end. Our approach to deterring terrorism will undoubtedly become more sophisticated over time. Indeed, in the short term, there are a number of next steps that could contribute to an improved U.S. ability to deter terrorist networks. First, the United States needs to continue to refine its ability to conduct strategic communications.<sup>110</sup> Many of the policies identified above relied heavily on the U.S. ability to communicate a deterrent message to terrorist networks. For example, effective direct denial policies require not only that the United States develop the ability to thwart terrorist attacks, but also that it clearly communicate that capability to terrorists. Terrorists are unlikely to be deterred by an impressive homeland security capability, if they do not know it exists. The ability to communicate threats to terrorist networks is also an important component of other response and denial policies. To pursue a strategic denial strategy, for example, the United States must effectively convey the message that terrorism will fail. Washington must communicate that it will thwart terrorist attacks and that the United States will not concede to terrorist demands even in the face of successful attacks. There are, however, great difficulties with communicating to terrorist networks, including penetrating non-Western cultures, simultaneously appealing to multiple audiences, and competing in a media-rich environment. A coordinated interagency approach to strategic communications is necessary to improve Washington's ability to broadcast its threats to terrorist organizations and deter terrorist activity.

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<sup>110</sup> On strategic communications, see, for example, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, available at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf). For a skeptical view, see David Edelstein and Ronald Krebs, "Washington's Troubling Obsession with Public Diplomacy," *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 89-104.

In addition, the U.S. ability to deter terrorism could be improved by a more sophisticated understanding of our terrorist adversaries. The ideal-type deterrence strategies outlined above can be tailored to deter different types of terrorist groups and activities. Predictably deterring terrorist networks, however, requires a better understanding of them. In order to influence an adversary's cost/benefit calculation, we must adequately comprehend how that adversary weighs the cost and benefits of various outcomes. While our understanding of terrorism has greatly improved since 9/11, there is more we need to know. What do terrorists value that we can hold at risk? What are terrorists' tactical and strategic goals, and what probability of failure must they face in order to call off a particular terrorist attack, or to abandon terrorism as a tactic altogether?

Obtaining such detailed information on terrorists and their networks will require public and private efforts. In the public realm, the U.S. government should design interrogation policies to extract this category of information from detained terrorists. At present, interrogations are often conducted with the primary goal of obtaining actionable intelligence relating to ongoing terrorist operations. This continues to be an important function, but captured terrorists also contain a treasure trove of information on the hopes and fears of terrorists. Such information can be extracted and readily exploited in an effective deterrence policy.

Outside of government, the academic community can also contribute to deterrence against terrorism by helping government officials to better understand our terrorist adversaries. Scholars possess detailed knowledge of the history, ideology, psychology, and politics of specific terrorist organizations. Making this information easily accessible to government officials responsible for developing counterterrorism

policy could greatly contribute to ongoing U.S. government efforts. Just as in the formation of nuclear deterrence policy over a half century ago, academic research has an important role to play in helping the United States government incorporate deterrence into its fight against international terrorism.

**Table 1. Changed Deterrence Environment**

<b>Cold War Deterrence</b>	<b>Post-9/11 Deterrence</b>
Single opponent	Multiple Opponents
State opponent	State and non-state opponents
Well-understood opponent	Poorly understood opponents
Targets to hold at risk were easily identifiable	Targets to hold at risk are difficult to identify
Must make threatened action credible	Must credibly threaten something you are not already doing
Deterrence policy relied on retaliation	Deterrence policy will require new forms of retaliation and denial
Kinetic	Kinetic and non-kinetic
Reliable channels of communication	Unreliable channels of communication
Absolute deterrence	Partial deterrence
<i>Deterrence is the cornerstone of national strategy</i>	<i>Deterrence is a component of national strategy</i>

**Table 2. Roles in a Terrorist Network**

<b>Terrorist Requirements</b>	<b>Corresponding Actors</b>	<b>Resulting Actions to be Deterred (illustrative)</b>
<i>Leadership</i>	Leaders	Direction to attack
<i>Safe havens</i>	State sponsors, sympathetic citizens	Provision of safe haven
<i>Finance</i>	Donors, Financiers	Donations, assistance
<i>Communications</i>	Logisticians, Webmasters	Logistical support
<i>Movement</i>	Forgers, illicit traders	Forging credentials, illicit trade
<i>Weapons</i>	Arms dealers, rogue scientists, state sponsors and abettors	Provision of weapons, expertise
<i>Personnel</i>	Recruiters, trainers, susceptible elements of the population	Recruitment, training
<i>Ideology</i>	Radical clerics, sympathetic citizens	Fatwas, incendiary sermons
<i>Intelligence</i>	Operatives, sympathetic citizens	Active and passive HUMINT

Note: Associated with each of the terrorist requirements are actors in different organizational roles with distinct goals and preferences.



**Table 3. A Deterrence Toolkit**

	<b>Impose costs</b>	<b>Deny Benefits</b>
<b>Direct approach</b>	<p><b><u>Focused Response:</u></b> Threaten to respond against violent extremists.</p> <p>e.g., threaten to imprison radical clerics who incite violence</p>	<p><b><u>Denial- tactical level:</u></b> Threaten to deny tactical success.</p> <p>e.g., visibly strengthen homeland security</p>
<b>Indirect approach</b>	<p><b><u>Indirect response:</u></b> Threaten to respond against assets valued by violent extremists.</p> <p>e.g., threaten to impose costs (travel restrictions, taxes, etc) on terrorists' families</p>	<p><b><u>Denial- strategic level:</u></b> Threaten to deny strategic success.</p> <p>e.g., communicate that demands regarding troops in the Middle East will not be met, even in the face of terrorist attacks</p>