NAUKI O BEZPIECZEŃSTWIE / SECURITY STUDIES

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DETERRENCE AS A COMPONENT OF RESPONSE TO HYBRID THREATS (THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AS A FOCAL POINT)

Introduction

Throughout history, states have sought to test others or to pursue their objectives, even in the most dangerous of contexts, for example, the threat of mutually assured destruction (MAD) did not deter the Soviet Union from seeking to deploy ballistic missiles in Cuba or the US from deploying missiles in Turkey[1]. Thus, once a hybrid threat has been identified, the next question is how to deter and respond to it. The problem of deterring hybrid warfare actors – or "hybrid deterrence" – can be seen as a part of the broader challenge of deterrence in the 21st century. Nothing could be more dangerous than just re-applying old recipes to new challenges. As the threat evolves, so must the answer to deter those who threaten[2].

Different aspects of deterrence have been intensively studied. The origin of the concept of deterrence can be traced back in antiquity. The term goes back to the Latin "dēterrere", meaning to "frighten from or away", and is defined as "to discourage and turn aside or restrain by fear"[3]. The Roman adage "if you want peace, prepare for war" is found in the work (De re militari) of Vegetius, Roman military expert (late 4th century). But the principle it conveys can also be found in Plato's "Laws". In modern times, deterrence theory is predominantly referred as a product of the Cold War in the Western strategic thinking. The concept has

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[1] *Can hybrid attacks be deterred? And if so, how do we do it?*, MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project March 2018.
[2] T. Prior, *Resilience: The 'Fifth Wave' in the Evolution of Deterrence in Oliver Thränert*, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich 2018, https://bit.ly/2UtiVW4.
[3] A. Bendiek, T. Metzger, *Deterrence theory in the cyber-century. Lessons from a state-of-the-art literature review*, Working Paper RD EU/Europe, 2015/ 02, SWP Berlin, May 2015, p. 4.

had to adjust to new threats and realities while building on past foundational principles[4]. A brief period in the ending of the Cold War saw a serious effort to reduce the reliance on deterrence, particularly nuclear deterrence, in international politics, but it was soon replaced by serious movement in the opposite direction. Yet efforts to reduce the need for and use of deterrence continue[5]. Raghda Elbahy aims to address the limitations of classical deterrence theory in dealing with violent non-state actors[6]. Patrick M. Morgan elaborates on the concept and theory of deterrence[7]. Tim Sweijs and Samo Zilincik examine the rise of cross domain deterrence (CDD) in the context of deterrence theory as a concept that has been developing over the past few years but predominantly in a military context and it argues that CDD is applicable also to hybrid domains. The authors adduce insights concerning the use and utility of CDD against hybrid threats and identify the prerequisites for deterrence to play a role in an overall strategic posture to deal with cross domain hybrid activities[8]. Vytautas Keršanskas outlines key elements to guide the states of the Euro-Atlantic community in developing a deterrence strategy against hybrid threats[9]. Claudia Major and Christian Mölling try to associate the new conditions with old deterrence[10]. David Takacs introduces the basic concepts of deterrence and discusses the differences between the deterrent capabilities of Ukraine and the Baltic States[11]. Matus Halas endeavors to explain why deterrence does not work in the Baltics[12]. Literature review shows that, the issues with regard to the deterrence strategy of the South Caucasus countries have not been studied.

The objective of this paper is to highlight that, hybrid attacks can be deterred, through increasing resilience and exposing perpetrator's vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, deterrence is a component of response to hybrid threats, not a response itself[13]. The research methods primarily used in the paper are comparative analysis and synthesis.

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[4] A. Filippidou, *Deterrence: Concepts and approaches for current and emerging threats, Deterrence. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications*, Springer, Cham 2020, pp. 1–18.

[5] P.M. Morgan, *The Concept of Deterrence and Deterrence Theory*, July 2017, https://bit.ly/2UgG0fZ.

[6] R. Elbahy, *Deterring violent non-state actors: Dilemmas and implications*, "Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences" 2019, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 43–54.

[7] P.M. Morgan, *The Concept of Deterrence…*.

[8] T. Sweijs, S. Zilincik, *Cross Domain Deterrence and Hybrid Conflict*, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, December 2019, https://bit.ly/33wJfDe.

[9] V. Keršanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a more strategic approach to countering hybrid threats*, The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, March 2020, https://bit.ly/2RCLgbG.

[10] C. Major, C. Mölling, *Rethinking Deterrence: Adapting an Old Concept to New Challenges*, June 30, 2016, https://bit.ly/2HbU46o.

[11] D. Takacs, *Ukraine's deterrence failure: Lessons for the Baltic States*, "Journal on Baltic Security" 2017, no 3(1), pp. 1–10.

[12] M. Halas, *Proving a negative: why deterrence does not work in the Baltics*, 11 Jul 2019, https://bit.ly/2FwqhoF.

[13] *Can hybrid attacks be deterred?…*.

The evolution of deterrence concept

The emergence of new strategic challenges necessitates the evolution and adaptation of traditional deterrent concepts[14]. It is difficult to guess whether aggressors who employ hybrid warfare can be deterred, and if so how – including to what extent existing deterrence theory and practice may apply[15]. Therefore, it would be relevant to examine the theories of deterrence and the circumstances that necessitated the evolution of those theories. There have been different waves of deterrence theory. Developments in deterrence theory since the turn of the century may therefore be applied to deterring hybrid aggressors[16]. The emergence of deterrence in military theory dates back to the 1920s/30s when the first flight bombers were considered unstoppable by defensive measures. Then, strategists thought that large-scale attacks on one's cities could only be prevented, if the other side feared counter-attacks of similar or greater magnitude. Deterrence theory gained prominence and developed to its present state during the Cold War nuclear stand-off between the USA and the Soviet Union[17]. Knopf highlights four waves in deterrence theory[18]. The first wave came in the direct wake of the invention of the atomic bomb in the mid-1940s, with scholars considering its effects on international stability[19]. The first nuclear bombs demonstrated a similar offensive advantage, and Bernard Brodie, in 1946 after having witnessed their destructiveness, was among the first to observe that "from now (on the military establishment's) chief purpose must be to avert wars"[20]. The second wave emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. It applied tools like game theory to develop much of what became conventional wisdom about nuclear strategy (at least in the West)[21]. Starting in the 1960s but really taking off in the 1970s, the third wave used statistical and case-study methods to empirically test deterrence theory, mainly against cases of conventional deterrence. With the advent of nuclear weapons, the term deterrence has been largely applied to the basic strategy of the nuclear powers and of the major alliance systems. The premise of the strategy is that each nuclear power maintains a high level of instant and overwhelming destructive capability against any aggression, i.e. the ability, visible and credible to a would-be attacker, to inflict unacceptable damage upon the attacker with forces that survive a surprise attack. Knopf suggests that, the fourth wave finds its origin in the events of 9/11 and focuses on the problem of asymmetric threats and great powers dealings with rogue or weak states and

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[14] T. Sweijs, S. Zilincik, *Cross Domain Deterrence...*, p. 7.
[15] *Hybrid Warfare: Understanding Deterrence*, MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project, March 2019, https://bit.ly/3hGB4t9.
[16] Ibidem, p. 38.
[17] A. Bendiek, T. Metzger, *Deterrence theory...*.
[18] E. Wilkinson, *Resilience and Deterrence: Exploring Correspondence Between the Concepts*, in: *Deterrence. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications*, eds. A. Filippidou, Springer, Cham 2020, pp. 19–33.
[19] T. Sweijs, S. Zilincik, *Cross Domain Deterrence...*.
[20] A. Bendiek, T. Metzger, *Deterrence theory...*.
[21] E. Wilkinson, *Resilience and Deterrence...*.

terrorists (including in the context of regional rivalries). Consequently, deterrence moved away from attempts to calculate and measure the number of weapons or a specific capability to deter against a particular threat at a particular time[22]. Fourth wave deterrence theory is characterized by two key elements that are relevant to hybrid warfare. First, a shift away from the relatively symmetrical mutual deterrence of state-actors towards deterring "asymmetric" threats from non-state and pseudo-state actors. Second, the recognition of a broader concept of deterrence that goes beyond military means[23]. In the fourth wave's world of deterrence of non-state actors, this realization might be termed performative deterrence: closely related to Schneier's term "security theatre", it is the notion that displays of capability, even when they are not grounded in real capability, possess deterrent value. The illusion of capability can be more important than the capability itself[24]. However, Tim Prior suggests the "fifth wave" of deterrence theory. The fifth wave of deterrence development, in another words concept of resilience is rising at a point when established international security practices are fumbling to respond effectively to security challenges. Resilience can increase the ability of security institutions to cope with and respond to complex threats in a deliberative manner. Security policy, decision-making processes must match the complex threat environment they seek to govern by being flexible, proactive, and distributed[25]. We apparently observe that, there is a chasm between the first three (dealing primarily with nuclear deterrence) and last two (from terrorists to guerrillas and hackers to propagandists) theories with regard to actors. By now, it is widely acknowledged that traditional concepts of nuclear and conventional deterrence that were developed and implemented during the second half of the twentieth century, no longer suffice in today's strategic environment. As Henry Kissinger, a prominent strategist stated: "The end of the Cold War made the doctrine of mutual Soviet-American deterrence obsolete"[26]. It should be noted that, deterrence is fundamentally and absolutely about actors, not strategies. Actors have different priorities, strategic aims and "assets" they care about. Understanding these assets and strategic aims – and thus achieving a more complete understanding of deterrence – requires focusing more directly on actors[27]. Deterrence is as much about interests – if not more so – than capabilities. We can strive to be bigger, better, cleverer, quicker and more agile than our adversaries. But strength does not always deter: as we mentioned above, there are many examples of deterrence failing even when a target state has been more powerful, more capable or more sophisticated. If an aggressor's commitment to achieving its objectives or defending its interests is greater than ours, deterrence is likely to fail despite our best efforts. Equally,

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[22] Ibidem.

[23] *Hybrid Warfare: Understanding Deterrence*, p. 38.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] T. Prior, *Resilience: The 'Fifth Wave'…*.

[26] T. Sweijs, S. Zilincik, *Cross Domain Deterrence…*, p. 7.

[27] *Hybrid Warfare: Understanding Deterrence…*.

despite the costs and risks that hybrid attacks can entail for perpetrators, some are likely to be willing to bear those costs if their equities or objectives are important enough to them[28].

Characteristics of deterrence strategy

Deterrence is a military strategy under which one power uses the threat of reprisal effectively to preclude an attack from an adversary power[29]. According to Ducaru, deterrence means "trying to prevent a conflict by convincing a potential adversary that the consequences of its actions, including retaliation, economic sanctions, political isolation, legal challenges or even military defeat, will outweigh the potential gains"[30]. In addition, David Takacs states "it will incur a higher loss or lower gain that would follow from avoiding an attack"[31]. Deterrence assumes the existence of capabilities, credibility and communication if it is to achieve anything. The three elements of deterrence are virtually inseparable. Deterrence may succeed, if the entire combination of three elements is in place. It is impossible to isolate one element from the others since, for example, credibility means "effectively communicating one's commitment" as well[32]. In other words, deterrence refers to the practice, the process or the situation in which one state relies on the prospect of harm to persuade an opponent not to engage in certain specified behavior[33]. This cost-benefit calculation considers four basic variables: 1) assessment of the benefit that the challenger would get if it succeeds; 2) possible costs to the challenger caused by response from the deterring state; 3) probability that the deterring state will respond with force and 4) possibility for the challenger to defeat the response[34]. As Matus Halas stated: *If the challenger has an intention to attack, but a threat by the deterrer is simultaneously backed by sufficient capabilities, credibility and clear communication, then the challenger would change the mind and abolish his/her plans for an attack*[35]. Unlike traditional military deterrence, where the adversaries' militaries stay away from each other, the deterrence against hybrid threats is supposed to stretch across the cyber, economic and social domains, takes place in precisely those areas in which the adversaries are most closely entangled. The assumption is that, once an attacker is exposed, it will stop attacking. Experiences show that, most of the "softer" tools do not stop a determined aggressor. However, according to Matus Halas, a smaller, non-military challenge can somehow be deterred by an equally small non-military threat[36].

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[28] *Can hybrid attacks be deterred?...*.
[29] E. Wilkinson, *Resilience and Deterrence...*.
[30] D. Takacs, *Ukraine's deterrence failure...*.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] M. Halas, *Proving a negative...*.
[33] T. Sweijs, S. Zilincik, *Cross Domain Deterrence...*, p. 7.
[34] V. Keršanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a more strategic...*, p. 9.
[35] M. Halas, *Proving a negative...*.
[36] M. Rühle, *In Defense of Deterrence*, April 30, 2020, https://bit.ly/3hHEbkw.

Hybrid warfare can be forestalled even though it is a formidable task. However, it is much easier to nip any threat in the bud. A classic example is the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. When it became clear that Washington was ready to defend its core security interests, the Soviet Union withdrew the missiles it had started to deploy in Cuba. Another example is the Vietnam War. Although the United States was militarily far superior, it ultimately had to withdraw because the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong were willing to make much greater sacrifices to achieve their goals than the US was willing to make in support of South Vietnam[37]. History has shown that deterrence can fail. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the Argentinean attack on the Falkland Islands in 1982 are examples. In both cases, a militarily weaker actor attacked a stronger opponent[38].

The logic of deterrence is to reduce the probability of an enemy attack. However, for deterrence to be effective it has got to be backed up by both political resolve and military capabilities[39]. A hybrid campaign uses multiple tools, vectors and activities, in coordination and with hostile intent, to achieve its objective. Key behaviours many states may need to deter include: 1) broad military aggression or use of force; 2) threats to critical national infrastructure; 3) threats to individuals, citizens or people living in a state's territory (physical risk, assassination, harassment, kidnap etc.); 4) interference in the state's core democratic or governmental functions; 5) wider violations of the rules-based international system and its norms. Besides these generally agreed hostile actions, each deterring actor should identify its own thresholds based on its national security threat assessment and systemic vulnerabilities[40].

According to Vytautas Keršanskas, strategies to deter hybrid activity should aim at fully dissuading hostile actors from high-level hybrid activities, while simultaneously aiming to mitigate low-level hostile activities by denying their negative effect[41].

Deterrence strategies come in two broad categories: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. Deterrence by denial aims to undermine the ability of the adversary to achieve their objective in the first instance. This type of deterrence coincides with the idea initiated by Kroenig and Pavel that "deterrence is a psychological relationship". What matters in this approach is the psychology of the adversary: whether or not they believe that certain actions will hold certain consequences[42]. Deterrence by punishment aims to persuade the adversary the costs of achieving their objective will be prohibitive by threatening retaliation to aggressive action[43]. An essential element in this

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[37] M. Rühle, *Deterrence: What It Can (and Cannot) Do.*, 20 April 2015, https://bit.ly/33E893Z.
[38] C. Major, C. Mölling, *Rethinking Deterrence…*.
[39] D. Takacs, *Ukraine's deterrence failure…*.
[40] V. Keršanskas, *Deterrence: Proposing a more strategic…*, p. 11.
[41] Ibidem, p. 13.
[42] *Hybrid Warfare: Understanding Deterrence…*.
[43] *Countering Hybrid Warfare*, eds. S. Monaghan, MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project, March 2019, p. 35, https://bit.ly/3btI0XN.

type of deterrence is a degree of uncertainty on the part of a would-be aggressor as to whether the target power, although attacked and badly damaged, will nonetheless retaliate even at the risk of suffering further, crippling damage in a second attack[44]. Both categories are applicable in the South Caucasus. The second category is suitable in case the nations in the region pose a threat to each other. However, the most serious threats might be posed by the external actors, which have excelled themselves in hybrid tactics. This fact underscores the importance of deterrence by denial. There are two examples where the deterrence by punishment was applied in the South Caucasus. In 2008, Georgia's attempt to restore its territorial integrity by punishing the separatist regimes failed miserably with Russia's intervention. However, in April 2016, in July and September 2020, Azerbaijan successfully applied a strategy of deterrence by punishment against Armenia in which even covert supporters of Erevan were disappointed.

In addition to deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment, at least four additional different types of deterrence can be distinguished; they are neither mutually exclusive nor mutually exhaustive[45]:

General deterrence is said to be in effect when the balance of power is stable and no actor is considering mounting an attack on another. General deterrence can be in effect at the global level or at a regional level. General deterrence is the ongoing, persistent effort to prevent unwanted actions over the long term and in non-crisis situations[46]. It is undeniable fact that, Armenia has territorial claims in Georgia and the deterrence strategy of Tbilisi with the support of the West against Armenia is an example of general deterrence. Azerbaijan's deterrence strategy against external actors, which might ignite provocations of ethnic minorities and religious groups is another example of general deterrence.

Immediate deterrence is required when an actor starts to contemplate or prepare for military action, thereby unleashing a crisis or emergency and causing general deterrence to break down. Immediate deterrence represents more short-term, urgent attempts to prevent a specific, imminent attack[47]. Georgia's deterrence strategy against Russia is an example of immediate deterrence, which obviously failed in 2008.

Direct deterrence, also known as *central deterrence*, involves a deterrer threatening a potential aggressor with retaliation to prevent the aggressor from using military force against the deterrer's most vital interests, such as its homeland. Because direct deterrence involves the defense of vital interests, it is generally believed to involve a credible threat. An example of direct deterrence would be the Estonian armed forces trying to deter Russia from attacking Estonia. Georgia's deterrence strategy against separatist regimes

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[44] E. Wilkinson, *Resilience and Deterrence…*.

[45] K. Mallory, *New Challenges in Cross-Domain Deterrence*, "Perspective", RAND Corporation, 2018, https://bit.ly/3mtixnL.

[46] M.J. Mazarr, *Understanding deterrence*, "Perspective", RAND Corporation, 2018, https://bit.ly/2Haxueq.

[47] Ibidem.

and Azerbaijan's detergence strategy against Armenia − an overt adversary are examples of direct deterrence.

Extended deterrence involves a deterrer threatening retaliation against a potential aggressor in an attempt to prevent the potential aggressor from pursuing a certain course of action against an ally (or protege). Because extended deterrence involves defending non-core interests of another state, the probability that the deterrer will actually carry out the retaliation threatened is regarded as lower than in the case of direct deterrence, in which a deterrer is defending its own vital interests. Extended deterrence would be foreign armed forces trying to prevent an attack on Estonia, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) multinational battalions, which were deployed in each of the Baltic States and Poland in early 2017. Turkey's decision to send troops to Azerbaijan for military exercises right after the July 2020 escalation is an example of extended deterrence against Armenia's supporters. US' support to Georgia and Russia's decision of deploying units in Armenia are another examples of this deterrence.

Small nations in the South Caucasus are not capable of punishing the great powers with burning ambitions to be present in the region. The only deterrence against to these threats is to involve international organizations or other super powers with contrary ambitions. The Western support to Georgia during 2008 crisis with Russia was deterrence, which dissuaded Russia from further occupation. Turkey's unanimous support to Azerbaijan after July 2020 escalation was the best deterrence against Armenia's external supporters. Because it is clear-cut that, in that escalation Armenia was manipulated by non-regional actors. David Takacs claims that, Ukraine's lack of collective defense treaties and no resilience capabilities on the one hand and the NATO membership of the Baltic States on the other are the seemingly obvious reasons why Ukraine has not been able to deter Moscow while the Baltic States have been successful so far[48].

A state that is the subject of an attack by another state has a good reason to defend itself. If the state is the subject of an attack that qualifies as an act of war, then it has the right to use force in order to defend itself. The approaches to deterring hybrid threats are not mutually exclusive. And when applied to a particular context, several might be employed at the same time providing that, they did not undermine or contradict each other[49]. At the time of Russian involvement in Crimea crisis, Ukraine's military deterrence capabilities were solely dependent on its national army due to the lack of collective defence agreements and effective resilience capabilities. An agreement, which was supposed to guarantee Ukraine's territorial integrity was the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 was later contravened by Russia[50]. The bottom line is that, Ukraine's deterrence in order to thwart Russian offensive failed in that crisis. Neither deterrence by denial, nor deterrence by punishment worked in this case, which proved the loopholes in the overall resilience of Ukraine against hybrid threats.

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[48] D. Takacs, *Ukraine's deterrence failure…*.
[49] *Can hybrid attacks be deterred?…*.
[50] D. Takacs, *Ukraine's deterrence failure…*.

The South Caucasus countries are not exception. The consequences would be as bad as it was in Ukraine. Considering the capacity of the nations in the South Caucasus, it might be deduced that deterrence by denial fits well with the countries in the region (regarding the threats emanating from non-regional actors). However, the balance of resources invested into deterrence measures will be a matter for each nation. As a general rule, spending across different sectors (for example, whether on public education, infrastructure resilience or high-end military capability) will not only bolster deterrence by denial – such as through societal resilience – but also contribute positively to overall deterrence[51].

Conclusion

The South Caucasus is a region, which lacks unity among its nations. The region is plagued with so-called "frozen conflicts" – three serious threats, which undermine the security in the region and beyond. While Azerbaijan's 20 percent had been occupied by Armenia until the war broke out in late September, 2020, Georgia has still been struggling to restore its territorial integrity for decades. The dearth of trust between the countries makes the whole region vulnerable to external meddling. This fact necessitates developing long-term deterrence strategy for every country against the regional and non-regional threats. Armenia and separatist regimes in Georgia pose a number of problems to the region, including the obstruction of the integration into the Western community. Therefore, Azerbaijan and Georgia need to focus on two main categories of deterrence – deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. The first version is applicable to Armenia and separatist regimes in Georgia, while the second category will make the external actors refrain from their malign actions. Therefore, Azerbaijan and Georgia should develop the strategies by both punishment and denial against the regional threats and potential dangers posed by non-regional actors. Apart from it, the cooperation with the international organizations, which are interested in creating regional unity, as NATO should be enhanced. This strategy will definitely strengthen the overall deterrence of the regional countries against external meddling.

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[51] *Countering Hybrid Warfare*, eds. S. Monaghan, p. 43.

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SUMMARY

Deterrence has become more noticable among the issues related with hybrid threats for the last decade. The genesis of deterrence has been studied in the paper. The characteristic features of deterrence strategy have been presented. The categories of deterrence have been examined based on the examples from diferent regions. The evolution process of deterrence concept has been delineated. The South Caucasus has been chosen as a focal point and its comparison with other regions has been conducted. The vulnerabilities of the countries in the region have been presented. The recommendations have been made for developing robust deterrence strategy against external actors and their linchpin in the region.

KEY WORDS: hybrid threats, strategy of deterrence, South Caucasus