

B-2 Spirit assigned to 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing takes off from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, July 19, 2023, as part of bomber Agile Combat Employment exercise (U.S. Air Force/Patrick Sullivan)



# New Strategic Deterrence Frameworks for Modern-Day Challenges

By Kayse Jansen

Once again, the United States must contend with the prospect of conflict with a strategic adversary. In fact, the Nation must consider the potential for conflict with multiple strategic competitors that are all increas-

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ingly reliant on nuclear weapons to achieve their national objectives. Russia's enduring reliance on its nuclear arsenal and China's dramatic nuclear expansion mean that, for the first time in its history, the United States will soon face two nuclear peers. North Korea's accelerating nuclear capability further complicates an already challenging security environment. Even more alarming: All

three potential adversaries are expanding the breadth and depth of their relationships and areas of cooperation.

Today's threat landscape stands in stark contrast to the profile of threats facing the United States and its allies just 10 years ago and is the catalyst driving bipartisan support for the Nation's wholesale nuclear recapitalization. Over the next 20 years or so, the Department of Defense

(DOD) and the Department of Energy will replace every U.S. nuclear weapons system (except for the B-52, which is getting renovated); modernize the associated nuclear command, control, and communications architecture; and revitalize weapons production infrastructure. These efforts will ensure credible and effective forces for decades to come. Yet an often overlooked but equally important aspect of the enterprise requires the same level of focus and energy—intellectual capital.

Decades of fighting militarily inferior adversaries with little to no concern of strategic escalation have atrophied the intellectual frameworks required to deter and, if necessary, fight today's potential adversaries. Paths to nuclear use, strategies that simultaneously account for prevailing conventionally while deterring strategic attacks, and concepts to restore deterrence should an adversary choose strategic escalation are among the most important considerations the United States must contend with in an era of intensifying Great Power competition. So along with modernizing the hardware and software of the U.S. nuclear enterprise, we are called to revitalize our cognitive approaches. This requires the national security community to understand the character of today's security environment, revisit and refresh enduring deterrence truths, and explore new deterrence frameworks necessary for modern-day challenges.

## A New and Complex Security Environment

“Deterring strategic attacks against the United States, Allies, and partners”<sup>1</sup> is one of the top DOD priorities. Adjectives preceding the word *deterrence* often evoke confusion, debate, and misinterpretation, so for the purposes of this article, *strategic deterrence* simply refers to deterring strategic attacks. Any use of nuclear weapons against the United States, its allies, or partners would be considered a “strategic attack,” but not all potential strategic attacks involve the use of nuclear weapons. In fact, U.S. policy is intentionally vague in defining what constitutes a strategic attack. In large

part, this is due to a necessary level of humility, realizing we might not know how to characterize a nonnuclear strategic attack until one occurs. Given the rapid advancements in technology and a dramatic increase in reliance on those technologies, there is a growing range of scenarios that could be strategic in nature but are not well understood today. Regardless of our ability to know these scenarios, the United States still seeks to deter their emergence.

Today's security environment is one of intense complexity. Such complexity stems not only from the myriad threats facing the United States and its allies and partners but also from the number of potential adversaries capable of carrying out those threats—that is, strategic competitors. Further complicating the issue is the growing cooperation between our strategic competitors centered on a common goal to uphold and replace the liberal rules-based international order or simply minimize or eliminate U.S. influence in their near abroad. In short, we face a congested and compounding security environment.

**Congested.** U.S. relations with its strategic competitors are becoming increasingly strained. Individually, China, Russia, and North Korea are all capable of conducting strategic attacks against the United States or its allies and partners. Iran could also be classified as a strategic actor because of its regional missile capabilities. The “so what?” emerges when we connect the dots—that the potential for crises and armed conflicts is increasing for all strategic competitors. While simultaneously deterring all these actors is difficult, the challenge is more complicated.

**Compounding.** We can no longer consider potential adversaries *purely* as separate and distinct challenges that can be addressed via individually tailored strategies. As China, Russia, North Korea, and even Iran expand cooperation with one another, they are becoming increasingly united, at least in their proximate security objectives. There is building momentum in the global adversarial system that will continue to challenge the liberal rules-based international order. The result is a threat environment in

which the collective actions of multiple strategic competitors maneuvering in coordination is more complex than confronting multiple strategic actors individually. Taken a step further, should simultaneous crises or conflicts develop, they will not be isolated events. At a minimum, U.S. actions and messages aimed at one will be seen and interpreted by others, but even this is insufficient to capture the compounding nature of the security environment. The risk of opportunistic escalation in those crises and conflicts, whether coordinated or otherwise, is growing. Stated differently, the decision calculus of a potential adversary regarding an escalation choice is likely influenced and potentially emboldened by the existence of other like-minded actors revolting against the status quo.

If the challenges of today's security environment are fundamentally more complex than in previous eras, what are the implications for deterrence? Which aspects of deterrence theory and practice still hold, and which require modernization? This article seeks to distinguish between the truths of deterrence theory that remain valid and worthy of review and the applications of that theory that must evolve to meet modern-day challenges. To that end, the article introduces new strategic deterrence frameworks with the goal of advancing efforts to develop holistic, multiactor strategic deterrence concepts fit for today's security environment.

## Deterrence Foundations: Enduring Truths

Contemplating future deterrence strategies requires recalling basic deterrence principles that remain fit for purpose. These include the fundamentals of deterrence theory that have held since the advent of nuclear weapons, the nature of deterrence evolution across the spectrum of conflict that points to the relationship between deterrence and compellence, and the interplay between deterrence and other national security strategies such as competition and warfighting that can either be mutually supportive or in tension. While enduring, some truths have been skewed

or simplified over the decades, so the Nation has not seriously considered them. Thus, the following sections not only reintroduce some of these truths but also emphasize nuances that have been diminished or dismissed during the time of U.S. unipolarity.

**Deterrence Theory Fundamentals.**

*Deterrence* is an intentional act or set of actions aimed to influence adversaries’ decisionmaking, so that adversaries choose restraint over aggression. Influence is directed at four factors of a decision calculus: costs of action, costs of restraint, benefits of action, and benefits of restraint. These costs and benefits are based on a decisionmaker’s perceptions. With this being the case, effective deterrence relies on identifying and accurately evaluating aspects of an actor’s strategic culture and vital interests, which influence its value judgments, risk-taking propensity, and myriad other factors shaping its decisionmaking processes. A common shortcoming of deterrence strategies is the tendency to project one’s own values and ways of thinking onto the target, resulting in ineffective deterrence operations or misclassification of a potential adversary as irrational.

Deterrence strategies too narrowly focused on cost imposition (that is, influencing an adversary’s perceived costs of action) and benefit denial (influencing an adversary’s perceived benefits of action) may also be insufficient in effectively

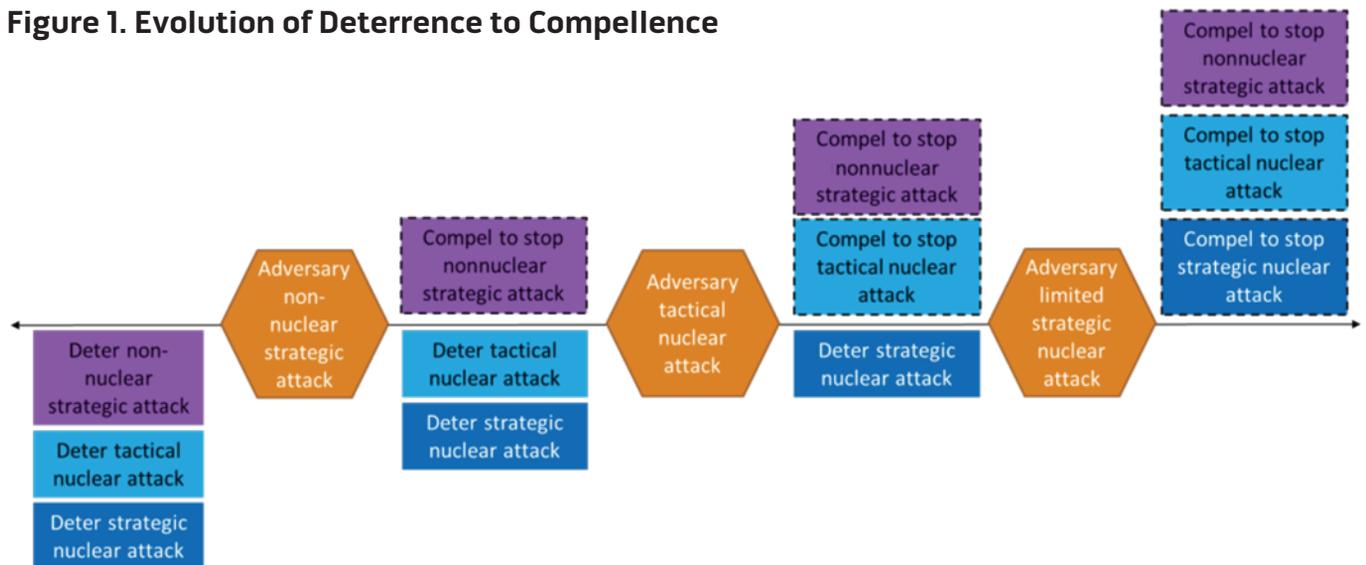
influencing a decision, especially when matters of national security are on the line. In such scenarios, a potential adversary’s perceived costs of inaction (the consequences of doing nothing) are critical drivers of deterrence failure. If a decisionmaker is convinced that the costs of doing nothing are simply unacceptable, then it may very well risk incurring whatever costs an opponent has threatened to impose. Simply put, the certainty of the consequences facing an adversary if it does not act may outweigh the uncertainty of consequences if it does act.

**Deterrence Across the Spectrum of Conflict.** A second basic principle is that multiple deterrence objectives exist simultaneously and evolve in priority and nature according to the level of aggression in play. Simultaneous deterrence objectives include deterring aggression deterring armed conflict, deterring limited tactical nuclear use, deterring nonnuclear strategic attack, and deterring large-scale nuclear use. In peacetime, all these objectives exist, but those focused on higher levels of escalation are not as urgent because they are at a much lower risk of failure. Thus, while deterring strategic attack is always a U.S. objective, the risk of such an attack day to day is near zero, so activities and messaging are primarily aimed at deterring aggression that could lead to a crisis. A corollary to this principle is that deterrence does not fail all at once but in stages.

The nature of deterrence objectives also evolves. Should a deterrence objective fail, one seeks to restore it. If deterrence of armed conflict fails, one engages in operations, activities, and investments aimed at restoring that deterrence or, stated differently, compelling de-escalation and, ultimately, termination of the conflict. Thus, the nature of deterrence objectives, once overcome, evolves into a compulsion objective (see figure 1). This is true even of deterring strategic attacks. Should an adversary conduct a strategic attack, nuclear or otherwise, the United States does not simply respond by escalating to the highest levels of nuclear use but responds in a way that seeks to restore deterrence of strategic attacks. The evolution of deterrence objectives will likely not be so linear—there are no laws of physics requiring a stair stepping (or ladder climbing) escalation path. But more on that later.

Deterrence and compulsion are two sides of the same coin. Both rely on threats and promises to influence an adversary not to take an action or to stop aggressive actions.<sup>2</sup> I call this *deterrence-based influence* (DBI), from here forward used interchangeably with *deterrence*. Whereas deterrence approaches revolve around “if you do not, I will not” (that is, promise-based messaging regarding costs and benefits of restraint) and “if you do, I will” (threat-based messaging regarding

**Figure 1. Evolution of Deterrence to Compulsion**





Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarine USS West Virginia conducts port visit at U.S. Navy Support Facility Diego Garcia during scheduled patrol, Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, October 25, 2022 (U.S. Navy/Jan David De Luna Mercado)

costs and benefits of action), compellence centers on “if you do not stop, I will not stop” (threat-based messaging *and actions* regarding costs and benefits of action) and “if you stop, I will stop” (promise-based messaging *and actions* regarding costs and benefits of restraint). An influencer must be credible not only in its threats but also in its promises.

**Deterrence—Competition—Warfighting.** The final enduring principle is that deterrence, from the U.S. perspective, is not the same as competition or warfighting, or even preparation for warfighting. DBI depends on the adversary’s point of view. Competition and warfighting center on one’s own competencies, capabilities, and capacities. While typically assessed in comparison to a potential adversary’s competencies, capabilities, and capacities, competition and warfighting sufficiency are ultimately determined by one’s own perspectives, national goals, strategy, policy, and ways of warfare. This is why simply preparing for war is not a sufficient deterrence strategy. It considers only one’s own perspective of readiness and, in doing so, addresses

only half of a potential adversary’s decision calculus via threats of cost imposition and benefit denial.

Competition activities and warfare preparation can, and often do, support deterrence by positively influencing an adversary’s perceived costs and benefits of action. However, these activities can also undermine deterrence by negatively influencing an adversary’s perceived costs and benefits of restraint. Competition activities may remove opportunities for collaboration, thereby removing any potential benefits of restraint. Competition activities may also undermine a potential adversary’s vital national interests and its perceived security, thereby exacerbating potential costs of restraint. At the same time, activities geared toward warfare preparation may risk worsening perceived costs of restraint if they are perceived as closing a window of opportunity or are interpreted as offensive in nature rather than defensive.

Competition and warfare preparation, if unconstrained, risk undermining deterrence. Thus, it is critical that security strategies recognize and balance the interplay among deterrence, competition,

and warfighting. As discussed in the next section, this interplay presents a dilemma in the day-to-day DBI period.

## New Strategic Deterrence Frameworks

Modernized strategic deterrence frameworks are necessary to analyze and navigate a new and changing security environment characterized by increasingly aligned strategic competitors armed with a growing range of escalation options. The goal of introducing new frameworks is to equip the national security community with fresh ways to think about strategic deterrence and, ultimately, develop modern DBI concepts and strategies that address today’s complex, congested, and compounding security environment.

**Escalation Dynamics.** Developing effective deterrence strategies requires understanding the nature of escalation dynamics. When considering the potential for conflict with a strategic adversary, escalation dynamics are best characterized by chaos theory, where certain properties of a chaotic network (unfortunately) apply quite well.

First, a chaotic network is one in which the future state of a system is unpredictable. DBI relies on understanding an adversary's perceptions and is therefore already challenged by a high level of uncertainty. The challenge grows when seeking to understand, and then influence, perceptions in a crisis or conflict, when stress is elevated and the reality of not knowing the adversary's strategy or intent comes to fruition.

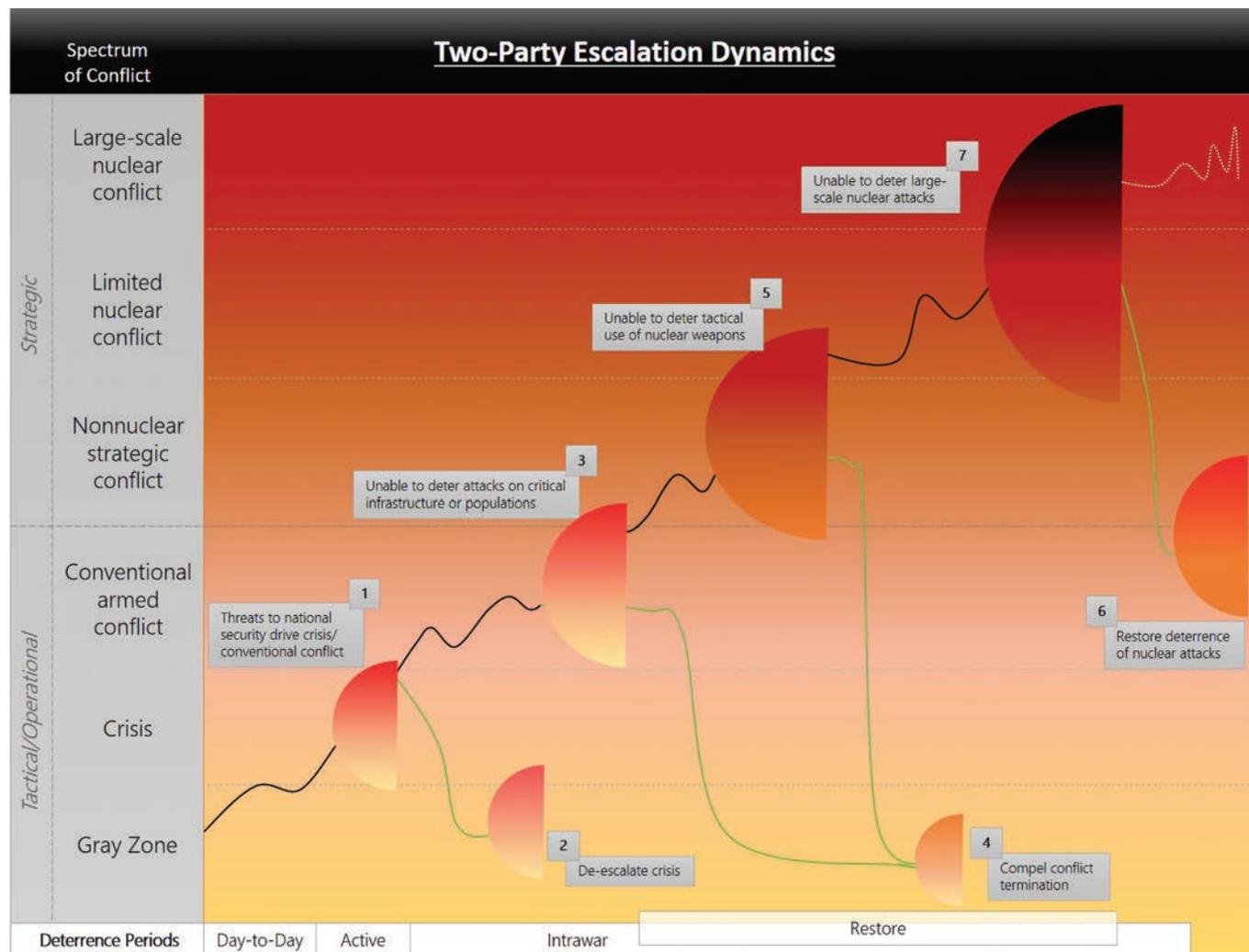
Uncertainty is a defining attribute of potential crisis or conflict with a strategic competitor; it was not a driving factor in the war on terror or other conflicts the Nation faced over the last few decades. Indeed, these battles contained their own complexities and challenges, but none of them risked escalation to a strategic level. Each adversary was constrained by

its limited capacities and capabilities, and all were inferior to the United States and its allies and partners. The result was total domination on the battlefield with no concern of strategic escalation. This is not the case when considering conflict with a strategic adversary, where uncertainty exists across the entire spectrum of conflict and grows with each level of aggression. Uncertainty is depicted as cones in figure 2, distinct inflection points where the adversary can escalate at a time and place of its choosing (that is, points 1, 3, 5, and 7). Points 2, 4, and 6, along with their coordinating green off-ramps, depict U.S. attempts to de-escalate, or compel termination, of varying levels of aggression.

It is important to recall just how significant the concept of uncertainty is in the arena of strategic deterrence.

Full-scale armed conflict between two nuclear-armed adversaries has no historical precedent. How such a conflict progresses, whether the capacity for nuclear use results in uncontrolled escalation or extreme restraint, is hypothetical. Thus, deterrence strategies must be flexible to a wide range of potentialities. Concepts such as "escalation management" or "escalation control" are outdated in this context. Rather, new concepts such as "escalation maneuver" are necessary to create a sense of adaptability to uncontrollable factors. Innovations in nonnuclear capabilities and growing reliance on space and cyber further exacerbate potential uncertainties, namely, the form that non-nuclear strategic attacks will take and the extent of their impact on populations and national decisionmakers.

**Figure 2. Two-Party Escalation Dynamics**





Airman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jackson Ligon, left, and Senior Airman Jonathan Marinaccio, 341<sup>st</sup> Missile Maintenance Squadron technicians, connect reentry system to spacer on intercontinental ballistic missile during simulated electronic launch Minuteman test, September 22, 2020, at launch facility near Great Falls, Montana (U.S. Air Force/Daniel Brosam)

The second attribute of a chaotic network is a sensitivity to initial conditions. In short, slight changes to system inputs can result in dramatically different futures. Applying this characteristic to escalation dynamics reveals that the entire spectrum of conflict is interconnected. Activities conducted today, and activities that occurred in the past, influence the path of escalation in the future or whether escalation occurs at all. As a result, strategists must consider the tradeoffs between taking risks now versus taking risks later. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to take provocative actions early, as the consequences of escalation are more acceptable in crisis than they would be in conflict. This is called *forward connectivity*, but there is also backward connectivity. *Backward connectivity* refers to the impact that future potentialities have on activities conducted today. This is not a new concept. During the Cold War, for instance, it was described as the *nuclear shadow*: the capacity of a nation to escalate to the highest levels of aggression both enables and restrains its behavior in every scenario short of that extreme. As a result, strategic deterrence

is concerned not only with the potential of strategic attack but also the potential of a crisis or conflict in the first place, and even the nature of competition in the gray zone leading to a crisis. Furthermore, deterrence strategies must heed the way conflict is prosecuted, realizing the way in which the actor achieves objectives at the tactical/operational level influences an adversary's decision calculus regarding the need or opportunity to escalate to the strategic level.

The chaotic nature of escalation dynamics with a strategic adversary may lead to extreme nonlinear escalation rather than the stair-stepping (or ladder-climbing) escalation displayed in figures 1 and 2. The potential for extreme jumps in aggression also depends on things such as the adversary's risk-taking propensity; warfighting strategy and the role of its nuclear weapons therein; force composition and posture; and perceived consequences of defeat and prospects for success. It also depends on the adversary's view of U.S. will and resolve. These factors contribute to the potential of nonlinear escalation, as displayed in figure 3. Here, the adversary perceives

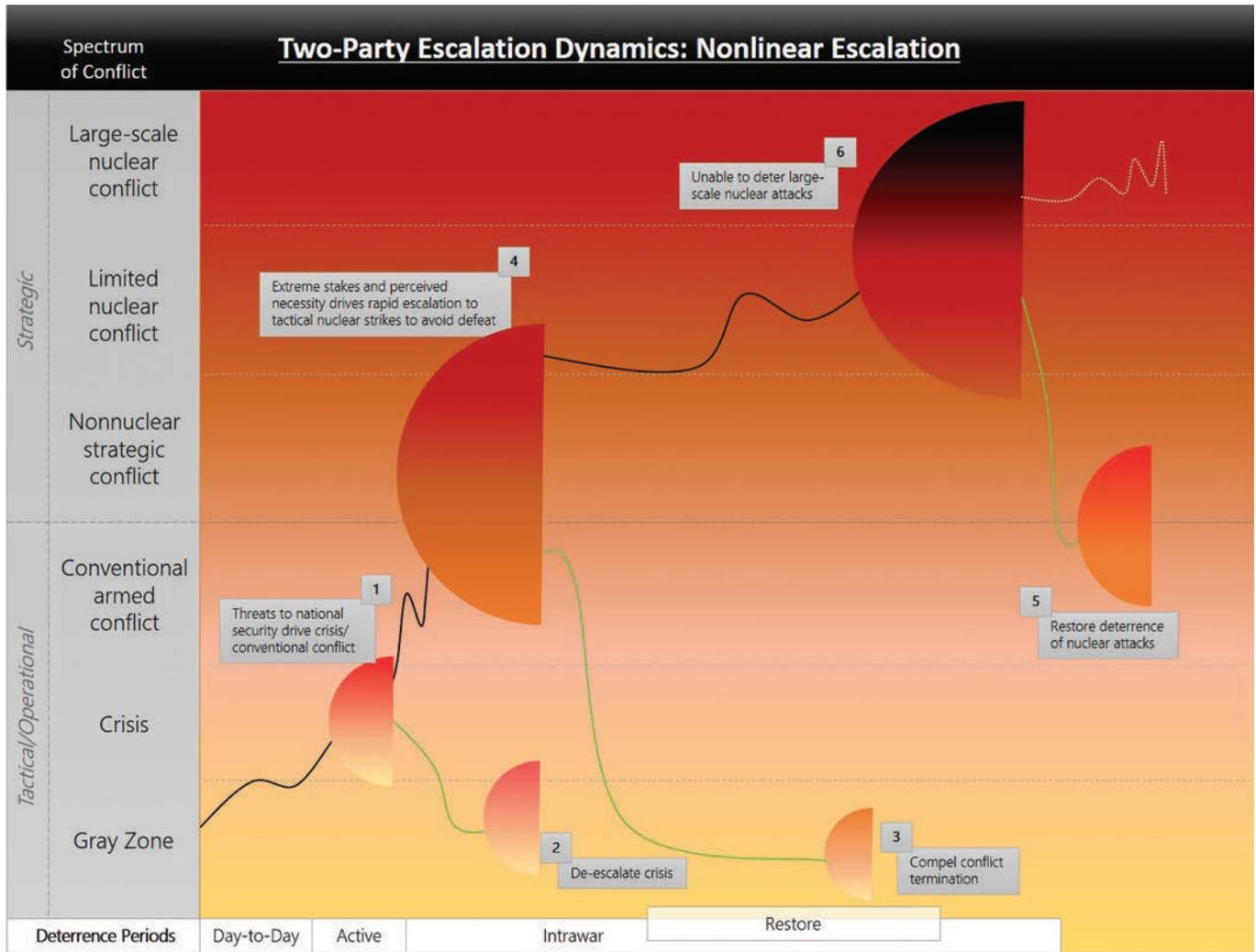
rapid escalation to tactical nuclear use as necessary to establish a warfighting advantage and, otherwise, avoid certain defeat (point 3).

An adversary conducting such extreme escalation is a possibility too often dismissed in our war games, plans, and strategies. When it comes to crisis or conflict with a strategic competitor, traditional warfighting strategies that attempt to overwhelm and defeat at the tactical/operational layer with no regard to the strategic layer are dangerously insufficient. As discussed in the next section, the challenge becomes prevailing in the tactical/operational and strategic layers simultaneously.

**DBI Periods.** Understanding escalation dynamics provides insight into the interplay among varying levels of aggression. As mentioned, key inflection points denote a leader's intentional decision to escalate to a higher level of aggression.<sup>3</sup> These escalation points result in distinct DBI periods: day-to-day, active, intrawar, and restore (see bottom of figures 2 and 3).

Each DBI period prioritizes different objectives and holds its own challenges. As a result, each requires

**Figure 3. Nonlinear Escalation**



unique approaches while accounting for the interconnectivity among them. The principal objective of the day-to-day period is to deter aggression and destabilizing behaviors that may lead to a crisis. The challenge of this period is maintaining and upholding deterrence objectives while competing with potential adversaries. Competition strategies seek to advance one’s own position relative to another’s. Such advantages may include diplomatic relationships and agreements, geographical accesses and territorial claims, military capabilities and capacities, global economic influence, and scientific and technological advancements. In Great Power competition, the ultimate issue at stake is the international order. All these competition objectives run the risk of elevating a competitor’s cost of

restraint. Thus, day-to-day strategies must manage the tension between competition and deterrence.

The priority objective in the active period is deterring escalation of an existing crisis into full-scale armed conflict. When in a crisis with a strategic competitor, the challenge becomes balancing the need to be decisive with the risk of triggering unnecessary or unintended escalation. Uncertainty of the adversary’s intent can risk, on the one hand, indecision or insufficient responses to effectively demonstrate stake and will, resulting in the adversary escalating from a perceived position of strength or advantage (for example, perceived opportunity for a *fait accompli*). On the other hand, uncertainty of adversary intent can risk overly aggressive actions that drive the adversary to escalate into an

unnecessary conflict when, perhaps, the competitor had limited aims to restore or protect national interests that were achievable short of all-out conflict.

Another important consideration for adversary intent is deciphering whether a decision to prosecute conflict has or has not been made. If the adversary has not made the decision, then the primary objective remains deterring armed conflict. If the adversary has made the decision, but has not yet fully carried it out, then the primary objective becomes compellence, or convincing the adversary to change its mind regarding escalation. Recognizing which is called for—deterrence or compellence—is critical to successful influence. Where deterrence approaches are typically more passive, compellence approaches are active. Where deterrence

approaches are largely messaging-based, compellence approaches execute previously messaged threats.

In the intrawar period, the primary DBI objective is deterring strategic attack. Depending on the adversary, this could be nuclear, nonnuclear, or both. The intrawar challenge, therefore, is prevailing at both the tactical/operational and strategic levels of war. The tactical/operational level focuses on battlefield advantages on land, on or under the sea, in the air, in space, and in cyberspace. Regardless of domain, the tactical/operational layer is about correlation of forces and capability integration to prevail militarily against the adversary. In doing so, the objective is to compel adversary leadership to de-escalate, but it takes a conventional approach in doing so (that is, strategic influence first requires tactical/operational victory).

The strategic layer focuses on influencing adversary leadership regardless of force correlation. It may include the same military domains, but their application is designed to directly influence the adversary's key decisionmaker(s). In addition, diplomatic, informational, economic, and

other tools are used to convince adversary leadership to refrain from escalation or turn the adversary's escalatory behavior around. How to defeat the adversary operationally, while convincing it not to use the means available to escalate out of such defeat, is a wicked problem and the dilemma of the intrawar period.

Finally, the restore period includes two key DBI objectives. The first is to compel termination of ongoing but limited strategic attacks, and the second is to deter large-scale, existentially threatening strategic attacks. The challenge in this period is correcting the failure(s) of previous strategic deterrence attempts in a manner that does not result in further escalation.

If efforts leading to the adversary's strategic attack were insufficient (for instance, inadequate execution) or incorrectly focused (wrong perceptions), how do deterrence planners course correct? The correction cycle may go like this: If an adversary calculated the consequences of its action prior to decision and those consequences were acceptable, then restoring strategic deterrence requires a response that "fixes" those specific

perceptions. However, recall the growing uncertainty of such an environment: Determining what those perceptions were, and what they might be now, is extremely difficult. Alternatively, if the adversary's strategic escalation was from a position of necessity (that is, consequences of restraint were unacceptable), then the question at hand is what response (to include self-restraint) might ease those pressures, if one even exists? The worst-case scenario is responding in a way that inadvertently exacerbates consequences of inaction to an extreme that drives large-scale existential escalation.

*Interwar Dynamics.* As complex as two-party escalation dynamics and DBI periods are, it gets worse when considering the potential for simultaneous crises or conflicts. Multiple priority DBI objectives would exist, and the challenges of an individual DBI period would be complicated by the challenges of others. Moreover, the escalation dynamics of one conflict may interfere with the dynamics of another. An adversary's perceived need or opportunity to escalate may be influenced by the events occurring in another conflict.



Air Force B-52H Stratofortress assigned to 23<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron prepares to refuel with KC-135 Stratotanker assigned to 91<sup>st</sup> Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron in U.S. Central Command area of responsibility during Bomber Task Force mission, March 12, 2023 (U.S. Air Force/Diana M. Cossaboom)

New strategic deterrence frameworks must be tailored not only to distinct potential adversaries but also to the dynamics of specific DBI periods by adversary. In general, approaches for day-to-day DBI are not sufficient for active, intrawar, or restore. We cannot continue the same deterrence activities that were occurring before conflict during conflict, just to a greater extent. Approaches to each DBI period's challenges must be as unique as the challenges themselves. The same applies to whether there is a single crisis or conflict or multiple. If there are multiple, approaches to one must account for the others. In such circumstances, the United States will be pursuing multiple objectives simultaneously, within and across different adversaries, with potentially varying priorities and DBI periods.

Grappling with deterring multiple strategic adversaries under a range of diverse scenarios elevates the importance of understanding interwar dynamics. Interwar deterrence comprises strategies to deter secondary, tertiary, or any additional crises and conflicts from emerging when already engaged in one. It also includes deterring or compelling termination of parallel, duplicative, or opportunistic escalation across multiple ongoing conflicts.

Complexity grows as the number of strategic adversaries increases, their level of coordination deepens, and the range of their escalation options expands. In crises or conflicts, this complexity manifests as a high level of uncertainty regarding potential escalation pathways that the United States must consider and seek to influence. It also increases risks of compounding escalation dynamics. Compounding escalation dynamics may induce higher levels of aggression when multiple strategic adversaries are engaged than would exist when confronting a single competitor.

The extent to which compounding escalation dynamics emerge likely depends on the nature of the relationship between strategic adversaries. Figure 4 exhibits the range of these potential relationships and possible timing of simultaneous crises or conflicts. In general, the risk of compounding escalation dynamics increases as relationships move from misaligned to aligned.

To add another layer of complexity, historical evidence shows these relationships as dynamic. Relations between and among competitors may and would likely evolve according to the level of aggression. What might start as non-aligned and uncoordinated crises may develop into aligned and coordinated,

or even allied, simultaneous conflicts. Even if multiple crises or conflicts do not emerge, engagement in one will always include the others as observers with the potential to be more. Thus, strategic deterrence frameworks must account for all strategic adversaries and span across and within varying levels of conflict intensity.

### Modern DBI Formula

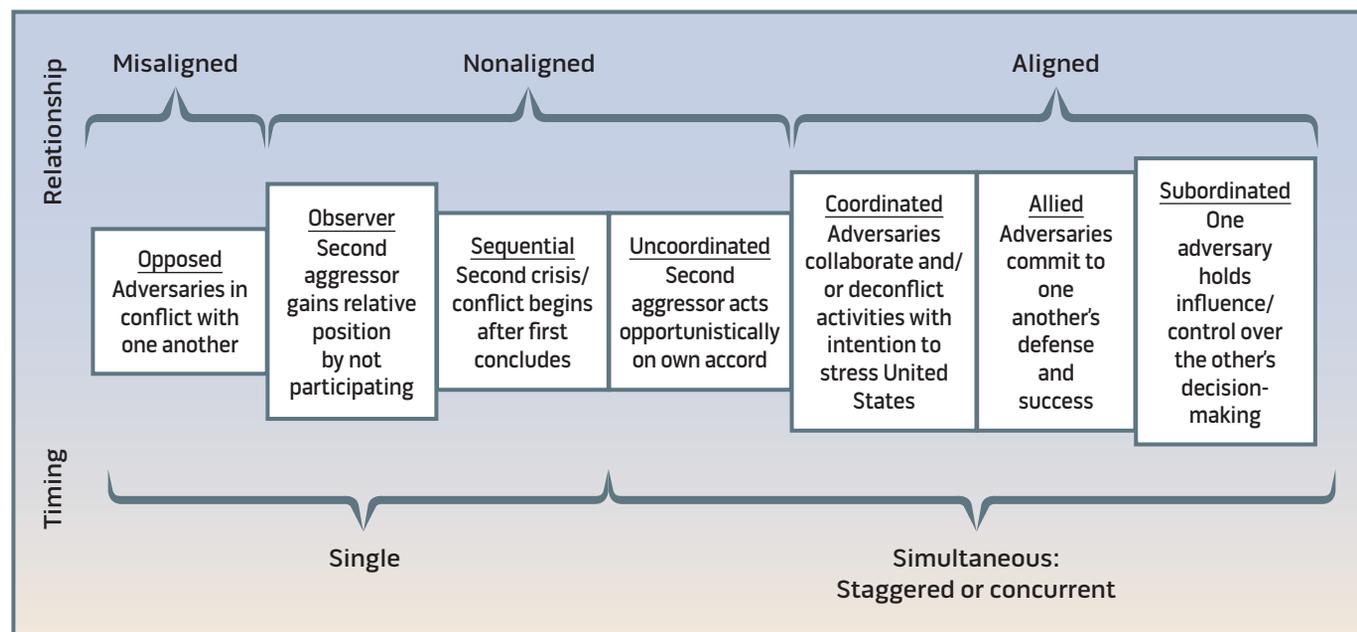
In a multiparty environment, where the United States will be required to pursue multiple DBI objectives simultaneously across varying levels of aggression, the traditional deterrence formula of “deter actor X from action Y in situation Z” is outdated.<sup>4</sup> Rather, a new formula is required that considers multiple potential or ongoing crises or conflicts. A modern DBI formula follows:

Influence actors  $X_i$  regarding actions  $Y_j$  under  $Z_k$  conditions, where

- $X_i$  captures all potential strategic adversaries
- $Y_j$  includes all priority DBI objectives relative to each potential adversary
- $Z_k$  provides context pertaining to the level of aggression for each potential adversary.

Modernized deterrence frameworks keep multiple potential adversaries and multiple DBI objectives in mind.

**Figure 4. Spectrum of Relations**





B-21 Raider is unveiled to public at ceremony on December 2, 2022, in Palmdale, California (U.S. Air Force)

Operations typically designed and/or executed in a particular fashion for a specific actor must now be crafted to achieve a multiadversary effect. This could result in scenarios risking a lower level of effectiveness against the primary adversary for the sake of achieving a greater, multiactor influence. Alternatively, it could result in operations that require a higher level of aggression than would otherwise be necessary but are now appropriate for 2<sup>nd</sup> or n<sup>th</sup> party influence. Whereas tailored deterrence strategies traditionally focus on a singular adversary, modern DBI frameworks must have the flexibility and creativity to address multiple adversaries simultaneously.

### Conclusion: Necessary Shifts

The unique challenges of today's security environment necessitate an integrated approach to deterrence. Integrated deterrence uses all elements of national power, along with those of U.S. allies and partners, to deter across the spectrum of conflict. Such an integrated approach is critical to influencing all four elements of multiple potential adversaries' decision calculi under a range of circumstances.

Shifting from a singular focus to a multiactor scanner will be the most difficult hurdle to overcome. Shifting requires intellectual diligence and creativity. More fundamentally, it requires fighting the urge to simplify the problem. Too often we narrow our strategy development to

fit resource constraints under the way things are typically done. Today's strategists, however, must recognize the threats as they are and face head-on the reality of a complex, congested, and compounding security environment.

Fortunately, there are some best practices that will help. First, let the worst-case scenario become the planning scenario. Specifically, stop restricting analytic curiosity of adversary partnerships and alliances, the scale and scope of such relationships, and the timing of their emergence. A simple review of history's wars shows partnerships and alliances form and separate according to individual actors' security needs. The statement "They would never" should be prohibited from the modern strategist's lexicon.

Second, analyze the interconnectivity of potential adversaries. Understanding an adversary means considering the range of possible paths to escalation with the range of possible conjoining crises or conflicts. In an era of Great Power competition, where the vital national interests of multiple strategic adversaries converge, it is prudent that we connect the dots to see the entire threat landscape.

Finally, increase understanding of potential adversaries' strategic cultures. Understanding a competitor requires understanding its unique history, values, and practices. This should guide strategy development across all DBI periods but may be especially critical for intrawar, restore, and interwar strategies.

A new security environment demands assessing our strategic deterrence approaches to identify the truths that are enduring, the assumptions that no longer hold, and the frameworks that require an overhaul. What was sufficient for previous threat environments is not sufficient today. JFQ

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> 2022 *National Defense Strategy of The United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> Another form of compellence, which is not included here, is influencing another to take actions it does not want to take.

<sup>3</sup> While accidents or unauthorized actions may also lead to escalation, these instances fall outside the scope of this article, as their results are unintentional or at least not the intention of the leader whose decision calculus is the target of strategic deterrence frameworks. Nevertheless, these unintentional or unauthorized paths to escalation are necessary to consider and mitigate for a comprehensive security strategy.

<sup>4</sup> *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept, Version 2.0* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, December 2006), 52, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc\\_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-337](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-337).