



DETERRENCE IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on “Deterrence Implications of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine” hosted by National Institute for Public Policy on March 29, 2022. The symposium examined the impact of Moscow’s military aggression on the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence security guarantees and what lessons can be learned about the functioning or failure of deterrence in conditions where aggressors are willing to attack others despite the prospects of sanctions and penalties in response.

David J. Trachtenberg

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Before I turn the floor over to our speakers, I would like to offer a few remarks of my own, with the same caveat that these are my personal views and do not necessarily reflect the position of any employer or organization with which I am or have been affiliated.

First, what we see in Ukraine today is a clear failure of deterrence. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated the fallacy of what some have called “Deterrence by Detection” or “Deterrence by Disclosure.”¹ Simply telling Russia we know what they are up to by publicly releasing information about their military buildup on Ukraine’s borders was clearly inadequate to prevent them from invading.

Nor did the forewarning of severe sanctions serve as an effective deterrent. Despite the president’s recent comment that “Sanctions never deter,” the Secretary of State declared, “The purpose of those sanctions is to deter Russian aggression”; the Pentagon spokesman stated, “we believe there’s a deterrent effect” to sanctions; and the National Security Advisor stated, “The president believes that sanctions are intended to deter.”

Let me be clear: this is not a failure of NATO’s deterrence policy, which is intended to prevent an attack on the Alliance or any of its members, but it is still a failure of deterrence in that Russia was not dissuaded from invading Ukraine despite the Biden Administration’s public declarations that its actions—including the imposition of harsh sanctions—were intended to deter such a conflict.

Second, where deterrence has worked is in limiting the parameters of the American and Western response. Arguably, it is the United States that has been deterred. The U.S. government has set red lines—only these red lines demarcate what the United States will NOT do. For example, the United States has made clear that:

¹ See, for example, Justin Katz, “US Should Pursue ‘Deterrence By Detection,’ Says Marine Corps Commandant,” *Breaking Defense*, September 1, 2021, available at <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/09/us-should-pursue-deterrence-by-detection-says-marine-corps-commandant/>; also see Eric Edelman, “The Pros and Cons of ‘Deterrence by Disclosure,’” *The Dispatch*, February 21, 2022, available at https://thedispatch.com/p/the-pros-and-cons-of-deterrence-by?utm_source=url.



- No U.S. troops will be sent to Ukraine—Ukraine is not a NATO member and there is no Article 5 commitment requiring us to defend it
- No U.S. special operations personnel will go to train Ukrainian forces in unconventional warfare
- No transfer of Polish MiGs to Ukraine will be sanctioned because it could be seen by Russia as escalatory
- No Patriot or THAAD defensive systems will be sent to Ukraine because they would require U.S. operators, which could be seen as escalatory
- A “no-fly zone” is out of the question, because it would be escalatory and could lead to direct confrontation with Russia
- Indeed, the United States even cancelled a previously planned Minuteman ICBM test launch out of concern that it could be seen as provocative and escalatory

Such actions and statements may be interpreted by an opponent as weakness, or at least an unwillingness to risk escalation. Deterrence is more likely to fail if one side believes the other is unwilling to respond forcefully to its threats or actions.

Third, because Russia is a nuclear power, it seems as though the United States feels compelled to de-escalate and search for “off ramps” that give Vladimir Putin a way to “save face.” The deterrence message this sends to aggressors everywhere is that the United States does not want to confront a major nuclear power directly, because of fear that any such confrontation would mean, in the president’s words, “World War III.”

As an Indian analyst wrote last week, “a powerful nuclear weapon state can mount a conventional military offensive without fearing nuclear retaliation by nuclear allies of the targeted state.” This gives powerful nuclear countries a “protective shield to further their interests using conventional military might. Such strategic benefits are why nuclear weapons are so sought after.”

Fourth, in this context, the proliferation aspects of this deterrence failure are troubling. Why shouldn’t hostile powers seek nuclear weapons to deter the United States from challenging their aggression? And why shouldn’t allies seek their own nuclear arsenals as insurance against nuclear-armed aggressors in the face of doubts over the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent? Indeed, would Russia have seized Crimea and invaded Ukraine if Kyiv had retained its legacy Soviet nuclear weapons?

Fifth, the implications for deterrence of Russia’s actions are global. The U.S. response has not been lost on China, which sees Taiwan as a “renegade” province that needs to be brought under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. And, like Ukraine, there is no Article 5-like legal obligation for the United States to come to Taiwan’s defense should China decide the time is ripe for military action.

Yet on numerous occasions, the United States has upheld the principle that wanton aggression by one state against another should not be allowed to succeed, and U.S. troops have repeatedly been deployed as a symbol of America’s commitment to this principle. For example, the United States led a global coalition to expel Saddam Hussein’s troops from Kuwait although the United States had no legal treaty obligation to do so. What is different

now, however, is that the aggressor is a nuclear-armed one. One might be forgiven for questioning if the United States will act on principle only when the risks of escalation are small, when the opponent is a non-nuclear one, and when there is a legally binding treaty commitment to do so.

If the U.S. commitment to this principle is to be taken seriously by others, then doing what's right should not depend on whether there is a written legal obligation that compels the United States to act. Failing to act because there is no treaty obligation to do so may be perceived as an act of cowardice, not strength. And it may reinforce a dangerous, if mistaken, belief in the minds of potential aggressors regarding where their aggression is likely or not likely to be challenged by the United States. It is on such perceptions that the efficacy and reliability of deterrence rests.

With these introductory comments, I look forward to the remarks of our panelists.

Keith B. Payne

Keith B. Payne is President of the National Institute for Public Policy and Professor Emeritus at Missouri State University's Defense and Strategic Studies graduate program.

There have been significant developments in the threat environment that, together, present a deterrence challenge beyond anything we have experienced in the past. The difficulty of deterring today's great powers exceeds that of our Cold War experience and policy—with which I am very familiar.

It is critical that we adjust our deterrence strategies to these developments, and dangerous not to do so.

The Commander of Strategic Command, ADM Charles Richard, has rightly identified this deterrence challenge with two points he has emphasized:

- First, ADM Richard points out that all of our military planning depends on nuclear deterrence working. If nuclear deterrence fails, we are in an unknown world in which our planning may be upended.
- Second, ADM Richard points out we must rethink deterrence in light of current threat circumstances.

Reflect on these two realities for just a minute:

1. Nuclear deterrence working as expected is necessary for our military plans to have coherence, and,
2. our thinking about deterrence is in serious need of updating.

We have a significant problem: the basic deterrence principles have not changed for 2000 years, but we must now rethink how to apply it—a difficult job that must be done carefully and effectively.

The new developments that have so upended much of our assumed wisdom about deterrence are on display in Ukraine and in China's aggressive posturing against Taiwan.

I will take just a few minutes to discuss these developments.

The first involves how our opponents see their stakes in the contemporary crises, and how they see U.S. stakes.

In short, they see an enormous asymmetry in stakes to their coercive advantage in any engagement.

Russia and China see their respective prizes, Ukraine and Taiwan, as rightfully theirs, and as having been wrongfully stolen from them.

Recovering these prizes is central to the reigning nationalist myths in Moscow and Beijing. For those leaders, recovering what has been taken from them, and from past national humiliation, is a matter of correcting a great wrong. The United States is deemed the impediment to setting history right.

For deterrence purposes, it does not matter if our opponents' visions of national redemption are reasonable, or reflect any historical truth; it only matters if they are deeply committed—which appears to be the case in Moscow and Beijing.

Why does this particular political context matter for deterrence? Because decades of cognitive studies show that decision makers who consider themselves aggrieved and responding to loss will accept increased levels of risk to achieve their needed prize. They have a high tolerance for inflicting hurt and accepting hurt in pursuit of their prize because achieving it is their due and a national and personal necessity. For a historical analogy, think of Hitler's drive to destroy the 1919 Versailles Treaty and his pursuit of Lebensraum.

This may sound like irrelevant psychology and history to some of you, but it is wholly relevant to deterrence considerations. Deterrence is all about leadership decision making involving national goals, perceptions of power, communication, and the willingness to inflict and tolerate hurt. Deterrence is much more than the usual line that it is about capability and credibility—no, it is much more than that.

Equally important for U.S. deterrence considerations in this regard is a pertinent conclusion, based on a careful examination of historical case studies by academics, that: "To the extent that leaders perceive the need to act, they become insensitive to the interests and commitments of others that stand in the way of the success of their policy." In this case, the United States is deemed the party standing in the way.

Why is this relevant to today's discussion of deterrence? Because deterring Russia and China from seeking their respective cherished prizes is not simply about creating some level of threatened pain that we hope they will find unacceptable, and thus the threat will deter.

Deterrence now is about creating and communicating the type and level of cost that is greater than what our opponents will have to endure if they do not secure their cherished prize. That means we must pace our deterrence threats not according to what we think is intolerable for the opponent in general, but according to what opponents deem to be more intolerable than continuation of the hated status-quo.

There is no methodology that allows us to estimate that measure with confidence. The talking heads who claim to have a precise answer are guessing; there can be more or less informed or ignorant speculation, but it is all speculation.

It is natural to want an easy and obvious solution to our deterrence problems; we tend to want easy deterrence. One way to ease our deterrence problem is to assume that opponents share our own understanding of what is rational in terms of inflicting and accepting cost. If we know how opponents calculate these things, it is far easier to understand how to make deterrence work.

Unfortunately, Washington has a long tradition of expecting opponents to calculate cost and behave based on projecting our own values and perceptions onto them, i.e., mirror-imaging. The result is our great surprise when opponents think and behave differently. This tendency is disastrous for our deterrence hopes and plans. There are many historical examples.

In 1941, Dean Acheson told President Roosevelt that the Japanese would be deterred from attacking; this was at the same time that Tojo was informing Japan's Emperor that there was no alternative to attacking the United States.

In 1950, the IC reported to President Truman that China would be deterred from moving against us in Korea; shortly thereafter, China sent almost 200,000 troops into the war.

In 1962, the CIA reported that Khrushchev would be deterred from placing missiles in Cuba. Shortly thereafter he did just that.

Henry Kissinger has reported that in 1973, Washington could not conceive that Egypt and Syria would again attack Israel. It would be unreasonable for them to do so after the disastrous 1967 war. They launched the Yom Kippur war nonetheless.

In 1990, U.S. officials apparently believed that Saddam would likely not attack Kuwait because he had been warned. He did so anyway.

In 2014, to our surprise, Russia invaded and occupied parts of Ukraine--a first step in Putin's vision of dismantling Ukraine as an independent country.

And now, in 2022, again to our surprise, Russia again invades Ukraine, in a second step of Putin's vision. And we now try to figure out how not to provoke Putin in this context.

These examples illustrate how often we tame opponents in our image of them by casting our own definition of what is reasonable thinking and behavior onto them. And we then are surprised and perplexed when they are much more aggressive.

As a consequence, and we are confronted with crises that might have been deterred had we bothered to better understand what they actually would dare to do in pursuit of their cherished goals.

In discussions of deterrence, I often hear the confident prediction that, "they won't dare do that," referring of course to an opponent's provocation of us. It is a comforting expectation, and the usual policy recommendation that follows from this confident expectation is that we do not need to have some capability or another for deterrence because opponents would never dare to so cross us.

Let me suggest that American commentators who so often assert their favored expectation of what opponents will dare to do typically have little idea what they are talking

about. They simply are projecting their own enlightened definition of what is reasonable onto opponents. Of course, it greatly eases our problems if we assume that opponents will behave reasonably, as we would like them to.

This optimistic, ethnocentric assumption about what Russia and China will and will not dare to do has been in full bloom for 30 years. It was the basis for all the naïve optimism about a cooperative “new world order” after the Cold War, and the associated vapid belief that nuclear threats and nuclear deterrence have become passé.

The same shock that typically follows such naivete now is apparent in our reactions to Russia’s nuclear threats in the context of its bloody drive to conquer Ukraine, and in China’s drive to end Taiwan’s autonomy.

Yes, Moscow will use nuclear first-use threats to help expand the empire. The debate about that is over. And those threats appear to have their desired effect on Washington. That too is now apparent to all.

The truth is that when opponents deem the prizes they seek to be their rightful due and a national necessity per their respective national myths, there should be zero optimistic assumptions about what the opponent will not dare to do.

This is the case with regard to Russia’s views of Ukraine and China’s views of Taiwan. Our deterrence strategies and capabilities must reflect those truth; I fear they do not.

We are not tasked with simply coming up with a deterrence strategy that promises some level of cost if opponents cross our redlines; anyone can do that—it is easy. Instead, we are tasked with knowing and credibly presenting a deterrence strategy that promises greater cost if they violate our redlines than what they will have to endure if they continue to accept the status quo.

If you understand this deterrence problem, you understand our current deterrence challenge vis-à-vis Moscow and Beijing.

My colleagues and I at National Institute are now completing a study regarding the deterrence of Beijing in this difficult context—which we will soon release.

I will close by noting that it is an American tradition, when opponents behave in ways outside our expected norms, for U.S. officials and commentators to label them unhinged, or “mad”; most recently seen with Putin. No, opponents typically are not “mad”; they simply are following a version of rational behavior that we, in supreme egocentrism, have declared impossible for any rational opponent.

Narrowing our expectations of opponents’ likely behavior to conform to our own definitions of what constitutes rationally permissible behavior is comforting, but again, it is disastrous for our deterrence strategies. Doing so has led to deterrence failures in the past and will likely do so again—not because the opponent is irrational and suffering from some psychopathy, but because, if we continue our past ways of thinking, deterrence may well fail because of our inability to move beyond the mirror imaging of the past. This has happened vis-à-vis Moscow, and I fear is happening vis-à-vis Beijing.

Curtis McGiffin

Curtis McGiffin is Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Strategic Force Studies at the Air Force Institute of Technology.

Thank you, Prof. Trachtenberg. I very much appreciate the invitation to be here today and it is an honor to share this panel. Let me first start with the standard disclaimer. Anything I say today represents my own thoughts, ideas, and assessments and does not represent those of the United States Air Force, the Air Force Institute of Technology, or Missouri State University.

I'd like to start my comments off from my perspective as a deterrence educator and address what my students can learn from observing this live case study.

To better posture my students for learning, I like to bin material so they can better process the challenge. Today I'm going to use a bin similar to the famous 1966 Western movie with Clint Eastwood called "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly," except today I'm going to reverse it and we're going to call it The Ugly, The Bad, and The Good.

The Ugly

So, let's first start with the **ugly**. It's all pretty clear to us on this panel that what we've witnessed over the last 35 days is **the failure of deterrence** and when deterrence fails the result is war... death and destruction and suffering. This is really felt by the Ukrainian people, of which 10 million have been forced to flee their homes with another 3.8 million fleeing the country...becoming what Reuters has called the "worst Refugee crisis since WWII."

Next, as this conflict drags on and Putin becomes more desperate to win (or not lose) the **risk of conflict escalation** grows. Either horizontally—by crossing NATO borders—or vertically with the use of chemical or nuclear weapons.

And then there are the veiled but unambiguous **nuclear threats** from Russia. Through the use of nuclear **brinkmanship**, Putin seeks to coerce (by that I mean to both deter and intimidate) the NATO allies into NOT taking direct action...or measures of indirect action in the case of Polish MiG-29 transfers. I think we are witnessing the most deliberate use of a nuclear coercive threat since the end of the cold war...certainly by Russia.

This is what happens when you have a generation of statesmen, government officials and military leaders who don't understand the theory of deterrence or how to apply it. The misapplication of deterrence theory and the clumsiness of deterrence messaging has at best confused and at worst contributed to this dire situation. This is the same foreign and defense policy team whose watch included the first Ukraine invasion almost 8 years ago to the day, the 2011 Libyan War, the 2012 rise of ISIL (and later ISIS), Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil war in 2015, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, the ugly failure of economic sanctions as a deterrent will be the biggest lesson to study. Indeed, this over reliance on soft power deterrence without explicit hard power deterrence has shown yet again to be a recipe for disaster. On March 3, 2022, Congressman Gallagher who sits on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) identified that the failure to deter Russia from

invading Ukraine is the administration's first attempt to apply their new strategy of "integrated" deterrence ... and that it failed.

The Bad

Now, let's move on to the **bad**. There is much to study as we watch this tragedy unfold and there are a number of lessons to garner from the BAD influencers.

It is often said "The first casualty of War is Truth." This is made much worse in today's world of **social media and fake news**. One example of this Clausewitzian fog of war is the reported casualty numbers: Russia says they've only lost 1,500 soldiers, while the Ukrainians estimate almost 15,000 Russian dead and U.S. intelligence recently estimated somewhere in the 7,000 range; NATO estimates that up to 40,000 Russian troops have been captured, injured, or killed. It's difficult to know what truth to believe.

Bad deterrence messaging is another problem for this conflict. President Biden stated just days ago, "I did not say that in fact the sanctions would deter him. Sanctions never deter." Yet on February 11, 2022, the national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, stated, "the President believes that sanctions are intended to deter." Vice President Harris said on February 20 in Munich, "the purpose of sanctions has always been and continues to be deterrence." And Secretary of State Tony Blinken said on the same date in a CNN interview that "The purpose of the sanctions in the first instance is to try to deter Russia from going to war." These attempts at unambiguous communication have at best been confusing and at worst disadvantaged our deterrence credibility. Still, President Biden reiterated just days ago that no U.S. troops will fight in Ukraine; instead reemphasizing allied unity and a commitment to Article 5. However, NATO has continued to be deterred by Russian threats and is reluctant to make the major muscle movements of Western deterrence mechanics such as an increased bomber presence, a Reforger-like airlift exercise deployment to demonstrate the U.S. ability to deploy large amounts of warfighting capability quickly, a maritime quarantine of the Black Sea, or the transfer of familiar Russian made jets. To quote Seth Cropsey: "**Deterrence fails when leaders tell adversaries we are trying to deter, what we won't do.**"

Next, is the **failure of "non-treaty agreements"** that ultimately impact U.S. credibility. These agreements are largely conciliatory assurances that are generally non-binding and unratified. The 1994 Budapest memorandum is a classic example of a non-treaty agreement made with regard to sovereignty and security issues. On Dec. 5, 2013, President Xi Jinping and then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed a nuclear agreement that described both countries as "strategic partners." A joint statement on the agreement declared: "China pledges unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the nuclear-free Ukraine and China further pledges to provide Ukraine nuclear security guarantee when Ukraine encounters an invasion involving nuclear weapons or Ukraine is under threat of a nuclear invasion."² Non-treaty agreements pose some risk to smaller nations who accept

² Bill Gertz, "Putin's war tests China's nuclear pact with Ukraine," *The Washington Times*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/putins-war-tests-chinas-nuclear-pact-ukraine/>.

these relationships in lieu of a binding treaty. This may be why Finland and Sweden are actively considering moving from the “enhanced opportunities partnership” status to full NATO membership and a more binding Article 5 treaty.

As the Obama-Biden Administration sought to reduce the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy in the 2010 NPR, we see this continued effort today. A letter written and released this past December by some 700 noted scientists, engineers and academics called for the elimination of ICBMs, a unilateral reduction in warheads, and a No-First-Use (NFU) pledge. This was followed by a January letter, signed by 13 U.S. senators and 43 U.S. House representatives urging the United States to take bold steps to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons, elevate arms control, install a No-First-Use policy and retire former President Donald Trump’s new, unnecessary nuclear weapons...this as the Ukrainian war was warming up. Again, this represents a fundamental ignorance regarding the application and function of deterrence theory.

The Good

Finally, let’s talk about the **good**. Despite all the Ugly and the Bad the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has yielded, good lessons can be found.

First, the value of **energy independence** when it comes to national security is paramount. The warnings presented by President Reagan and later from President Trump have now been corroborated. Buying energy from your adversary is a two-fer...and by that, I mean, not only is that nation compensating their potential adversary with currency for that supply; but it also transfers to that adversary the ability to manipulate the flow of energy and thus negatively impacts your own national security perspective. If you can’t be self-sufficient in energy production, then doing business with reliable partners and not potential adversaries is now key to waging deterrence.

The value of **collective deterrence**. NATO and the countries that make up NATO seem to have found their spine and their wallets. We now see Germany changing course in its defense policy and spending; Denmark publicly moving to 2 percent contributions; and, as I mentioned, neutral nations now contemplating joining NATO. These are all second and third order effects that Putin did not want to see.

Next, it is probably fair to say that the invasion of Ukraine has single-handedly saved **America’s nuclear Triad** as we know it today. I think there was a real desire by this administration in February of 2021 to reduce the U.S. nuclear posture; in March of 2022 those ambitions have been washed away by the realism of the world and nuclear modernization will likely continue apace. But even the rumored language change in the upcoming Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) leaves some ambiguity as to nuclear first use. The United States has been nuclear hedging for 30 years; to the great dismay of the anti-nuclear crowd, the fear that this kind of Ukrainian event could happen has been vindicated.

The obvious **Russian failures** on the battlefield may not be enough to suggest Russia is a paper tiger. But Putin’s over confidence, coupled with botched planning and logistics, has

proved costly to Russian credibility. The result will be an increased reliance on their nuclear power and increased risk of an escalation event to save face.

And finally, a **renewed interest in the study of deterrence theory**. On any given news broadcast, the “d” word is used and misused on a daily basis. This public discussion is an opportunity to educate the masses on the value of deterrence, the difficulty of deterrence, and the peace-keeping value of nuclear deterrence. There will also be renewed attacks on all three of those sentiments in the coming months and years, which will require diligent and persistent messaging in response. Remember, deterrence fails every time it’s not competently and consistently employed. The 2022 Ukrainian conflict will serve as a stark reminder of that.

Matthew R. Costlow

Matthew R. Costlow is Senior Analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy and former Special Assistant in OSD’s Office of Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy.

The U.S. deterrence community, loosely defined as those analysts, scholars, and practitioners whose jobs require some familiarity with the concepts of deterrence, are rightly focused on what they can learn about the functioning of deterrence from real world events happening in Ukraine as we speak. In one sense, those deterrence “lessons learned” have not even been completed yet—ongoing events have a tendency of changing the “real” lesson to be learned. On the other hand, U.S. policymakers do not have the luxury of historians to wait for the definitive history of this conflict to be written to then begin drawing lessons for the functioning of deterrence.

So, in this spirit of being fully aware that the deterrence lessons I discuss today could change tomorrow due to unforeseen events, I want to focus my remarks on what deterrence lessons China may learn from the Russo-Ukrainian war. Now, to be clear, I think most of the work we—as U.S. analysts—should contribute to is learning deterrence lessons from this conflict for the betterment of U.S. planning and policy with regard to Russia. After all, Russia—despite its battlefield failures—will likely remain an opponent that the United States and NATO must deter for decades to come. Yet, we would do well to remember that just because China is not, for the moment at least, directly involved in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, it is watching all sides very closely. To put it bluntly, U.S. officials must be aware that China is watching their policies and practices toward Russia and Ukraine, and may learn deterrence lessons about U.S. behavior that could be detrimental to U.S. interests in the future. If there is one bottom line conclusion of my remarks today, it is that U.S. officials can influence what deterrence lessons Chinese officials may learn from this conflict, but they cannot determine the lessons Chinese officials may draw.

Influencing China

Although much of China's official military policies and intentions are unclear, due to its policy of deliberate opacity, I believe Western analysts have correctly pointed out that external events to China have influenced China's deterrence policies. This indicates that the United States may have some, and I emphasize only some, ability to influence China's deterrence perceptions.

Within the span of three years, 1989-1991, Chinese officials experienced three world-altering events. First, in 1989, Tiananmen Square taught Chinese officials—in their mind—the value of repressive internal security and surveillance tools to minimize the chance of domestic revolution. Second, in 1991, the fall of the Soviet Union taught Chinese officials the value of a market-based economic system—although tightly regulated with heavy state influence—as a means of building national wealth. Third, also in 1991, the resounding U.S. victory in the Gulf War against Iraq taught Chinese officials that they needed to modernize their military and pursue asymmetric means of threatening American power.

I do not know of any official U.S. statements to this effect at the time, but I am sure many U.S. officials would have hoped that the deterrence lesson other states should learn from the Gulf War was: "Do not mess with the United States of America. You will lose." In short, U.S. officials would have hoped other states would focus on America's strength as demonstrated by the Gulf War, but China chose instead to focus on its perception of America's weakness—dependence on modern technology.

My point in this short historical summary is that we can be sure China is watching unfolding events and forming deterrence conclusions as we speak. But we do not know precisely what those deterrence lessons are, and we do not know precisely how much weight Chinese officials will place on them. As our Keith Payne, and Robert Jervis, have pointed out—a major problem for deterrence is confirmation bias—that is, Chinese officials will likely draw lessons from the Ukraine conflict that conform or fit into their already pre-existing beliefs.

I contend this is likely bad news for U.S. hopes of deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. First, China could draw a deterrence lesson that Russia's tacit nuclear signaling had a deterrent effect on the United States and NATO. Even worse, Vladimir Putin's nuclear signaling was not even very explicit—a rescheduled exercise and a vaguely worded call for extra manning for nuclear operations was all it took for U.S. and allied officials to warn about World War III. If CCP leaders already believe that the United States is unwilling to risk escalation, and it appears they do already believe this, then the United States not directly intervening in the Ukraine conflict will further reinforce this belief.

Second, the Russian experience in Ukraine may only reinforce the apparent CCP belief that a war of attrition allows the United States to send in deadly military aid—even from afar—that can significantly increase losses and even imperil victory. To be sure, the United States sending military aid to Ukraine is orders of magnitude easier than it would be to do the same for Taiwan. But, Russia's losses only one month into the conflict may only further support the existing CCP belief that if deterrence is going to fail (i.e., they choose to no longer

be deterred), then it should fail quickly—and, in the words of Colin Gray, “fail deadly.” This may or may not mean Chinese nuclear employment, but U.S. officials should at least be aware of the possibility that a lesson the CCP draws from the Ukraine conflict is that a slowly evolving conflict only benefits the West.

Third, and last, we can only speculate about how this Russo-Ukrainian war will end, or if it will end in any kind of formal sense—and the deterrence implications that result. It is incredibly difficult to tell whether President Putin believes he has any political room to conciliate on Ukraine or accept political aims well below what his initial war aims are. One can easily imagine Putin believing he has no room to conciliate and that victory in Ukraine is the only thing that will maximize the likelihood of staying in power. On the other hand, one can also imagine a wounded Putin that claims a limited victory in Ukraine and turns inward, focusing on domestic purges that shore up his support until such time as he may wish to try attacking Ukraine again.

In either case, CCP leaders may derive some deterrence lessons from Putin’s political fate. If Putin conciliates in Ukraine, and claims a partial victory, but is forced out by the Russian people, a palace coup, or some mysterious unexplained illness, CCP leaders may become only further convinced that failure is not an option with Taiwan. Chinese officials remember the 1990s and the ignominious fates of various Warsaw Pact leaders.

Conclusion

Allow me to conclude by saying I am not advocating that the United States orient its policy on Ukraine to influencing a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Influencing China’s perception should be a factor, but not the factor, in U.S. decisions. I will restate my conclusion that CCP officials are the only ones to determine what the “right” deterrence lessons are from the Ukraine conflict. The United States is allowed to say what lessons it thinks China should draw from the conflict, but U.S. officials cannot be so naïve as to think those are the lessons CCP officials inevitably will draw from the conflict. The United States should be worried that CCP officials are watching the Ukraine conflict and confirming all their prior biases—which are all not to the U.S. advantage to put it mildly.

My final thought is that we, as deterrence practitioners, should study more when state leaders refer to historical events as evidence for their beliefs. We know that North Korean officials have cited the case of Moammar Gaddafi in Libya and Saddam Hussein in Iraq as evidence for what happens when a state fights the United States without nuclear weapons. What other times have foreign leaders looked abroad and found deterrence lessons they have applied to their own policies? These questions need some further study.

Franklin C. Miller

Franklin C. Miller is a Principal of The Scowcroft Group and a former senior DoD official and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff.

In light of what my colleagues have said thus far, I come before you today as a contrarian. Actually, however, I see myself more as someone who's practicing realpolitik.

I have eight points I'd like to make quickly.

First, as I told a group of British Parliamentarians a few days ago, I do not see Putin's invasion of Ukraine –cruel, unjustified, and reckless though it is—as representing “a failure of NATO's deterrent.”

- NATO's deterrent exists to deter attack on NATO's 30 nations. Ukraine is not in NATO. Ukraine wanted to be in NATO—but we all know what happened.
- We can say that the failure to deter Putin's aggression is akin to Acheson excluding South Korea from the US security perimeter in 1950; in that sense it may have been a failure of national policy.
- But it was not a failure of deterrence and to say that it was is dangerous because false narratives are poisonous and have a way of spreading.

Second, the idea that we have been deterred by Russia's nuclear weapons from putting troops on the ground to assist the Ukrainian armed forces is also completely wrong. If NATO had decided to defend Ukraine, I must have missed it. And NATO would not have so decided, because the question would have fractured the Alliance. It is counter-intuitive to say NATO was deterred from taking an action it never intended to take.

Third, the selective release of intelligence information by the US and British government's (among others) was not a failure of deterrence because those “leaks” were intended not to deter but to hamper and confound Russian military activities....which they did. For the first time in many years the West played a good hand in the so-called ‘gray area’. It should keep doing so.

Fourth, the imposition of sanctions was not threatened to deter because sanctions are not a good deterrent against an enemy determined to attack his neighbor. They are, however, intended to induce pain in the enemy's homeland and to light the fires of political change. They may yet do so.

Fifth, a narrative has sprung up in some quarters that our “failure” to engage militarily in Ukraine stems directly from our unwillingness to confront a nuclear-armed adversary directly. The last time I looked, we are today engaged directly confronting three nuclear-armed adversaries: deterring Russia from aggression against ourselves and our NATO and Pacific allies; deterring China from aggression against ourselves and our Pacific allies; and deterring North Korea from aggression against our Pacific allies.

Sixth, there is a notion that Putin's rhetorical nuclear saber-rattling was the “real deal”. That may well turn out to be true at some point, (but hopefully not) but at this point the rhetoric is all there is. Were additional SSBNs put to sea? No. Did mobile ICBM's exit

garrisons? No. Were shorter-range nuclear weapons moved from storage areas? No. Were explicit threats to halt or take certain actions made to accompany the nuclear rhetoric? No. So according to my experience, this wasn't (thankfully) "the real deal"

Seventh, critics have been quick to say that the Russian invasion represents a failure of the Administration's "Integrated Deterrence" strategy. I'm not here to defend the Administration (or criticize it) but I think it's a bit rich to suggest that "Integrated Deterrence" has failed when Team Biden hasn't even defined what it is. Based on my own experience and work, including recently advising some DoD officials, I believe "integrated deterrence" is much simpler and less complex than is usually described.

- First, I believe it means engaging with our adversaries in the Gray Zone, fighting disinformation and misinformation and working ourselves to develop overt and covert messaging to support US and allied policy objects. We've been missing in action in this area since the end of the Cold War and it is a major vulnerability, especially since our adversaries are very busy in this space. The US and UK release of information about intended Russian military action was, I believe, an excellent step back into the gray area. And such gray area activities need to be integrated into our various contingency plans and war plans to help shape the battlefield—every day.
- Second, I believe it means that we must begin to integrate our military planning to bring space, and cyber, and nuclear into the various geographic combatant commanders' war plans. For too many decades we have allowed those geographic commanders to plan as if they should focus on air, land and naval campaigns without much need to integrate space, cyber, and nuclear. That is a fundamental mistake, and it needs to be corrected. If it takes an "Integrated Deterrence" push from the top of the Pentagon to accomplish this, I'm all for it.

Finally, I want to make an observation about one lesson of the Ukraine situation for Taiwan. I will be writing a piece on this soon. As we watch the US and other NATO nations trying to stuff equipment into the hands of the Ukrainian armed forces at literally the eleventh hour it should be apparent this is not a good way to bolster defenses. Now imagine a last-minute decision to try to do the same for Taiwan in the midst of an impending attack by the PLA. If we are serious that Taiwan should remain independent until if and when the time comes when it decides it wants to become part of the PRC, we need to begin sending advanced equipment and trainers now to Taiwan. Last minute resupply is a risky proposition. As I said, more on this in the near future.

