

The Significance of Conventional Deterrence in Latin America

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THE ARMED FORCES of Latin America must determine their new roles in a changing environment of new threats and opportunities. Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru have been searching for their strategic destinies in a world that grows more conflict-ridden yet interdependent each day.

An advance toward real integration is desirable because that is how countries create synergies that bring them out of prostration and underdevelopment. Concrete integrating forces exist, but progress is slow because of problems arising from historic mistrust, asymmetrical economies, and political instabilities. Strategic documents show that these countries prefer conventional (classical) deterrence as the political and strategic model of choice, but the documents raise questions.

Pure and simple deterrence is more than just an adequate political and strategic model; it can be the motive for an arms race. Reconciling cooperation with deterrence is difficult. Cooperation and deterrence are each other's opposites.¹

What is Deterrence?

When French General André Beaufre published *An Introduction to Strategy* and later *Deterrence and Strategy* in the early 1960s, his insight greatly influenced deterrence-theory analysis within international-relations circles.² B.H. Lidell Hart characterized *An Introduction to Strategy* as the most complete strategy treatise published in that genera-

tion. The Vatican analyzed the papers extensively at the fourth session of Vatican Council II in 1966 and later commented on them in the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."³

Beaufre defined nuclear deterrence as the only kind of deterrence that produces the effect it seeks—to avoid or to end war—as the Cold War demonstrated. The following facts confirm Beaufre's assertion:

- The United States destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with two atomic bombs, which led to Japan's surrender. Atomic weapons were outlawed, but the use of conventional arms continued.

- Nuclear proliferation has been slow, but the phenomenon of global terrorism and nuclear development in countries like North Korea could end this situation.

- Wars have continued throughout the world despite conventional deterrence.

Understanding what deterrence is, however, is complicated. Deterrence is often confused with the desire to avoid aggression, which is the natural attitude of a country that feels equal or inferior to another. Not having experienced war for a long time complicates the issue. These attitudes are themselves the consequences of deterrence.⁴ Nevertheless, deterrence as a methodology to achieve peace succeeds to the degree that a country has a sound strategic political model. Thus, deterrence is not random or casual; it is the result of concrete actions.



With a certain amount of regularity, Latin American countries profess that because there have been no wars for a long time there has been a successful execution of deterrence. This argument is debatable. There are innumerable causes that have effectively prevented conflicts, such as the presence and intervention of international bodies or of a great power; economics; lack of internal support . . . and so on.

Some fundamental requirements of deterrence are the physical capability to inflict damage, the ability to demonstrate power, and credibility. A country only obtains credibility through the political will to employ force. The political will to use force is the breath of life of deterrence. If the will does not exist, a potential adversary will perceive this and render the other two requirements—the ability to demonstrate power and the capability to inflict damage—inert.

Deterrence has no “first name”—in the sense of being defensive or offensive. We should not attach adjectives such as “defensive” or “offensive” to the word “deterrence” because if deterrence is successful there will be no need for defensive or offensive action. Deterrence’s objective is secret, only for domestic consumption, or for later revelation by history. Since the politics of defense is by nature secret, what can a country do to demonstrate that it is not eager to attack another nation-state or to gain objectives in foreign territories?⁵

Deterrence is an “effect.” Its results depend on the opinion the opponent has of his adversary’s capability to win. This explains why it is difficult to deter those who have different cultures or lifestyles. French General Eric de la Maisonneuve asked, “How can we deter the Liberian gangs, the Khmer Rouge, or Somali clans?”⁶ Weapons, whether conventional or nuclear, do not intimidate such groups.

In *Deterrence and Strategy*, Beaufre sets forth the precepts on which a strategy of deterrence is based.⁷ Because he developed his work in the context of the bipolar world of the Cold War where the threat of nuclear war was effective, he states, “No explanation for the current strategic situation is satisfactory without a definition of the nuclear situation; no definition of the nuclear situation is possible without knowledge of the laws that rule deterrence.”⁸

The existence of a threat causes a psychological result and prevents adversaries from taking up arms. An adversary must measure the risk he runs if he

unleashes a crisis, because the response will produce political, economic, social, and moral damage from which recovery will not be easy; material damage and psychological factors play a decisive role in deterrence.

Beaufre believed that military action should be avoided in a nuclear scenario and that victory should be won by paralyzing the adversary through indirect action. It is not simply a matter of terrifying the enemy; it is also a matter of hiding one’s own fear by executing those actions that show the opposite. This equilibrium-through-terror axiom ruled during the Cold War and prevented a nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Maintaining the peace and the territorial status quo; limiting the intensity and extent of conflicts; and paralyzing the actions of the enemy are only possible through deterrence.⁹ If we take what Beaufre proffers and transfer it to current situations, we can clearly see that deterrence remains highly desirable.

For Beaufre, deterrence was above all the threat of nuclear war. The actions of the past 40 years prove him right. The atomic threat guaranteed peace better than conventional arms did.¹⁰ Of course Beaufre saw the problem principally from the French strategic viewpoint. He was not convinced by conventional deterrence: “The classical arms race creates instability, just as the nuclear race creates stability.”¹¹ This might be true, but not in countries led by terrorists or fanatics possessed by messianic visions or that have no political or strategic discipline.

Beaufre’s thesis, that the threat of using atomic weapons is the only means for worldwide stabilization, is pessimistic. His pessimism lies in the contradictions between nuclear and conventional deterrence. When one party develops greater offensive capability than another, instability results.

Victory in a conventional war is unilateral; in a nuclear war, destruction is bilateral. The simple expectation of success by one party can unleash aggression in his adversary. Beaufre develops this idea in more detail in a theory called “the dialectic of the expectations of victory.”¹²



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Classical Deterrence

Beaufre's thought is not restricted to a defense of nuclear deterrence. Elsewhere in his treatise he reflects on the possibility of combining nuclear deterrence with conventional deterrence. He summarizes his concept in this manner: "The nuclear and classical levels tied to each other, essentially with classic atomic weapons, brings to the latter the stability it lacks and returns to the former the elemental risk of instability that it needs in order to continue its role as the great stabilizer."¹³

Beaufre is saying that nuclear and conventional deterrence are "Siamese twins" because the instability the conventional mode provokes makes nuclear deterrence necessary, precisely in order to obtain stability. In sum, true deterrence is obtained only through nuclear deterrence. The Cold War proved this, and history provides not even one example of successful conventional deterrence.

A new, post-Cold War interpretation of deterrence in a globalized world is known as "persuasion." Persuasion supersedes bilateralism or even the multilateralism of traditional deterrence. Persuasion is deterrence in all azimuths.¹⁴ Misonneuve defines persuasion in *The Coming Violence? Essays on Modern Warfare*: "Persuasion is simultaneously the expression of a universal potentiality without the designation of an adversary, and a posture of neutrality that guarantees the absence of war between powers of the same level. . . . Potentiality and neutrality that will lead, nevertheless, to intervening in one way or another to prevent a disturbance provoked by third parties."¹⁵

For Misonneuve, the deterrence of persuasion is the foundation for a future strategy and the first argument for a renewal of collective security. The projection of security replaces the projection of force. Misonneuve is proclaiming a strategy of prevention.

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ful execution of deterrence. This argument is debatable. There are innumerable causes that have effectively prevented conflicts, such as the presence and intervention of international bodies or of a great power; economics; lack of internal support; illegitimacy of causes; internal weakness of a state; and so on.

Strategic equilibrium of measurable and quantifiable nuclear materials is a factor in deterrence. No one doubts that this material should be quantified; it is important to measure its potential effects in combat, not in a vacuum. Classical war, with its many factors that relativize, potentialize, or reduce the use of arms, is complex. The concepts of friction, waste, multiplier effects, and other concepts have particular weight. While no one has experienced nuclear war, it is presumed that other variables govern it. The effect of arms in their absolute form is a "bonus."¹⁶

For countries with low or medium national power, however, the only solution seems to be to bet on classical deterrence—using conventional arms to prevent aggression. I believe such deterrence is uncertain and insecure and will only achieve success relative to how much of a rapid-action force is employed and who carries out the action.

The Armed Forces and Conventional Deterrence

Deterrence requires the capability to carry out effective conventional military operations with speed, force, and power, with adequate logistical support, and an efficient general staff that can make swift decisions. In opting for strategic deterrence, armed forces need to integrate deterrence into the political dimension by employing force, political stability, and economic development.

The first capability that armed forces need to achieve deterrence is an offensive capability. Armed forces should possess mechanized armor and infantry; aircraft with an active radius that permits the capacity to take out distant targets; and ships

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with an attack-and-destroy capability.

To have a deterrence capability, armed forces should also have social prestige and their society's support, recognition, and respect. An aggressor might see a country whose armed forces project a poor public image as an easy target. Also, the prestige of defense institutions as seen by their own population is fundamental to achieving deterrence because it cultivates continuity and loyalty in a restless force.

In terms of conventional deterrence, the armies of developed countries tend to structure themselves as rapid-deployment forces (RDFs). The slogan of the now historic French RDF of "Far, Strong, and Fast" summarizes what a conventional deterrence strategy should be in order to achieve success. In effect, it is a question of instilling an appropriate level of fear in the adversary. To reach this objective, it is important to project unity with the ability to attack rapidly at the heart of the state—or better yet, its resources—with force and lethality. This type of conventional operation produces damage that is the closest to nuclear damage and is a sure and efficient method to neutralize an adversary. In the future, all states with a deterrence strategy will have to structure their armies to have some RDF-projection capability.

The Future of Conventional Deterrence

History has proven Beaufre right. Nuclear deterrence and its "equilibrium through terror" pre-

vent conflicts. However, we cannot say the same for conventional deterrence. During the past 50 years, it has not been able to prevent wars. Deterrence conducted by classic military forces is onerous. Today's forces, equipped with great technology and sophisticated armaments, are offensive forces. Deterrence comes through quality, not necessarily quantity, and through political stability, economic development, prestige, history, and an effective military.

Modern armies are projections of a state's foreign policy and have three functions: the constitutional mission of defending territorial integrity; deterrence; and the projection of peace and stability. Added to these missions are others derived from so-called "new" threats, which each country must evaluate based on its particular situation.

The modernization of armed forces in Latin America will need a force design that can confront new strategic definitions. Depending on the strategic challenge, forces might vary from a few battalions to a number of brigades. Large units like divisions or corps are expensive and archaic. A military force must always support the strategy of deterrence. Large territorial armies do not necessarily possess a deterrence capability. Latin America, which is not likely to create a collective security system, should endeavor to achieve an environment of security based on mutual trust, bilateral or multilateral cooperation, and reduced military spending. **MR**

NOTES

1. For more information see "Bases for a New Strategic Modality for Chile," *Armed Forces and Society Magazine* (Flacso) (January-March 2001): 24-47.
2. André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy* (Madrid: Institute for Political Studies, 1966), and *Deterrence and Strategy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
3. Pope Paul VI, "Pastoral Constitution: On the Church in the Modern World," Rome, 7 December 1965.
4. Situations in countries that feel equal or inferior to others or that have not experienced war for a long time can be recognized only as "natural" deterrence or, in some cases, an event dependent on contingency deterrence.
5. Chile, Argentina, and Brazil clearly express the defensive objective that motivates them.
6. See Eric de la Maisonneuve, *La Violence qui vient? Essai sur la guerre moderne* (The coming violence? Essays on modern warfare) (Paris: Arlea, 1977), 227. In Paris in September 1997, I met Maisonneuve (former director of the French Foundation for National Defense Studies) just after he had published this book. He expanded on some concepts raised in the book.
7. Beaufre, *Deterrence and Strategy*, 26.
8. *Ibid.*
9. For a more in-depth study, see Beaufre.

10. *Ibid.*, 42.
11. *Ibid.*, 74.
12. *Ibid.*, 80.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Edward N. Luttwak, *Le Paradoxe de la Strategie* (The paradox of strategy) (Paris: Odile Jacobs, 1989), 245 and following pages. Deterrence in a 360-degree view is also known as deterrence in all azimuths. To be more linguistically precise, see Pedro Felipe Monlau and Joaquín Gil, eds., *Etymological Dictionary of the Spanish Language* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: 1946), 1,056. "Suadir" comes from the Latin word "suadere" or "to persuade." From the word "suasum" comes "suasible" ("suasibilis") and "suasorio" ("suasorios").
15. Maisonneuve, 227.
16. In 1982 and 1983, I worked on the "Regulation for the Computation of Army Potential in Chile" (publishing data not given). I can verify how difficult it is to evaluate qualitative factors in military units, where quantitative factors (having measurable information) and qualitative factors (complex and difficult to estimate) were separated. A great difference exists between nuclear and conventional valuation. Most of the countries that I am familiar with compute forces, including large units, but do not estimate qualitative factors because they are subjective and difficult to quantify.