Dissuasion: Conceptual, Planning, and Organizational Challenges for the U.S. Combatant Commands

By Gregory F. Giles[1]

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the conceptual, planning, and organizational challenges currently faced by the US Combatant Commands (CoComs) in supporting the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review defense policy goal of dissuasion. These insights are drawn largely from recent and ongoing collaboration involving SAIC, the Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO) of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and Headquarters, US Strategic Command (STRATCOM). The dissuasion challenges confronted by STRATCOM provide some basis for extrapolation to the regional CoComs (e.g., US Central Command, US Pacific Command).

I. Conceptual Challenges

Of the four QDR defense policy goals (Assure, Dissuade, Deter, and Defeat, or "ADDD"), dissuasion poses perhaps the greatest challenge to CoCom planning staffs. It has not been expansively articulated in official statements by civilian and uniformed Pentagon officials, nor conveyed in detailed planning guidance to date. As a result, CoCom planning staffs, much like analysts in the broader defense community, are largely forced to scrutinize the meaning and planning implications of this concept from a few paragraphs in a limited set of strategy documents and official statements made before Congress and elsewhere. Moreover, it is not abundantly clear that CoComs are the most appropriate levels within the national security apparatus at which to plan and wage dissuasion, since to do so involves resources and a number of activities conducted beyond their authorities and responsibilities.[2]

In this context, there is a sense of unease over the prospect of being held responsible for developing plans that support the QDR's defense policy goals, without a full understanding of the intent behind the concepts.[3] While the Office of Secretary of Defense (Policy) is able to shed light on the origins of the dissuasion goal and its general intent, it has acknowledged that more work is needed to further develop the concept and translate it into planning guidance. In the meantime, STRATCOM has focused on developing plans to support the QDR's deterrence policy goal. This is not unexpected, given the Command's central role vis-à-vis US strategic nuclear

forces and its familiarity with deterrence concepts. This current deterrent focus is also the result of STRATCOM's mandate to develop the first Joint Operational Concept on Strategic Deterrence (SD-JOC), which has now been approved by the Joint Staff and is awaiting the signature of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. While the SD-JOC references the interaction among the four QDR defense policy goals, it does not deal with dissuasion in any detail.

A "Strategic Security Workshop" recently held at HQ USSTRATCOM and sponsored by ASCO highlighted some of the particular conceptual challenges confronting the CoComs with respect to planning for assurance, dissuasion, and deterrence.[4] Among these:

- Is dissuasion a policy goal with limited focus (i.e., China) or broad application? The view put forth at the workshop by OSD Policy incorporates both aspects.

- What behavior are we seeking to dissuade? Might that behavior inadvertently be channeled in directions that pose greater risks to the United States?

- What are dissuasion "observables?" What can be observed in theory compared to our actual monitoring capabilities?

- What are suitable dissuasion measures of effectiveness? Much like deterrence, this is an effort "prove a negative." Monitoring the effectiveness of dissuasion is further complicated because a competitor's/adversary's behavior is not necessarily stimulated by or directed exclusively at the United States.

- How can you tell when your posture vis-à-vis a competitor needs to shift from one of dissuasion to one of deterrence? In STRATCOM parlance, how do we work the "ADDD seams?"

- Where does "re-assurance" factor in as a means of mitigating/precluding military competition? The notion that we can "re-assure an adversary" (i.e., withhold the threat of military attacks in return for "good behavior") does not come naturally to the Department of Defense culture and therefore risks neglect unless engaged in the broader Inter-Agency (IA) process.

II. Planning Challenges

STRATCOM is grappling with issue of how to operationalize planning for dissuasion and the other QDR defense policy goals. STRATCOM's leadership recognizes that all four of the goals essentially involve influencing the decision-making of a would-be competitor or adversary. Yet there is an understandable reluctance to characterize this as planning for "influence operations," given the domestic and political baggage recently associated with the term.

A major concern for STRATCOM is how to integrate planning in support of the QDR's ADDD goals. STRATCOM fully understands that planning and actions in support of one goal could affect other goals directed against the same opponent, as well as other would-be competitors/adversaries elsewhere in the same area of responsibility and around the globe. Working this issue requires setting some pragmatic boundaries, however. Otherwise, there is a risk of "thinking the unplannable."

Another challenge comes in the form of deliberative versus adaptive planning for dissuasion. Participants at the Strategic Security Workshop noted the likelihood of sudden events, such as a

change in national leadership or the interception of illicit WMD-related cargo, which could require the pertinent CoCom to send a signal quickly to the regime in question. That signal could be conciliatory or coercive, depending on the situation. To the maximum extent feasible, such contingencies should be reflected in the deliberative planning process, so as to reduce the burden on adaptive planning. This view reflects some degree of skepticism by outside experts that the CoComs, as currently structured, could bring adequate analytical and planning resources quickly to bear on a rapidly emerging dissuasion challenge.

Also of concern to STRATCOM planners is how to deal with ambiguous or conflicting information as it pertains to the intentions of foreign leaders. This uncertainty cuts across the spectrum of assure, dissuade, and deter. While this range of uncertainty cannot be eliminated completely, a variety of approaches could be pursued to narrow it. These approaches include:

- Delphi processes that challenge a range of experts (including regional specialists) to achieve consensus on regime intentions;

- 3-D cognitive analysis, a semi-quantitative technique of weighting certainty developed by Newton Howard;

- Maintaining the integrity of intelligence sourcing as it moves up the chain of command; and,

- A matrix of competing hypotheses to show clearly evidence and areas of uncertainty, span all conceivable explanations, and highlight long-term versus short-term analysis.

There is likewise an appreciation at STRATCOM and presumably in the other CoComs that the current suite of planning tools are not up to the challenge of integrated ADDD operational planning. The fields associated with "decision science" offer some possibilities, such as psychological profiling of key foreign leaders, case studies of regime decision-making, and network analysis. STRATCOM, for its part, is developing a multi-layer assessment framework, which takes a systems-based approach to identifying key people, processes, and facilities of military concern. Yet there are no "turn-key" solutions here, and certainly no integrated tool kits that meet current CoCom assurance, dissuasion, and deterrence planning needs.

III. Organizational Challenges

Concurrent with CoCom conceptual and planning challenges with regard to dissuasion, are organizational challenges. In this regard, IA coordination remains the single greatest hurdle. Current STRATCOM, and presumably other CoCom, thinking about dissuasion is heavily, if not exclusively focused on *military* missions and means. While this may not be surprising, it inhibits the development of an optimal approach to dissuasion, one that draws upon the full range of *national* power, to include diplomatic, informational, and economic means. Part of the problem is the continuing lack of a suitable IA coordinating mechanism outside of the National Security Council. While STRATCOM has created a Joint Inter-Agency Coordinating Group (JIACG), this body may lack the bureaucratic clout needed to secure active, sustained, and meaningful IA participation in the development and refinement of the Command's "assure, dissuade, and deter" plans. Regardless of whether the JIACG is retained, modified, or supplanted, it was suggested at the workshop that effective coordination may require agreement between no less than the Deputy Secretary of Defense and his counterpart at the State Department to energize and sustain the necessary degree of collaboration.

Yet to be determined is the relationship between STRATCOM and the regional CoComs in the

"assure, dissuade, and deter" planning realm. In some sense, this is an extension of the broader division of labor challenge as OSD and STRATCOM begin to integrate non-nuclear strike, missile defense, information operations, and special operations with strategic nuclear forces in the "New Triad." In the context of "assure, dissuade, and deter," there is real potential for overlapping and uncoordinated demands on the intelligence community, as STRATCOM and the regional CoComs build their respective plans. One possible approach is for STRATCOM to borrow from the Joint Integrative Analysis and Planning Center (JIAPC)[5] model and offer to provide "one-stop shopping" for the regional CoComs' "assure, dissuade, deter" planning needs. Indeed, STRATCOM appears to be moving in this direction by developing a Command position on the creation of a "Strategic Deterrence Assessment Laboratory" (SDAL) at HQ STRATCOM that would conduct analysis in support of deterrence planning by all relevant CoComs, consistent with the SD-JOC.

IV. Next Steps

A number of initiatives could be pursued to advance CoCom planning in support of the QDR defense policy goals, in general, and dissuasion, in particular. On the conceptual front, deeper thinking, more rigorous analysis, and wider publishing on dissuasion is clearly in order. These efforts should draw upon the significant body of competitive analysis work already done on managing the long-term military competition with the Soviet Union, and take account of the more uncertain international security environment we currently face.[6] Moreover, examples typically cited by DoD officials as dissuasion "success stories," such as the Soviet Union's failure to develop aircraft carriers, should be more closely scrutinized to establish with greater confidence the relative influence of US actions vis-à-vis other variables, such as a country's "strategic personality" (e.g., in the Soviet case, the natural obstacles that a traditional land power would face in trying to develop an ocean-going navy). Similarly, other nations may choose not to compete with the United States in certain categories of traditional military strength (e.g., fighter aircraft) because they are investing heavily in transformational technologies (e.g., novel energetics). Thus, fixation on apparent dissuasion "success stories" could unintentionally obscure greater downstream military challenges to the United States.

By understanding better the historical lessons learned, as well as the broader picture of contemporary and transformational military competition, we will be in a much stronger position to judge realistically the strengths and weaknesses of dissuasion as a policy goal. That assessment, in turn, can help shape how to allocate resources for the purposes of dissuasion relative to other QDR defense policy goals (i.e., assure, deter, deny) and other defense policy frameworks that might be developed in the future. The Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment historically has been a key player in this regard and its current thinking about dissuasion needs to be more widely shared and effectively integrated with the CoComs.

In terms of planning, a number of precedent-setting, dissuasion-related initiatives are in the formative stages within OSD Policy and STRATCOM. Chief among them is forthcoming tasking from OSD to STRATCOM to develop an operational plan for strategic deterrence. How that plan evolves could have direct implications for dissuasion planning. For example, a dissuasion annex might be included in the plan or a separate dissuasion plan could follow using a similar approach. Similarly, moving the SDAL forward will help fill critical analytical and planning gaps in the CoComs. Additionally, OSD Policy, STRATCOM, and ASCO need to engage the regional CoComs to build a more widely shared understanding of the dissuasion concept, assess the readiness of the regional CoComs to engage in such planning, and pass lessons learned in particular AORs back to OSD and HQ USSTRATCOM.

In terms of organization, greater thought needs to be given to the most effective forum for dissuasion planning. The QDR itself called for "new processes and organizations… within the

defense establishment" to provide a "clear strategic focus" that would combine "technical, experimental, and operational activity" to achieve a "dissuasive effect." Three years later, those processes and organizations have yet to be put in place. Instead, the picture that emerges is one of some conceptual thinking about dissuasion at the OSD policy level and some thinking about how to operationalize the concept at the CoCom level, but not much in terms of structure and processes linking the two. Nor is it clear that the DoD's attempts at dissuasion will be effective without greater involvement on the part of the IA, in terms of parallel processes and focal points.

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References

1. This paper represents the views of the author, not necessarily those of SAIC or its US Government sponsors.

2. For example, decisions about S&T investments needed to maintain US military superiority – a key means of discouraging competition, lay with OSD Acquisition, the Services, related laboratories, etc. Likewise, decisions about the nuclear stockpile involve the National Nuclear Security Administration of the Department of Energy.

3. The challenge of developing plans from limited policy guidance is not unique to the current administration. It is, nonetheless, particularly acute in the case of the dissuasion concept.

4. See *Strategic Security Workshop: "Assure, Dissuade, Deter"; 3-4 August 2004, Summary Report,* prepared for DTRA/ASCO and HQ USSTRATCOM by SAIC. For official use only.

5. JIAPC will serve as an intelligence fusion center for Information Operations. Although located at HQ USSTRATCOM, JIAPC will be available to support all interested CoComs.

6. In addition to the paper prepared by Dr. David Yost for this seminar, see also, David J. Andre, "Competitive Strategies: An Approach Against Proliferation," in *Fighting Proliferation: New Concerns for the Nineties*, Henry Sokolski, ed., Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, January 1996.

About the Author

Greg Giles is an Assistant Vice President and Manager of the Advanced Concepts and Strategies Division at Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC). Since 1989, he has led and contributed to numerous studies for a variety of US Government clients and pioneered the use of "strategic personality" profiling in the mid-1990s, developing the strategic personality profile of Iran. Currently, Mr. Giles is leading a project for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency on Iranian motivations to acquire WMD and US policy options to confront such proliferation. He is the author of "The Islamic Republic of Iran and Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons," in *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Scott Sagan, Peter Lavoy, and Jim Wirtz, editors, Cornell University Press, 2000. He also wrote "The

Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran 's Leaders and Strategic Culture," in *Know Thy Enemy,* Barry Schneider and Jerrold Post, editors, USAF Counterproliferation Center, July 2003 (Second Edition).