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# Dissuasion as a Strategic Concept

by Richard L. Kugler

## Key Points

**The phrase "dissuasion of potential adversaries from pursuing threatening military competition and ambitions" initially appeared in the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* as one of four key strategic goals abroad; the other three are assuring allies and friends, deterring threats and coercion against U.S. interests, and decisively defeating adversaries who commit aggression. The term also was endorsed in the *U.S. National Security Strategy,* published in late 2002. Despite this clear articulation, the Bush administration has yet to clarify how the concept will be applied to defense plans and strategy.**

**Dissuasion can be an effective complement to deterrence. It offers a potent concept for handling geopolitical situations in which U.S. relationships with key countries fall short of overt rivalry but can deteriorate if strategic and military competition takes hold. Dissuasion also will have to be integrated into American diplomacy in sensitive regions where the goal is to constrain potential rivals without provoking them into becoming adversaries or forming hostile coalitions.**

**For the Department of Defense, dissuasion requires adaptation of military missions and transformation of capabilities. For example, it underscores the need to keep large U.S. forces in Asia for strategic reasons that go beyond deterring war on the Korean Peninsula. There and elsewhere, it may necessitate adjustments in the U.S. overseas military presence, power-projection capabilities, defense transformation, and alliance military relationships.**

Some analysts want to downplay dissuasion or set it aside entirely because of its ambiguity. But ignoring this emerging idea would be short sighted. Despite its haziness, the term goes to the heart of new-era geopolitics in several key regions, including Asia. If the United States can learn how to dissuade skillfully, its strategic effectiveness in troubled regions will improve significantly. When the idea of deterrence first appeared 50 years ago, it too was ambiguous. During the Cold War, however, it acquired a role of central importance once it was equipped with a full-fledged strategic theory. The same may hold true for dissuasion in the early 21st century—but only if it too is equipped with the full set of analyses and calculations needed to bring it to life.

During the Cold War, the French often used the term *dissuasion* as synonymous with deterrence. The new U.S. defense strategy, however, employs the term differently in broader ways that reflect its usage in the English language. One dictionary defines dissuasion as the "act of advising or urging somebody *not* to do something: e.g., she dissuaded him from leaving home." (In this sense, it is an antonym of *persuasion,* which promotes a course of action.) In strategic terms, dissuasion can be defined as an effort by the United States to convince a country or coalition to refrain from courses of action that would menace our interests and goals or otherwise endanger world peace. How, then, does it differ from deterrence?

## Complement to Deterrence

Deterrence is the logic of direct military coercion applied against a hostile, well-armed enemy. Deterrence is pursued when the scent of war is in the air and when an adversary already possesses both the political intention and military capability to commit aggression. The main aim is to deter the adversary from committing aggression by threatening to respond in ways that will not only rebuff him but also inflict unacceptable losses on him. Presumably, the only thing capable of stopping the adversary is realization that the United States will immediately employ its military forces to defeat him. During the Cold War, deterrence was pursued vigorously in Central Europe and Northeast Asia by deploying large U.S. forces and building alliance defense postures for warfighting against surprise attacks.

By contrast, dissuasion arises in a different, less confrontational place along the spectrum from peace to war. It applies to situations in which the relationship between the United States and another country has not yet descended into intense political-military rivalry but has the potential to do so if events take a wrong turn. Thus, the United States is dealing not with a full-fledged adversary but with a country with which it has a mixed relationship of cool peace, mutual suspicions, and common incentives to avoid violence. War is not in the air, but deep trouble could arise if that country begins misbehaving in ways that threaten U.S. interests. The United States is mainly concerned with discouraging that country from embracing policies and building forces that could produce political confrontation, military competition, and war. The United States, therefore, acts not by threatening direct military retaliation as an ever-present reality, but by making clear that it will thwart and frustrate hostile steps through countervailing measures of its own. Whereas

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deterrence is the logic of military coercion under dark war clouds, dissuasion is the logic of peacetime strategic influence in settings marked by wary maneuvers but with no war clouds on the horizon.

In short, dissuasion aims at urging potential geopolitical rivals not to become real rivals by making clear that any sustained malevolent conduct will be checkmated by the United States. It involves military pressure applied with a velvet glove, not crude threats of war and destruction.

Dissuasion should be seen as a *complement* to the longstanding policy of deterrence, not as a component of that policy or a replacement for it. Since these two concepts are separate and distinct, with different roles, they should be defined in ways that make clear where one leaves off and the other begins.

Some regions may require that one concept plays a stronger role than the other; elsewhere, a balanced mixture of the two may be needed. Regardless, these two concepts should work together strategically in ways that are mutually enabling. To be successful in many regions, the United States will need to be able both to dissuade and deter—and to do so in a manner that shifts emphasis between them as the future unfolds. The United States should develop its strategic policies and plans accordingly.

If dissuasion is pursued in this important but integrated way, it may prove more useful than some anticipate. Beyond question, there is a clear need for something like it. The United States cannot afford to act as though deterrence is its sole concept for handling the gray area of modern geopolitics: the cavernous zone between friendship and confrontation where nations are not primed for war but eye each other warily and often maneuver for advantage. Deterrence is appropriate for situations in which intense confrontations with adversaries already exist, but it does not have widespread applicability in this gray zone. Because dissuasion has considerable relevance there, it is a new-but-old idea whose time may have come. It offers a way not only to keep potential adversaries at bay but also to reassure allies and lessen the extent to which the United States will be compelled to deter, preempt, and fight wars.

Dissuasion is not easily accomplished, and it can fail or even backfire. Since it is a political-military idea that should be seen through the lens of the information era, it must pursued in ways that take advantage of, and help shape, the transformation of U.S. forces, overseas presence, and defense strategy. Dissuasion also is a multilateral concept. Because it normally requires not only the trust of key allies and partners but also their active cooperation as well, it cannot be carried out unilaterally. Dissuasion must be embedded, moreover, in a diplomacy aimed toward promoting regional stability, not used merely to intimidate countries into fearing U.S. military prowess. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "Speak softly and carry a big stick."

The United States does not have a great deal of experience with dissuasion because the Cold War led it to see the world in terms of friends and foes and to view its strategy choices in terms of assurance or deterrence. But the concept has deep historical roots in the era before the great ideological conflicts of the 20th century. Indeed, much of the 19th century in Europe was an exercise in sustained dissuasion by dominant powers, which regularly employed peacetime military pressure as one instrument to underscore preventive diplomacies and sometimes resorted to the threat of war or war itself. There are still numerous enemies who need deterring. But elsewhere, traditional geopolitics may be reemerging in ways that will mandate a strong reappearance for dissuasion as well. Asia and China are obvious examples, but far from the only candidates. If indeed traditional geopolitics is reemerging, the United States will need to learn how to practice this time-honored art, for in a geopolitical setting in which assertive countries are neither friends nor foes, the responsible exercise of power will entail neither assurance nor deterrence but instead dissuasion strategies that are sui generis.

**dissuasion aims at urging potential geopolitical rivals not to become real rivals by making clear that any sustained malevolent conduct will be checkmated by the United States**

*Dissuasion* originally appeared in the American strategic lexicon a few years ago, mainly as a concept to help guide measures to strengthen homeland security and build missile defenses. The idea was that if potential adversaries were confronted with strong U.S. defenses in these two areas, they would be less likely to employ terrorism and weapons of mass destruction strikes against the U.S. homeland and overseas interests. In the chaotic world now emerging, dissuasion has the potential to play a greater role. It can be the missing link in national security strategy because it can help cover the large gray zone between assuring allies and deterring adversaries. If the United States dissuades successfully, it will both lessen the extent to which potential adversaries rise to challenge American interests and help stabilize the global security system, which otherwise is prone to generate multipolar rivalries and could even produce a multiregion coalition against the United States. Successful dissuasion can help facilitate the pursuit of other strategic goals. To the extent that the United States can dissuade potential adversaries, it will be better able to reassure allies, and it will be able to do so at less cost and effort than otherwise. Similarly, successful dissuasion may reduce the extent to which full-fledged deterrence must be pursued. It may limit the occasions in which preventive or preemptive strikes against adversaries must be launched. Beyond this, it may reduce the number of wars that the Armed Forces will be called upon to fight.

Dissuasion offers a potent way to help make U.S. strategy more effective and manageable. But dissuasion is a subtler concept than deterrence, and pursuing it is less straightforward than reassuring allies. Because it aims toward influencing the strategic psychology and political aspirations of potential adversaries, its methods require analyses that go beyond traditional military calculations of how forces and technologies interact. The same judgment holds true for the important tasks of creating multilateral trust and acceptance of U.S. strategies for dissuasion and of mobilizing as much allied help as possible.

**Richard L. Kugler wrote this paper while a distinguished research professor in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (NDU). Currently, Dr. Kugler is a distinguished research professor in the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at NDU. Please e-mail questions or comments to Dr. Kugler at kuglerr@ndu.edu.**

## A Geopolitical Tool

A brief review of the historical record will help set the stage for assessing the pursuit of dissuasion as a geopolitical tool. Theodore Roosevelt was the first American President to practice the peacetime use of military power as a strategic instrument of influence. Roosevelt sent his Great White Fleet around the world to signal America's emergence as a global power. He knew, too, that military power must be used wisely, embedded in a larger diplomatic strategy aimed at creating stable security relationships, not bullying countries for the sake of intimidation alone. Indeed, Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to settle the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. He did indeed carry a big stick, but he also spoke softly, urging moderation and compromise when the geopolitical situation called for it.

Roosevelt's opposite was Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, whose heavy-handed conduct contributed greatly to the disaster of World War I. When Wilhelm rose to power in the 1890s, he inherited a peaceful Europe with a secure Germany at the pinnacle of a stable balance of power system. During 1850–1870, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had won three wars against Denmark, Austria-Hungary, and France that resulted in the unification of Germany as the continent's greatest power. But knowing not to press his advantage too far, Bismarck, after 1870, embarked upon a successful diplomatic campaign to sign security treaties with Russia and Austria-Hungary and to befriend England. The effect was to bind Germany closely to these three countries, while leaving France isolated but secure within its borders. Intent on overthrowing this inheritance, the callow Kaiser Wilhelm fired Bismarck, further bolstered Germany's military, and started bullying his neighbors under the mantle of German nationalism. Over a 20-year period, he tore up his security treaty with Russia, driving it into the arms of France. He then launched a dreadnaught naval race with Britain that resulted in it also aligning with France. Next, he built a large German army for a two-front offensive strategy aimed at mobilizing recklessly in order to crush France before turning to defeat Russia. He was not interested in dissuasion or other approaches to stable relations with his neighbors, but instead domination in Europe and an imperial German domain outside it.

With nationalism and militarism on the rise, stable Europe steadily mutated into an unstable bipolar system, primed to explode into war even in the absence of a serious political reason for doing so. When World War I broke out and then deteriorated into a bloody stalemate, Wilhelm rejected a diplomatic settlement, instead pursuing victory through submarine warfare against Britain that brought the United States into the conflict against Germany. The result was the defeat of Germany and destruction of Europe in ways that reverberated throughout the 20th century, setting the stage for Nazism, communism, World War II, and the Cold War. Wilhelm's disastrous legacy goes down as an example of how not to practice geopolitics and dissuasion. Whether World War I could have been prevented is unclear, but other European countries may have been partly at fault for failing to dissuade or deter aggressive German actions at the onset.

**dissuasion will be most regularly practiced along the so-called Southern arc of instability, stretching from the Middle East to the East Asian littoral**

World War I gave geopolitics and balance of power policies a bad name in history textbooks. Yet the preceding century had been an era of relative peace in Europe precisely because geopolitical diplomacy was practiced wisely, with a sense of firmness and moderation. In the eyes of many historians, Europe's experience from the Congress of Vienna through the Bismarck era showed that a notoriously violent region could be stabilized if four conditions were present:

- common political values or at least agreed codes of conduct and restraint
- an equilibrium of legitimate political interests that leaves the major powers satisfied with their safety and status
- a stable military balance that hinders aggression, coupled with a capacity for collective action when aggression occurs
- a foundation of security, upon which political and economic progress is built, thus reinforcing peace and removing incentives for war.

Throughout much of the 19th century, such celebrated diplomats as Metternich, Talleyrand, Palmerston, and Bismarck strove to create these conditions and turned this form of geopolitical management into a high art. Indeed, they were pragmatic men willing to use military power, pressure, and even war when necessary. But they also grasped that military power had to be employed as a servant of strategic thinking and diplomacy, not the other way around. They avoided the perils of carrying nationalism too far. They also realized that peace rested on more than a mechanical balance of military power—that larger political considerations were equally important. Their success in this arena goes a long way toward explaining Europe's steady progress during this century. When World War I erupted, the reason was not that these geopolitical values were proven wrong but that they had fallen into disuse. They were replaced by the kind of self-serving strategies, abusive diplomacies, and bullying military conduct that polarized Europe, triggered military competition and political maneuvering, and made war inevitable.

## Implications for Today

What implications does this history have for U.S. policy and strategy? Obviously, the old-style geopolitics of the 19th century is not reemerging. But a new-style geopolitics of the early 21st century is steadily evolving. As globalization accelerates, some countries are gaining power (China and India), others are losing power (Russia), and others are adjusting to the new frustrations and opportunities facing them (Iran and Turkey). The result is a murky global setting, full of gray-area relationships that seemingly have the potential to produce enhanced stability or great turmoil, depending upon how these relationships are handled. For the United States, dealing with these new geopolitical dynamics may be equally important as containing and deterring enemies who also will be on the scene. To the extent that the United States can dissuade key countries, thereby influencing them to exercise restraint in their foreign policies and defense preparations, the world will be a safer place and U.S. interests will be better protected.

The place that geopolitical management and dissuasion will be most regularly practiced is along the so-called Southern arc of instability, stretching from the Middle East to the East Asian littoral. Europe seemingly has resolved its old-era poisonous geopolitics. Even Russia is showing signs of adjusting gracefully to its new, limited role. But the Southern arc is another

matter. At least until the war on terrorism is won and the "axis of evil" is suppressed, the United States regularly will be pursuing classical deterrence, intervening in crises, and waging war against a host of adversaries. But in parallel ways, the United States will be pursuing new-era dissuasion in its dealings with other countries, most notably with China. Two kinds of dissuasion policies will be needed in shifting ways: the harder-edged type that relies mainly on military intimidation and the softer-edged type that adroitly blends military pressure with mature diplomacy sensitive to the larger political issues at stake. Along with deterrence, the harder version may be consistently needed in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. The Korean Peninsula aside, Asia today will require dissuasion of the sort that blends military power and diplomacy until the future becomes better known.

The main attraction of dissuasion is that while it is not always easy or inexpensive, it can help inhibit otherwise tough-minded countries from going over the edge in their foreign policies and defense strategies. It can help prevent them not only from competing with the United States militarily but also from menacing our allies, seeking to dismantle our collective security arrangements, and striving to impose new geopolitical arrangements that damage American interests and values. As the United States seeks these benefits through the use of military power and other instruments, it will need to recognize the chief risk of dissuasion: if it is pursued in heavy-handed ways, it can be counterproductive. It can help intensify regional polarization and militarization, motivate countries to pursue asymmetric strategies aimed at negating U.S. strengths, alienate allies, and trigger the formation of coalitions against the United States. The disastrous legacy of Wilhelm must be remembered; his experience is a case study in how a dominant power can overplay its geopolitical hand and thereby greatly damage its own security, as well as cause regional destabilization of the sort that produces a steady drift toward war.

In pursuing dissuasion, a key challenge facing the United States will be to strike a sensible balance between assertiveness and restraint. This will require not only applying military power adroitly but also integrating it with cooperative instruments of foreign policy: diplomacy, political commitments, economic aid, trade and investments, information, institution-building, and the spread of democratic values. Perhaps a combination of dissuasion and cooperation will work best. Above all, there will be a need to remember history's lesson that while regional peace requires a mechanical military balance of power, it also requires other conditions: acceptance of common values and codes of conduct, an equilibrium of legitimate interests, and a foundation of security that gives rise to economic and political progress. The exact policy mix will vary with the situation at hand, but, as a general rule, the United States will experience greater success if it blends its pursuit of dissuasion with parallel policies aimed at creating these larger conditions for peace.

The need for a mature balance applies especially to dealing with China—and all of Asia for that matter. In the coming years, Asia will require a mix of strategies: deterrence on the Korean Peninsula, assurance of our closest allies including Japan, community-building in Southeast Asia, and an adroit handling of China. Destined to become a great power in future years, with growing military strength and expanding strategic reach, China is in the process of defining not only its geopolitical aims around its borders but also its stance toward the entire Asian security-economic system and the U.S. role in it. Even as it struggles to create a quasicapitalist economy and to join the world economy, it remains authoritarian in its politics, shows signs of rising nationalism and resentment of the U.S. leadership role in Asian security affairs, and strives to modernize its military forces, including with assets for power projection.

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Clearly, the United States will need to think in terms of dissuading China from the assertive, menacing political-military conduct that rising geopolitical powers often have pursued before. What the United States does not want is for China to become in Asia what Germany became in Europe a century ago: a bullying rogue elephant. Just as clearly, the United States needs to encourage China to become a democracy with a market economy, to pursue its legitimate interests in moderate ways, and to integrate into the larger Asian system that we are trying to build: one anchored in peace and progress. If these positive goals are achieved, America will not have to worry about an adversarial China.

Whether China can be integrated into a stable, pro-democracy Asian system is to be seen and will be a long-haul proposition. In the interim, the United States cannot afford to ignore China's overreaching behavior, including any efforts to enhance its military strength and political influence in ways that intimidate its neighbors and drive the United States out of Asia. The great risk is that if the United States is maneuvered into lessening its security guarantees to its allies, Japan will be motivated to pursue an independent stance. Some analysts fear that Japan might create its own nuclear deterrent, but even short of this, it might build a large military for power projection and start throwing its weight around as a leading geopolitical actor in Asian security affairs. In this event, the result could be a highly polarized, unstable Asia anchored in mounting Japanese-Chinese rivalry, with the United States on the outside looking in.

This worrisome prospect presents the United States with the need to perform a delicate balancing act that will prevent China from turning into a menace as its power grows, but that also keeps the door open for it to become a constructive contributor to a peaceful Asian community. This is the sort of demanding geopolitical agenda that would have challenged Europe's best diplomats and leaders of the 19th century. Just as dissuasion had a key role to play in European policies then, it has a new role to play in U.S. policies toward Asia today, for it will be a means not only to constrain China's assertive, nationalistic policies but also to assure American allies in ways that promote stability across the entire region.

Sometimes dissuasion will require the United States to apply its military power firmly against China; Taiwan is the obvious example. But a consistent strategy aimed at treating China as an adversary and intimidating it militarily almost inevitably would backfire, probably in more ways than one. In this event, the United States might not only turn China into a permanent enemy but also alarm Japan and other allies, as well as alienate parts of the rest of Asia, including Southeast Asia. Barring a

Chinese decision to embark on an imperial agenda for reasons of its own, the United States normally will need to pursue a balanced form of dissuasion, along with a full set of policies aimed at achieving other goals. The exact U.S. policy mix will depend upon the evolving situation, but the best advice is to remember Roosevelt's maxim.

## Defense Planning

Dissuasion is a product of U.S. military forces and the overall strategic strengths of the Nation. Clearly, American democratic values, economic power, cultural influences, and diplomatic skills figure prominently in the equation. Just as clearly, there will continue to be many situations in which these assets alone will not be enough to accomplish dissuasion: the history of the past century shows many cases of adversaries who stared U.S. strategic strength in the face and chose to compete and transgress anyway. In dealing with these situations, the Armed Forces will play a key and often dominating role. Consequently, care must be taken to ensure that U.S. military forces are well prepared to carry out this role and its associated missions. Maintaining a military posture that can win all wars likely to be fought may not, in itself, be enough to ensure that dissuasion is accomplished.

Even so, dissuasion is not widely used in the Department of Defense (DOD) today partly because its implications for defense planning are unclear and hard to determine. Deterrence is a more comfortable and shop-worn term because it is a known commodity. It offers clear guidelines for defense planning anchored in tangible military affairs, not abstract political calculations. But deterrence suffers from a key liability; it requires existing enemies before it can be applied in ways that will come across as credible and attractive to the American people and our allies. What will happen, though, if the future produces murky, dangerous geopolitics in key regions, but no implacable enemies and big warfighting contingencies worthy of the name? This could happen in Asia if Korea unifies, thereby depriving U.S. defense strategy of the key contingency that has anchored American deterrence strategy, force-sizing practices, and alliance relationships for many years. It could also happen in the Middle East and Persian Gulf if U.S. policy succeeds in overthrowing the Saddam Husayn regime in Iraq but is left facing an array of countries that are worrisome geopolitical actors yet not outright enemies.

In this event, the United States could face the dilemma of either not having a credible strategic anchor for its defense planning or manufacturing enemies in order to create such an anchor. In theory, the concept of deterrence could be stretched beyond its normal meaning to include situations in which potential rivals are being encountered. This practice, however, could result in deterrence being watered down to the point that it is not always regarded as necessitating fully prepared forces for warfighting. During the Cold War and afterward, DOD has preferred to apply deterrence only to dangerous situations requiring such full-scale defense preparations. The risk is that if deterrence is now reinterpreted to cover less-demanding situations, it will not automatically trigger a proper, galvanized response when truly dangerous confrontations occur.

**pursuit of dissuasion begins by establishing stable, favorable force balances in key theaters**

Dissuasion offers a viable way out of this dilemma. It permits credible defense planning and alliance-preserving diplomacy in a geopolitical setting—a setting that lacks immediate, fearsome enemies. It thus offers a viable approach for such situations, while allowing deterrence to remain solely focused on more dangerous confrontations. For this reason, among others already mentioned, dissuasion is a useful defense concept, but only if it is equipped with a strategic theory that defines U.S. military requirements and priorities for pursuing it. Creating such a theory, in turn, necessitates deep thinking about the cause-and-effect relationship regarding how, in this information era of accelerating globalization, U.S. military prowess affects the peacetime geopolitical dynamics of key regions. The need for such thinking is nothing new; in fact, it has been an important factor in U.S. strategic calculations for decades. But unlike earlier periods, dissuasion now may be rising to claim equal status with military-anchored deterrence in some locations. This is a looming reality that DOD cannot afford to ignore.

If the United States can succeed at dissuasion, it will help preserve its capacity to win wars decisively, while reducing the costs of preparing its forces. Success also will allow DOD to perform key missions with smaller forces than might otherwise be the case, thereby enhancing its ability to extract maximum global mileage from its limited, often overstretched forces. In addition, successful dissuasion will enhance American ability to reassure allies and to maintain the cohesion and effectiveness of alliance relationships. Allies, after all, tend to be more loyal and committed if they judge that they are on the winning side of military competition. The same can be said of neutral countries that tend to choose sides depending upon who is likely to best safeguard them. The strategic benefits of successful dissuasion thus are amply compelling to justify taking this goal seriously and working hard on its behalf.

As the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (*QDR Report*) notes, the pursuit of dissuasion begins by establishing stable, favorable force balances in key theaters. Beyond this, the United States will be trying to establish favorable balances that potential enemies will not strive to tilt in their favor, especially in ways that open the door for them to commit aggression. Critics might say that the U.S. military is already so superior to adversaries that any special effort to channel their defense preparations in benign directions is unnecessary. But even if they are waging an uphill battle, the governments of such countries can gain prestige in the eyes of their own people and neighbors by trying to stand up to alleged U.S. hegemony. Nor is achieving a measure of success beyond the pale for them, especially if they pursue asymmetric strategies focused on areas where they possess exploitable leverage or where U.S. superiority rests on a thin, brittle technological edge. They might not have any serious prospect of defeating U.S. forces in combat, but they might realistically aspire to inflict a heavy toll in casualties and overall difficulty—thereby enhancing their capacity to deter U.S. intervention in crises. Countries animated by such motives will not be dissuaded easily. The United States will need to be able to convince them that their efforts will be fruitless, that the costs will far exceed the benefits, and that they risk spending themselves into bankruptcy by trying to compete with the U.S. military.

Successfully dissuading tough-minded countries, therefore, cannot be taken for granted, or viewed as a natural byproduct of normal U.S. defense planning. At times, this task may be costly and difficult, and if targeted countries develop countervailing strategies, it may not always be fully successful. At a minimum, it will require focused efforts and the conscious tailoring of U.S. forces and programs so that they exert significant constraining leverage on the ambitions and prospects of these countries. Beyond this, DOD and the U.S. Government should remember that the goal is not merely to dissuade potential adversaries from competing militarily with the United States. An equally important goal is to dissuade them from pursuing malevolent political and strategic agendas that might be achievable even if their military forces remain decidedly inferior to the United States. If a potential adversary successfully weakens the resolve and loyalty of key U.S. allies, it will have achieved a great deal in political terms irrespective of its technical standing in the military balance. Foreclosing such efforts by denying them any chance of success is a key part of the dissuasion agenda.

How can DOD best array its military forces and preparedness efforts so that they effectively perform the dissuasion mission? While the answer will affect the U.S. military posture as a whole, it may have an especially big impact on the U.S. overseas military presence in regions where enemies and wars are supplemented or replaced altogether by murky geopolitics. Along the Southern arc of instability, for example, the presence of U.S. military forces may not alone be enough to produce peace and progress, but it could have a general stabilizing effect while providing ready-response options in event of crises. In theory, space-based information systems and the capacity to deploy powerful forces swiftly from the continental United States in a crisis can combine to lessen the need for a large, permanent overseas presence. But realities suggest that overseas presence still plays an important role in peacetime and wartime, even though its exact contribution is hard to measure.

The events of the past decade or so have offered insights into this role. In the two regions where the United States deploys large forces, it has been successful at steering strategic trends in the right direction. In Europe, the large U.S. military presence and leadership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seemingly played a positive role in dissuading Russia from opposing NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe. The Russians were not thrilled by the idea, but they lacked the military power and associated political leverage to block the action. Thus, they gracefully acquiesced to it. In Northeast Asia, the U.S. military presence has kept North Korea bottled up and has helped warn China not to invade Taiwan.

Across the vast regions from the Balkans to the Persian Gulf and South Asia, regions where the United States does not deploy comparably large forces or lead well-established alliances, the geopolitical pattern has been different. Three times the United States has been compelled to fight regional wars against adversaries who were not sufficiently impressed by U.S. military strength to be dissuaded or deterred. Iraq, Serbia, and al Qaeda in Afghanistan all discounted American willpower to oppose their aggressive designs. They were mistaken, but the United States had to wage wars in order to rebuff them. All three of these wars were caused by many factors other than any disrespect for U.S. military prowess, but, even so, a stronger and more visible U.S. force presence may have had a constraining effect.

**a period of dynamic change lies ahead in regional geopolitics, and the overseas presence must change along with it or risk sliding into irrelevance**

These experiences suggest that in this new era, the presence or absence of the Armed Forces on a permanent basis has a significant impact on trends toward peace or war. As a general rule, sizable U.S. forces will remain needed in troubled regions. But this strategic principle does not mean that the current presence should remain static or continue to perform its current missions. A period of dynamic change lies ahead in regional geopolitics, and the overseas presence must change along with it or risk sliding into irrelevance. The task will be one of determining the size and mix of forces, as well as such activities as security assistance and outreach efforts, that will be required in each region to achieve key strategic goals. Understanding the respective roles of dissuasion and deterrence will be an important element of this calculus.

In troubled regions, surface appearances suggest that requirements for dissuasion will be less than those for deterrence. While this often may be the case, it likely will not always hold true. Requirements for deterrence can be large when there is a large, well-armed enemy to ward off and when deterrence takes the form of a full-fledged defense capability for wartime contingencies. If enemies are small and not well armed, however, deterrence can be attained on the cheap, with small forces. As for dissuasion, it is a proactive concept whose requirements will depend upon the countries or coalitions to be influenced and the size of the region to be covered. In troubled regions, it often will require the United States to adopt a visible military profile in ways that clearly signal its firm intent to several countries. This goal may not be readily accomplished with small forces. In some places, the requirements for dissuasion could be substantial, and they could match or exceed those for deterrence.

Equally important, the requirements of dissuasion may be different from those of deterrence. For example, deterrence may require an overseas presence of 80,000 troops or more in a region, and dissuasion an equal number. But the exact mix of joint forces deployed, and the associated measures that animate their missions and activities, may differ significantly between the two concepts. As an illustration, deterrence may mandate large ground forces at a single location. By contrast, dissuasion may require fewer ground forces but larger air and naval forces that are spread out over a greater geographic space and that are used proactively to wield targeted types of influence. A strategy that combines deterrence and dissuasion may require a mix of these two deployment patterns. There is no simple, unchanging formula for calculating force needs for all occasions. Each region must be addressed individually on its own merits, in ways that adjust to unfolding geopolitical changes.

In Europe, the United States seems unlikely to station large forces for regional dissuasion alone or for local deterrence and defense. But it likely will continue stationing such forces for the purpose of motivating NATO and Europeans to become better at projecting power to other regions and for working closely with U.S. forces. Strategic calculations in the Persian Gulf may be affected by a growing emphasis on

dissuasion, but current military presence is so small that a posture similar to that of today may be needed even if Saddam is removed from power. The region most principally affected will be Asia, where the current military presence is both large and anchored in classical deterrence concepts. A shift away from deterrence toward dissuasion could have big implications for Asian overseas presence. The exact impact may not be easily determined today, but because defense plans are future oriented, the issue merits at least preliminary attention.

The pursuit of dissuasion will require U.S. defense plans to view Asia as a whole, rather than the current practice of focusing mostly on Northeast Asia while treating the rest of the Asian littoral as a backwater. The coming geopolitical interaction with China and other countries will take place heavily along this entire littoral, not just in Northeast Asia and Taiwan. Key U.S. military missions along this littoral will include missile defense plus conventional power-projection in ways that are flexible and adaptable, attuned to the goals of dissuasion and assurance, while capable of responding to a wide array of flashpoints, crises, and potential conflicts. If the Korean Peninsula standoff is resolved, the United States likely will no longer need to deploy the same ground forces (two Army brigades and two Marine brigades) in Northeast Asia. But missions elsewhere along the vast Asian littoral could require an equal number of air and naval forces or even a greater number. The *QDR Report* calls for shifting more naval combatants to Asia and for creating better bases, facilities, and infrastructure along the Asian littoral. These are initial measures. Further steps will require careful analysis.

## Dissuasion and Transformation

As it assesses dissuasion missions and requirements, DOD will need to ensure that this effort is interlocked with its transformation agenda. Transformation involves more than merely acquiring new information systems and other technologies for U.S. forces in order to enhance warfighting capabilities. Importantly, it involves the design of future forces so that they can carry out the entire defense strategy. Transformation concepts thus must be applied to overseas presence and to alliance relationships because they too will be changing. Dissuasion particularly requires a clear understanding of transformation imperatives; whereas deterrence focuses on existing enemy capabilities, dissuasion aims to influence potential adversaries not to acquire future capabilities and otherwise to refrain from competing with U.S. forces.

To pursue this goal, DOD must view dissuasion not in static terms but in the dynamic, future-oriented terms of transforming the Armed Forces, so they are capable of defeating enemies in wartime and constraining military options and geopolitical aims of future adversaries. As a result, future U.S. overseas presence must be at the front-end of transformation, which should be tailored not solely to upgrade its warfighting capabilities but also to strengthen alliances so that they too constrain

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the force-building aspirations of potential adversaries. What applies to overseas presence also holds true for transformation of the entire U.S. military posture as it is gradually but steadily reconfigured for operations in the information age.

Whereas U.S. forces will carry out dissuasion in the near term, transformed forces that are different from today's posture will pursue it in the future. Transformation comes in two forms: mid-term and long-term. Of the two, mid-term transformation has more important implications for dissuasion in the foreseeable future. Mid-term transformation involves efforts to blend new organizations, operational concepts, and weapon systems emerging from the research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E), and procurement pipelines. If these efforts are properly tailored, they will have the capacity to enhance the pursuit of dissuasion against potential adversaries over the critical next decade and beyond. Long-term transformation mostly involves the pursuit of entirely new technologies and weapon platforms that are now in the early stages of RDT&E and will not be fielded for many years. As these new systems come to fruition and enter the inventory, they will help pursue dissuasion in the long haul, when potential adversaries may be different. The goal of dissuasion thus enhances the premium attached to a skillful mid-term transformation, while mandating attentiveness to the long term as well.

As stated in the *QDR Report*, the DOD transformation agenda is animated by such operational goals as defending the homeland and bases abroad, building interoperable and effective command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance ($C^4ISR$) systems, forcibly entering crisis zones against area-denial threats and asymmetric strategies, denying the enemy sanctuary and engaging its forces rapidly, and making effective use of space. While the means to pursue these goals must be heavily influenced by purely military calculations, the requirements and dynamics of dissuasion should enter the equation. To the extent that future U.S. forces fulfill these operational goals, they will be better able to win wars and to deter and dissuade. While this obviously will be the case for U.S. combat forces, acquisition of modern $C^4ISR$ systems and space systems likely will have positive effects of their own. Among other benefits, these assets will help give the United States better awareness of how potential adversaries are building their forces, thereby constraining them from springing surprises on the United States. Such effects need to be taken into account in shaping the transformation roadmaps being pursued by the military services and DOD as a whole.

The potential relationship between the operational characteristics of transformed forces and pursuit of dissuasion offers high-leverage ways to enhance the effectiveness of U.S. defense strategy. As noted above, successful efforts to strengthen homeland security and build missile defenses can greatly lessen the incentives for adversaries to pursue terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. If transformed forces possess the capacity to enter crisis zones in the face of stiff opposition, adversaries will have fewer incentives to create access-denial capabilities in the form of antiship missiles, strike aircraft, and other similar assets. If U.S. air and missile forces can perform countersanctuary bombardment and other deep-strike missions, adversaries will have less incentive to build integrated air defenses with double-digit

surface-to-air missiles. If ground forces can perform swift maneuvers and strike lethally, adversaries will have fewer incentives to build strong forces with armored capabilities for aggression. Clearly, the act of acquiring such information-era capabilities through transformation does not guarantee that potential adversaries will refrain from pursuing threatening military competition and ambitions. But it will help increase the costs of such efforts and make them less likely to succeed. In this important sense, it will enhance dissuasion.

The imperative need for information-era transformation applies to the European allies as well. Today, they have large military forces, but they are unable to project power off the European continent to long distances. The Europeans and NATO need to launch a transformation effort to develop better forces and capabilities for swift power projection, lethal strike operations, and interoperability with U.S. forces. The idea of NATO and the Europeans creating a spearhead response force for such purposes is a good step in the right direction. If the Europeans can become better at performing new missions outside their continent, this will enhance deterrence and NATO warfighting capabilities. In commensurate ways, it will enhance dissuasion as well, for, in the final analysis, the prospect of the United States and Europe acting together on behalf of this purpose will have a greater impact than the United States acting alone.

## Conclusion

Is dissuasion an idea whose time has come? Seemingly so, for the simple reason that it provides a viable concept for coping adeptly with new-era geopolitical dynamics—often in better, more effective ways than such older concepts as deterrence. This does not necessarily mean that dissuasion should become the dominating theme of overseas presence and overall U.S. defense strategy. Moreover, dissuasion may prove costly in some places and inherently difficult to achieve. But the emerging global scene necessitates that dissuasion be given an appropriate role, along with the other core strategic goals of the *QDR Report* and the *National Security Strategy*. Determining how to do so is the challenge facing DOD and the U.S. Government, and it promises to be an interesting one because, like much of today's world, it requires fresh thinking and innovative decisions.




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