Public Abstract

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Perfect Deterrence Theory, Capability,
and the Problem of Al Qaeda

During the Cold War, a large body of literature was compiled by scholars studying international conflict â€" that of deterrence. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, however, a new body of literature has begun to grow â€" that of terrorism. Interestingly enough, these two literatures have only rarely been considered together. This paper seeks to do so. By utilizing perfect deterrence theory, a theory of general deterrence, I seek to explain why some terrorist networks are more deterrable than others. Specifically, I investigate a case involving the United States and Al Qaeda in an attempt to establish that terrorist networks of true believers are far more difficult to deter than other terrorist groups, because true believersâ€™ desire for conflict always outweighs their desire to maintain the status quo.