

DETECTING TRUE BELIEVERS:
PERFECT DETERRENCE THEORY, CAPABILITY
AND THE PROBLEM OF AL QAEDA

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

DETECTING TRUE BELIEVERS:
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AND THE PROBLEM OF AL QAEDA

presented by Lisa J. Davis, a candidate for the degree of Master in Political Science, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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*I dedicate this work to
My family
My friends
And my country*

*11 September 2001
We still remember
and will never surrender*

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ABSTRACT

During the Cold War, a large body of literature was compiled by scholars studying international conflict – that of deterrence. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, however, a new body of literature has begun to grow – 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 – a state actor - and Al Qaeda – a network of true believers – in an attempt to establish that terrorist networks of true believers are far more difficult to deter than other terrorist groups, because true believers' desire for conflict always outweighs their desire to maintain the status quo.

Deterring True Believers:
Perfect Deterrence Theory, Capability, and the Problem of Al Qaeda

For nearly fifty years, the threat of the Soviet Union fathered a large body of literature – that of deterrence. Deterrence is the act of using threats to prevent an adversary from pursuing undesirable objectives. The literature examined many forms of deterrence as well as the likelihood of its success. With the conclusion of the Cold War, however, the literature suggests that many scholars believed that this strategic tool had become largely obsolete in the realm of modern conflict; for this reason, the volume of new literature on deterrence greatly decreased.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, however, suggest that a new threat has arisen – that of terrorism which might be effectively countered by deterrence strategies. In this paper, I bring these two bodies of literature together and make a number of contributions to this growing body of literature. First, I explore the issue of deterring terrorism through the lens of general deterrence; the form of deterrence is defined as the period of time existing between crises. Previous research addresses the topic of deterring terrorism through the lens of immediate deterrence; this form of deterrence is defined as a crisis scenario where one actor is seriously considering altering the status quo.

While these analyses are interesting and helpful in certain situations, they fail to explain why general deterrence failed in the first place. By approaching this discussion through the lens of general deterrence, I conclude that the affinity of certain terrorist networks toward conflict prevents general deterrence from succeeding. Put another way,

certain terrorist networks are inherently opposed to the status quo and are willing to go to great lengths to alter it.

Second, I explore how terrorist networks of true believers are, by definition, different from other terrorist networks. According to Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001), true believers are terrorist agents who embrace both homicidal and suicidal tendencies due to an intense dedication to their religiously or politically radical ideology. The political science literature (Ethan Bueno de Mesquita 2005, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita 2000, Heyman 2003, and Post 2007) argues that true believers are more acceptant of violence and conflict than other terrorist networks. I incorporate both of these assertions into my conceptualization of true believers and conclude that these differences do, in fact, set them apart from other terrorist networks.

Third, I investigate this topic through the employment of the logically sound perfect deterrence theory rather than the logically inconsistent classical deterrence theory. Classical deterrence theory emphasizes material capability but assumes that no threat is credible; it asserts that no state would rationally accept conflict as a rational outcome and concludes that all of the world's wars have occurred purely by accident.

Perfect deterrence theory, however, argues that conflict can be and has been a rational outcome in the past. Its conceptualization of capability and credibility is based on the preferences of the actors involved, and it assumes that capability is a necessary condition for deterrence success. The creators of this theory (Zagare and Kilgour 2000), argue that their theory is more consistent in a logical sense than classical deterrence theory; I contend that their claim is correct, and I employ it here in this investigation of deterring terrorism.

Through the use of perfect deterrence theory, one that examines the success and failure of general deterrence, I conclude that the affinity toward conflict projected by certain terrorist groups – networks of true believers - makes them night impossible to deter, because – according to perfect deterrence theory – if one actor prefers conflict to the status quo, their opponent’s threat is incapable and general deterrence will necessarily fail.

In this paper, I employ a case study examining the relationship between the United States and Al Qaeda. Specifically, I investigate the 11 September 2001 attacks; I explore the events preceding and immediately following the attacks in an attempt to accurately determine the capability and credibility of the actors under scrutiny. Ultimately, I conclude that the hypothesis I pose is valid; the United States failed to pose a capable threat and this prevented general deterrence from succeeding.

I conclude that when state actors engage with networks of true believers, general deterrence will always fail, because state actors will always lack a capable threat. Since general deterrence strategies cannot aid state actors in deterring networks of true believers, I encourage policymakers in states opposed to these networks to employ immediate deterrence strategies to combat these lethal and ideologically dedicated networks.

Transnational Terrorism

A large body of research available examines transnational terrorism. In this section, I first define transnational terrorism and investigate the different forms terrorism

takes. Next, I identify some common characteristics and causes of terrorist activity and determine how Al Qaeda fits into this discussion.

Defining Terrorism

Dugard (1974, 74-75) identifies terrorism as “acts of violence designed to bring about political change”. The foundation of his conceptualization is based on the definition created at the 1937 Convention Against Terrorism and identifies “assassinations of heads of state, damage to private property, and any attacks designed to endanger the lives of the public” (Dugard 1974, 77-79) as terrorist attacks. Another important distinction that Dugard identifies is the *fear* that terrorist attacks are designed to instill in the intended targets. This is a common definition used by many scholars (e.g., Turk 1982; Whitehead 1987; Deutch 1997). I contend that the key component in all of these discussions is *the use of violence to achieve their political ends*. Terrorists, according to this definition, refuse to use diplomacy to achieve their goals; fear is instilled far more successfully through action than through diplomatic association.

This basic definition is a good foundation, but I contend that this conceptualization of terrorism is far too broad for the purposes of this paper. My goal here is to determine how terrorists embracing extreme ideologies can be deterred, but this definition fails to distinguish mainstream terrorist groups from the organizations that embrace extremist ideologies. I contend that the breadth of transnational terrorism in the case examined here is much narrower. Deutch (1997) appears to have a better grasp on the scope of terrorist activities. Deutch’s work also identifies the strategy of targeting non-combatants – an important element of transnational terrorism that Dugard fails to

identify. Turk (1982) further explores this concept and argues that terrorists employ different levels of violence (lethal and non-lethal) to instill fear in their foes. This also is an important point; it suggests that an ‘all or nothing’ end game is unlikely. Put another way, terrorists are typically unwilling (or perhaps unable) to direct their full capabilities at a single target.

George (1988) offers yet another element to this definition. He contends that modern acts of terrorism are designed to benefit the interests of a select group rather than the general public; he identifies violent acts enacted for the public good as ‘tyrannicide’ (George 1988, 390-391). The payoffs of terrorist acts therefore are designed to benefit a select group of people.

One of the key characteristics of terrorism is the desire of terrorist operatives to achieve some sort of political end (Dugard 1974). Many scholars (e.g., Deutsch 1997; Alexander and Swetnam 2000; Turk 1982, and Whitehead 1987) agree that this defining characteristic sets terrorists apart from other violent criminals. I therefore include it in my definition of terrorism.

These elements, I contend, constitute an acceptable definition of terrorism. According to my definition, therefore, terrorists are individuals that pursue violent acts that instill fear in an attempt to achieve some political end, target non-combatants, utilize capabilities as needed (varying level of lethality), and receive selective benefits from successfully orchestrating and carrying out attacks. This definition is much narrower than the original definition posed by Dugard (1974), but I contend that it presents a much clearer picture of the terrorists the world recognizes today.

Forms of Terrorism

The literature identifies several forms of terrorism; here, I investigate them. Deutsch (1997) explores revolutionary terrorism as groups of terrorists seeking to remove the current government from power or to pursue independence – as another prevalent form of terrorism existing today. While I argue that this form of terrorism is less present today than it was when Deutsch wrote his article, I contend that the basic principles of this form of terrorism are still important. Terrorists within this group are attempting to force new ideas upon the current global establishment. Taken in an international context, that is exactly what many terrorist organizations try to achieve.

The last form of terrorism that I investigate here is Islamic terrorism. Deutsch (1997) differentiates between mainstream and extremist groups. He categorizes Hamas in Palestine as a mainstream group, because it has a *broad set of goals*. It seeks to destroy the state of Israel and establish an Islamic Palestinian state. In general, it has a broader set of goals than do extremist groups. Extremist groups, like Al Qaeda, embrace a set of goals based on their individually narrow interpretation of Islam (Deutsch 1997). He identifies this form of terrorism as the one that poses the greatest threat to the national security of the United States and other state actors.

It seems as if there is little difference between revolutionary and Islamic terrorism save the religious dimension; both forms seek to overthrow a government or way of life and establish another in its place. I believe the distinction lies on the scope of these group's goals. The goals of revolutionary terrorists exist on a predominantly domestic level while Islamic terrorists tout objectives that extend to the international realm. Revolutionary terrorists seek to alter the status quo solely in their respective state while

the goals of Islamic terrorists are much broader. This distinction is not evident in Deutsch's work, but I contend that it is necessary to explore it here, because I contend that Al Qaeda and other like-minded terrorist networks could be included in both of these classifications.

Alexander and Swetnam (2001) discuss Al Qaeda's domestic and international goals. They conclude that Al Qaeda seeks to create a world in which Muslims both at home (in the Middle East) and abroad can prosper. To do so, Alexander and Swetnam (2001) assert that actively combating the West and its interests is the only way that the goals of these networks can be achieved.

Because both domestic and international aspects are clear in Al Qaeda's goals, I conclude that the risks and tendencies of both of these forms should be considered in these analyses. I further assert that the identification of domestic and international goals is typical of other networks embracing extremist ideologies as well. These forms of terrorism are distinct in their own way but are similar in others. I now investigate these similarities in order to better comprehend what states are facing when confronted with a terrorist threat.

Characteristics of Terrorism

There are many similarities among terrorist groups. First, I explore the argument that inequality is the root cause of terrorist activities. Turk (1982) and Deutsch (1997) suggest that the social and political inequality existing in authoritarian regimes is the root cause of terrorism. Posen (2002) and Deutsch (1997) argue that certain areas of the Middle East (particularly the impoverished regions) are the most prevalent source of

terrorist activity. Posen as well as Hamilton and Hamilton (1983) contend that Al Qaeda (as well as other Middle-Eastern terrorist groups) resents the political, social, and economic inequality that exists between the Middle East and Western democracies. They contend that this terrorist group believes that Western democracies have intentionally encouraged the economic gap that exists between East and West, and, for this reason, they further assert that these networks seek avenge these wrongs. The literature clearly identifies economic inequality as a key component to the formation and maintenance of terrorist groups and the ideologies that they claim to defend.

Another similarity that the literature identifies is that terrorist attacks tend to be targeted against democratic states (Whitehead 1987). Connected with the concept of inequality, Turk (1982) argues that many terrorist organizations seek to terrorize Western democracies in the hopes that their exploitation of politically, socially, and economically disadvantaged states will cease. Osama bin Laden himself asserts that this is one of Al Qaeda's primary goals (bin Laden 1998).

Most of these characteristics are common among transnational terrorist groups – including Al Qaeda. It is essential that this is understood because these commonalities affect the generalizability of the case study I conduct later in the paper. The deterrence literature is also important for this investigation; I contend that investigating the threat of terrorism through the lens of deterrence sheds new light both into determining the severity of the threat posed by terrorist extremists and also enabling scholars to glean insight regarding the likely outcomes of future encounters with these lethal terrorist networks.

Deterrence

The next major topic I explore is deterrence. Again, I contend that it is necessary to operationalize the term. Next, I distinguish different forms of deterrence that are relevant to this paper. Following this dialogue, I explore two specific theories of deterrence – classical deterrence theory and perfect deterrence theory. Finally, I identify which of these theories I chose to employ in this paper and the rationale for doing so.

Defining Deterrence

Before defining what deterrence is, I need to identify the key element of deterrence - threats. Some scholars conclude that only threats discouraging future action (deterrence) should be included in this definition while threats encouraging future action (compellence) should not be (Schaub 2004). However, I contend that the logic behind both of these processes is very similar. For the purposes of this paper, I attempt to determine how state actors can prevent future terrorist attacks (prevent terrorist networks from altering the status quo); I am interested in the *prevention of action*. At the same time, however, state actors also try to encourage terrorist networks to move away from their violent past; therefore, I am also interested in the *encouragement of action*.

Quackenbush (2010a, 1) developed a definition of deterrence that works exceedingly well within the parameters of my analysis. According to Quackenbush's (2010) definition, deterrence is "the use of a threat by one party in an attempt to convince another party to maintain the status quo." I argue that this is exactly what state actors seek to do when dealing with terrorist networks; state actors are interested in preventing

terrorist networks from initiating future attacks. Therefore, this definition of deterrence serves as the foundation of my analysis.

Types of Deterrence

The literature differentiates between four forms of deterrence: general vs. immediate deterrence, unilateral vs. mutual deterrence, direct vs. extended deterrence, and conventional vs. nuclear deterrence. These forms of deterrence are identified and discussed by Quackenbush (2010a); I argue, however, that only two of them are relevant in my analysis: general vs. immediate and mutual vs. unilateral. After defining the differences that exist within these two forms of deterrence, I identify how they are relevant to the theory developed in this paper and also the case study included therein which investigates the deterrence relationship between the United States and Al Qaeda.

General vs. Immediate Deterrence

The key difference between these forms of deterrence is what Quackenbush (2010a) defines as a crisis situation. Morgan (2003, 9-10) identifies immediate deterrence as ‘the relationship between opposing states where one state is seriously considering an attack while the other is mounting a threat of retaliation in order to prevent it.’ In short, immediate deterrence refers to a crisis situation.

General deterrence, on the other hand, is a period where two states maintain their military capabilities although there is no evidence that suggests an attack is imminent (Morgan 2003, 9). This situation, unlike immediate deterrence, consists of what I refer to as ‘cautious down time’. Both sides are prepared for an attack but are not expecting one in the immediate future. Most of the deterrence literature addresses deterrence

relationships of the Cold War (particularly the relationship between the United States and the USSR) (e.g., Lebow 1989; George and Smoke 1989; Lebow and Stein 1995); according to these scholars, many researchers consider this deterrence relationship to be a general one. For this reason, Zagare and Kilgour (2000) contend that general deterrence has been investigated more rigorously than immediate deterrence. For the purposes of this paper, I contend that the relationship between the United States and Al Qaeda falls within a general deterrence context; although both of these actors are prepared for an attack from their adversary, there is little evidence to suggest that an attack is imminent (May 2004). My case study attempts to capture this reality.

Unilateral v Mutual Deterrence

Some forms of deterrence are not concerned with the presence of crisis but rather the alteration of the status quo. Unilateral deterrence, as Quackenbush (2010a) defines it, is when one state desires to alter the status quo and another seeks to maintain it. Drezner (1998) presents an example of unilateral deterrence in his investigation of the success of economic sanctions. He argues that the Challenger (the actor being deterred) seeks to prevent the Defender (the actor attempting to deter) from altering the status quo by imposing economic sanctions.

Conversely, mutual deterrence is quite different. In this situation, both states wish to alter the status quo. The clash between the United States and the Soviet Union is a good example of mutual deterrence (Zagare and Kilgour 2000). These concepts of deterrence are significantly different, but I contend that only one is applicable to the analysis I conduct. I argue that unilateral deterrence is the most applicable form in this examination of deterring terrorism. Terrorist networks like Al Qaeda seeks to impose its

ideas across the globe and establish an international Islamic regime (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002). Conversely, state actors like the United States seek to prevent future attacks and create a world that is free from fear and ideological tyranny (May 2004). I attempt to capture this reality in the case study I conduct later in the paper.

Now that I have identified and discussed the different types of deterrence, I address and discuss the different theories of deterrence that are utilized by scholars. Zagare and Kilgour (2000) differentiate between two theories of deterrence: classical deterrence theory and perfect deterrence theory. I discuss both of these theories at length and then address their similarities and differences.

Theories of Deterrence

The two theories of deterrence I explore in this paper are classical deterrence theory and perfect deterrence theory. Classical deterrence theory represents the conventional wisdom on deterrence (Quackenbush 2010a) while the theory of deterrence developed by Zagare and Kilgour (2000) – perfect deterrence theory – rectifies a number of anomalies existing in classical deterrence theory. First, I discuss classical deterrence theory. I then explore Zagare and Kilgour’s perfect deterrence theory. Finally, I examine the similarities and differences between these two theories and determine which one is the most appropriate for the theory I develop here. After doing this, I address the (very limited) body of literature where terrorism and deterrence converge.

Classical Deterrence Theory

Classical deterrence theory has three main premises: in order to deter attacks, a state must persuade attackers that it has effective military capabilities, could impose upon

the attacker unacceptable costs, and project that its threat would be carried out if provoked (Schelling 1960; Powell 2003). In classical deterrence theory, the key element that determines deterrence success or failure is capability. Credibility, however, is understood to be unimportant.

Classical deterrence theory argues that conflict is the least preferred outcome for the actors involved in any deterrence relationship; due to this fact, it assumes that since no actor rationally prefers conflict, states avoid making threats that might instigate conflict. Thus, no threat is credible (Powell 2003). Conflicts that have occurred throughout history, however, suggest otherwise. Zagare and Kilgour's (2000) theory rests on the importance of credibility. Rather than emphasizing capability, perfect deterrence theory logically demonstrates that capability is a necessary condition for deterrence success (Zagare and Kilgour 2000); if an actor's threat fails to be capable, deterrence will necessarily fail.

Another problem with classical deterrence theory is that it assumes all actors behave in a similar manner. Zagare and Kilgour (2000) note real world implications suggest otherwise. They contend, contrary to classical deterrence theory, that states can and do act differently. I contend that the relationship between state actors and extremist terrorist networks – particularly Al Qaeda and the United States – is an excellent empirical example. Zagare and Kilgour (2000) refined classical deterrence theory and created perfect deterrence theory.

Perfect Deterrence Theory

Although perfect deterrence theory is, in some ways, similar to classical deterrence theory, it is also distinctly different as well. The concepts of perfect

deterrence theory that diverge from the conventional wisdom of classical deterrence theory are the concepts of capability and credibility. These concepts, rather than being based on material or human factors, rest on the preferences of Challenger (State A) and Defender (State B).

Capability is an actor's ability to hurt his adversary. According to classical deterrence theory, an actor's capability is determined by the possession of physical factors like manpower, weapon capacity, and the like. Rather than measuring capability through material means, perfect deterrence theory identifies the capability of an actor by its opponent's preference between the status quo and conflict. (Zagare and Kilgour 2000, Quackenbush 2010a). For example: if Challenger perceives Defender's threat is as capable, Challenger will prefer the status quo to conflict and deterrence will succeed; adversely, if Challenger perceives Defender's threat as incapable, Challenger will prefer conflict over the status quo.

According to Zagare and Kilgour (2000), classical deterrence theory assumes that no threat is credible; this assertion is based on the assumption that the pursuit of conflict is irrational. Perfect deterrence theory, however, disputes this proposition. While an actor's capability is based on its opponent's preference between conflict and the status quo, an actor's credibility reflects its preference between conflict and backing down. For example: if Challenger's threat is credible, he prefers to fight rather than back down; conversely, if Challenger's threat is incredible, he prefers to back down rather than fight. This theory therefore explains both credible threats and the occurrence of conflict while classical deterrence theory does not.

Zagare and Kilgour's (2000) perspective on capability and credibility differentiate perfect deterrence theory from the conventional wisdom – classical deterrence theory. The theory developed by Zagare and Kilgour (2000) enables scholars to accomplish two main objectives: it allows students of international conflict to explain more cases (particularly cases which end in conflict) and prevents scholars from making logically inconsistent assumptions and predictions. For this reason, I believe that perfect deterrence theory is more appropriate for my analysis; it enables me to investigate actors (like Al Qaeda) who are willing to risk a great deal to succeed as well as avoid logical inconsistencies that are typical in analyses that utilize classical deterrence theory.

Improving Perfect Deterrence Theory

In general, the calculations of capability and credibility are based on the circumstances at the time in question; in other words, past decisions are typically regarded as irrelevant in these analyses (Zagare and Kilgour 2000, 65-95). I contend, however, that past decisions enable scholars to more accurately assess the situation and strategic options available to the actors in question. Including past actions into the calculation of an actor's current capability and credibility was investigated by Press (2005). I contend that an investigation of past actions is relevant here, because I suspect that the past actions of both actors strongly influences their preferences. When relevant, therefore, I investigate past decisions of the United States and Al Qaeda and, where applicable, identify how past decisions affect decision-making and what factors encourage shifts in behavior.

Detering Terrorism: Strategy, Preferences, or Both

As I said before, very few scholars have considered counter-terrorism from a deterrence perspective. However, those who have seem to fall into two groups: those that develop strategies of deterring terrorists and those who investigate the preference orderings associated with different types of terrorists. I contend that the major flaw in this literature is that these groups fail to adequately speak to each other.

Strategy

The most notable scholars in this group are Ginges (1997) and Lebovic (2007). Both of these scholars discuss two strategies: deterring by punishment and deterring by denial. The analysis of Ginges is much simpler than the investigation of Lebovic. Lebovic further delineates the strategic options available to policymakers while Ginges focuses on the psychological effects these strategies would potentially have on terrorists. While these analyses are insightful, I contend that they fail to address two key issues. First, they fail to grasp that once terrorists have decided to pursue attacks, general deterrence has failed; therefore, the strategies prescribed by these scholars are investigating immediate deterrence rather than general deterrence. Second, these scholars fail to investigate how different ‘types’ of terrorists would likely respond to such strategies (if they respond at all).

In his analysis, Ginges (1997) differentiates between deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. He claims that both of these deterrence strategies rest on the assumption that terrorists are, in fact, rational actors that make calculated decisions based

on potential costs and payoffs. According to Ginges (1997), a deterrence by denial strategy attempts to minimize payoffs and maximize costs to the terrorist. This strategy seeks to prevent terrorists from seeking out and successfully attacking targets. It also assumes that Defender (state actor) is unwilling to negotiate with Challenger (terrorist network). This strategy is portrayed as a defensive strategy (Ginges 1997).

Deterrence by punishment is a much more aggressive strategy and is considered to be an offensive tactic. This form of deterrence involves the location, apprehension, interrogation, and possible execution of terrorist operatives and clerics (Ginges 1997). Ginges suggests that this strategy strongly advocates re-education and re-integration into society, but punitive measures (such as execution) can and should be used in extreme cases. Ginges (1997) concludes that deterrence by punishment strategies are the best option available to state actors. On the one hand, hopeless cases are executed and further damage on their behalf is prevented. On the other hand, terrorists that are re-educated can be re-introduced into society and can become honest citizens.

The analysis of Trager and Zagorcheva (2006) is very similar to the discussion of Ginges. They discuss deterring by punishment as well as deterring by denial. Trager and Zagorcheva (2006) conclude that deterring by denial is the best strategy; they argue, however, that it only serves as a temporary deterrent. Granted, most deterrence theorists argue that deterrence relationships have the potential fail (Zagare and Kilgour 2000); Trager and Zagorcheva (2006) argue, however, that the possibility of failure is no reason to abandon this strategy.

Like Ginges as well as Trager and Zagorcheva, Lebovic (2007) addresses strategies of punishment and denial; however, he makes a further distinction between

offensive strategies and defensive ones. So rather than investigating two strategic possibilities, he examines four: offensive-punishment, defensive punishment, offensive denial, and defensive denial.

Lebovic (2007) suggests that an offensive-punishment strategy is exactly what it sounds like – it is an outward punitive action against a person or group. He suggests that targeting terrorist networks, infrastructure, training camps – all outside the deterrer's home turf – all fit into the category of offensive-punishment tactics.

Rather than punishing the terrorist on their home soil, defensive punishment strategies seek to foil imminent attacks and punish those involved (Lebovic 2007). The key difference between these strategies is the location where the punishment takes place; the unique element in these strategies is the punishment – the attempt to inflict unacceptable costs upon the terrorists before they successfully attack a target.

Denial strategies of deterrence, unlike punishment strategies of deterrence, seek to defend the homeland against future attacks. Actors who utilize offensive denial strategies seek to outwardly apprehend or kill key operatives of terrorist networks – thus denying them the capability to plan or execute future attacks (Lebovic 2007). Conversely, actors who employ defensive-denial strategies attempt to protect vulnerable or valuable targets, reinforcing domestic infrastructure, and shoring up the capabilities of the intelligence so that they are more prepared to detect and prevent future terrorist activity (Lebovic 2007).

Lebovic (2007, 170-176), unlike Ginges, believes that a defensive-denial based strategy is more appropriate for deterring terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. He suggests that an offensive-punishment strategy only encourages further recruitment of terrorist operatives, an offensive denial strategy, while useful, is difficult to successfully

complete, and a defensive-punishment strategy, while useful, should be used as a last resort (Lebovic 2007).

I contend that the scholars that claim to be investigating deterring terrorism fail to comprehend that they are, in fact, examining strategic options that are available once general deterrence has failed; in other words, these scholars actually investigate strategies of immediate deterrence. The goal of my paper is to identify whether or not general deterrence can succeed when state actors are threatened by networks of true believers. The research of previous scholars in this discussion fails to provide an adequate answer to this perplexing question.

Preferences and True Believers

While Ginges, Lebovic, and Trager and Zagorcheva develop a number of interesting deterrence strategies designed to address the problem of terrorism, they (particularly Ginges) fail to accurately identify that different types of terrorists have different preference orderings; the failure to identify these differing preferences prevents these scholars from making accurate policy prescriptions. This is particularly true in cases where these networks are comprised of true believers.

Defining True Believers

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (2000), Ethan Bueno de Mesquita (2005), Heyman (2003), and Post (2007) differentiate between three kinds of terrorists: complacent opponents, reluctant terrorists, and true believers. These scholars conclude that the difference between these classifications rests on the preferences of the actors. A complacent opponent prefers to use terrorist acts as a last resort; they employ acts of

terror only when diplomatic negotiations have been exhausted and when the ideas of these networks are repressed. Reluctant terrorists prefer to use acts of terror only when negotiations with their enemies fail; they are more likely to engage in acts of terror than complacent opponents but are less likely to do so than true believers. True believers' prefer to get what they want by performing acts of terror; in other words, their most preferred method of achieving their objectives is by engaging in acts of violence. Bueno de Mesquita (2000, 340-341) contends that Al Qaeda network is a network of true believers.

Ethan Bueno de Mesquita (2005) Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (2000), Heyman (2003), and Post (2007) argue that preference orderings alone differentiate networks of true believers from other terrorist organizations. Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001) assert that this understanding of true believers is too simplistic. They contend that a number of additional elements should be included in any definition of true believers. First, they argue that operatives within networks of true believers maintain a 'warrior mentality' which is rooted in their desire to pursue conflict and violence in hopes of achieving some religious or political end (Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001, 4). They identify this warrior-like characteristic as a homicidal tendency (Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001).

Second, Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001) contend that networks of true believers are nearly always dedicated to some political or religious goal; they suggest that operatives within these networks are typically willing to risk martyrdom for the goals they pursue; they identify this tendency as a suicidal one. Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001) further claim that the achievement of those goals is contingent upon the

attachment of these networks to their homicidal-suicidal tendencies. In short, these homicidal-suicidal tendencies differentiate true believers from other terrorist networks.

Third, Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva (2001) contend that the political or religious ideologies these networks espouse are typically radicalized interpretations of religions or political ideologies that are widely accepted. This radicalization, they argue, reinforces the attachments of true believers to conflict, violence, and self-sacrifice (Meloy, Mohandie, Himpel, and Shiva 2001). I contend that the additional elements identified by these scholars are essential to understanding networks of true believers. Therefore, I consider these elements as I explore the deterrability of these warrior-like and ideologically fervent terrorist networks.

Crenshaw (2000, 412) argues that many transnational terrorist networks (including Al Qaeda) are true believers or “the new terrorists”. She contends that many of these “new terrorists” have global goals, are motivated by religious conviction, are more fanatical and lethal, and seek to maximize the number of casualties per attack in order to ensure that they receive the intended payoffs (Crenshaw 2000, 411-412). Bernholz (2004, 317-318) agrees but contends that the primary motivator of modern terrorists is ‘supreme values’; he suggests that typically these values are religious ones.

Deterrence and True Believers

The two groups present in this literature provide interesting insight to this discussion, but I argue that these groups fail to speak to each other. I contend that this is detrimental to this dialogue because it seems that the investigation of strategy and preference orderings should go hand in hand. The scholars examining strategic options

for deterring terrorism seem to overlook or understate the importance of rational calculations on the part of both actors (the state actor and the terrorist network). Similarly, the scholars examining the preference orderings of terrorists fail to include strategic prescriptions based on their knowledge of the preference orderings of terrorists – particularly true believers.

Another (and perhaps more notable) problem with the analyses of previous scholars is their inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that true believers' preference orderings make them inherently prone to conflict. The ideologies of true believers encourage them to pursue their objectives at any cost – even all-out-conflict. For this reason, I contend that perfect deterrence theory is the theory of deterrence that is most appropriate for investigating this paradoxical phenomenon, because it accounts both for actors who prefer conflict over all other outcomes and the possibility that certain threats made by actors might be incapable.

Finally, I contend that previous studies misinterpret what deterrence actually seeks to achieve. As stated before, Quackenbush (2010a, 1) defines deterrence as 'the use of a threat by one party in an attempt to convince another party to maintain the status quo'. Many of the strategies proposed (particularly by Lebovic, Ginges, and Trager and Zagorcheva) are designed to prevent Al Qaeda's attempts at altering the status quo from succeeding. At this point, Al Qaeda has already decided to alter the status quo; thus, general deterrence has failed. The vast majority of the policy prescriptions presented by Lebovic, Ginges, and Trager and Zagorcheva are therefore better classified as strategies of immediate deterrence rather than general deterrence strategies. Perfect deterrence

theory, however, explores general deterrence situations and attempts to determine if and why an actor can be deterred (Zagare and Kilgour 2000).

The case study that follows employs perfect deterrence theory which considers the capability and credibility of the actors involved; the capability and credibility of both actors takes into consideration the preferences of both actors. Once the capabilities and credibilities of the actors involved are identified, I am able to identify the rational outcome of the deterrence situation in question. By analyzing the attacks of 11 September 2001, a situation of failed general deterrence, I seek to determine why deterrence failed and what state actors can do in future to effectively deter future attacks orchestrated by true believers.

Theory

There is notable disagreement in the literature investigating the issue of deterring terrorists. Some (Lebovic 2007, Trager and Zagorcheva 2006, and others) say that terrorism can be deterred. Others (Bueno de Mesquita 2000, Crenshaw 2000, and Bernholz 2004) argue that networks of true believers like Al Qaeda cannot be deterred. I contribute to this discussion by including both elements (preference orderings and strategic decision-making) that are explored in the literature. To do this, I utilize perfect deterrence theory and, when relevant, take into account past actions and their effects on decision-making in the present. Before I do so, however, I briefly list a number of assumptions to create as close to a real-world interpretation of reality as possible.

Assumptions

I contend that it is necessary to identify a number of assumptions so this theoretical discussion can move forward. A couple of these assumptions are intended to create an image of the real world in which interactions between state actors and networks of true believers take place; others are designed to limit the bounds of this discussion to a reasonable length.

Level of Analysis

Deterrence theories of any sort state that actors have an equal capacity to make decisions. Despite the fact that the United States is a state actor and Al Qaeda is a much smaller and much less powerful terrorist group (a non-state actor), I assert that this assumption holds in this discussion as well. I am not suggesting that a power difference does not exist between these two actors; rather, I am implying that each actor has the same capacity to make rational choices. This assumption is essential, because it allows me to discuss the interaction of these types of actors in a meaningful way.

Excluding Third Party Involvement

Lebovic (2007) argues that Al Qaeda's power as a network comes at least partially from the willingness of 'rogue states' to financially and militarily support it. Despite this assertion, I conclude that third party involvement has little to do with the decision-making process of terrorist networks. The evidence suggests that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda gain most of their support from individual donors and the black market. Although third party actors sometimes provide terrorist networks with safe-havens to train, I contend that these terrorists acquire most of the resources (raw and human) that it needs through its own ingenuity. Therefore, in order to limit the length of

this analysis and also to more fully capture the reality of the capability and credibility of the actors (both state and non-state) in question, I assume away the influence of third parties in the operations of Al Qaeda and other networks of true believers.

This assumption is not as easily reconciled in the case of state actors like the United States. While the United States is, arguably, the world system's sole hegemon, its ability to effectively deter terrorists rests, at least partially, on international intelligence sharing and proactive responses to potential attacks; the reliance of other state actors on their allies represents a similar scenario. Despite this reality, I argue that the key to an effective deterrence strategy against terrorist networks like Al Qaeda is affected most strongly by the direct efforts of the state actors themselves rather than the indirect actions of their allies. Therefore, I assume away the involvement of third parties in this paper.

Unilateral Deterrence Relationships

As stated before, a unilateral deterrence relationship is one where one actor prefers to maintain the status quo while the other actor prefers to alter the status quo (Zagare and Kilgour 2000). It seems plain that terrorist networks with ideologies similar to Al Qaeda are dedicated to the alteration of the status quo; they must engage targets to encourage further recruitment and bring in needed funds (Alexander and Swetnam 2001). State actors like the United States, on the other hand, seek to prevent future attacks and thus seek to maintain the status quo (May 2004). I therefore assume the deterrence relationships between these actors to be unilateral.

Rationality

Zagare and Kilgour (2000) and Quackenbush (2010a) suggest that a notable difference between classical deterrence theory and perfect deterrence theory is their

conceptualization of rationality. Zagare and Kilgour (2000) argue that classical deterrence theory assumes that states would not rationally make decisions that could lead to the execution of their worst possible outcome; in other words, some decisions are inherently irrational.

Perfect deterrence theory, however, argues something quite different. It asserts that an actor's decision is rational so long as they believe it is rational (Quackenbush 2010a); it takes into consideration emotional, strategic, and political variables which classical deterrence theory does not. Therefore, I assume the concept of rationality utilized in perfect deterrence theory – instrumental rationality (Quackenbush 2004).

These assumptions create an image of the real world that enables me to investigate the ability of the state actors to effectively deter terrorist networks comprised of true believers; I contend that these assumptions both present a more accurate interpretation of reality than any other scholarly work examining deterrence relationships between states and terrorist groups and provide an acceptable framework upon which I build the following theory.

Perfect Deterrence Theory and the Threat of True Believers

A number of scholars (e.g., Ginges 2000; Lebovic 2007) argue that terrorists can be deterred while others (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 2000, Heyman 2003, and others) suggest that true believers are notoriously difficult (if not impossible) to deter. Through an employment of perfect deterrence theory, I seek to determine which of these assertions (if any) is correct. I hypothesize that the assertions of the scholars investigating preference orderings (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 2000, Heyman 2003, and others) are

correct; the ideological steadfastness of true believers will lead them to perceive the threats posed by their adversaries as incapable, because these groups inherently prefer conflict over the status quo and are willing to do anything to achieve their objectives.

In this paper, I conduct a case study examining the interaction between the United States and Al Qaeda. Through an application of perfect deterrence theory, I attempt to determine why the United States was unable to deter the attacks of 9/11 and what is likely to occur between these two actors in the future. Therefore, I pose the following hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that both the United States and Al Qaeda believed that their opponent posed a credible threat; both actors prefer, when attacked, to fight rather than back down.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, I contend that the reason general deterrence failed in this instance was that the United States failed to pose a capable threat to Al Qaeda; because the ultimate goal of this terrorist network is all-out-conflict and the elimination of the Western way of life, the United States had no way of posing a threat hurtful enough to deter Al Qaeda from successfully carrying out the attacks of 11 September 2001. Third, because the capability of the US is contingent upon the ideological strength of the Al Qaeda network (which is unlikely to change), I contend that future attacks upon the United States and other states opposed to the ultimate objectives of the Al Qaeda network are highly likely if not inevitable; only through provoking state actors like the United States can Al Qaeda achieve its ultimate objective – conflict with the state actors that oppose it.

I investigate each of these hypotheses in turn using primary documents composed by both actors. This enables me to determine their preferences and to identify that the

assertions of perfect deterrence theory hold. The primary documents used to determine the preferences of Al Qaeda include speeches, instructional manuals, and court testimony provided by either the Al Qaeda leadership or operatives functioning within Al Qaeda's global network. The primary documents used to establish the preferences of the United States include reports from Senate commissions, court cases, and speeches. The documents for both actors were selected in such a way as to maximize objectivity and accuracy.

Many scholars have identified Al Qaeda as an organization whose success is dependent upon its secrecy; because the network is highly efficient at operating under the radar, only a limited amount of information is readily available to the general public. The same is true for the United States. While a large amount of information is available to individuals within the United States government, only a limited amount of that information is accessible by the general public. Using all of the information available to the general public, I conduct a case study on 11 September 2010 and consider the interactions between the United States and Al Qaeda in order to determine what the preference orderings of each actor were so that I can identify whether or not the assertions of perfect deterrence theory mirrors the real-world outcome of the interaction between state actors and terrorist networks comprised of true believers.

The United States vs. Al Qaeda

As stated before, the capability of the United States and Al Qaeda depends on how their adversary perceives them. If one actor's threat is incapable, its adversary

prefers conflict to the status quo; on the other hand, an actor's threat is capable if its adversary prefers the status quo to conflict. An actor's credibility, on the other hand, is not based on the preferences of its adversary but rather on its own preferences.

I contend that Al Qaeda perceived threats posed by the United States as incapable whereas the United States perceived the threats posed by Al Qaeda to be capable. I further contend that the threats of both the United States and Al Qaeda were also credible. Here, I investigate the documents available on both sides in order to determine the capability and credibility the United States and Al Qaeda in the decision to proceed with and respond to the attacks of 9/11.

Al Qaeda's Capability and Credibility

The United States' perception of Al Qaeda has evolved since the interaction with this terrorist organization began. The United States' dealings with Al Qaeda indicate that the US strongly prefers the maintenance of the status quo to conflict; thus, the threat of Al Qaeda is capable. Similarly, the sect of Islam that Al Qaeda subscribes to encourages conflict with nonbelievers as opposed to the pursuit of their objectives through more peaceful means. For this reason, Al Qaeda prefers fighting over backing down; thus Al Qaeda's threat is not only capable but credible as well.

Capability

Al Qaeda's capability depends on the preference of the United States between the status quo and conflict. The United States' responses to threats shortly before 9/11 suggest that the United States was far more interested in the maintenance of the status quo; if it had not, the United States would have initiated a conflict with Al Qaeda before

it had the chance to attack the United States. Al Qaeda's threat is therefore capable, because the United States strongly preferred the maintenance of the status quo to conflict.

After the end of the Cold War, the United States learned that Al Qaeda had shifted its focus from "the Soviet desecrators" to "the Western crusaders." (bin Laden 1996). The United States also knew that Al Qaeda was actively seeking weapons-grade uranium and sought to use it against the United States (Al Fadhli 2001). The United States was aware of a number of things. First, it knew that Al Qaeda was actively planning an attack on the United States (Bush 2001b). Second, it was aware of an aborted attack on the US mainland using jet liners in 2000; the operatives of this attack were also the terrorists who were ultimately responsible for the successful completion of the 9/11 attacks (May 2004, 166-167). Intelligence gathered later in 2000 and early in 2001 suggested that Al Qaeda was moving forward with the aborted plan, but the intelligence failed to provide the targeted location of the impending attack (May 2004).

Third, intelligence demonstrated that large amounts of money were being funneled to bin Laden from sympathetic donors (particularly the Taliban government in Afghanistan) and was being re-directed to the terrorists in charge of the upcoming attack (May 2004, 170-171). Based on the available intelligence, the CIA concluded that donors had provided Al Qaeda between \$400,000 and \$500,000 specifically for the upcoming attack (May 2004, 172).

Richard Clarke, Bush's advisor on counter-terrorism, urged the administration to act; the intelligence suggested that bin Laden's assault upon America was imminent and only swift action could counter it (May 2004, 176). The Bush administration utilized both military and diplomatic means in the hopes of preventing the attack. Bush sent an

ambassador to Afghanistan to inform the Taliban that if bin Laden attacked, the United States would retaliate against Afghanistan unless it agreed to sever ties with bin Laden's network; the negotiations failed, and Afghanistan continued to support Al Qaeda and its plan to attack the United States (May 2004, 205-206).

The United States also attempted to use diplomatic means to persuade Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to refrain from aiding bin Laden. Bush was aware that the leader of Pakistan – Musharraf – was friendly with the Taliban regime and encouraged him to discourage the Taliban from supporting bin Laden; rather than complying, Musharraf asserted that the only way to end Afghanistan's support of bin Laden was to eliminate the Taliban regime (May 2004, 207).

Under Bush, Rice encouraged the reformation of the CIA, and this reformation led to the formulation of a number of operations which were designed with the intention of killing bin Laden and disabling the Al Qaeda network in mind. Clarke and Rice were enthusiastic about this option, but Cofen Black, the chief of the Counterterrorism Center (CTC), believed the risk of failure was much higher than the payoffs of success (May 2004, 211). Clarke strongly argued against aborting this plan and argued that “no response to the threat would only encourage Al Qaeda and the Taliban to wantonly take American lives.” (May 2004, 212).

By the summer of 2001, the US military had formulated a plan for ousting the Taliban but was unsure if the pursuit of this mission was realistic; it was likely that neighboring states would be unwilling to let the United States use their airspace to wage this war (May 2004, 208-209). Bush also stated that the occupation of Afghanistan would be a unilateral act and would likely anger a number of nations in the U.N.; in short,

Bush believed that attacking Afghanistan was inadvisable unless the US was attacked again (May 2004, 209).

While this plan was considered, threats against the United States increased exponentially; most of these threats were targeted at US interests abroad, so Bush raised the level of alert for the US military stationed in six targeted states to its highest possible point (May 2004, 257). ‘Disruption operations’ against Al Qaeda were deployed in 20 countries in the hopes of preventing attacks abroad (May 2004, 258). The US poised itself abroad in an attempt to divert potential attacks; at the same time, the fortification of the US homeland was underway.

At the beginning of July, direct threats against the United States increased and the FBI informed states and local law enforcement about the possibility of an attack; the FBI encouraged law enforcement to be on high alert against suspicious individuals of Middle Eastern descent (May 2004). But by the end of July, intelligence coming in suggested that bin Laden’s plans might have been postponed but ‘would still happen’ (May 2004, 260).

The definitiveness of the attack location came on August 6; Bush’s presidential daily brief stated, “Bin Laden determined to attack United States” and it suggested that rather than being targeted at US interests abroad, the pending attack would be aimed directly at the US mainland (May 2004, 260). Rice and Clarke attempted to marshal a response to this threat, but bureaucratic regulations left both unsure of whose job was whose (May 2004, 262-263). Ultimately, Clarke concluded that monitoring suspected Al Qaeda cells in the United States would be the best way to address the problem (May 2004, 261).

The United States' response to the threat of 9/11 ended disastrously, but the threat that Al Qaeda posed to the United States was taken very seriously. The actions taken by the United States to prevent attacks both abroad and at home suggest that the United States strongly preferred to maintain the status quo (no attacks) rather than initiate a conflict with bin Laden and his network; thus, the threat posed by Al Qaeda to the United States was extremely capable.

Credibility

Al Qaeda's credibility is based on its preference, once attacked, between fighting and backing down. In his 1996 *fatwa*, bin Laden stated that Muslims across the world had been wronged by 'the Western Crusaders' and that it was the goal of Al Qaeda to strive against Western states until they meet Al Qaeda's demands or are defeated by the Al Qaeda network (bin Laden 1996). After the attacks of September 11, bin Laden issued another statement and said that 'we (Al Qaeda) will fight until there is no other god than Allah' (bin Laden 2001). He further asserts that 'attacks will not stop until America complies with Al Qaeda's demands' (bin Laden 2001).

Bin Laden's rhetoric echoed the ideology of the Al Qaeda network itself. In *The Al Qaeda Training Manual*, it states that 'Islamic governments have never and will never be established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils; they are established by pen and gun, by word and bullet, by tongue and teeth' (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002, 8). Al Qaeda operatives are trained to be true believers; they are trained both to attack and also to retaliate once attacked. Bin Laden, his clerics, and the operatives within the Al Qaeda network are trained to prefer fighting over backing down. The United States government was well aware of these preferences (May 2004), so the United States assumed that Al

Qaeda meant business. Because Al Qaeda strongly preferred to fight the United States than back down, their threat was credible.

The United States' Capability and Credibility

Al Qaeda's understanding of the threat the United States posed prior to the attack on 9/11 was dependent both on the information Al Qaeda had of itself and the information Al Qaeda had gathered on the United States. Ultimately, Al Qaeda appeared to regard the United States' threat of retaliation as incapable. Conversely, however, bin Laden's network believed that the threat of retaliation in response to this attack – a direct attack on US soil – was exceptionally credible.

Capability

The primary reason why Al Qaeda believed the United States' threat to be incapable has a lot to do with its ideology and mission as a terrorist network rooted in Islamic fundamentalism. In *The Al Qaeda Training Manual* (2002), a cleric of Al Qaeda suggests that the powerful nations of the West are responsible for the persecution of Muslims across the globe, that acts of peace have not and will not bring about a better world for Muslims, and Muslims must be willing to die to promote their interests throughout the world (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002). In a videotaped speech on 13 December 2001, bin Laden made a similar statement and asserts that 'we (Al Qaeda) will fight until there is no other god but Allah.'

Al Qaeda operatives believe that their goals supersede the physical world in which they live; they are attempting rid the world of nonbelievers and establish a global society rooted in Islamic tradition (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002). More than that, clerics and

operatives of Al Qaeda argue that conflict is necessary in order to bring about the world they are working to create; similarly, they recognize and accept that serving Allah in their mission might require martyrdom (bin Laden 1996; 1998).

In his 1998 fatwa, bin Laden declares that all good Muslims should welcome martyrdom in the name of serving Allah and that attempts at doing so would encourage conflict. It would encourage religious warfare that would ultimately result in the establishment of a global Islamic regime; the only way to resolve the tensions between Al Qaeda and its adversaries is for its foes to concede. Al Qaeda's war against America is not fought on political grounds but on religious ones (bin Laden 1996; 2001). Al Qaeda's clerics and operatives are therefore unwilling to back down because they believe that their eternal destiny is dependent upon the maintenance of their resolve (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002). In short, Al Qaeda's ideology leads it to be inherently averse to the status quo; it is their least preferred outcome and any threat the United States sends Al Qaeda's way is therefore inherently incapable.

Credibility

The credibility of the United States on 11 September 2001 was extremely high; I contend, however, that its credibility evolved over time. I assert that the credibility of the United States has everything to do with who was in power at the time and the stakes of inaction associated with the current threat. President Clinton, while starting off his term in office as a hardliner against terrorism, ultimately capitulated and refrained from action altogether. President George W. Bush, however, was determined, once the US was attacked, to respond both offensively and defensively to the threat posed by Al Qaeda.

During Clinton's presidency, Al Qaeda mounted three attacks against the United States; these were the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, the 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 2000 attack on the *USS Cole* (May 2004). After the first two attacks, President Clinton made either offensive or defensive moves in an effort to retaliate against Al Qaeda. After the second attack, however, Clinton decided that offensive tactics needlessly affected civilians and ineffectively dealt with the current threat. During his tenure in office, Clinton had three opportunities to capture or kill bin Laden; at the last minute, however, he commanded military personnel and CIA operatives to stand down (May 2004). He squandered three opportunities to rid the United States of the threat posed by Al Qaeda; because of Clinton's inaction, this threat is still present today.

On 26 February 1993, a car bomb exploded inside the parking garage located below the World Trade Center; the attack killed six people and injured over a thousand (May 2004, 71). At once, Clinton provided the Justice Department with every available tool to apprehend and try those responsible for this attack; soon after, Ramzi Yousef, the man responsible for the planting of the bomb, was arrested (May 2004, 72). Yousef provided another name – Mohammed Salameh; this man had provided Yousef with the materials necessary to create the car bomb; he was also arrested (May 2004).

Both of these men were well-known operatives of the Al Qaeda network, and they claimed responsibility in name of Al Qaeda and Allah whom they claimed to serve (May 2004). The 9/11 Commission (May 2004) claims that the ability to rapidly capture and try these terrorists discouraged the Justice Department as well as other agencies from rethinking their counter-terrorism strategy and caused both the government and the

general public to underestimate the threat that Al Qaeda posed to the United States. The threat may have been underestimated, but President Clinton, being a hardliner against terrorism at the time, attempted to shore up the ability of agencies to deal with this new threat (May 2004).

He delegated the power of dealing with domestic counter-terrorism to the Justice Department and the FBI; the FBI eventually was given almost total responsibility (May 2004, 74-75). The key problem with this allocation of power was that the FBI was still attempting to shift its focus from a Cold War posture to the mindset of stopping terrorists. The FBI had gathered over fifty years worth of information regarding the Cold War, and virtually all of that research proved useless in counter-terrorism operations (May 2004).

The FBI also faced another problem – that of addressing the threat of Al Qaeda; this network of true believers was far different than any enemy the United States had ever dealt with. During the Cold War, Communist and other political subversives were relatively easy to detect; their agendas required outward (but often peaceful) action; the nature of the Al Qaeda network required it to be exceedingly secretive but also, when propelled to act, shockingly lethal (Al Qaeda Cleric 2002).

The president delegated counter-terrorism efforts abroad to the CIA, and they faced many of the problems plaguing the FBI. Old information was irrelevant to the current threat and the secrecy inherent in the Al Qaeda network made operatives, clerics, and potential attacks ‘very difficult to detect’ (May 2004, 80-82). While these defensive actions were taken, a couple offensive options were considered but ultimately abandoned.

As early as 1995, Clinton considered the possibility of intercepting bin Laden. Two opportunities presented themselves; one of these occurred in 1996 and the other in

1998. The 1996 operation was based on intelligence suggesting bin Laden was training operatives at a camp near Kandahar, Afghanistan; he was located on one of his properties, Tarnak Farms (May 2004, 111). The CIA along with military personnel positioned themselves to intercept bin Laden, but were commanded to stand down right before the operation was scheduled to commence; Clinton believed that the potential loss of life and the high risk associated with the operation was too great to justify proceeding with it (May 2004, 114-115). It was soon apparent that Clinton's inaction only encouraged further activity from Al Qaeda.

On 7 August 1998, Al Qaeda struck again and attacked two United States embassies – one in Kenya and one in Tanzania; intelligence quickly identified bin Laden and his network as the orchestrators of the attacks, and Clinton vowed to 'identify those who were responsible and bring them to justice.' (Clinton 1998). This attack, unlike the previous one, provoked Clinton to initiate both a military response and also a renewed interest in capturing bin Laden (May 2004).

The military response included the bombing of Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and bombing a pharmaceutical company in the Sudan which was being funded by bin Laden and was also suspected of producing chemical and biological weapons (Clinton 1998). Only the attack in Afghanistan was designed to target both Al Qaeda as well as the Taliban government – a regime which was aiding and abetting the Al Qaeda network; despite these intentions, both states perceived these attacks as direct attacks on themselves rather than attacks against Al Qaeda.

Both of these attacks were poorly planned and caused a number of problems. The attack in Afghanistan was, all things considered, ineffective in achieving its objective; the

training camp that was targeted sustained only minimal to moderate damage, and only a handful of Al Qaeda operatives were eliminated (May 2004, 118-119). The failure of the Afghani attack was only part of the problem, however. The attack on the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant proved to be more detrimental than originally anticipated.

The attack on the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant went off without a hitch; the plant was completely destroyed, but later intelligence suggested that the plant was not a site of chemical and biological weapons production (May 2004). It was, however, responsible for the production of over half of Sudan's medical supplies; anti-American protests broke out and a humanitarian crisis presented itself, but because the Clinton administration still believed its intelligence was good, it refrained from sending humanitarian aid to the Sudan (May 2004). Upon discovering that the intelligence was inaccurate, many of Clinton's advisors wondered whether the strike had 'created 10,000 new fanatics when there would have been none' (May 2004, 118).

In a last ditch effort, Clinton made one final bid to eliminate bin Laden. Early in 1999, Clinton was alerted that the CIA had definitive evidence suggesting bin Laden was, once again, training new recruits near Kandahar, Afghanistan. This time, both CIA operatives and military personnel were stationed within striking distance of bin Laden's camp; the operation was approved by the President and CIA operatives made ready to intercept. The president failed to authorize the attack in time; the operation was never executed, and bin Laden was able to escape (May 2004, 136). These attempts to retaliate against the attacks orchestrated by bin Laden and his network were ineffective at best, but these attacks were primarily designed to send a statement rather than to provoke a

response (May 2004, 191). The attack on the *USS Cole*, however, was designed to provoke a response – one that would never come.

On 12 October, 2000, Al Qaeda struck a third time but, this time, targeted a US Navy vessel – the *USS Cole*; seventeen people were killed and over forty were injured (May 2004, 190). The retaliatory attempt in response to the 1998 embassy attacks were still fresh in Clinton's mind; the failure of both the military operation in Afghanistan and the CIA's inability to collect accurate intelligence discouraged Clinton from acting (May 2004, 191).

Clinton's advisors suggested that the president engage in diplomatic talks with the Taliban government in Afghanistan; however, Clinton was reluctant to believe the admittedly sketchy intelligence suggesting that bin Laden and his network were directly responsible for the attack (May 2004, 193-194). Clinton did not believe that the CIA had gathered enough intelligence to demonstrate to the Taliban that bin Laden was responsible, so the possibility of diplomatic talks was ultimately abandoned (May 2004).

The credibility of the Clinton administration in response to the Al Qaeda threat was high early in his presidency but sharply declined as his presidency neared its end. His gradual reluctance to offensively deal with the Al Qaeda problem as well as his reluctance to approach other governments through diplomatic means made the threats of the United States less credible than they might have been. The United States' credibility, however, took a sharp upward direction upon the election of George W. Bush.

In his inaugural address on January 20 2001, Bush re-established the United States as a hardliner against terrorism. He claimed that 'the United States was a nation of ideals' and it would defend those ideals abroad if that was necessary (Bush 2001a). Bush

maintained this rhetoric during his time in office prior to 9/11. Bush stated that ‘I am tired of playing defense – I want to play offense’ (May 2004, 202).

Bush’s rhetoric was matched in action; during his first few months in office, he sent covert operatives into Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to investigate Al Qaeda’s threat and capabilities and found bin Laden’s network to be strong (May 2004). Threats overseas encouraged Bush to activate military personnel in six states and also attempted to close gaps within the US’ domestic infrastructure (May 2004, 257). However, these attempts were unable to prevent the attacks that occurred one morning in September.

On 11 September 2001, Al Qaeda challenged Bush for the first (and only) time. Two planes flew into the World Trade Center in New York City, and one plane flew into the side of the Pentagon; a fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania, and its intended target was spared (May 2004, 278-279). Bush wasted no time in issuing retaliatory threats – ‘we will not negotiate with terrorists’ (Bush 2002) and ‘we will not distinguish between the terrorists and those that harbor them’ (Bush 2001b).

Bush was as good as his word; within two days, Bush communicated his demands to states he believed were supporting Al Qaeda – Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan quickly and unconditionally complied while Afghanistan failed to do so (May 2004, 330-331). Because Afghanistan refused to comply with US demand, the United States had initiated its attack on Afghanistan by mid-October (May 2004, 334).

By the end of 2001, Bush had also begun to discuss the invasion of Iraq which was supposedly producing chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear weapons of mass destruction; Bush encouraged other nations to join in the endeavor, and by 2003, military

operation in Iraq were underway (May 2004, 338). While offensive tactics were being pursued abroad, defensive measures were being pursued at home.

In 2002 and 2003, Bush created a National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States and delegated this committee with the task of determining why 9/11 occurred and asked the committee to devise a number of policy options that would better enable the United States to prevent future attacks (May 2004, xv). The Committee provided a three pronged strategy which included ‘attack terrorists and their organizations, prevent the continued growth of Islamic terrorism, and protect against and prepare for future attacks.’ (May 2004, 365-398).

In 2007, Bush issued a fact sheet indicating what had been done since 9/11 to make the United States safer. This included ‘capturing a number of known Al Qaeda operatives, disrupted a number of terrorist plots, remaining on the offense, and increasing defensive capabilities (Bush 2007). He also indicates that ‘although Al Qaeda has not succeeded in attacking us since 9/11, they are not idle.’ (Bush 2007)

He argues that US resolve must remain strong in order to win the War or Terror (Bush 2007), and under his leadership, the United States appeared strong, resolved, and determined to fight Al Qaeda until the war was won. Bush’s rhetoric matched his actions while Clinton’s did not. The actions Bush took in response to the attacks of 9/11 suggest that the credibility of the United States had increased; in a videotaped recording released on 13 December 2001, bin Laden asserts that he expected the U.S’s credibility to be relatively high.

The only historical evidence available that supported bin Laden’s expectations occurred before World War I and World War II. The attack of the *Lusitania* and the

discovery of the Zimmerman note encouraged the United States to enter World War I when their intentions up to that point were to remain neutral. Similarly, the US refrained from entering World War II until Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. As stated before, bin Laden believed that a military response to the bombing of the *USS Cole* was likely. He stated that if the United States failed to retaliate to that attack, he would be forced to pursue attacks on the US mainland on a more grandiose level – the only other option that historical precedent suggests would be effective (May 2004, 191). Bin Laden believed that when the stakes of inaction were raised to an intolerable level, the United States would be forced to act (May 2004, 191). Bin Laden was perfectly confident that the attacks of 11 September 2001 would provoke the United States into conflict; he was correct.

Both the stakes of inaction and the leadership at the time affected the credibility of the United States. During Clinton's time in office, the United States was attacked abroad three times, and the Clinton administration largely responded to these attacks with reluctance and limited action. Shortly after the Bush administration assumed office, it encountered the first direct terrorist attack on US soil and rapidly made it apparent that the United States strongly preferred fighting Al Qaeda to backing down, because it was convinced that backing down would lead to future attacks and would convince Al Qaeda that it had achieved its objective (Bush 2001b). Thus, the threat posed by the United States was credible. Now that the preferences of both actors have been identified, I show how these actors fit into the theory developed by Zagare and Kilgour's (2000).

Perfect Deterrence Theory and the Problem of Al Qaeda

The results of the case study conducted here indicate that my hypotheses are correct; within the context of perfect deterrence theory, both actors believed that its adversary posed a credible threat. Because of its extremist ideology, global goals, and its dedication to see to it that its goals come to fruition, however, Al Qaeda perceived the threat posed by the United States as incapable. Applying these results more generally, the extremist ideology of terrorist networks comprised of true believers is what makes them nearly impossible to deter, because they inherently prefer conflict to the status quo and prevent state actors from posing capable threats.

The Future and the Threat of True Believers

9/11 was the first attack on the US mainland successfully conducted by Al Qaeda; it was successful because it ended up leading to Al Qaeda's most preferred outcome – conflict. Some might argue that this case is an outlier, but I contend that when dealing with true believers, the case examined here is representative of the standard scenario rather than a rare event. Through the employment of Zagare and Kilgour's (2000) theory which assumes capability as a necessary condition for deterrence success, I identify the only rational outcome between state actors and terrorist networks of true believers - conflict.

If state actors cannot deter true believers in a general deterrence setting, one can only assume that future attacks will occur, because these states lack the ability to lethally injure these global networks. All the same, as Zagare and Kilgour's theory indicates, the

only option available to these states is to combat these terrorists on the battlefield; therefore, further conflict is inevitable. State actors must engage in such hostilities, because it is their only hope of eradicating these groups. Only by doing so can state actors that are threatened by networks of true believers re-establish peace in a very troubled world.

Because the United States did not (and theoretically cannot) present a capable threat to Al Qaeda, this terrorist network of true believers (Bueno de Mesquita 2000) is impossible to deter. The Islamic fundamentalist ideology which Al Qaeda and other networks of true believers subscribe to encourages the use of terrorist acts to achieve one's objectives as their primary course of action; these organizations discourage the use of diplomatic tools and accept nothing less than either conciliation from its adversaries or total victory on the battlefield – which has now been brought to the mainland of the United States and other state actors opposed to the ultimate objectives of these networks.

While this analysis focused exclusively on the ability of the United States to deter Al Qaeda, I believe that the results of this study are applicable more generally. I contend that there are many terrorist networks in existence today that tout ideological attachments that are very similar to that of Al Qaeda – a network of true believers. The case study conducted here indicates that the ability of an actor to deter a network of true believers is non-existent; I hypothesize that networks sharing similar ideologies are just as undeterrable as the network controlled by bin Laden. If this is so, the only option available to states is to engage in conflict. Only by forcibly removing the threat of these networks can the threat of true believers be appropriately addressed – if it can be addressed at all.

Conclusion

Previous examinations attempting to resolve the issue of deterring terrorism focus more on immediate deterrence rather than general deterrence. By employing Zagare and Kilgour's (2000) perfect deterrence theory, I believe I have successfully provided a beneficial contribution to this discussion; however, the results that were produced here are hardly encouraging for the state actors combating terrorist networks like Al Qaeda. They indicate that no matter how credible the threats posed by the United States are, Al Qaeda is nigh impossible to deter. More generally, the lack of capable threats against networks of true believers prevent state actors from deterring these organizations from pursuing future attacks; because this is the case, I conclude that future attacks orchestrated by these networks are extremely likely if not inevitable if networks of true believers are not successfully eliminated through conflict.

Perfect deterrence theory has enabled me to investigate the issue of deterring terrorism from an angle that has not been employed in the past. It has permitted me to use a logically consistent theory of general deterrence to evaluate the relationship between the United States and Al Qaeda – a state and a terrorist network comprised of true believers. Although this study likely fails to represent all possible cases, I contend that the results have provided both students of terrorism and deterrence a generalizable foundation on which to build further research. The results produced here indicate that true believers cannot be deterred; I expect these results to prove true to other states opposed to the objectives of terrorist organizations that cling to theologically and politically extreme ideologies. Only through further investigation of this phenomenon

will students of international conflict and transnational terrorism be able to come to any definitive conclusions regarding the questions posed here.

If my hypothesis is reaffirmed as true through further investigation, policymakers have new questions to address. Is the War on Terror worth fighting? If so, how should the War on Terror be fought? If terrorist networks like Al Qaeda cannot be deterred, what does this reality mean for the United States and other state actors and the global system in general? All of these questions and their implications are up for debate and only through further examination can students of these issues determine how real-world outcomes should shape counter-terrorism policy in the future.

Because the foes of true believers have no other alternatives save concession, I conclude that the War on Terror is an absolute necessity. It is the only means that state actors have available to them that could ultimately result in any form of positive conclusion. Backing down at this point should not and cannot be an option, because backing down will ultimately lead to further attacks or worse as evidenced by the inaction of the Clinton administration. State actors that are opposed to the ultimate objectives of these networks need to band together to combat the threat that they pose. Because networks like Al Qaeda have operatives functioning across the globe, it is essential that their opponents are able to combat these organizations on a global scale as well.

The results produced here indicate that perhaps the War on Terror should be taken to a new level. Because the results produced here suggest that only option available to the adversaries of true believers is conflict, the United States and other opponents of these networks need to take this conflict seriously and remain firm in their resolve; the

results reported here indicate that a lack in resolve will only encourage these networks to pursue future attacks.

The reality of the situation plaguing the United States and other relevant actors suggests that a failure to appropriately address the threat posed by true believers could lead to a destabilization of the global system; if networks like Al Qaeda achieve their ultimate objectives, the hegemony of the United States will end and would most certainly be replaced by a jihadist regime bent on removing all things Western from civilization and would be re-crafted to fit its narrow perception of how the world should operate. This is a conflict that must be fought; it is also a fight that must be won. Only by meeting Al Qaeda and other networks of true believers face to face on the battlefield can their adversaries hope to ensure the stability of the current global system.

This analysis has attempted to present a logically consistent theory regarding the deterrability of true believers. The results produced here indicate that the dedication of networks of true believers to their radical ideologies prevents state actors from posing capable threats. Because perfect deterrence theory assumes that capability is a necessary condition for deterrence success, I conclude that it is impossible for state actors to deter true believers. The only outcome state actors can pursue in an effort to preserve their way of life is, as Zagare and Kilgour (2000) argue, conflict.

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