

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

Lisa J. Davis

Dr. Stephen Quackenbush, Thesis Adviser

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 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 believers' desire for conflict always outweighs their desire to maintain the status quo.