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How Competition Undermines Deterrence

Kayse Jansen
Missouri State University, Jansen222@live.missouristate.edu

HOW COMPETITION UNDERMINES DETERRENCE

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Kayse Jansen

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ABSTRACT

The re-emergence of great power competition has brought with it a U.S. government-wide initiative to reclaim and strengthen advantage and influence across all elements of national power. Competition is considered necessary to secure American interests and protect the existing liberal international order, as well as uphold deterrence by enhancing the nation's ability to impose costs and deny benefits. This view, however, neglects a critical factor in deterrence: the cost of restraint, which reflects the acceptability of the status quo. Paradoxically, the more successful the nation is at "competition," the less likely it may be in important deterrence situations. Successful diplomatic and economic competition, in particular, can actually undermine a state's vital security imperatives, thereby raising its cost of restraint to an unacceptable level undermining deterrence. This argument is illustrated by an empirical dissection of Russia's 2014 decision to annex Crimea and examination of the conditions surrounding Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor. The thesis concludes with insights for today's great power rivalry with China, principally that excelling at strategic competition may result in strategic deterrence failure for the United States or its likeminded allies and partners.

KEYWORDS: great power competition, strategic competition, deterrence, cost of restraint, tension

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Approved:

Jared McKinney, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Amy Nelson, Ph.D., Committee Member

Kerry Kartchner, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

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INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom offers that the best way to deter an opponent is to be prepared to fight one. This axiom lays at the heart of United States (U.S.) policy. In particular, the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy states, "The surest way to prevent war is to be prepared to win one."[1] This, of course, is not a new concept for the United States. George Washington, in his first Congressional annual message, claimed "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."[2] The concept dates back even further in global history. In 4th or 5th century, Roman general Vegetius wrote the following expression at the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire[3], *"si vis pacem, para bellum,"* which is translated as "if you want peace, prepare for war."

The message is that having a strong military force, prepared for war, is the best approach to convince a challenger to choose restraint, to not initiate a conflict or even act in an aggressive manner. Said differently, succeeding in military competition naturally strengthens deterrence. But history has proven this is not so simple. The establishment of a strong, even dominant,

[1] Jim Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," 2018.
[2] Loren Thompson, "Remembering George Washington's Advice About How To Avoid Wars," Forbes, accessed June 14, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2015/06/30/remembering-george-washingtons-advice-about-how-to-avoid-wars/.
[3] Vegetius had watched Rome neglect its army and allow it to become weak. This weakness, in turn, emboldened challengers to rise against Rome and Roman soldiers to flee from lack of training and armor.

military power has been shown insufficient to deter aggression by a weaker state, especially in circumstances where the weaker state believes its national interests are at stake.[4]

If military power is necessary, but not sufficient, to deter war, what other factors influence a nation's decision to initiate conflict? Competition, this thesis argues, is one such factor. The first two chapters of the thesis define competition and deterrence in general terms as well as in strategic terms (i.e., strategic competition, strategic deterrence). This is a crucial step as interpretations of competition and deterrence often vary. With a common understanding of the terms, the thesis hypothesizes the tension between competition and deterrence, and illustrates it in practice in an empirical evaluation of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary and considerations for today's security environment as the United States competes with—and seeks to deter—China.

[4] For research on historical examples of deterrence failure, see Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Beyond Deterrence," *Journal of Social Issues* 43, no. 4 (1987): 5–71; Michael E. Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies, Or, Did You Ever Have One of Those Days When No Deterrent Seemed Adequate?" (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, March 1977); Barry Wolf, "When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence" (Santa Monica: RAND, 1991).Lebow and Stein's "Beyond Deterrence", Brown's "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies"

COMPETITION

With the release of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) came the reemergence[5] of the term "great power competition" (see Figure 1). The concept was then re-iterated in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) as "long-term strategic competition" and remains a crucial piece of President Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance to "prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation."[6] Unfortunately, none of these documents clearly define what competition means or how the United States should organize its military, information, diplomatic, and economic policies and practices to achieve success. It should be no surprise, then, when the Departments of Defense and State address competition differently, or when analysts, strategists, and policy makers within a single department struggle to operationalize a competition strategy.

Using the Trump Administration's policy and guidance[7], the following sections explore the concept of great power competition (GPC)[8], what it is and how the United States competes

[5] Most recently, from the Cold War. See Thomas F. Lynch III, *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2020).

[6] Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance" (The White House, March 2021), https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/.

[7] This thesis uses the Trump Administration's guidance documents as a foil to define strategic competition and strategic deterrence. While national guidance will evolve with new Administrations, the findings and conclusions of this thesis remain valid. Great power competition, even if called by another name like "strategic competition" under the Biden Administration, will endure as long as the United States continues to confront other great powers in order to uphold and protect the liberal international order. Likewise, strategic deterrence will remain the cornerstone of U.S. national defense policy as long as adversaries are able to threaten U.S. vital interests. For the sake of simplifying these grand concepts of strategic competition and strategic deterrence, and to uncover the potentially catastrophic tensions existing between them, this thesis utilizes the Trump Administration's guidance.

[8] Henceforth, a term used synonymously with strategic competition.

diplomatically, informationally, militarily, and economically. By dissecting competition across all elements of national power, the thesis reveals the shortcomings and risks existing in a competition strategy and how, when executed alongside a deterrence strategy, tensions may emerge.

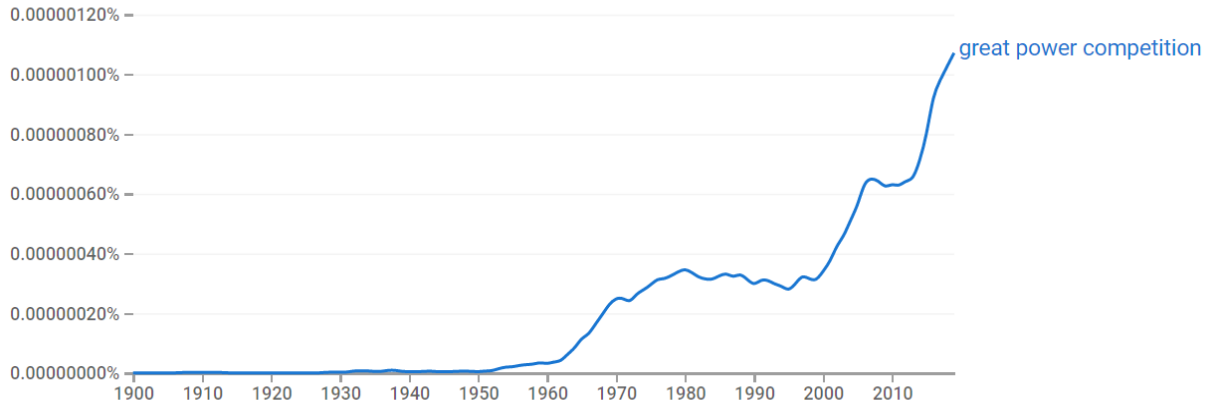

Figure 1: "Great Power Competition" Usage Over the Last Century[9]

Strategic Competition

> 2018 National Defense Strategy [Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge] articulates our strategy to compete, deter, and win in this environment. The reemergence of long-term strategic competition, rapid dispersion of technologies, and new concepts of warfare and competition that span the entire spectrum of conflict require a Joint Force structure to match this reality.[10]

[9] "Google Books Ngram Viewer," accessed July 17, 2021, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=great+power+competition&year_start=1900&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3.
[10] Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy."

This quotation exemplifies the complexity surrounding the concept of "competition". First, it distinguishes competition from deterrence and prevailing in conflict (i.e., "win"), breaking the notion that competition is simply a way to deter and prevail. This implies competition encompasses its own, unique objectives. Second, it acknowledges the "re-emergence of long-term strategic competition" as a geopolitical environment directly shaping U.S. defense strategy and posture. From this perspective, strategic competition, or great power competition, can be defined as timeframe in which "two countries have amassed enough military, political, and economic power such that they *can* compete with one another."[11] Indeed, if no real competitors exist, a strategy of competition is unnecessary, however capability itself is insufficient. A *purpose* for competition is also required. Historically, great power competition refers to the 17th through early 20th centuries when empires and nation states sought to establish policy in an environment uncontrolled by commonly understood norms.[12] More recently, it has been used to describe the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.[13] In both eras, great power competition sought to establish influence, whether it be political or ideological, regional or global.

Furthermore, the 2018 NDS uses "competition" at least six different ways throughout its text (see Table 1). It simultaneously presents a strategy to "compete" with "strategic competitor[s]," to sustain or regain "competitive military advantage[s]" by "expanding the competitive space" in "competition short of armed conflict" in an era of "long-term, strategic

[11] Quoting Dr. Oriana Skylar Mastro (emphasis added) in Kathleen Hicks, "Great Power Competition," Transcript, Defense 2020, accessed June 15, 2021, https://www.csis.org/analysis/great-power-competition.
[12] Michael J. Mazarr, "This Is Not a Great-Power Competition," *Foreign Affairs*, May 29, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-05-29/not-great-power-competition; Hicks, "Great Power Competition."
[13] Lynch, *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition*.

competition". Variants of the term "competition" are used to describe what the United States will do, against whom, for what, how, in what phase of conflict, and in what geopolitical environment.

Table 1: 2018 NDS Various Uses of Competition

2018 NDS Use	Meaning
Compete	Verb / U.S. strategy or approach
Strategic competitors	Noun / Subject or target of U.S. strategy
Competitive military advantage[s]	Adjective / Advantages the U.S. seeks to secure
Competitive space	Adjective / Domain in which advantages are achieved
Competition short of armed conflict	Noun / Phase of conflict (i.e., gray zone)
Long-term, strategic competition	Noun / Timeframe or era

Of the various uses, competition as a strategy is of utmost concern here. But even with this scoping, a variety of definitions exist, although they differ in terms of what they purport. From narrow to broad in scope, these include: maintaining the United States' present level of preeminence and influence[14] (i.e., competing for primacy or prestige); protecting and advancing U.S. interests through diplomatic, economic, and strategic advantages[15] (i.e., competing for

[14] Ali Wyne, "America's Blind Ambition Could Make It a Victim of Global Competition," The National Interest (The Center for the National Interest, February 11, 2019), https://nationalinterest.org/feature/americas-blind-ambition-could-make-it-victim-global-competition-44227; Daniel H. Nexon, "Against Great Power Competition," *Foreign Affairs*, February 15, 2021.

[15] Daniel J. O'Donohue, "Joint Doctrine Note 1-19: Competition Continuum" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 3, 2019), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf?ver=2019-06-10-113311-233.

relative advantages); and shaping security architectures and international norms to protect democratic values[16] (i.e., competing to protect the liberal international order).

This thesis contends that modern-day great power competition refers specifically to competition between nations to establish and protect an international order. The international order determines the norms or standards world leaders are expected to uphold and operate within; prestige, influence, and relative advantages are all subordinate to the established principles of acceptable and unacceptable behavior on a global scale. The "winner" of this competition is able to shape principles and norms to be most advantageous to its operating system, norms that advance its vital national interests and enable continued success and security. Alternatively, the "loser" of this competition exists in a world shaped by norms which undermine its ability to achieve its vital national interests and even discredits its governing model. But herein lies a downfall of a competition approach: the prospect that there are winners and losers and the resulting neglect of a middle ground (i.e., coexistence and cooperation). Rather, great power competition is an infinite game[17], where players come and go, and rules are in the eye of the beholder. Thus, the problem with competition for dominance over the global order is rejecting the possibility to represent multiple, even conflicting, models (i.e., liberal democracy and illiberal autocracy), no doubt leading to a timeless struggle between diverse nations each seeking international legitimacy.

[16] MITRE, "Great Power Competition: The Cold War as the World Knew It Is Long over. Taking Its Place Is the Great Power Competition, or GPC.," Great Power Competition, April 10, 2020, https://www.mitre.org/news/focal-points/great-power-competition; Wilson Center, "Great Power Competition," Great Power Competition, n.d., https://www.wilsoncenter.org/issue/great-power-competition.

[17] For more on finite vs infinite games, see Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2019).

Today's great power competition is both politico-military and economic in nature. Indeed, the two are now intertwined. "The United States consolidated its [past] military victories with political and economic triumphs built on market economies and fair trade, democratic principles, and shared security partnerships."[18] Written in 2018, this vision demonstrates consistency in U.S. strategic objectives since the close of World War I. At that time, President Woodrow Wilson envisioned an "all-encompassing liberal world order, an international system made up of states bound together by free trade, international rules and institutions, and a shared commitment to the principles of democratic governance and universal human rights."[19]

The interdependent nature of the political and economic was not always the case. Indeed, this vision did not become reality until the end of the Cold War, when the United States emerged in a position of unchallenged global power.[20] So, while the next 25 years were marked with the seemingly unhindered expansion of liberal democratic principles and free and open markets, the United States failed to achieve liberalizing reform in China (and Russia). The theory, put into practice from Presidents George H. W. Bush to Barack Obama, was that "integrating China into the international trade system would lay the foundations of a new liberal world order." That economic liberalization in China would surely lead to political liberalization of the Chinese Communist Party.[21] This was likely the result of a short-sighted "end" to an era of great power

[18] Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (The White House, December 2017), https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf.
[19] Lynch, *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition*.
[20] While an "all-encompassing liberal international order" was Wilson's vision, Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan all approached China from the standpoint that cooperation was achievable without requiring a change to the Chinese Communist Party.
[21] Graham Allison and Fred Hu, "An Unsentimental China Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2021, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-18/unsentimental-china-policy.

competition when, in reality, it was only an extended halftime. China, taking full advantage of the liberal economic system to achieve its first centenary goal of building a "moderately prosperous society"[22], never intended to become a liberal democracy. A similar story can be told of Russia.

For China and Russia, the liberal international order challenges the legitimacy of their own illiberal regimes—an unacceptable status quo.[23] So, as the United States realized the unfeasibility of reforming these (increasingly powerful) authoritarian regimes and as the prospect of peaceful coexistence began to fade[24], it began to shift from an approach of cooperation to one of strategic competition. This shift was officially acknowledged in the 2015 National Military Strategy[25] and then fully embraced in the 2018 National Security Strategy[26] and National Defense Strategy. In short, strategic competition was adopted to protect the American way of life from the threat of a revisionist China and revanchist Russia.

From another perspective, the U.S. shift to strategic competition may be the short-sighted result of viewing the U.S. unipolar moment not as a moment, but as an enduring international

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[22] "The 19th National Congress of the CPC Offers New Opportunities to China as Well as the World in a New Era," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Grenada, May 18, 2018, http://gd.china-embassy.org/eng/gywm_1/dsjhjwz/t1560437.htm; Jo Kim, "So Much for a Rough Year: China Is Set to Achieve Its First Centennial Goal in 2020," The Diplomat, January 6, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/so-much-for-a-rough-year-china-is-set-to-achieve-its-first-centennial-goal-in-2020/.

[23] Lynch, *Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition*.

[24] Ely Ratner, "There Is No Grand Bargain With China: Why Trump and Xi Can't Meet Each Other Halfway," *Foreign Affairs*, November 27, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-11-27/there-no-grand-bargain-china.

[25] "This 2015 National Military Strategy addresses the need to counter revisionist states that are challenging international norms…" (Joint Chiefs Of Staff, "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America" (Fort Belvoir, VA: Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 2015), https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA619156.)

[26] "In short, [China and Russia] are contesting our geopolitical advantage and trying to change the international order in their favor." (Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America.")

reality. This reality, then, paves the way for a permanent, even unquestionable, liberal international order. Thus, the [re]emergence of challengers seeking to undermine such an unquestionable world order is a threat requiring such an approach as strategic competition. The question now is, *how* does the United States compete?

How the United States Competes

In order to maintain political, military, and economic superiority, the United States engages in activities by diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) means to shape and protect the liberal international order. This paper analyzes U.S. strategy vis-à-vis each to show its relevance to the current U.S. approach to great power competition. Namely, these various means of exerting and accruing power are used in pursuit of objectives designed to further the U.S. ability to "prevail" in great power competition. In fact, the "subordinate" goals identified under the alternative perspectives on defining great power competition (i.e., prestige, influence, and relative advantages) now come into play as how the United States competes.

As was the case above, the thesis uses Trump policy and guidance as the foil to articulate the ways and means of U.S. strategic competition. While overarching approaches to national security, like deterrence and competition, are enduring, the ways and means of achieving competition objectives (i.e., the strategy) are likely to evolve with new leadership.

Diplomatic Competition. Diplomatic competition is aimed at ensuring the United States (and its likeminded allies) perform the role of global leaders, remaining at the head of the international table[27]. Such global leadership ensures the United States and its allies are driving

[27] "Authoritarian actors have long recognized the power of multilateral bodies and have used them to advance their interests and limit the freedom of their own citizens. If the United States

the agenda, shaping and protecting the liberal international order, and that China and Russia are not. The goals of diplomatic competition also include preventing China and Russia from establishing an equivalent leadership role where either country can influence the international order to reflect its authoritarian model and interests. From a purely competitive standpoint, diplomatic competition is aimed at preventing Chinese and Russian influence. Such a zero-sum perspective, however, abandons the possibility of peaceful co-existence (at a minimum) and prosperous interdependence (at best), where each great power can have their interests represented in a multi-polar world—and all the benefits that come with it.

The United States also competes by building, strengthening, and expanding its diplomatic relations across the globe, building a coalition of partners with shared interests and, oftentimes, a common governance model. These shared interests are largely economic, but also include liberal democratic values like rule of law, human rights, and free societies. A robust coalition amplifies the U.S. voice in international for a, and permits U.S. influence across the globe, specifically into regions China and Russia seek primacy. From a military perspective, the United States establishes mutual defense agreements with other countries, sometimes in China and Russia's backyards. Such agreements commit nations to fight as a unified force, increasing the overall military might confronting adversaries in armed conflict.

Information Competition. With the world becoming increasingly interconnected via information channels and platforms, information is an increasingly powerful tool. As such, the United States has adopted a strategy to use information strategically in great power competition. Information competition can be viewed through two lenses. First, the United States utilizes the

cedes leadership of these bodies to adversaries, opportunities to shape developments that are positive for the United States will be lost." (Trump, 40.)

power of information to advance American influence around the world, by spreading U.S. ideals and norms in communication campaigns.[28] Second, the United States counters adversary propaganda and misinformation (aka, fake news). "[China and Russia] weaponize information to attack the values and institutions that underpin free societies…"[29] In this sense, the United States engages in information combat with China and Russia, on an ongoing basis, to uphold the validity and advantages of the liberal international order.

Alternatively, the United States engages in the same sort of information weaponization to undermine the authoritarian models of China and Russia. Consider the way the United States used the 2019 Coronavirus pandemic to criticize authoritarianism, from blaming leadership "blindness" due to China's highly centralized governance structure[30] to the Chinese government censoring Wuhan doctors and residents from publicizing the truth at ground zero[31]. This is just one scenario illustrating how the United States may be antagonizing its competitors, driving their necessity to change the international order and what norms are deemed acceptable.

Military Competition. The military component of great power competition refers to the U.S. pursuit and retention of capability overmatch, or the "combination of capabilities in

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[28] Trump, 35.
[29] Trump, 34.
[30] Zeynep Tufekci, "How the Coronavirus Revealed Authoritarianism's Fatal Flaw," The Atlantic, February 22, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/02/coronavirus-and-blindness-authoritarianism/606922/.
[31] Emily Feng and Amy Cheng, "Critics Say China Has Suppressed And Censored Information In Coronavirus Outbreak," NPR, February 8, 2020, https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/08/803766743/critics-say-china-has-suppressed-and-censored-information-in-coronavirus-outbrea; "China Covid-19: How State Media and Censorship Took on Coronavirus," *BBC News*, December 29, 2020, sec. China, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55355401; Chris Buckley, "Chinese Doctor, Silenced After Warning of Outbreak, Dies From Coronavirus," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/06/world/asia/chinese-doctor-Li-Wenliang-coronavirus.html.

sufficient scale to prevent enemy success and to ensure that America's sons and daughters will never be in a fair fight."[32] More specifically, out of the eleven military objectives stated in the 2018 NDS, three are closely tied to supporting great power competition. First is "sustaining Joint Force military advantages, both globally and in key regions" via "a more lethal force, strong alliances and partnerships, American technological innovation, and a culture of performance." This objective reflects the NSS statement on capability overmatch. Second is "maintaining favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, Europe the Middle East, and the Western Hemisphere" and the final associated objective is "ensuring common domains remain open and free".[33]

These competition-focused defense objectives aim to uphold and protect the liberal international order. "Military advantages" and "favorable regional balances of power" seek to ensure the United States is postured to prevail in armed conflict—the ultimate culmination of competition. Short of armed conflict, military forces deploy to "ensur[e] common domains remain open and free", enforcing the rule of law through activities like freedom of navigation operations.[34]

There are serious problems with the "overmatch" concept, however. First, it does not hold when it comes to peer or near-peer nations. It is unfeasible for United States to maintain "overmatch" in all areas of military competition, especially when considering that competitors play by different rules (e.g., biological and chemical weapons, application of artificial intelligence). Second, there is no way to know whether the United States retains overmatch short

[32] Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," 28.
[33] Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," 4.
[34] For more on freedom of navigation operations, see "A Freedom of Navigation Primer for the Spratly Islands," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, November 2, 2015, https://amti.csis.org/fonops-primer/.

of comparing them in conflict. But even in conflict, strategy and tactics play a determining role. Finally, seeking "overmatch" likely results in a variety of arms races for the sake of having the most or fastest or biggest (or whatever metric is being used) regardless of what is necessary to accomplish one's military strategy and objectives. Rather, military competition is better served to seek relative advantages, in well-defined areas, necessary to achieve one's military objectives.

Economic Competition. Finally, economic competition plays a central role in today's great power competition. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has led a global dispersion of the Western economic model, a model based on "free market principles, fair and reciprocal trade, private sector activity, and rule of law."[35] At the same time, the United States solidified its expansion through the creation of financial institutions and international forums that establish and uphold equitable rules for all participants.

China and Russia, however, continue to pursue economic ties via "state-directed mercantilism…that can disadvantage recipient nations and promote dependency."[36] From exploiting the benefits of the World Trade Organization but protecting its domestic markets from reform, to using its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to gain political concessions from other countries, China is directly challenging the liberal economic model.[37] The United States, however, must also acknowledge where China's economic influence has benefitted participants and be aware of not forcing nations to "pick a side".

Continued success and prosperity of liberal democratic nations like the United States depend on the economic globalization enabled by the Western economic model. So, a critical

[35] Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," 38–39.
[36] Trump, 39.
[37] Donald J. Trump, "United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China" (The White House, May 20, 2020), https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/united-states-strategic-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/.

component of strategic competition is protecting and advancing that economic model. The United States, therefore, engages in economic competition by countering China's predatory economic practices while protecting and promoting the liberal economic model. The United States, however, must acknowledge that the current economic model remains in China's best interest and is, therefore, an area of cooperation rather than competition. After all, China's growth occurred within and was enabled by economic globalization under the Western economic model.

The Challenge with Strategic Competition

While strategic competition may be understood as a function of competition across the DIME, the actual execution of these activities requires yet another level of detail.

Strategic competition has a rippling effect through the interagency, where departments must further define and evaluate goals to advance actionable policies. For the Department of Defense, competition goals are achieved through various operations, activities, and investments. What often results, and is therefore equated with great power competition, is an overwhelming

focus on gaining advantages in practically every area of military capability—space[38], cyber[39], hypersonics[40], artificial intelligence[41], etc.

Without a clear understanding of what strategic competition is, or the role the U.S. military plays, competition becomes transposed from strategic competition via military means, to simply military competition. The same can be said for the rest of the interagency. Strategists and policymakers, therefore, lack a clear vision of what the nation is competing for, and competition is done simply for competition's sake. Rather than designing diplomatic, informational, military, and economic actions to be most effective to advance strategic goals, activities are individually assessed by their competitiveness relative to the adversary. This invites risk of overspending or misaligned spending of limited resources, engaging in arms races, and, as the thesis will address in later sections, undermining other vital national goals like strategic deterrence.

[38] William J. Broad, "How Space Became the Next 'Great Power' Contest Between the U.S. and China," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/24/us/politics/trump-biden-pentagon-space-missiles-satellite.html.
[39] Brad D. Williams, "US 'Retains Clear Superiority' In Cyber; China Rising: IISS Study," *Breaking Defense*, June 28, 2021, https://breakingdefense.com/2021/06/us-retains-clear-superiority-in-cyber-but-china-poised-to-challenge-study/.
[40] Philip E. Ross, "Russia, China, the U.S.: Who Will Win the Hypersonic Arms Race?," IEEE Spectrum: Technology, Engineering, and Science News, November 17, 2020, https://spectrum.ieee.org/aerospace/aviation/russia-china-the-us-who-will-win-the-hypersonic-arms-race.
[41] Graham Allison and Eric Schmidt, "Is China Beating the U.S. to AI Supremacy?," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, August 2020, https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/china-beating-us-ai-supremacy.

DETERRENCE

Deterrence is an enduring element of U.S. national security strategy. While the goal and foundation of deterrence has not changed (i.e., to convince an adversary to restrain from aggressive or harmful action), the application of deterrence has evolved along with the security environment. Early in the Cold War, deterrence was predicated on mutual vulnerability, or mutually assured destruction between the United States and the Soviet Union. With nuclear arsenals at their highest levels, it was commonly accepted that nuclear war would escalate uncontrollably and, therefore, must never be fought; to some extent, the existence of nuclear weapons was deterrence in and of itself. As additional rogue actors came on the scene and technological advancements enabled precision strike capabilities, tailored deterrence strategies emerged with concepts such as managing escalation. Further, factors such as the establishment of international institutions and economic globalization have introduced additional means to deter. This chapter defines strategic deterrence, reframes the deterrence equation for era of great power competition, and articulates how the United States deters using all elements of national power.

Strategic Deterrence

Just as there are multiple conceptions of competition, so too are there of deterrence. Deterrence can be considered both a goal one is striving towards and the method of achieving that a goal—something achieved vice something executed. Strategic deterrence, therefore, can be interpreted as a condition in which the adversary is deterred from conducting a strategic attack or the act of deterring an adversary via strategic means. During the Cold War, this equated to "nuclear deterrence", which was used to describe both what the United States was seeking to

deter (i.e., nuclear attack) as well as how the United States sought to deter it (i.e., with nuclear weapons).

Alternatively, strategic deterrence can be used to describe an overarching approach to deter. It is a holistic strategy for orchestrating all levers of national power to deter across the entire spectrum of conflict. This requires understanding the linkages from gray zone activities occurring below the level of armed conflict, to large-scale conflict, to nuclear war. For the purpose of this thesis, and in staying consistent with the previous section, strategic deterrence is used to describe a state's holistic strategy to deter another state, the ultimate goal of which is protecting the nation's security.

Today, strategic deterrence is more than protecting against nuclear attacks. Today's adversaries may "…attempt strategic attacks against the United States—without resorting to nuclear weapons—in ways that could cripple our economy and our ability to deploy our military forces. Deterrence must be extended across all…domains and must address all possible strategic attacks."[42] Relatedly, how the United States deters extends beyond a reliance solely on nuclear weapons. Since the Cold War, there has been a direct relationship between nuclear and conventional strategies, where nuclear means were used to offset conventional disadvantages as well as deter conventional aggression.[43] This, along with the threat of uncontrolled escalation and mutually assured destruction, enabled the East and West to avoid open and direct conflict. This offset strategy and threat of mutually assured destruction persist today, however the relationship is increasingly complicated.

[42] Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," 27.
[43] Jim Mattis, "Nuclear Posture Review," 2018, III.

Technological advancements enable expanded utility of, and therefore expands the threat posed by, conventional weapons through enhanced precision, speed, and maneuverability. What once took a nuclear detonation to achieve desired effects is increasingly accomplished via conventional means. Further, the benefits the United States enjoys from cyber-based and space-based capabilities has also introduced vulnerabilities exploitable by adversaries without requiring kinetic, let alone nuclear, effects. Two key implications follow. First, nations may be able to undermine another nation's nuclear deterrent without using nuclear means, by threatening key command and control nodes or even nuclear forces themselves. And second, the concept of mutually assured destruction may be dropping to a non-nuclear level that does not require a massive offensive. This increasingly threatening and complicated security environment necessitates re-examining the nation's strategy for deterrence.

Reframing Deterrence for Today

Before exploring the nation's deterrence strategy, it is first necessary to define and understand deterrence. Fundamentally, deterrence is the act of influencing another player not to act or behave in a way counter to one's interests. It is a cognitive operation that involves understanding and manipulating another's decision calculus.

Deterrence is often boiled down to imposing costs and denying benefits, simplified by Alexander George and Richard Smoke as "the persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits."[44] However, a person's decision calculus contains four elements (see Figure 2). Beyond cost of action (CoA) and benefit

[44] Quoted in Michael J. Mazarr, "Understanding Deterrence," *RAND*, 2018, 5, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html.

of action (BoA), a decision maker considers the cost of restraint (CoR) and benefit of restraint (BoR), or the costs and benefits of inaction.[45] Written as a formula, deterrence holds when CoR + BoA < BoR + CoA.

Figure 2: Deterrence Elements

While the Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept (DO JOC) addresses all four elements, it still consolidates cost and benefit of restraint under one activity, "the consequences of restraint (i.e., costs and benefits of not taking the course of action we seek to deter)."[46] This results in three "ways", or categories of action, aimed to influence a decision maker: "threaten to deny benefits, threaten to impose costs, and encourage adversary restraint."[47] While important contributions to a more complete understanding of deterrence, these three categories do not give

[45] Kevin Chilton and Greg Weaver, "Waging Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2009): 33–34.
[46] James E. Cartwright, Peter Pace, and Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept" (Department of Defense, December 2006), 5, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-337.
[47] Cartwright, Pace, and Rumsfeld, 5.

justice to a critical factor determining whether deterrence is achievable—the cost, or acceptability, of restraint. Framing the issue of restraint in terms of "encourage" leads to actions attempting to "incentivize" restraint or convince an adversary of the upside if they choose another course. It leads deterrence analysts and strategists to believe deterrence is simply inflicted on the other actor, either by making threats or promising incentives. It fails to respect the legitimacy of critical drivers of adversary action, from the adversary's point of view.

It is possible for the costs of restraint to become so unacceptable that no threat of cost imposition or threat to deny desired objectives can overcome the certainty of unacceptable loss resulting if no action is taken. Simply put, the *known* consequences to the decision maker if action is not taken outweigh the *unknown* risks of an outsider's potential response to that action, especially when that information is missing or poorly understood, and options are developed to mitigate the impact of such responses. The cost of restraint becomes a canalizing factor[48], independently determining the decision to act.

The following hypothetical example illustrates the potentially canalizing attribute of CoR. Consider a scenario in which a child's life is being threatened by a captor and the parent has only minutes to act. However, the child's captor credibly threatens the parent's life if they make any rescue attempt. Further, the captor tells the parent that any attempt will be futile, the child cannot be saved. For most parents, the loss of their child's life is an unacceptable cost of restraint. Not even a threat to the parent's own life (high CoA) or meek chances of rescue success (low BoA) are sufficient to deter the parent from action—the CoR is the only factor

[48] In network theory, a canalizing factor determines the state of a network regardless of the other inputs; it becomes the only input that matters. This concept captures the nature of the cost of restraint element in a decision calculus.

influencing the parent's decision calculus. Indeed, most parents would act when facing the unacceptable *known* cost of the potential loss of their child's life.

From this perspective, the deterrence equation requires rewriting. Rather than simply ensuring the perceived costs of action outweigh the benefits (i.e., CoA > BoA), deterrence strategists must ensure the perceived costs of restraint do not outweigh the perceived benefits or, more appropriately, acceptability of restraint (i.e., CoR < BoR).[49] Considering the hypothetical example once again, if the captor would tell the parent the child would live only if they refrained from interfering, thereby introducing a high BoR, then the parent's decision calculus would shift. Now, the BoR outweighs the CoR while cost and benefit of action remain irrelevant.

This shift considers an adversary's cost of restraint as the primary driver rather than its perceived benefit of action. Holistically, however, deterrence requires that costs of action and benefit of restraint outweigh benefits of action and costs of restraint.

Under this definition, there are four categories for action rather than the three mentioned in the DO JOC (see Figure 3). The fourth category defers cost of restraint or avoids increasing the adversary's cost of restraint. It is preventative in nature, ensuring a nation's activities do not create an environment or situation in which its adversary must act.

The key is transitioning from approaching restraint as incentivizing it or attempting to convince the other party they do not need to act, to restraining oneself. Restraint seeks to prevent driving the other party to a place where they must act, thereby driving the likelihood of successful deterrence towards zero and necessitating other methods of interference (e.g., conflict). Said differently, self-restraint aims to reassure an adversary its core national interests are not at risk, decreasing its costs of inaction or, if done preventively, refraining from driving an

[49] As described above, holistically, deterrence holds when CoR + BoA < BoR + CoA.

adversary's cost of inaction. "Reassurance aims to reduce [adversary] fear and uncertainty, and is effective in mitigating the effect of the security dilemma and avoid unwarranted escalation…reassurance is primarily a tool that enables effective deterrence by mitigating its escalatory effects."[50] The goal is preventing the adversary from thinking they lose less by acting than by doing nothing.

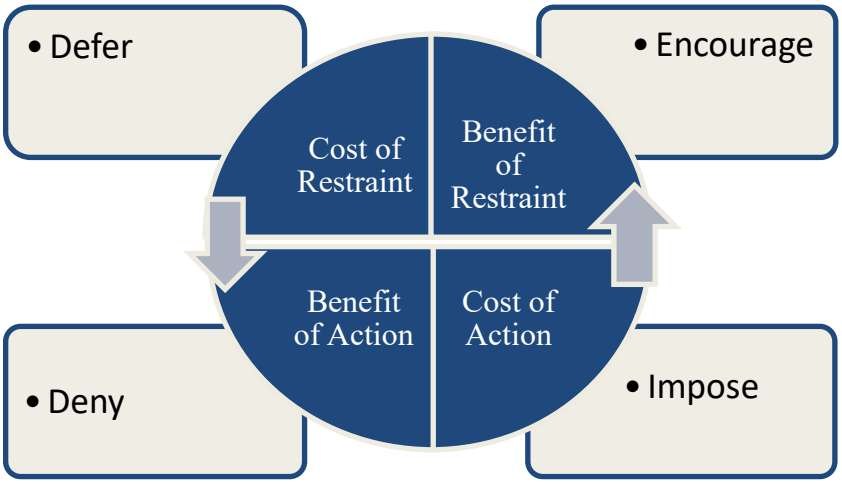

Figure 3: Deterrence Categories for Action

This thesis suggests that the CoR element of deterrence is even more critical than an adversary's perceived BoA. Traditional deterrence focuses on countering an adversary's BoA by threating cost imposition and benefit denial, ensuring the costs of action outweigh the perceived benefits. Reassurance focuses on preventing or countering an adversary's CoR by exercising self-restraint.

[50] Ole Marius Tørrisplass, "Deterrence or Reassurance? Determining the Appropriate Norwegian Response to a More Unpredictable Russia," *99 s.*, December 8, 2017, iii, https://nordopen.nord.no/nord-xmlui/handle/11250/2478377.

Exploring this concept further, two key differences exist between influencing the action elements of the decision calculus versus the restraint elements. First, influencing an adversary's perceived cost and benefit of action requires making threats—threats to impose unacceptable costs and threats to deny the benefit sought to be gained. Threats, however, may make matters worse, escalating a situation that would not have escalated otherwise.[51] Focusing on the costs and benefits of restraint, however, does not require the use of threats. In fact, the opposite is the case. Extending incentives and seeking areas of cooperation not only increases the benefit of restraint but can stabilize relations. Awareness of, and respect for, an adversary's red-lines and core national interests can help the U.S. from increasing an adversary's costs of inaction.[52]

Second, threatening cost imposition and benefit denial rely on relevant and sometimes timely messaging, such threats would be tailored to address the immediate crisis or conflict to influence an adversary's near-term decision making. Increasing the benefit of restraint and deferring the cost of restraint are longer term activities aimed to stabilize the geopolitical environment so that 1) the adversary prefers continued cooperation and the benefits of that cooperation (e.g., economic growth and stability) over aggression, and 2) the adversary does not perceive any overwhelming risk to its vital interests which would drive a necessity for action.

[51] For extensive research into the unintended consequences of the (over)use of threats, see David P. Barash, *Threats: Intimidation and Its Discontents* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[52] A focus on the adversary's cost and benefit of restraint, by encouraging cooperation and exercising one's own self-restraint, may be ineffective if the adversary is driven by revisionist or malign ambitions. For more on this, see Tørrisplass, "Deterrence or Reassurance?"

How the United States Deters

Strategic deterrence, defined as a strategy to deter in order to guarantee the security of the United States and its allies and partners, requires more than just military means. Effectively influencing each element of the adversary's decision calculus requires utilizing and coordinating across all levers of national power.

Deterrence via Diplomatic Power. The network of alliances and partnerships the United States maintains plays an essential role in deterrence. On the one hand, it increases the perceived cost of action as aggression is met with a collective response from multiple nations rather than the singular nation in the sight lines of the aggressor. Additionally, strong alliances and partnerships can decrease the perceived benefit of action of an aggressor attempting to undermine its mutual defense agreements.

On the other hand, accepting a nation into a mutual defense agreement could be a tool to increase the benefit of restraint of a fence-sitting nation, a country whose leaders may be at a deciding point between great powers to which it should develop closer ties. Another way to increase BoR is incentivization through international recognition and expanded roles or positions in international institutions. International institutions also present a way to increase CoA, imposing costs on an aggressor via demarches or banning its continued participation in that forum.

Finally, diplomatic measures can defer increasing the cost of restraint through activities such as strategic stability dialogues and arms control negotiations. These sorts of actions enhance the state of relations between adversarial nations in hopes of decreasing tension and risk of miscalculation.

Deterrence via Information Power. While the information domain can be considered as means to influence another's decision calculus, from methods ranging from information warfare to positive international recognition, its primary role is executing the communication piece of deterrence. Effective deterrence requires capability (i.e., the deterrer is able), credibility (i.e., the deterrer is willing), and communication (i.e., the deterree is aware and understands the deterrer's capability and credibility). The deterrer must have constant, long-term communication to shape the environment, as well as tailored, short-term communication to manage crises and conflicts.

This requires a variety of communication methods and access to decision makers, ranging from public statements (e.g., press conferences, social media, unclassified publications) to discreet messages direct to the decision maker (e.g., hotlines, force generation and posturing).

Deterrence via Military Power. Deterrence, as a primary foreign policy, did not gain relevance until the advent of nuclear weapons.[53] While nuclear weapons still provide the ultimate threat of cost imposition, the application of deterrence theory has evolved to encompass the wider range of capabilities present in the Joint Force.

Certainly, advancements in conventional, cyber, and space capabilities have increased the role these assets play in deterring aggression across the spectrum of conflict. While the constant presence of nuclear weapons plays in the background of a decision maker's mind, non-nuclear capabilities may be of more relevance at the lower levels of aggression, particularly in the gray zone and in crisis. Nuclear weapons play an increasing, and ultimately dominant, role to "…prevent nuclear attack, non-nuclear strategic attacks, and large-scale conventional

[53] For more on how the invention of the nuclear weapon dramatically shaped foreign policy, arms control, and defense policy and strategy, see Michael MccGwire, "Deterrence: The Problem - Not the Solution," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 62, no. 1 (Winter, -1986 1985): 55–70, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398608437276.

aggression."[54] Air and missile defenses also contribute to deterring aggression as having a capability to defeat an attack decreases the BoA of executing an attack in the first place.

Deterrence via Economic Power. Economic interdependencies and enabling of accelerated growth have driven globalization, or the increased interconnectivity between nations worldwide. As such, the economic lever is powerful when it comes to influencing another leader's decision calculus, both incentivizing BoR and imposing CoA.

Economic tools, "…including sanctions, anti-money-laundering and anti-corruption measures, and enforcement actions"[55] can increase an aggressor's CoA. Alternatively, like diplomatic means, economic incentives such as trade agreements can increase perceived BoR while an open and free market may decrease the perceived BoA of coercive economic practices.

Deterrence Across the Spectrum of Conflict. Finally, strategic deterrence requires more than acting at the cusp of deterrence failure, when the United States believes an adversary attack is imminent. Rather, deterrence exists across the spectrum of conflict. The most effective way to deter an existential threat is to deter the crisis or conflict enabling the sort of environment where an adversary prepares to execute such an attack. Indeed, the nature of a spectrum of conflict is that aggressive actions in the gray zone, below the level of armed conflict, ultimately connect to the highest levels of aggression—nuclear war. Key to successful strategic deterrence, therefore, is tailoring activities to deter across the entire spectrum, from aggression below the level of armed conflict to a strategic attack. As mentioned previously, this requires long-term, preventative activities to shape the environment and state of relations, as well as more immediate deterrence messaging given the context of a situation and specific threat.

[54] Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," 30.
[55] Trump, 34.

The Problem with Deterrence

With a deeper understanding of the current U.S. approach to great power competition, two principal issues emerge with how the United States operationalizes deterrence. First, the utility of deterrence is exaggerated, resulting in the concept being inappropriately applied to a multitude of threat situations and scenarios. For instance, the NSS states "The Joint Force must remain capable of deterring and defeating *the full range* of threats to the United States."[56] Specifically identified, these include border security infractions, illegal immigration, malicious cyber activities, nuclear proliferation, and terrorism. However, deterrence may not be the best approach to address these threats. The cost of inaction may be too high to deter illegal immigration. The threat of retaliation may not be credible to an unattributable cyber actor or rogue nuclear proliferator, and it may not even be meaningful to the terrorist finding honor in martyrdom. Some threats are not appropriately served by a deterrence strategy. This fact must be acknowledged in order to avoid wasting time and resources on an ineffective strategy and shift efforts towards developing an effective one.

This first issue is exacerbated by the second, that deterrence analysts assume worst-case, which often leads to an overuse of threats to increase perceived costs of action. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, an over-reliance on making threats may in fact make matters worse. As threats are exchanged, tensions escalate as each side feels more threatened, until a crisis or conflict, that both parties were seeking to avoid, breaks out.[57] Secondly, basing deterrence strategies off worst-case analyses diverts "attention and intellectual resources from more fundamental problems…from the *avoidance* of crises."[58] Rather than prioritizing relieving

[56] Emphasis added. Trump, 29.
[57] For more on this phenomena, see Barash, *Threats*.
[58] MccGwire, "Deterrence: The Problem - Not the Solution," 67.

the sources of tension that would drive a crisis or conflict, deterrence strategies tend to assume away the threat, taking it for granted, and narrow in on how to deal with it. MccGwire offers the following as a practical example:

> …a Soviet drive into Western Europe would be a response to a strategic imperative where war was inevitable, not a surrender to the temptation to go to war for the sake of territorial gain. A Soviet offensive would therefore be a by-product of the much more momentous decision that world war was unavoidable. It could not be prevented by simple threats of punishment, which would already have been taken into account.[59]

Restated, the threat of Soviet invasion would have only been realized if the Soviets were driven to a point of unacceptable cost of restraint (i.e., unavoidable war), not because they perceived a high benefit of action (i.e., territorial gain). This is critical to understand for two reasons. First, strategists must consider whether U.S. actions are instigating a crisis or threat that would not exist otherwise. And second, if the adversary does have a high CoR, deterrence efforts via threatening cost imposition or benefit denial will likely be done in vain. Such approaches are better suited to deter an adversary driven by a perceived BoA.

The thesis now turns to consider the tension between competition and deterrence, how competition undermines deterrence by pushing on those elements favoring action, especially cost of restraint.

[59] MccGwire, 62.

TENSION BETWEEN COMPETITION AND DETERRENCE

The tension between competition and deterrence can be seen in a hostage situation in which first responders have identified two approaches. They bring in a negotiator to influence the shooter to believe that his best (or least bad) option is to release his captives and turn himself over to law enforcement. At the same time, first responders call SWAT in case negotiation fails, and action is necessary. The negotiator can be viewed as analogous to deterrence, and SWAT as analogous to competition. Now picture that the culprit, while seemingly open to dialogue with the negotiator, catches a glimpse of SWAT moving into place. At this moment, the potentiality of releasing hostages is undermined by the challenge posed by the SWAT team; now the hostages cannot be released as they are essential to the shooter in case of confrontation with the SWAT team. In this case, the negotiator's efforts were undermined by the SWAT team. Two conclusions can be drawn. First, competition is necessary as an insurance policy: in the event deterrence fails, a nation is prepared to defend its security via conflict. However, and secondly, activities required for competition (e.g., to prevail in conflict[60]) can either enhance or undermine influence efforts aimed to deter conflict from occurring in the first place. If the negotiator and the SWAT team had coordinated strategies, the negotiator could have used the threat of a SWAT engagement to their advantage, to pressure the shooter towards releasing hostages. However, if deterrence and competition strategies are not aligned, competition poses a threat to successful deterrence. This is one example of the tension between competition and deterrence, largely from

[60] As discussed in the chapter on Competition, there are multiple ends to competition, beyond preparation for and prevailing in conflict. Of significance, one such role includes a nation's prestige and role status. See Reinhard Wolf, "Taking Interaction Seriously: Asymmetrical Roles and the Behavioral Foundations of Status," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 1186–1211, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119837338.

a military perspective. This segment explores the potential for competition, across DIME, to undermine deterrence.

Tension, at the Strategic Level

The preceding sections described the goals of strategic competition and strategic deterrence, namely, protecting and advancing the international order and protecting the security of the nation, respectively. At the height of great power conflict, these goals become incompatible. As a nation rises in power, it seeks an international order reflecting its values and not the declining power's. Unless the declining power accommodates the desires of the rising power or relinquishes its position, armed conflict ensues.[61] In such a scenario today, where the United States and China (or Russia) possess advanced capabilities, from cyber and space weapons to nuclear weapons, armed conflict may quickly and easily escalate into an existential threat. And here is the dilemma. For each player, they must choose to cede their position for the international order (and all that comes with it) or continue in a conflict placing the nation's existence at risk. They must prioritize either strategic competition or strategic deterrence.[62]

[61] This is often referred to as Thucydides' Trap. While not a predetermined outcome of great power conflict, history has shown its potential. Even after armed conflict concludes, the cycle repeats. This battle for power and influence is an infinite game.
[62] This, of course, from a realist perspective. From an idealist perspective, there is potential for great powers to co-exist—for strategic competition and strategic deterrence to endure under a true multi-polar geopolitical environment.

Tension, in Overarching Concepts

Identifying key differences between competition and deterrence leads to an understanding of their tension in general terms (see Figure 4). This section explores some of these differences to start unpacking how competition might undermine deterrence.

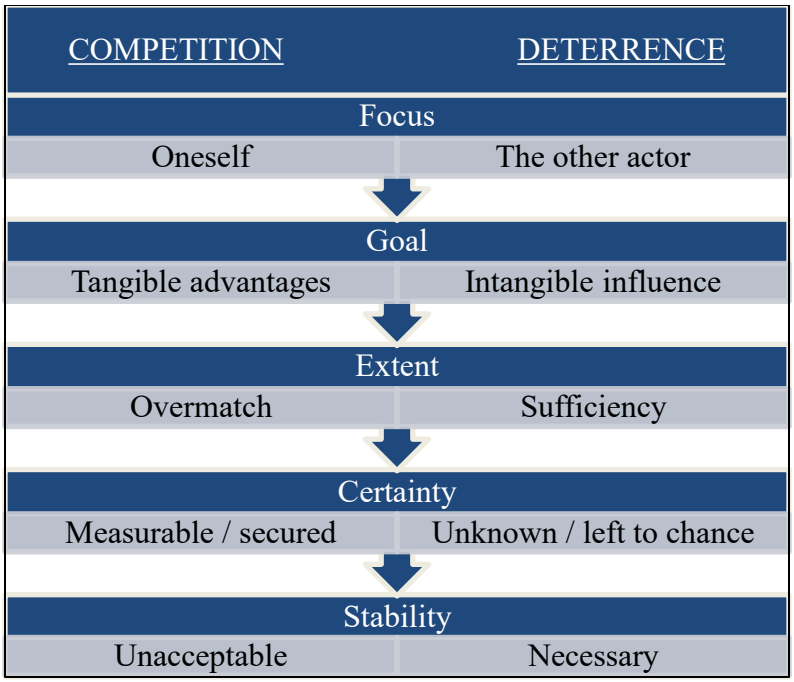

Figure 4: Differences between Competition and Deterrence

In competition, one takes actions to gain or maintain marked advantages over another, by enhancing one's own position and/or undermining another's. These advantages exist across the DIME and take various forms, ranging from networks of influence to military capabilities to the

global economic model. In general, such advantages are measurable and understood.[63] At the extreme, competition seeks overmatch with little room for uncertainty or risk.

Deterrence, however, occurs by one influencing another's behavior by seeking to understand and manipulate their perceptions and decision calculi. While competitive advantages may play a part in influence campaigns (to threaten cost imposition, for example), deterrence requires only what is necessary to convince the other player to refrain from undesired activities. Overmatch and certainty are not required. In fact, some theorists claim deterrence resides in leaving something to chance.[64] Further, seeking a competitive overmatch undermines stability, more on this next. Unlike competition, deterrence cannot be measured or understood in any certain terms; it is one's best guess at the cognitive state of another and an attempt to influence that unknown state.[65]

One final distinction between competition and deterrence revolves around the issue of stability. There are many definitions of stability (or strategic stability), with new interpretations continuing to emerge.[66] Most, however, narrow their definition around the conditions in which

[63] While advantages may be measurable, the effectiveness of such advantages are harder to quantify. For example, one country may have a superior conventional warfighting force, but this does not guarantee its victory. Other factors, such as strategy, tactics, and experience, play critical roles in determining who prevails in a conflict.
[64] "The threat that leaves something to chance" is a key concept in Schelling's theory of deterrence. For more on this concept, see Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1966).
[65] Like competition, it is challenging to quantify the effectiveness of deterrence as only the negative can be proven (i.e., when deterrence fails). For example, while correlations can be drawn from the advent of nuclear weapons to the cessation of great power conflict, one cannot prove nuclear deterrence as the determining factor.
[66] Lawrence Rubin and Adam N. Stulberg, *The End of Strategic Stability? Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries* (Georgetown University Press, 2018), 4.

nuclear weapons are used.[67] This thesis offers yet another alternative, but with a broader perspective. Given the nature of today's strategic competition and the implications of technologically advanced capabilities, this thesis defines strategic stability as a relative state of peace between great powers. In other words, strategic stability is the geopolitical state in which no great power feels incentivized or pressured to initiate a crisis or conflict against another great power. This interpretation is more closely tied to traditional Chinese thinking in which strategic stability constitutes "a comprehensive concept for describing the overall stability of a bilateral relationship…effected by a wide range of factors—military, political, diplomatic, and economic."[68]

As discussed in the previous section, the spectrum of conflict interconnects initiation of a crisis up to full scale nuclear use. It then follows that architects of strategic stability should incorporate concepts including the conditions under which a crisis would emerge between nuclear-armed great powers, not just the conditions in which these powers would consider nuclear use, a much more extreme and limiting measure. As such, strategic deterrence would maintain a direct tie to strategic stability. As strategic stability is strengthened, so is strategic deterrence. Strategic competition, however, in its aims to secure advantages or overmatch, rejects strategic stability and, as a result, poses a threat to strategic deterrence. The supporting relationship stability has towards deterrence, coupled with the disrupting relationship competition has towards stability, conceptualize how competition and deterrence are in tension.

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[67] Rubin and Stulberg describe strategic stability as "a common frame of reference for how nuclear weapons affect global peace and security." (Rubin and Stulberg, 2.) Colby defines strategic stability as a condition in which "no party has an incentive to use nuclear weapons *save for vindication of its vital interests in extreme circumstances*." (Elbridge A. Colby and Michael S. Gerson, "Strategic Stability: Contending Interpretations" (Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, February 2013), 55.

[68] Rubin and Stulberg, *The End of Strategic Stability?*, 174.

Here, it is useful to compare competition and deterrence in their relation to threats. How one perceives a threat is a mix of another's capability and intent. In competition, one prioritizes capabilities that the other often translates as an increasing threat, intent being assumed. This undermines stability, in turn undermining deterrence since one cannot confidently know the cognitive state of another, one uses actions to determine intent. From a defense perspective, as the department tasked with being ready to prevail in conflict, intent must be assumed under a worst-case scenario. Other departments, or even the financial sectors within the department of defense, are open to more ideological interpretations regarding military issues.[69] However, as the thesis explores next, elements of competition across the DIME have the potential to undermine strategic deterrence.

Tension, in Competition Approaches

As discussed in the section on deterrence, the nature of today's rivalries results in a conflict continuum linking the potential for existentially threatening war to activities conducted in the gray zone. As such, it is necessary to consider how day to day competition across the DIME might undermine the strategic stability between great powers. What follows is an examination of the approaches to competition, viewed from the lens of their potential to undermine strategic stability, thereby potentially acting in tension with strategic deterrence. The thesis first considers military competition, then turns to the diplomatic, information, and economic aspects.

[69] For more on this, see Thomas Boyd-Carpenter, "The Political Context of Deterrence," in *Conventional Deterrence into the 1990s* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 7–43.

Military Tension. Military competition not only has the potential to undermine strategic stability, but technological advancements in military capabilities, both nuclear and non-nuclear, present new dilemmas to deterring a strategic attack once in a crisis or conflict. Both potentials are explored here.

First, military competition produces technological advancements that, while providing operational advantages, may come at the expense of deterring a nuclear or non-nuclear strategic attack. In considering this risk, the thesis explores how both nuclear competition and non-nuclear competition can actually undermine deterring a nuclear attack.[70]

Before examining nuclear competition, it is necessary to note that the nuclear realm is often sheltered from competition calculations. In fact, nuclear is likely the only category of military capability in which the United States intentionally seeks *not* to compete. Indeed, the nuclear arms race of the Cold War left both the United States and the Soviet Union with massive nuclear stockpiles and massive hits to national budgets. U.S. nuclear forces play the following roles in U.S. national security strategy: deterring nuclear and non-nuclear strategic attack; assuring allies and partners; achieving U.S. objectives if deterrence fails; and hedging against an uncertain future[71]—competition is not included. The United States does not seek to engage in another arms race, rather it pointedly states it seeks to avoid such competition.[72] However, there

[70] While strategic attack is broader than just nuclear, for the purpose of the paper, it is sufficient and more straightforward to simply consider deterring a nuclear attack.
[71] Mattis, "Nuclear Posture Review," VII.
[72] Mattis, 33.

is a critical disconnect when it comes to competition and dominance as a principal objective for all other areas of military power.[73]

Acknowledging the United States does not compete in the nuclear realm, the United States does modify and enhance its nuclear capabilities to *sufficiently* achieve the roles outlined above.[74] One potential implication of such nuclear enhancements includes improving the accuracy of nuclear capabilities to enable counterforce operations. Naturally, this threatens the survivability of an adversary's forces in order to limit damage to one's own interests. But, in practice, it also undermines the adversary's assured second-strike capability, the foundation of deterrence via mutual vulnerability.[75] This has at least two negative effects. First, it undermines first strike stability[76], placing the adversary in a use-or-lose predicament. Second, it invites an arms race, as now the adversary must overcome a new threat to its nuclear deterrent. Thus, competition in the nuclear realm, albeit of secondary effect (pertaining to U.S. policy), has the potential to undermine nuclear deterrence and ultimately ignite full-scale competition by initiating an arms race.

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[73] The 2018 National Defense Strategy identifies "Challenges to the U.S. military advantage", stating that "For decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain" however competition with revisionist powers and emerging commercial technology risk "eroding the conventional overmatch to which our Nation has grown accustomed." (Mattis, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," 3.)

[74] For example, the 2018 NPR identified a risk that Russia believes it can effectively coerce the United States via limited first use given its larger and more diverse non-strategic nuclear capabilities. In response to this assessed deterrence gap, the report recommended not a one-for-one capability match, or overmatch, in the class of non-strategic nuclear weapons (i.e., a competitive response), but a measured addition of "supplements" to enhance the credibility of U.S. nuclear forces in the mind of Russian leadership (i.e., a sufficient deterrence response). (Mattis, "Nuclear Posture Review," 53–54.)

[75] Keir A. Lieber and Daryl Press, "The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 9–49.

[76] A state of stability where neither side perceives an incentive or a need to strike first.

Transitioning to the issue of non-nuclear competition, one of the biggest issues is the artificial line [mostly Western] strategists and policymakers have drawn between the nuclear and non-nuclear. In short, activities in the non-nuclear realm will not, or should not, have significant effects on the nuclear. But it is not that clean. Advancements in conventional capabilities, even non-kinetic capabilities (e.g., cyber offensive tools), threaten to undermine nuclear deterrence.[77]

U.S. development and integration of advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems and precision-strike conventional weapons, as demonstrated in the Gulf War, was perceived by Russia as the United States obtaining the ability to threaten the survival of its nuclear force, without having to resort to nuclear means. What is more, U.S. advancements in missile defense technology enable the United States to defend against any Russian weapons that might have survived.[78] In response, Russia "designed nuclear weapons with very low yields and adopted a military doctrine that calls for such weapons to be used if Moscow fears that its nuclear arsenal is at risk or if it is losing a conventional war."[79] China holds similar fears, which are worsened with the prospect of the United States developing and deploying conventional hypersonic weapons.[80] It remains to be seen whether it will follow a similar path as Russia, however reports of Chinese nuclear diversification and expansion might be an indicator of such a response.[81]

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[77] Or the ability to deter a nuclear attack.
[78] Rubin and Stulberg, *The End of Strategic Stability?*
[79] Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., "The Eroding Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, 2019, 65, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/eroding-balance-terror.
[80] Rubin and Stulberg, *The End of Strategic Stability?*, chap. 7.
[81] On the scope and scale of Chinese nuclear modernization, diversification, and expansion, see Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," Annual Report to Congress, 2020, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF.

The result of technological advancements in non-nuclear capabilities is the erosion of the hard line once separating the nuclear realm from the non-nuclear. The stability of nuclear deterrence no longer resides just in the relative balance of nuclear power ensuring mutually assured destruction—advanced non-nuclear capabilities now have the capacity to threaten the survivability of such deterrent forces.

More than just threatening the nuclear deterrent of an adversary, advanced non-nuclear capabilities now have the potential to pose strategic effects on par with that of a nuclear detonation. This potential is captured in the revised declaratory policy of the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, stating "Extreme circumstances [for which the United States would consider the employment of nuclear weapons] could include significant non-nuclear strategic attacks. Significant non-nuclear strategic attacks include, but are not limited to, attacks on the U.S., allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure, and attacks on U.S. or allied nuclear forces, their command and control, or warning and attack assessment capabilities."[82]

Secondly, and as explored with the other elements of national power, military competition has the potential to undermine strategic stability. With the development of tailored nuclear weapons to counter a conventionally superior adversary comes the potential for actual nuclear use to prevail in a conventional conflict. As a result, Russia and China "may see conventional aggression as less risky, since they can employ certain types of nuclear weapons if things go badly."[83] Ultimately, the disappearing line between nuclear and non-nuclear, as a result of military competition, may in fact undermine strategic stability by lowering the bar for a conventional conflict or crisis to occur.

[82] Mattis, "Nuclear Posture Review," 21.
[83] Krepinevich, "The Eroding Balance of Terror," 66.

Additionally, the increasing use of gray zone tactics, or activities below the level of armed conflict, push up against the crisis/conflict line. Such activities are designed to get away with as much as possible without igniting a crisis or conflict. These include actual military operations, but operations that are concealed or irregular, such as cyber infiltration, undersea warfare, and space disruption activities. While intended to operate below the level of armed conflict, these sort of gray zone operations invite the risk of miscalculation and inadvertent escalation as each competitor seeks additional advantages and gains, pushing harder and harder against that fickle line separating "peacetime" from armed conflict.

While the military lever is concerned with the physical security of a nation, the other arms of power enable security interests such as political legitimacy, international prestige, internal stability, and national prosperity. To varying degrees, these can all play roles in a leader's perception of their nation's security and, in the case of authoritarian states like China and Russia, of their own security.

Little has been written on the potential for diplomatic, information, and economic competition to undermine deterrence. This thesis contends that, given these levers of national power influence one's perception of security, competition in these fields may actually be the drivers for crises and conflicts. As articulated in the deterrence section, deterrence failure between great powers today will likely result from an unbearable cost of restraint. What follows is an examination on how competition in the D, I, and E levers may, in fact, result in an unacceptable increase in cost of restraint. To this end, the thesis first considers the potential for tension in general terms, recognizing such tension may result from threats (i.e., driving cost of restraint), but also opportunities to secure critical national security interests (i.e., driving benefit

of action). It then utilizes a mini case study to demonstrate how these areas of tension may have been key drivers in a recent real-world crisis.

Diplomatic Tension. Strategic competition revolves around determining and advancing the international order. In practice, the disadvantaged actor seeks opportunities to evolve the existing order to better reflect its political system and interests while potentially challenging or undermining the legitimacy of the current order, at least those elements perceived as threatening. Another critical area of diplomatic competition is expanding influence and collective strength through a network of like-minded allies and partners. A network of like-minded adversaries, however, increases the threat of a more formidable opponent. Such threat perceptions are exacerbated as alliances and partnerships expand in scope and scale.

Information Tension. Information competition primarily occurs in two forms, inwardly and outwardly focused. Inwardly focused competition strives for internal stability, or the opportunity to improve public opinion and minimize opposition. Such results require an information sphere reflecting a legitimate political system and leader effectiveness, among others. Competition comes in the form of battling counter-narratives from adversaries and, certainly, defending against an adversary igniting revolutions, protests, and instability within one's populace. Outwardly focused information competition seeks to (re)establish a position of strength and prestige on the global stage, and to undermine domestic and international legitimacy of rival actors. This includes recognizing opportunities to create such narratives while countering adversary threats to undermine one's global status.

Economic Tension. As discussed in the competition section, economic competition revolves around protecting and establishing the liberal economic model. More tangible, however, economic competition seeks to secure one's own advantages for economic stability and

prosperity, potentially at the expense of a competitor or, at the extreme, to undermine the economic stability of a competitor. This zero-sum potential exists when competing for access to natural resources or trade routes, and when establishing trade agreements and supply chains. Certainly, such economic opportunities must be secured for the survival and prosperity of a nation, emphasizing one's benefit of action. The flip side is also true, a threat to such economic necessities may intensify an actor's cost of restraint, driving some sort of action to address the threat and resecure national economic security.

Tension, in Action – Russia's Annexation of Crimea

The thesis now explores how competition may have played a role in Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Specifically, it applies diplomatic, information, and economic competition elements to characterize the security environment in which Russian President Vladimir Putin chose to forcibly annex Crimea. This is an especially relevant case study as the use of force was not necessary—President Putin had other means of influence over Ukraine.[84] Further, Putin must have known the use of force would come at the cost of international backlash and isolation, economic sanctions, and the reinvigoration of NATO.[85] If such high costs were sure to be understood, then what drove his decision? This section points to the potentially influential benefits of action (BoA) and costs of restraint (CoR) that might have tipped the scales and caused deterrence to falter.

[84] Oxana Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad," *Great Decisions*, 2015, 14.
[85] Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 50.

Diplomatic Drivers. The principal benefits of Russia taking Crimea by force included improving Russia's international status, albeit at the cost of its international prestige, as a relevant global power that would not be pushed around.[86] In a single stroke, Putin undermined liberal international norms by disrupting the post-Cold War European order.[87] As a matter of personal prestige, Putin was able to capitalize on an opportunity to enhance his reputation, the same reputation that enabled his rise to political power. Putin's reputation was built on "defending Russian interests, asserting [Russia's] rightful place as a global superpower."[88] Thus, in light of the spreading "threat to compatriots" narrative (that protesters in Ukraine were Western-backed, Russophobes intent on breaking Ukraine away from Russia and threatening the Russian compatriots living in Ukraine), Putin was well poised to act, solidifying his and Russia's status on the global stage along the way.

A major diplomatic CoR may have also factored into the decision to invade Crimea—not responding to NATO's eastern expansion may have been perceived as too costly to Putin. In 1999, NATO incorporated Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into the alliance. This was followed by NATO expanding into former Soviet republics, to include Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, in 2004. Then, in 2008, NATO looked further east and considered admitting Georgia and Ukraine, a move both France and Germany opposed for fear of antagonizing Russia. While NATO refrained from initiating any formal processes leading to Georgian and Ukrainian membership, it boldly declared that "these countries will become members of NATO." Putin's indicated that, if NATO admitted the two countries, this action would be perceived a "direct

[86] Wolf, "Taking Interaction Seriously," 1203.
[87] Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea," 47.
[88] Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad," 8.

threat" to Russia.[89] After the former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown, there was an increased risk of NATO finalizing Ukraine's inclusion into the alliance[90], resulting in two unacceptable outcomes for Putin. First, Ukraine would move out of Russia's orbit of influence and into the West's, potentially resulting in a NATO base in Crimea.[91] Second, "the possible success of Ukraine as a democracy in [the aftermath of the Euromaidan uprising] posed a great threat to the political system Putin has created. Putin needed to disrupt the continued momentum and success of a people's led political [and economic] structure which would directly undermine his authoritarian structure."[92] In addition to Ukraine's potential entry into NATO being a direct threat to Putin's autocratic legitimacy, it was a direct threat to Russia's identity. "Of all the post-Soviet states, the removal of Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence by way of popular revolution was, at least from the Russian perspective, the worst of the bad outcomes. Ukraine occupies a special place in Russia's historical narrative and national identity."[93] From this, we can conclude that restraint was not a viable option for Putin.

Information Drivers. There was great potential for Putin to spin the Ukraine crisis in way that improved his approval ratings and quieted internal opposition voices. Indeed, benefits of a potential invasion of Crimea included the high domestic approval ratings Putin would be able to secure via a successful information campaign.[94] This information campaign used the

[89] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the West Is to Blame for the Ukraine Crisis - The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault.
[90] Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad."
[91] Mearsheimer, "Why the West Is to Blame for the Ukraine Crisis."
[92] Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad," 14.
[93] Shevel, 9.
[94] See Damian Strycharz, "Dominant Narratives, External Shocks, and the Russian Annexation of Crimea," *Problems of Post-Communism*, September 18, 2020, 1–12. and Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea."

"threat to compatriots" narrative and appealed to the emotions and fears of the Russian population. The narrative originated with members of the Russian parliamentary opposition, who described Maidan protesters as Western-backed, anti-Russian forces and Russophobes intent on breaking Ukraine away from Russia, threatening Russian compatriots living in Ukraine, and bringing NATO troops closer Russia. It was not until Yanukovych was ousted from power that Crimean and Russian authorities also began describing the new Ukrainian government as a "neo-Nazi, Russophobic and anti-Semitic regime"[95]. Ultimately, at the bidding of the newly appointed prime minister of Crimea, Putin appealed to the Federation Council to use military force in Ukraine, stating a justification of "…the threat to citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots, the personnel of the military contingent of the Russian Federation Armed Forces deployed on the territory of Ukraine (Autonomous Republic of Crimea)."[96]

Towards the end of the crisis, almost half of Russian respondents believed Ukrainian protesters took part in demonstrations because of Western influence. This offered Putin an opportunity to reverse the impact of Western information competition activities to undermine Putin's legitimacy and reap the benefits of popular public support. Enabled by Russia's "threat to compatriots" narrative, annexing Crimea "brought momentous change within Russia itself, where it created the so-called "Crimean Consensus" and generated a massive wave of public support for the Kremlin's confrontational stance towards the Western world."[97] After months of denying the presence of Russian forces in Ukraine or Russia's role in Crimea, Putin's admitting

[95] As quoted in Strycharz, "Dominant Narratives, External Shocks, and the Russian Annexation of Crimea," 5.
[96] As quoted in Strycharz, 7.
[97] Andreas Umland, "Crimea Could Become an Expensive Liability for Putin," Atlantic Council, June 9, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/crimea-could-become-an-expensive-liability-for-putin/.

that the little green men were indeed Russian forces was intended for Russian public consumption—to bolster the government's image as decisively "asserting Russian power in gathering lands and peoples imagined to be Russian."[98]

In addition to the information campaign benefits Putin stood to reap from the invasion, there were also informational costs to consider, namely "Putin's fear of popular mobilization against his regime." [99] As discussed, Putin's reputation rested on a strong and legitimate presidency—the ongoing Euromaidan uprising, perceived to be orchestrated by the West, was an attempt to "overthrow an autocratic president by means of popular protests…"[100] Such popular revolutions presented a competing political model resulting in the destruction of authoritarian regimes, an unacceptable risk making restraint intolerable.

Economic Drivers. While the previously mentioned diplomatic and informational drivers are commonly understood in relation to the annexation of Crimea, the economic factors are not as widely discussed. Specifically, a significant economic benefit for Putin was securing the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) surrounding the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea. In fact, 70% of the Black Sea's potential natural gas deposits are concentrated in just two blocks that so happen to reside well within Russia's newly claimed EEZ. "When Russian forces annexed Crimea in 2014, they seized subsidiaries of Ukraine's state energy conglomerate Naftogaz operating in the Black Sea. The Kremlin appropriated these companies — and billions of dollars of equipment—and delivered them to Gazprom, Russia's state-owned energy giant. In one fell

[98] John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (2014): 255, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2014.985241.
[99] Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad," 9.
[100] Shevel, 10.

swoop, Russia ended Ukraine's offshore oil and gas operations and bolstered its own."[101] But Russia did not just end Ukraine's offshore operations, it ensured Ukraine's continued dependence on Russia to meet its energy needs.[102] Ukraine had implemented an "energy independence and gas diversification strategy"[103] that would end Russian gas imports by 2020 and become self-sufficient by 2035. Taking Crimea was a critical piece of Russia's plan to protect its economy as it offered access to the enormous oil and gas resources in the Black Sea. Russia's annexation of Crimea, and subsequent control of the Black Sea EEZ ended any hopes Ukraine had of energy independence.

Russia stood to benefit economically in additional ways. Just two months following the annexation, Russia and China finalized a massive, long-negotiated economic agreement, which enabled Russia to reduce economic dependence on the West. The 30-year, $400 billion gas agreement included the construction of a new pipeline, the "Power of Siberia," and the transportation of natural gas to Western China over the next several decades. Prior to this agreement, however, Russia had already committed to a bilateral "loans for oil" deal with China, agreeing to export oil to China until 2030 in exchange for a $25 billion loan.[104] Russia's silence

[101] Ariel Cohen, "As Russia Closes In On Crimea's Energy Resources, What Is Next For Ukraine?," Forbes, February 28, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2019/02/28/as-russia-closes-in-on-crimeas-energy-resources-what-is-next-for-ukraine/.
[102] See Biersack and O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea."
[103] Frank Umbach, "The Energy Dimensions of Russia's Annexation of Crimea," NATO Review, May 27, 2014, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/05/27/the-energy-dimensions-of-russias-annexation-of-crimea/index.html.
[104] For more on the energy agreements between Russia and China, see Biersack and O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea." and Angela Stent, "Russia, China, and the West After Crimea," *Transatlantic Academy* 2015-16 Paper Series, no. 8 (May 13, 2016), https://www.gmfus.org/publications/russia-china-and-west-after-crimea.

regarding its new territorial claims surrounding Crimea is revealing in that they enabled the Kremlin to shift eastward, protecting its economy[105] while isolating itself from the West.

Finally, shifting from benefits to costs, one economic cost reveals itself when considering the origins of the Euromaidan uprising. What sparked the protests initially was former President Yanukovych's last-minute decision to back out of the association and free trade agreement with the European Union (EU). This effort had been underway for several years, however Russia's continued pressure and interjections finally swayed President Yanukovych to abandon the agreement. Protests ignited, ultimately provoking Yanukovych to flee the country and the crisis to escalate. As discussed under the diplomatic drivers, Ukraine held special importance in Russian historical narrative and national identity. The potential for a Ukrainian democratic economic structure, aligned with the EU and resulting from the Euromaidan uprising, was a diplomatic and economic cost of restraint that would undermine Putin's authoritarian structure.[106]

There is large literature of analysis on the reason behind Putin's decision to annex Crimea, especially considering the economic and diplomatic backlash that resulted. This mini case study only offers a glimpse into that work with the goal of reframing the reader's perspective to consider the role diplomatic, informational, and economic competition might have played in the crisis. Indeed, the justification of Putin's decision lies not in just a single issue, but

[105] "The Russian government and its overall economy are dependent on the extraction and transport of natural resources…more than 50% of Russia's government revenue at the state level is from oil and gas. China's oil and natural gas consumption are substantial; oil accounted for one-third of total world consumption in 2013 and its natural gas consumption has been increasing..." Biersack and O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea," 261.
[106] Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad."

likely resulted as a culmination of Putin defending against perceived unacceptable costs of restraint and capitalizing on perceived benefits of action (i.e., CoR + BoA > CoA + BoR).

While deterrence of Russian aggression failed, the stakes were relatively low in that Russia was a nuclear-armed great power using asymmetric means (e.g., little green men) to gain territorial ground against a much weaker, independent (i.e., non-NATO) state. But how might deterrence theory hold up when considering the potential for crisis or conflict between two great powers, or even two nuclear-armed great powers? To explore this potential further, the thesis now turns to an in-depth examination of the circumstances surrounding the World War II Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Like this mini empirical evaluation, the thesis will explore how competition factors might have influenced Japan's decision calculus to escalate into armed conflict with the United States.

EMPIRICAL EVALUATION

In 1941, Japan shocked the world by attacking Pearl Harbor. This historical event is intriguing as it demonstrates the failure of a dominant military force to effectively deter conflict. As the thesis has articulated, typical views on deterrence suggest the ability to inflict unacceptable damage and deny objectives via military means can deter an adversary from launching an attack. Unmistakably, the United States maintained a military advantage over the Japanese, but deterrence failed. This chapter explores how the various competition factors might have played into Japan's decision to escalate to armed conflict with a superior competitor, with the goal of increasing understanding of how competition might undermine deterrence.

Why Deterrence Should Not Have Failed

As discussed in previous chapters, typical deterrence calculations would say an aggressor is deterred if the perceived costs of action outweigh the benefits it would achieve through action. Indeed, this should have been the case for Japan in 1941 as "the United States possessed the clear-cut capability to inflict an intolerable level of punishment on the Japanese empire as well as the capability to deny Japan her objectives (hegemony in the South Pacific and East Asia) should the United States have been so inclined."[107]

Not only were the U.S. armed forces, and the U.S. economy and industrial base backing them, more capable, the United States was beyond Japan's military reach. "In attacking Pearl Harbor, Japan elected to fight a geographically limited war against an enemy capable of waging

[107] Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies," 3.

a total war against the Japanese home islands themselves."[108] The military imbalance was not just a quantitative mismatch, but also a qualitative one. U.S. forces were capable of global operations, enabling them to impose unacceptable costs on Japanese homeland while the U.S. homeland (i.e., continental United States) remained a sanctuary against Japanese attack. In all aspects of military competition, the United States came out on top—and the Japanese leadership knew it. "These leaders estimated the costs of war as very high, the probability of winning as low, and the probability that the defender would retaliate as virtually certain. Yet, they chose to challenge deterrence."[109]

Furthermore, in an ongoing attempt to reshape the regional territorial status quo, Japan had been officially engaged in expansionist efforts in China since 1937[110] and had its eyes set on Soviet territory.[111] A conflict with the United States could only threaten to undermine success in these other theaters, resulting in a diplomatic cost of action (CoA).

Finally, the intent behind the U.S. trade embargo was partially deterrence-based.[112] The United States was actively trying to deter (or delay) Japan from advancing into Southeast Asia.

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[108] Jeffrey Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941: Some Enduring Lessons* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 1.
[109] Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter," *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 211, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010408.
[110] Japan had been expanding its territorial claims and influence since 1895, building the Japanese empire as opportunities presented themselves, to include acquiring colonies in Taiwan and Korea. (Mark R. Peattie, "The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. Peter Duus, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 215–70.) In short, Japanese expansion was not a new development, but early Japanese pushes into mainland China in 1935 directly countered the terms of the Washington Naval Conference aimed to protect Chinese sovereignty. Japan withdrew from the treaty in 1936 and by August 1937 had engaged China in full scale conflict. (Ikuhiko Hata, "Continental Expansion, 1905-1941," ed. Peter Duss, trans. Alvin D. Coox, vol. 6, The Cambridge History of Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 300–302.)
[111] Record, Japan's Decision for War in 1941
[112] It was also aimed at impeding Japan's war production capacity. See Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 14–15.

The resource freeze was a measured action not to provoke Japan, but "to haunt it with the constant threat that more severe measures might be applied".[113] The thesis acknowledges this is one interpretation of Roosevelt's intent. As Darnton explains in "Archives and Inference", there are conflicting conclusions surrounding FDR's goal behind his actions against Japan, whether they were in fact aimed to deter Japanese expansion or, alternatively, intended to provoke the Japanese into conflict.[114] The intent behind Roosevelt's actions is not the focus here. Indeed, it does not matter as the thesis solely focuses on Japanese perceptions of U.S. actions and how those perceptions influenced its decision calculus. But even if Roosevelt's goal was provocation, the argument holds that confronting a dominant military power is insufficient to determine the weaker player's decision for inaction.[115] Regardless of Roosevelt's intent, the Japanese chose the route of conflict.

The Japanese decision to attack the United States is so inexplicable, some conclude the event demonstrates the failure of deterrence theory altogether.[116] Further, many conclude such deterrence failures result from a miscalculation resulting from an ill-informed, time-compressed

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[113] As quoted in Record, 15.

[114] Darnton points to two authors having studied [at times the same] primary sources yet diverge in their conclusions. Marc Trachtenberg suggests FDR purposefully provoked Japan to attack to gain U.S. public support for war in the Pacific. Conversely, Dan Reiter concludes Roosevelt was pure in his attempt to deter Japanese aggression and conflict. The conclusion from Darnton's article is that one cannot know for certain the mindset of leaders in times past and the factors influencing their decision making. With this in mind, the thesis seeks to present a range of interpretations surrounding Japanese decision making and perceptions leading to its decision for conflict with the United States. (Christopher Darnton, "Archives and Inference - Documentary Evidence in Case Study Research and the Debate over U.S. Entry into World War II," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2018): 84–126.)

[115] While not the focus of this paper, it would be interesting to analyze the dynamics of one's decision calculus when clearly faced with provocation by a superior competitor. While the intent of the instigator is not deterrence, the weaker state still faces the risk of unacceptable costs if it chooses to engage.

[116] Lebow and Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory," 211.

and stressful situation, and simply acting irrationally. The thesis argues that this was not the case for Japan's decision. The Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor "was reached incrementally and reinforced at several steps along the line."[117] In fact, the decision was confirmed under two separate governments and over the course of many months.[118]

Indeed, the deterrence elements overwhelmingly favored inaction. However, the shortsightedness of U.S. confidence in these factors is evident in then-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Dean Acheson's statement that "no rational Japanese could believe that an attack on us could result in anything but disaster for his country."[119] Secretary Acheson held the same flawed deterrence logic as many strategists hold today, that an overwhelming cost of action is sufficient for deterrence. In fact, such certainty resulted in a U.S. perception that it could take whatever actions it pleased against the Japanese without fear of retaliation. The flaw resides in a deterrer-based perspective, rather than a deterree-perspective. The following section considers all the factors, from the deterree's point of view, and from a competition-deterrence tension lens, leading to Japan's decision to act.

Tension, at the Strategic Level

In the context of strategic competition, Japan sought to establish and govern not the international order, but the regional order in East Asia. This goal required expelling the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands from the region, "to establish a sphere for the self-

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[117] Bruce M. Russett, "Pearl Harbor: Deterrence Theory and Decision Theory," *Journal of Peace Research* 4, no. 2 (1967): 90.

[118] "Prince Konoye's government resigned following the expiration of the deadline [for successful negotiation with the United States], but the new cabinet formed under General Tojo took office not as a regime determined to take the nation into war, but rather as one still seeking a way out of the dilemma." (Russett, 90.)

[119] Quoted in Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 3.

defense and self-preservation of [the Japanese] Empire, and to build a New Order in Greater East Asia."[120]

Ko Unoki expands on this concept by offering the following explanation, based in realist international relations theory: "the outbreak of the Japanese-US conflict was the culmination of a nearly 100-year struggle for power to determine who would dominate the East Asian region."[121] Starting in the mid-19th century, the United States sought dominance in East Asia. Dominance allowed the United States to secure control over and access to the region's natural resources. This was critical to growing U.S. businesses and economy, ensuring that growth was sustainable by dictating the policies and rules of the region and establishing new export avenues for surplus American goods. In short, dominance in East Asia was thought an enabler of domestic security in the United States. Following the First World War, however, Japan grew increasingly resentful towards the United States. It rightly perceived the United States as attempting to contain its growth and, therefore, ability to step into what it believed was its destiny as the leader of Asia.[122]

The United States, in an effort to both contain and accommodate Japan's rise in power, partnered with other major powers to establish the Washington System.[123] For a time, this approach was acceptable to the Japanese. In the 1930s, however, Japan reignited its imperialist ambitions and initiated efforts to expand its influence across Asia. Achieving its goals, however,

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[120] Quoted in Record, 36.
[121] Ko Unoki, *International Relations and the Origins of the Pacific War* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 161.
[122] Unoki, 161–66.
[123] The Washington System sought to contain Japan's imperialist ambitions via "the dissolution of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a reduction in Japan's offensive naval fleet vessels, and a written agreement that had the Powers agree to observe the Open Door Policy China…at the same time it allowed Japan, too, to retain a sense of security through naval arms and security arrangements that ensured Japan's naval superiority in the waters surrounding Japan and its nearby territories in the Pacific…[and] the status quo of Japanese interests in China would be acknowledged." (Unoki, 166–67.)

required independence from the West, thereby negating U.S. ability to contain its rise through economic strangulation. Such independence required direct and secure access to raw materials and natural resources currently under European and American control.[124]

The United States was alarmed at Japan's invasion into China starting in 1935. While declaring a neutral stance, the United States continued raw material exports to Japan but also started assisting China in its defense efforts. From a strategic competition perspective, the U.S. decision to completely cut off Japan's oil supply in July 1941 was not simply a hit to Japan's economic and military needs, but by some Japanese accounts "the last straw" in a 90-year power struggle with the United States. "[Japan] decided to settle the question of who would dominate East Asia by launching a war that aimed to drive the US and the other Western colonial Powers out of the region."[125]

An alternative explanation for Japan's decision for war is rooted in power transition theory. As Japan saw itself reaching power parity with the United States, due to its own economic and military growth as well as the U.S. struggle from impacts of the Great Depression, it became increasingly dissatisfied with the current hierarchical power structure and sought to establish a New Order of East Asia. War, therefore, would put an end to the U.S.-dominated order and enable Japan to secure its position as the Dominant Power.[126]

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[124] Unoki, 167.
[125] Unoki, 168.
[126] Power transition theory suggests conflict is the manifestation of tension between a rising Great Power (i.e., Japan) and a sitting Dominant Power (i.e., United States). This explanation, however, falls short. Japan had not actually reached parity with the United States, either economically or militarily, when it chose to attack Pearl Harbor. Perhaps the Japanese elite convinced themselves otherwise, or perhaps factors of honor and saving face played a leading role. (Unoki, 175–76.)

Both the realist theory and the power transition theory fit as strategic competition explanations for the Pacific War. But a closer look at the dynamics between the Japanese and the United States leading up to 1941 attack suggests other, not so strategic, factors were at play.

Tension, in Action

Considering this strategic backdrop, the thesis now explores how competition activities across the DIME may have contributed to the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor. These competition elements are categorized by their influence on Japanese decision calculus, namely the factors driving a determination for action and a rejection of restraint (i.e., benefit of action (BoA) and cost of restraint (CoR)). The thesis starts with considering the most influential factors, the economic action drivers.

Economic Drivers. From an economic perspective, Japan's decision to use force was a mix of necessity (i.e., CoR) and opportunity (i.e., BoA).

As punishment for Japan's aggression in China and adherence to the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the United States banned or restricted items vital to Japanese national defense.[127] Principally, this included oil shipments for which the Japanese were heavily reliant on the United States.[128] In addition to the partial oil embargos, the United States banned Japanese acquisition of high-octane aviation gasoline, scrap iron, some lubricants, iron ore, steel,

[127] Lebow and Stein, "Beyond Deterrence," 14. and Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 16.

[128] "The Roosevelt administration was well aware that Japan imported 90 percent of its oil, of which 75-80 percent was from the United States…Roosevelt also knew that the Dutch East Indies…was the only other convenient oil producer that could meet Japan's import needs." (Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 15.)

steel products, copper, brass, bronze, zinc, nickel, and potash. Collectively, these embargos crippled Japan's industrial production.[129]

As Japan expanded its military operations in China, there were increased calls for a complete embargo on oil exports. Roosevelt seemingly understood the inconsistency in attempting to avoid provoking Japan (i.e., maintain deterrence) with continuing shipments of resources that directly supported the exact activities for which the embargo was put in place. Ultimately, State and Treasury hardliners won out and, in the summer of 1941, the United States completely suspended Japan's economic access, depleting Japan's foreign trade by 50 to 75 percent and depriving it of 80 percent of its oil requirements.[130] Japan's economy was in dire straits as Britain and the Netherlands joined in cutting off trade agreements. The three countries simultaneously froze all Japanese economic and financial assets, a move that the Japanese National Command Authority interpreted as a coordinated policy of encirclement.[131]

Japan had two alternatives to reestablish access to vital resources: strike an agreement with the three governments or take military action. Using force, Japan could secure tin, nickel, and rubber via Malaya, and most immediately crucial, oil via the Netherlands Indies.[132] The prospect of seizing and securing new, *independent* sources of resources introduced an economic BoA for Japan that would alleviate the consequences of its extensive dependency on U.S. trade. As Jeffrey Record puts it, Tokyo could either "resume its economic dependency on the United States or, alternatively, [advance] into resource-rich Southeast Asia and [place] its expanded empire on an economically independent foundation."[133]

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[129] Record, 16.
[130] Record, 17.
[131] Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies," 5.
[132] Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 98.
[133] Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 8.

Rather than bringing Japan to its knees begging for trade restoration, the embargo incentivized Japan to look elsewhere to fulfil its economic needs, enabling it to increase its independence from the United States.

Diplomatic Drivers. As just mentioned, there was a diplomatic alternative presented to the Japanese to meet its economic needs. Unfortunately, the terms of the peace settlement were unacceptable to Japan. The United States, British, and Dutch demanded a return to the status quo in exchange for resuming trade. This would require the Japanese to withdraw all of their forces from air and naval bases in Indo-China, abandon any right they had to station troops in China, and ultimately end all Japanese involvement in China.[134] As Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles put it, the United States demanded that Japan abandon its last "four years of national effort and sacrifice"[135] in China which, by extension, meant abandoning its aspiration to become the region's dominant power and resubmit to the economic dominion of the United States.

Such an outcome was given no serious consideration. Accepting the U.S. terms meant abandoning any hope of a Japanese empire—it meant abandoning that Japanese dream of the last 100 years. In the eyes of Japanese Foreign Minister Togo, "Japan was now asked not only to abandon all the gains of her years of sacrifice, but to surrender her international position as a power in the Far East. That surrender, as he saw it, would have amounted to national suicide."[136] The unfeasibility of the diplomatic off-ramp, due to political competition, resulted in a cost of restraint perceived as unacceptable.

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[134] Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 97.
[135] Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 90.
[136] Quoted in Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 97.

Information Drivers. Another factor influencing Japanese decision making was of internal influence and instability. Expanding on the unfeasibility of the diplomatic offramp, the Army High Command would not have tolerated abandoning its gains and position in China. Its prestige and influence were directly correlated to the war in China and had become the basis of its power in Japanese domestic politics. Further, conceding on China surely meant revolt by extremist elements within the Army.[137] General Togo characterized the internal dynamics in the following way, "If Japan were forced to give up suddenly all the fruits of the long war in China, collapse would follow." [138] Thus, the U.S. peace settlement was unacceptable not only from a diplomatic power and prestige perspective, but accepting the U.S. terms would have resulted in internal instability and collapse.

Military Drivers. The economic drivers of action coupled with the diplomatic and information costs of restraint resulted in a decision calculus favoring military action. But the target of this military action was not the United States, it was the Southeast Asian colonies which held an abundance of the critical resources Japan desperately needed.

Indeed, the decision to take military action against the United States was of secondary concern. Japan's decision for military action was aimed at Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. However, the Japanese assessed action against these Western colonies would certainly result in a U.S. response, declaring war on Japan and essentially guaranteeing Japanese defeat in such a scenario. [139]

In reality, however, Roosevelt doubted the U.S. willingness to go to war with another country over an indirect threat to American interests. The U.S. public held a strong isolationist

[137] Russett, 97.
[138] Quoted in Russett, 98.
[139] See Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies." and Russett, "Pearl Harbor."

sentiment that likely would have rejected the idea of getting involved in a war with Japan over their aggression against the British or Dutch colonies.[140] Further, the United States was committed to a "Germany-first" strategy to stop Hitler in Europe; diverting limited military resources to a war in the Pacific would only undermine American efforts against Germany.[141]

Regardless, the Japanese perceived with certainty a U.S. response and concluded it an imperative to strike the first blow. The Japanese concept was to temporarily knock out and degrade U.S. naval forces in the Pacific, occupy the islands, and turn the area "into a virtually impregnable line of defense which could long delay an American counter-offensive and mete out heavy casualties when it did come."[142]

Additionally, by inflicting maximum losses at the outset, Japan sought to reduce the likelihood of a prolonged war, both by reducing U.S. naval military power but primarily by breaking the will of the American people. The Japanese, aware of American overmatch in military power, considered it their best bet to deal a direct blow in hopes that the United States would not have the will to engage in a long war.[143] The window for conducting these blows, however, was closing. In July of 1940, the United States adopted the Two-Ocean Navy Act, an impressive expansion of U.S. naval power by 70% and the end to any sort of naval balance of power the Japanese maintained. The Japanese Naval General Staff predicted its favorable fleet

[140] Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 94–95.
[141] Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 11.
[142] Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 98.
[143] "…while [the Japanese] were well aware of America's potential strength and that the United States *could* win any war, they decided it might not *choose* to win a *long* war, and therefore picked the least unattractive course of action from a set of options few men would relish." (Russett, 99.)

ratio of 10:7 (U.S.-Japan) would only last to the end of 1941; by 1944 it could degrade as low as 10:3.[144]

Not only could the Japanese act before the gap in naval power widened, but it also saw an opportunity to reduce the gap by attacking critical U.S. naval power projection capabilities in a vulnerable state. This BoA was only enhanced by the fact the Japanese could execute a surprise direct attack. U.S. naval forces had been forward deployed to Hawaii in a demonstration of strength; however, this deployment also put them in a vulnerable state.[145]

Finally, the embargo and freeze on Japanese resources threatened the sustainability and warfighting capability of Japanese armed forces. Without replenishing oil and fuel stockpiles, the Japanese fleet could only operate another eighteen months, the Army only twelve months. [146,147] With the rejection of diplomatic solutions of a return to status quo (i.e., Japanese withdrawal from Indochina and China), Japan would have to take military action sooner rather than later while it still retained the capability and capacity for a successful campaign. In this way, the oil embargo drove the Japanese to the logic of preventive war. If war was inevitable and the Japanese military power would continue to weaken, then it was better to go to war now rather than later. Japan's chances for success would only worsen as time progressed.[148]

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[144] Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 240–41.
[145] Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 40; Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 98.
[146] Russett, "Pearl Harbor," 19.
[147] Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies," 4.
[148] Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941*, 25.

Summary

In summary, deterrence ultimately failed because Japan was left to decide between two costs of restraint deemed unacceptable, either national economic suffocation or surrender of Tokyo's empire on the Asian mainland and simultaneous submission to the United States. Jeffrey Record summarizes the Japanese perspective as follows:

> The United States was, in effect, demanding that Japan renounce its status as an aspiring great power and consign itself to permanent strategic dependency on a hostile Washington. Such a choice would have been unacceptable to any great power. Japan's survival as a major industrial and military power was a stake…Would the United States ever have permitted a hostile power to wreck its foreign commerce and strangle its domestic economy without a resort to war?[149]

Indeed, it is questionable whether the United States was executing a strategy of deterrence or containment, or something more. The United States did not threaten the trade embargoes to deter Japan's expansion into the Soviet Union or its aggression against the Southeast Asian nations. No, these economic and diplomatic actions were intended to compel the Japanese to stop its expansionist activities in China and even pull out completely, objectives more aligned with a rollback strategy.[150]

The unacceptability of this outcome necessitated the use of force against Malaya and the Dutch East Indies to replenish depleting resources critical to Japan's expansionist endeavors and enable economic independence from the United States. But because of the political, economic, and military ties Britain and the Netherlands maintained with the United States, the Japanese determined any such action would result in the United States declaring war on Japan. Thus,

[149] Record, 21.
[150] Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, chap. 4.

directly attacking the United States, in an attempt to degrade its capability and will to intervene in a drawn-out conflict, was determined as Japan's least bad option. Said differently, the Japanese calculated certain confrontation with the United States in its pursuit of necessity, therefore taking direct, pre-emptive military action would only reduce the risk of that confrontation. War with the United States was part of the calculation to take military action against Malaya and the Dutch East Indies; war was Japan's least bad option.

All of this was exacerbated by the fact that the longer the Japanese waited, the worse the situation would get. Due to the embargoes, Japan would only become weaker, and the United States would only get stronger. The Japanese faced significant costs of restraint and only a small glimmer of hope, but as General Staff Osami Nagano articulates, that window of opportunity was closing fast:

> Japan was like a patient suffering from a serious illness…the patient's case was so critical that the question of whether or not to operate had to be determined without delay. Should he be let alone without an operation there was danger of gradual decline. An operation, while it might be extremely dangerous, would still offer some hope of saving his life. The state was now reached…where a quick decision had to be made on way or another.[151]

Michael Brown, in his assessment of the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor, expertly summarizes the conditions of deterrence failure as follows:

1. "The perception of national or imperial deterioration.
2. Lack of a negotiative outlet.
3. Domestic insecurity of elites.
4. The perception of encirclement.
5. Insufficient access to crucial natural resources."[152]

[151] Quoted in Brown, "Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies," 6.
[152] Brown, 23.

All but the third condition can directly be tied to U.S. competition activities aimed to degrade and roll back the Japanese empire. The third condition is partially a result of the others, that leadership failure to secure Japan's hegemonic goals, while falling prey to a stronger United States, threatened the monarchy's legitimacy.

The key takeaways from this thesis and, in particular, this case-study exploration is 1) the emphasis policy makers and strategists must place on an adversary's perceived cost of restraint, 2) how competition, principally in the economic and diplomatic realms, threatens the acceptability of that critical element of deterrence, and 3) when possible, the importance of avoiding presenting the adversary with only highly unpalatable resolution options that ignore the canalizing effect of one's cost of restraint. As Michael Brown states in his analysis of historical deterrence failures, "long-term political and economic considerations dominate the short-term military balance in decisions to go to war."[153] In the case of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the long-term consequences to Japan's vital national security interests were "known" results of inaction—the military balance of power (i.e., correlation of forces) was only a factor requiring mitigation, it was not a sufficient deterrent.

[153] Brown, 21.

INSIGHTS FOR AN ERA OF GREAT POWER RIVALRY

The Biden administration, in a move of consistency with the last two administrations, is implementing an approach of strategic competition towards China. In a point of departure, however, the current approach emphasizes diplomatic and economic competition, elevating diplomacy as the nation's "tool of first resort."[154] While Biden's guidance de-emphasizes the military's role relative to Trump's National Security Strategy and specifically seeks to reduce the role nuclear weapons play, it acknowledges a powerful military along with a network of likeminded allies and partners are required for deterrence. Per the guidance, ensuring national security requires, among other priorities, "Promot[ing] a favorable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and our allies…; and Lead[ing] and sustain[ing] a stable and open international system, underwritten by strong democratic alliances, partnerships, multilateral institutions, and rules."[155]

Unfortunately, these priorities are in conflict with one another. Consider the following logic trail summarized from the preceding chapters:

1. The key driver in deterrence failure is an unacceptable cost of restraint, even at the expense of high costs of action (i.e., deterrence by cost imposition) and low benefits of action (i.e., deterrence by denial).
2. Unacceptable costs of restraint emerge when vital national security interests are perceived to be at risk.
3. Vital national security interests are primarily tied to diplomatic and economic issues.
4. These diplomatic and economic issues are at the center of strategic competition, defined by this thesis as the competition between nations to establish and protect an international order[156].

[154] Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," 14.
[155] Biden, 9.
[156] See the Competition chapter, specifically page 6.

The conclusion: while a favorable balance of power and a strong alliance network is necessary, it is insufficient to deter armed conflict when matters of national security are at stake. As the United States continues to confront China in a competition over the international order, it must recognize the increasing risk of conflict. This thesis is not recommending the United States forego strategic competition. Rather, it is making clear that this approach, and the actions required for its implementation, undermine deterrence. The United States cannot assume "the world's most powerful military"[157] and a robust presence in the Indo-Pacific are sufficient to deter China from aggression or armed conflict when U.S. and Chinese security interests and goals for the international order run counter to one another.[158] As the United States increases diplomatic and economic pressure against China, a credible military force is a necessary backstop. Necessary, not sufficient.

In short, excelling at strategic competition may result in strategic deterrence failure for the United States or its likeminded allies and partners.[159] In fact, "diplomacy as our tool of first resort" may be an escalatory and destabilizing approach towards China if it is absent any consideration of Chinese reassurance.[160] As the empirical evaluation on Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor demonstrated, matters of diplomacy and economy can be the drivers for

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[157] Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," 6.

[158] Biden's guidance states the United States will "ensure that America, not China, sets the international agenda, working alongside others to shape new global norms and agreements that advance our interests and reflect our values; ...support China's neighbors and commercial partners in defending their rights to make independent political choices free of coercion or undue foreign influence; …support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner; …stand up for democracy, human rights, and human dignity, including in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet." (Biden, 20–21.)

[159] This risk is dependent on *how* the United States competes.

[160] While reassurance seeks to avoid driving another's cost of restraint by leaving them less worried about one's intentions, its utility is questioned and likely exploited when engaging with a revisionist power. Reassurance remains useful, however, to avoid issues arising from unnecessary security dilemmas. (Tørrisplass, "Deterrence or Reassurance?")

military conflict. This does not suggest the Japanese conflict is a predictor for the future of the United States' relationship with China, but there are historical parallels worth mentioning.

Ko Unoki identifies six such parallels between 1941 Imperial Japan and 2021 People's Republic of China—four are worth mentioning here. First, a call for a 21st century East Asia Monroe Doctrine. Unoki refers to statements made by a Chinese naval officer to the Commander of United States Pacific Command in 2007 and by President Xi Jinping to President Obama in 2013 that hint towards the United States and China agreeing to spheres of influence or, perhaps more appropriately, hemispheres of influence.

Second, Unoki draws a similarity between Japan's dramatic economic growth to China outpacing the United States economically. More so today, such growth threatens to upset U.S. status as the dominant economic world power. Furthermore, increased collaboration between China and Russia threatens to undermine the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions and, potentially, the continued international primacy of the U.S. dollar.[161]

The third parallel is tied to the economic parallel: the increase in military spending that accompanied both Japan and China's economic growth. China continues to increase its defense budget, subsequently advancing and expanding its military force, to include dramatic changes within its nuclear forces.[162] While a significant change relative to Chinese historical spending, the United States continues to maintain a much larger defense budget.

The final parallel is resentment towards the West. As the Japanese grew resentful of U.S. racist immigration laws and acts of discrimination, so do the Chinese resent America's constant

[161] Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber and Andrew Osborn, "Russia's Top Diplomat Starts China Visit with Call to Reduce U.S. Dollar Use," *Reuters*, March 22, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-china-usa-idUSKBN2BE0XH.
[162] For more on China's military developments and expansion, see the Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China."

lecturing on their domestic issues and push for liberal democratic values. Such involvement is seen as an encroachment on Chinese sovereignty and way of life, as well as condescending and self-righteous.[163] This parallel has intensified over the last couple years as the United States has become more vocal regarding human rights abuses against the Uighurs and has reignited investigations into the origin of COVID-19.

Largely, these parallels paint a picture of a Chinese government economically and militarily motivated toward realizing its political and territorial ambitions that, while necessary to regain its rightful place as the central kingdom, run directly counter to the liberal international order established and upheld by nations to which China is increasingly resentful. While concerning, important differences exist today. These differences include more balanced trade agreements resulting in a mutually dependent economic relationship, China's declaration of a peaceful rise, and, relatedly, lack of armed invasion into other nations' sovereign territory.[164] Still, Chinese scholars have recognized and written warnings on the similarities between China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy and 1941 Imperial Japan.[165] Here, it is worth exploring how a hypothetical future deterrence failure scenario might look like. Reflecting on the areas of tension between competition and deterrence, as well as the Crimea and Pearl Harbor case studies, the thesis offers the following factors with potential to cause deterrence failure between the United States and China.

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[163] Unoki, *International Relations and the Origins of the Pacific War*, 177–85.
[164] This, of course, does not account for China's militarization of the South China Sea.
[165] Katsuji Nakazawa, "Analysis: China's Wolf Warrior Overreach Draws Comparison to Imperial Japan - Making Enemies on All Sides Goes against Ancient Diplomatic Textbook, Scholars Warn," Nikkei Asia, September 17, 2020, https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/Analysis-China-s-wolf-warrior-overreach-draws-comparison-to-Imperial-Japan.

First, the United States initiates the formation of an official "NATO-like" mutual defense alliance in the region, expanding on current bilateral alliances and partnerships into a coalition including the majority of Southeast Asian nations, especially those on China's boarder (i.e., India, Vietnam). China would likely perceive this move as a cost in which inaction enables its adversaries to encircle and pose a direct threat to China's security (similar to Russian views on NATO expanding into its backyard and, specifically, into prior Soviet bloc nations). At the same time, the United States, while refraining from inviting Taiwan into the Asian coalition, publicly states U.S. support of Taiwan's sovereignty and commitment to Taiwan's defense in the event of a Chinese invasion. China, certain that U.S. support will embolden Taiwan to declare independence and it only a matter of time before Taiwan joins the newly formed alliance, perceives a closing window of opportunity (i.e., CoR) to unify Taiwan.

Second, the United States engages in an aggressive, multi-front information campaign, to include infiltrating the internal Chinese Communist Party-controlled internet, aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the communist party by directly and conclusively blaming the Chinese government for the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the Chinese believe the United States is instigating recent uprises in Hong Kong (similar to the Ukrainian revolution). From the Chinese perspective, refraining from taking action risks internal instability.

Third, the United States, in conjunction with forming an Asian coalition, increases its military footprint in the region, both in its current bases (e.g., Japan and South Korea) and at newly established bases in India and Vietnam. Further, in an effort to counter China's nuclear expansion, the United States forward deploys its own nuclear weapons into the region. Just as the United States bolstering its military presence in Hawaii as a show of force backfired when Japan

perceived an opportunity to attack vulnerable naval assets, so too might China perceive a benefit in attacking vulnerable enemy forces in a region where it maintains military dominance.

Finally, the United States gains success in an economic campaign to "buy out" China's key trade partners and expose China's economic coercion. In its efforts, the United States undermines the reliability of China's Belt and Road Initiative, not only threatening China's continued economic growth, but its internal economic sustainment. Without action, the deterioration of China's critical economic system risks internal disruption and the demise of China's international prestige status.

Collectively, this hypothetical scenario demonstrates how competition activities aimed at gaining U.S. advantages and negating those of China's can undermine stability and deterrence. Beyond a call to develop strategies and plans that account for both competition and deterrence, it is outside of the scope of this thesis to recommend solutions for the challenge of today's great power rivalry.[166] Rather, the thesis seeks to inform the reader of the tension existing between competition and deterrence. In an era of great power rivalry, competition across DIME, especially diplomatic and economic competition, may drive another state's cost of restraint to the point where conflict is the least bad option, regardless of the military balance of power. In short, the thesis explains how competition undermines deterrence. Acknowledging the issue is the first step.

[166] For work on strategies and recommendations to balance deterrence and reassurance efforts, see Tørrisplass, "Deterrence or Reassurance?" While Tørrisplass does not address the issue of competition directly, the author acknowledges the need to mitigate security dilemmas via the use of reassurance approaches.

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