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Keith Payne. *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001. xiv + 225 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-9015-0.

Reviewed by Tom Nichols (Department of Strategy and Policy, U.S. Naval War College)

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Does Deterrence Have a Future (or Even a Past?)

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So many different communities of scholars and policymakers should read Keith PaynêÃs bracing and sensible new book that it's difficult to know where to begin sending copies. Those interested in the Cold War should read it with a wince at the smug complacency of so many U.S. policymakers about the dynamics of deterrence during that struggle. (Pointing out the "absolute lack of empiricism" at the heart of our mirror-imaging of "rationality" and deterrence, Payne points out the "now-apparent lethal mismatch between Western deterrence theory and Soviet war planning for Western Europe" pp. 20-23.) Those looking to the future should consider his warning that to wrap ourselves in the comforting belief in the universal rationality of nuclear deterrence is to court catastrophic danger. Students and specialists alike should read it because it combines a competent review and critique of deterrence theory with a look ahead to policy dilemmas that at present are only dimly seen, if seen at all, by scholars and leaders alike.

This might seem a peculiar enthusiasm for the book, given the simplicity of its central claim. However simple the claim, it is one that needs to be internalized by Westerners who have become accustomed to thinking that deterrence is a mechanical outcome of some sort of hard-wired intellectual condition present in all human beings. Payne argues a point that should be, but is not, obvious to Western leaders and scholars: "deterrence" is a condition created by an understanding of the opponentÃs culture, values, beliefs, and perhaps even emotional or physical conditions. It is not some foreordained result of a particular force structure, nor is it a tacit understanding among rational thinkers that nuclear war is unacceptable. This kind of thinking reached its zenith–or, more appropriately, its nadir–in Paul WarnkêÃs condescending 1977 comment that to discuss the idea of nuclear victory is to indulge "primitive" aspects of Soviet thinking. It is, in essence, a psychological condition, an unwillingness to fight that is generated by holding something valued at risk, or raising the costs–as the enemy would see "costs"–so high as to render the putative object of a war too dear.

Payne rightly reminds us that there is a difference between "rational" and "reasonable," a distinction long since lost in deterrence theory, not least because it is

a central (and tautological) tenet of our nuclear theology that anyone who does not have a healthy fear of war in the nuclear age is by definition "irrational." It is ironic that Payne must point out, in an age characterized by a mania for multiculturalism, that people can be "rational"–that is, they can act in a manner that is not random, and assign means to ends–but their goals may not be "reasonable" by our lights. He suggests a number of examples, ranging from Hitler to Saddam Hussein, where decisions are taken that are, on their own terms, "rational" but not "reasonable" to modern minds.

It may not be reasonable for a leader or regime to feel anything less than terror about nuclear war, but Payne challenges us to plan for the contingency where that may be precisely the case. We have already experienced this, even if we didn't know it at the time: as he points out, and as other materials have confirmed, Castro urged the Soviets to launch World War III during the Cuban missile crisis. Moreover, if we do in fact encounter an enemy with a less than healthy respect for the power of nuclear arms, it will be imperative to find out what such an enemy does fear, even if to us it may be a fear we find "unreasonable."

The idea that we should identify what the enemy fears in order to deter him is, or should be, unremarkable in itself. If it turns out that some new opponent is more afraid of puppies than nuclear weapons, then effective deterrence should rest on a reliable means to deliver puppies rather than plutonium to the his doorstep. Unfortunately, this would require detailed study of the enemy, an empirical investigation for which scholars have no inclination and policymakers have no time. Payne's call for more of this type of research is admirable, but sadly runs directly counter to the current trend for specialists in international affairs and security studies to know less, rather than more, about any country or set of nations in particular.

Instead, we remain committed to deterrence as a function of hardware. Payne quotes the former commander of the U.S. Strategic Command as saying in 1997:

"Ultimately, deterrence is a package of capabilities, encompassing not just numbers or weapons, but an assured retaliatory capability provided by a diversified, dispersed, and survivable force with positive command and control and effective intelligence and warning systems."

Payne follows this with the deadpan comment that "only by assuming all future challengers to be rational cum reasonable can deterrence be reduced to 'a package of capabilities' " (p. 79). Elsewhere, the same commander, Eugene Habinger, is quoted as saying, "every nation has its price when it comes to being deterred," a chilling comment that does not take into account how high that price might get for either side (p. 85).

This does not argue that in the future we will live in a world surrounded by reckless psychopaths–although I would not have been uncomfortable if Payne had made that case–but rather, it is to point out that the world has always been populated by regimes that do not share our values or our fears. Payne admits that "historically few leaders have shown themselves to be " 'indifferent' to their own survival and that of their regimes," but he continues:

"They also have nevertheless demonstrated a great variance in the priority they attach to such values. Other values such as liberty, religious or ideological devotion, revenge, national honor, and personal glory have, on frequent occasion, been accorded higher priority by leaders than the survival of their regimes or themselves, and they have consciously, willing risked, and sometimes sacrificed, themselves and their own countries in the service of these higher values" (pp. 83-84).

From this, Payne proceeds to create a deterrence "framework"–really, nothing more than a tree of logical questions–meant to release us from the straightjacket of "rational" deterrence. Questions include the psychological make-up of specific leaders, military options available to the enemy, and so on. His test case for this is the situation is the vertigo-inducing possibility of a Chinese-American war over a Taiwanese declaration of independence.

Some readers, and certainly some China specialists, may want to take issue with Payne's characterization of the Chinese leadership, but at the center of his analysis is one important assertion that seems credible enough: a successful attempt by Taiwan to claim independence as a state will threaten to bring down the communist regime and destroy the personal security of the Chinese leaders themselves. From this, Payne suggests that for a regime that sees a Taiwanese grab for independence as nearly the end of the world–or the end of their world, anyway–the willingness to fight, even with nuclear weapons, might be quite high.

Thus, any approach to deterrence that blithely wishes away Chinese aggressiveness, insecurity, and paranoia in the name of a "rational" Chinese leadership is itself a reckless policy based more on psychological denial than

any understanding of an actual situation, and risks placing the United States in the ghastly position of being surprised with a nuclear crisis it could not, or would not, foresee.

Overall, the book is competently written, and accessible; it can be read with profit by students, specialists, and interested readers alike. There are passages with some redundancy, particularly the case study of Hitler and others where the counter-intuitive examples of "rationality" go on a bit long. Some aspects, too, of "cognitive distortions" that Payne discusses seem labored, such as his discussion of drug use among various world leaders. Does it really matter that Hitler may have been whacked up on amphetamines for a good part of his day? It is hard to imagine that this made him–or the creepy gangsters who surrounded him–much worse than he might have been otherwise.

However, there are some truly fascinating facts scattered even in these sections, such as the frightening realization that the

commander-in-chief of the Russian strategic missile forces is actually a believer in astrology, calling it a "serious science" that helps the Russians launch spacecraft and missiles. Many will object that Nancy Reagan believed in astrology, too; there is no evidence, however, that Nancy had direct operational control over thermonuclear weapons or that NASA was timing launches to astrological criteria.

Payne's analysis is unsettling, and perhaps some of it is even overstated. There is no denying the transfixing reality of nuclear weapons. Even murderers willing to sacrifice themselves and committed to finding their place in heaven among virgins (a value structure Americans still cannot grasp) might still be unwilling to see entire cities of their own faithful turned to glass for a millennium. North Korea's current leader is, by all accounts, cruel and stupid, but even he may realize that a war with the West will be a singular event that will result in turning his nation into a wasteland. And it is instructive to note that for all his bluster, Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy became a convert to less violent means after a 1986 bombing of Tripoli–although in later years he said that if he had had a missile that could have reached New York at that moment, he would have used it.[1]

Still, it is hard to shake the feeling that there may be leaders in places like Iran who would roll the dice when confronted with an overwhelming Western military superiority that will threaten to end their regime, their system of government, their very lives. As one analyst of Iranian politics has recently written, the message during a crisis might be: "if you attempt to destroy us, we may go down, but we will take as many Americans, Europeans, and Israelis with us as we possibly can."[2]

Whether Payne is being alarmist or prescient is a matter for debate, but it is a debate that Americans and their allies should be having, instead of clinging to an only partially-understood experience from the Cold War. Payne's message, in any case, is one that can only be considered prudent: "Deterrence is inherently unreliable: prepare for its failure."

Notes:

The opinions are those of the author and not of the U.S. Government.

[1]. Quoted in Thomas Mahnken, "AmericâÃs Next War," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1995, p. 177.

[2]. Caroline Ziemke, "The National Myth and Strategic Personality of Iran: A Counterproliferation Perspective," in Victor A. Utgoff, ed., *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, U.S. Interests, and World Order* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 115.

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