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Partnership

Author's Response by **Elli Lieberman**, Missouri State University

I want to thank H-Diplo for publishing this response, and James A. Russell for taking the time to read and review my book. I also want to thank Robert Jervis for the additional comments on Russell's review. Because the review did not fully address the book's main arguments and findings, thereby missing the main points of the book, I wish to briefly describe and clarify the book's main goal, as well as some of its important findings.

Russell argues that "one of [my] conclusions is that authoritarian regimes are less able, for example, to objectively analyze an opponent's capability while overestimating their own …" and that "[my] literature review does not necessarily contribute to this argument. It is poorly organized, as the reader becomes immersed in a haphazard discussions of the deterrence literature" (2).

The theoretical chapter discusses the deterrence literature because the main goal of the book is to address the gap between theory and evidence in the deterrence literature, a gap that remained unsolved in over sixty years of research on the topic. The theory of deterrence, which was parsimonious and logically compelling, lacked solid empirical evidence, leading many scholars to conclude that deterrence consistently fails, that our

theoretical frameworks developed so far are poorly equipped to capture the phenomenon, and that, therefore, it is an unreliable tool for statecraft.[1]

The argument that deterrence does not work is predominant in the deterrence literature. In the early 1990s, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Stein,[2] in their debate with Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal,[3] and Paul Huth and Bruce Russett,[4] argued that deterrence fails, even when all the requirements for its success exist, because leaders under domestic political constraints develop motivated biases that defeat deterrence. Deterrence success between states is, according to Lebow and Stein, "uncommon, partial, and tenuous."[5]

This argument can also be found in the more recent literature on deterrence of terrorist organizations and non-state actors. After the 9/11 2001 al Qaeda terrorist attack on the United States, scholars argued that deterrence success would continue to be elusive because terrorist organizations, rogue states, and non-state actors were religiously motivated, irrational, and willing to die for their cause.[6] Deterring terrorist organizations is difficult because defenders find themselves imprisoned in a deterrence trap, where they lose regardless of whether they choose to use deterrence, which paradoxically increases the resilience, motivation, and organizational appeal of terrorist organizations, or they use appeasement, which undermines their resolve reputation.[7] Most recently, Andreas Wenger

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[1] Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 286.

[2] Richard Ned Lebow, "Deterrence: A Political and Psychological Critique," in Paul C. Stern, Robert Axelrod, Robert Jervis and Roy Radner, eds., *Perspectives on Deterrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter," *World Politics*, 41, no. 2 (January, 1989), pp. 208–24; Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics,* 42, no. 3 (April 1990); Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Beyond Deterrence," in Richard Ned Lebow, *Coercion, Cooperation, and Ethics in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[3] Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and the Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics*, 41, no. 2 (January 1989), 143–69.

[4] Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics*, 36 no. 4 (July 1984), pp. 496–526; "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics*, 42, no. 4 (July 1990), pp. 466–501.

[5] Lebow and Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," p. 348.

[6] T.V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[7] Emanuel Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric-Warfare Era," in Paul, Morgan, and Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence*, pp. 85–109.

and Alex Wilner found support for the argument that the deterrence of terrorist organizations is a difficult task and that it is likely to show results only at the margins.[8]

Not only do leaders develop motivated biases that defeat deterrence, they never learn from one encounter to another, which leads to the observation that "conflict begets conflict." According to Russell Leng,[9] dysfunctional learning leads to escalation from crisis to crisis, and according to Lebow and Stein, even the more relaxed requirements of deterrence theory about learning "are rarely met in practice."[10]

The theoretical chapter argues that the abstract theories developed during the Cold War to deal with nuclear deterrence could not be tested empirically and, therefore, lacked empirical support. Because the logic of nuclear deterrence compelled a preoccupation with the problem of stability, and the tension between the requirements of credibility and stability were solved in favor of the latter because failure led to Armageddon, the credibility problem could not be addressed or solved. The question of how a defender demonstrates capability, interest, and resolve could not be answered. Deterrence success in this framework was defined as an act of abstention from a challenge in a single deterrence encounter, a definition that has continued to guide the research tradition of the deterrence literature. One never really knew whether backing down in a crisis was a valid case of success because it was hard to ascertain whether the challenger seriously intended to attack or was just probing. Further complicating the task of resolving the credibility problem was the fact that tests of the theory that used conventional cases of deterrence, either by way of individual historical cases or many cases quantitatively, suffered from a selection bias by focusing only on cases that ended in failure.[11]

To understand how defenders demonstrate capability, interest, and resolve, deterrence has to be studied longitudinally in conventional deterrence, and within enduring rivalries, where costs are tolerable and failure becomes a teaching moment, creating the necessary knowledge requirements for deterrence stability. This is necessary because defenders who want to demonstrate resolve can only do so by going over the brink, a costly enough signal that separates resolute actors from mimicking, irresolute ones. Serious costly demonstrations of resolve cannot take place in situations in which nuclear weapons are involved. In conventional deterrence the solution of the tension between credibility and stability is achieved by deference to credibility.

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[8] Andreas Wenger and Alex Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2012).

[9] Russell Leng, *Bargaining and Learning in Recurring Crises* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 270.

[10] Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Against "Irrational" Adversaries? No Common Knowledge," in Paul, Morgan, and Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence*, p. 62.

[11] Achen and Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and the Comparative Case Studies."

The longitudinal perspective also led to a need to redefine what is meant by deterrence success. If, in the Cold War model, success is defined as a situation where a challenger backed down from a challenge, in enduring rivalries deterrence success can be observed when a challenger finally internalizes the lesson that he will not be able to achieve his goals though force—a higher-order outcome that Lawrence Freedman describes as "land may be coveted but not grabbed."[12] The process of internalization occurred as a result of lessons learned through repeated encounters with deterrence failure. Paradoxically, later cases of deterrence failure throughout the rivalry—"designing around"[13]—strategies, did not reflect the failure of deterrence, but rather reflected learning from prior deterrence encounters, and could be considered intermediate cases of success. The argument some critics make—that the use of force is not deterrence but war—becomes much easier to understand and reconcile within this context.[14] Individual case studies and quantitative analyses of immediate deterrence encounters do not capture these dynamics and can lead to wrong conclusions about how deterrence works, thereby detracting from our understanding of a far more complex dynamic of deterrence that can only be comprehended as a process of teaching and learning over time from defeat, failure, and war.

This is the logic of the theoretical chapter, given the problem the book tries to solve. The book tests the working of deterrence between states in the extended rivalry between Egypt and Israel from 1948 until 1973, and between a state and a terrorist, or non-state actor, between Israel and Hezbollah from 1982 until 2011.

Before discussing some of the book's findings, it should be noted that Russell correctly argues that it is difficult to generalize from the two cases addressed in the book given their geographic limitations and the particular context of Israel's strategic environment and deterrence practices. The original manuscript contained another chapter on the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan, but due to strict word count limits imposed by the publisher it was taken out. Although the findings from the India-Pakistan case could not be incorporated in this response, they will appear in a future publication. They support many of the findings in the two cases analyzed at length in this book.

The book's most important finding is that deterrence stability was created for meaningful periods of time in two difficult cases in which challengers and defenders were highly

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[12] Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), p. 30.

[13] Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

[14] On the 'defeat-deter' paradox see, Alex Wilner, "Fencing in Warfare: Threats, Punishment, and Intra-war Deterrence in Counterterrorism," *Security Studies*, 22, no, 4, (2013), pp. 740–72; Martha Crenshaw, "Will Threats Deter Nuclear Terrorism?" in Wenger and Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism*; Janice Gross Stein, "Deterring Terrorism, Not Terrorists," in Wenger and Wilner, eds., *Deterring Terrorism*.

resolute to attack and defend. This contradicts Morgan's assessment that deterrence works best when it is least necessary and when motivations to challenge are low.[15]

Conventional deterrence stability was established after 1973 in the Israeli-Egyptian case, and after 2006 in the Israeli-Hezbollah case. Thus, according to this logic, real strategic success in conventional deterrence situations was achieved, for example, when a state such as Egypt internalized the lessons learned throughout its rivalry with Israel and abandoned warfare as a means of achieving its goals. And, similarly, success against Hezbollah occurred when Hezbollah, after 24 years of continuous harassments, kept its border with Israel quiet for more than 7 years despite claims that Israel "lost" the 2006 war. Over 30 years deterrence stability in the Egyptian case and 7 years in the Hezbollah case, given 24 years of constant harassment, are significant examples of deterrence success. In the Israeli-Egyptian case, conventional deterrence stability also existed between 1956 and 1967, a period when deterrence worked despite the existence of strong pressure to challenge deterrence, which is something that single case or quantitative study methodologies do not detect.

Evidence that deterrence has been internalized in these two cases can be seen, for example, in the most recent 2012 Pillar of Defense operation in the Israeli-Hamas engagement where both Hezbollah and Egypt stayed out of the conflict despite pressures to intervene militarily. Hezbollah used to enter the fray whenever Palestinians challenged Israel, and in Egypt some members of the Egyptian government contemplated supporting Hamas militarily. Both Egypt and Hezbollah were self-deterred by memories of past experiences.

The evidence in the book did not support the argument developed by Lebow and Stein that domestic constraints lead to motivated biases and deterrence failure. For example, during the period between 1956 and 1967, Nasser was under serious pressure to challenge Israel or lose his leadership credentials in the Arab world, yet he chose inaction. It is in this context that the study finds that authoritarian regimes pose a greater problem for the establishment of deterrence stability. While inaccurate assessment of capability occurs universally as a result of objective difficulties in assessing power, authoritarian regimes suffer from structural information-processing pathologies that further complicate assessments of the balance, thus leading to greater miscalculation. Dictatorships do not know how weak they are and they create weak militaries that do not pose a political threat.

In addition to such information-processing pathologies, elites and multiple actors competing for legitimacy are willing to risk deterrence failure to enhance their grip on power in many cases. In the Israeli-Egyptian rivalry the regional power struggle for leadership in the Arab world, and the internal power struggle between Nasser and Amer, were the main driving forces behind many escalations, particularly in 1967. It is interesting to note that Nasser was deterred while Amer was not. In the Israeli-Hezbollah case, to gain legitimacy in the Shi'ia community over its rival Hezbollah, Amal, fearing losing its predominant position in the Shi'ia community, took the lead in the struggle against Israel,

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[15] Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, pp. 149–50.

more forcefully challenging Israel in Lebanon. The more moderate element within the Shi'ia community had to take a more hard-line position on Israel in order to upstage Hezbollah and preserve its leadership position. It is important to note that deterrence was enabled in the cases where these internal power struggles were resolved; Egypt under Sadat and Hezbollah after it consolidated its power, are good examples.

Regarding the issue of learning, Russell argues that "[i]f there is common strand in this volume's findings, it is the unsurprising finding that leaders miscalculate and make flawed decisions since they rely on imperfect information" (3). The evidence in this book shows a different pattern. The Egyptian leadership learned about Israel's capability and will throughout the rivalry, and the nature of the challenges that followed reflected the learning process. Israel's capability and will were established and reinforced in 1956 and 1967. By 1973, Egypt went to war knowing it would consider it a success if its limited-aims strategy were achieved. Interestingly, in the period leading to the Yom Kippur War the quantitative balance of capability between Egypt and Israel was in favor of Egypt by the largest margin when compared to other periods in the rivalry, yet Sadat was well aware of Egyptian weakness and he and his high command struggled to find a strategy that would enable a challenge. The strategy of *blitzkrieg* was written off because of the 1967 experience. And the strategy of a war of attrition was rejected because Israel demonstrated its particular capabilities and resolve during the 1969–1970 war of attrition. It is important to note that the absence of such knowledge about Israel's capability and resolve led Nasser to miscalculate and begin the war of attrition in the first place. Works such as those of Lebow and Stein, which focus only on the cases of deterrence failure in 1967, the war of attrition, and the 1973 war, do not capture the learning that occurs throughout a rivalry that leads to the internalization of deterrence.

In the Israeli-Hezbollah case, Hassan Nassrallh did not miscalculate in 2006 because he relied on imperfect information—as Russell argues my study suggests that leaders do—but because Israel did not respond resolutely to his challenges in the period between 2000 and 2006, thereby undermining Israel's resolve reputation. After the war, when Israel's reputation was reestablished, deterrence stability was recreated.

Deterrence fails when there are uncertainties about three variables—capability, interest, and reputation—that together produce deterrence stability, and not, as Russell suggests, for a variety of reasons (3). In the initial phase of any enduring rivalry there is great uncertainty about all of the variables, and creating the necessary knowledge requirements for stability takes a few rounds of deterrence failure. How these variables interact over time to produce deterrence success is an important finding in the book. Reducing uncertainties on one variable—capability and/or reputation—can change the balance of a different variable—interest—causing further deterrence challenges, as was the case in the Israeli-Egyptian rivalry after 1967.

While the book contains many interesting findings on the variables contributing to deterrence success, as well as the reasons why the process by which the knowledge requirements about them is created only by war, findings Russell neither mentioned nor discussed, I will include here a short discussion of only one such variable on which there

still is a great debate in the literature of deterrence—reputation.

The literature on reputations contains two basic and contradictory arguments. The first is the argument developed by Thomas Schelling that reputations matter. The core argument is that the defender should fight or retaliate to create a reputation for toughness in order to maintain a credible deterrent to prevent future attacks.[16] The opposite argument about reputations is that they do not matter and should never be fought for. According to Jonathan Mercer, actors view backing down as a response to situational constraints and do not draw conclusions about resolve from such actions.[17] Daryl Press adds that credibility does not hinge on the history of resolute actions, but only on interests and capability.[18] If the defender is strong and has strong interests, the threat is credible regardless of past actions.

Press argues, for example, that Hitler's decision to invade Poland was not shaped by Allied demonstrations of weakness at Munich, but by calculations of the balance of power that was changing in Germany's favor in the late 1930s. This demonstrated, according to Press, that reputation was irrelevant. The policy implication, according to Press, was not to use force to develop reputations as leaders rely on the balance of capability and interest.

The problem with this argument is that reputation cannot be created in the absence of capability and interest, and in such situations attempts to act tough are interpreted as bluff. Such a situation, discussed in the book, existed in the early 1950s between Israel and Egypt when Israeli retaliation was used in an attempt to create a reputation for resolve, attempts Nasser disregarded because he believed that given the equal balance of power no one had an offensive advantage. Testing for the effects of reputations when capability or interest is absent does not tell us much about the value of reputations in the deterrence equation. Both Hitler and Nasser relied on calculations of the balance of power.

A better test of reputation occurs when the balance of capability and interest favors the defender, yet he lacks a reputation for resolve. According to Press, reputation, in such a case, would not matter. Yet the Israeli-Hezbollah case is a good example of a situation where capability and interest favored the defender but the absence of reputation led to a challenge. Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 created a new deterrence equation where capability and interest favored Israel. Aware of the new strategic equation, Hezbollah tested Ehud Barak (Israel's Prime Minister at the time) during the October 2000 kidnapping and when Barak did not respond to the challenge despite many declaratory threats of severe retaliation, Hezbollah concluded Israel lacked resolve and continued to challenge Israel until 2006, although on a much smaller scale than before 2000. The

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[16] Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), Ch. 2.

[17] Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[18] Daryl Press, "The Credibility of Power: Assessing Threats during the 'Appeasement' Crises of the 1930s," *International Security*, 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/5), pp. 136–69; *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats,* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

absence of a reputation led to a challenge. Reputations for toughness were not enough to create stability when capability and/or interest were missing, but their absence undermined deterrence even if capability and interests existed. The book contains many other such findings on the issue of capability, interest, and rationality.

In conclusion, the study in the book solves a major gap in the deterrence literature, demonstrating that deterrence can be created even in difficult cases where challengers are highly motivated to attack. Deterrence has worked against states, and could succeed against deterrable terrorist organizations as well. The book shows that learning did take place and it does so by introducing the need to explore these issues within conventional enduring rivalries where the process of creating credibility can be observed and documented. It also uses a more difficult test of success, arguing that a process of internalization in difficult cases provides better evidence that deterrence can succeed than does an act of abstention from a challenge. Internalization is the culmination point of deterrence success. Deterrence, properly understood, resolves the security dilemma and leads, paradoxically through failure, to deterrence stability.

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