Chapter 11

Japanese Concepts of Deterrence

Nori Katagiri

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Abstract Japan has consistently adopted a deterrence-by-denial strategy in the post-war period. Its ability to deter foreign attacks depends more heavily on its ability to deny hostility than to punish perpetrators. Japan's deterrence-by-denial posture has faced at least two major problems. One problem is the inherent limit on its ability to deter foreign attacks. This posture is more oriented toward defence-by-denial than real deterrence. Japan's national security resources and institutions are positioned to deny hostility to defend the homeland, but they are not suited to deter foreign attackers because Japan bans itself from having the ability to conduct offensive military operations—a necessary factor for deterrence by the imposition of threats. Existing restrictions on the use and threat of force stem from post-war constitutional and normative constraints that have proven anachronistic today.

Keywords Japan • Self-Defence Force • deterrence by denial • extended deterrence • internal balancing

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11.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I identify some of the most important changes and continuities in the practice of deterrence by investigating the “Japanese way of deterrence (抑止, “yokushi” in Japanese)”. Specifically, I examine Japan’s deterrence posture by identifying the differences between deterrence-by-denial and deterrence-by-punishment. I follow other chapters of the book in defining the terms. On the one hand, deterrence by denial (拒否の抑止, “kyohi teki yokushi” in Japanese) is the ability to deny actions and persuade the opponent that it is unlikely to attain its immediate objectives at a reasonable cost. On the other hand, deterrence by punishment (懲罰の抑止, “chobatsu teki yokushi” in Japanese) comes from efforts to coerce targets into being discouraged from doing what they would otherwise do by the threat of punishment.¹

My argument is twofold. First, Japan has consistently adopted a deterrence-by-denial strategy in the post-war period. Its ability to deter foreign attacks depends heavily on its ability to deny hostility. Japan’s defence posture has in turn drawn from the combination of internal balancing and multilateral hedging strategy with the US alliance at its centre.² The defence posture has shaped Tokyo’s preferences on operations, weapons acquisition, and joint exercises. Slow but clear changes have occurred mostly at tactical and operational levels of the denial strategy. In short, the traditional political and strategic foundation of defence policy remains firmly in place, while operational and tactical levels of defence policy get constant adjustments and upgrades in order to increase deterrent capability.

Second, Japan’s deterrence-by-denial posture has faced at least two major problems. One problem is the inherent limit on its ability to deter foreign attacks. This posture is more oriented toward defence-by-denial than real deterrence. Japan’s national security resources and institutions are positioned to deny hostility to defend the homeland, but they are not suited to deter foreign attackers because Japan bans itself from having the ability to conduct offensive military operations—a necessary factor for deterrence by the imposition of threats. Existing restrictions on the use and threat of force stem from post-war constitutional and normative constraints that have proven anachronistic today. This leads to the second problem in that recent changes in weapons acquisition, logistics, and combat preparedness have not significantly helped increase Japan’s deterrence. These changes are so focused on equipment and technology that the overall lack of deterrence continues to hold.

I make these arguments in three steps. First, I explore the concepts of deterrence, deterrence by denial, and deterrence by punishment both in general terms and in Japanese strategic contexts. I do so by investigating how Japan’s deterrence posture has developed since the end of the Cold War. Second, I explore how legal and normative restrictions on the use of force have shaped Japan’s deterrence-by-denial posture. Finally, I disentangle the deterrence-by-denial posture by looking into the

¹Preface by Osinga and Sweijis in the present volume.

²Katagiri 2019.

strategy of internal balancing and multilateral hedging—the two elements that characterize the “Japanese way of deterrence”.

11.2 Deterrence-by-Denial and Japan’s Threat Perception

In this chapter, deterrence is defined in terms of state practice to use the prospect of harm to coerce an opponent *not* to engage in unwanted behaviour. The key to deterrence is to credibly threaten the imposition of such an unbearable pain that the opponent reconsiders actions that it would otherwise take.³ Defining deterrence this way allows us to understand Japan’s deterrence efforts and make analytical distinction between deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. As mentioned above, deterrence by denial is the ability to deny actions and persuade the opponent that it is unlikely to attain its immediate objectives at a reasonable cost, while deterrence by punishment is based on the coercion of targets into being discouraged from doing what they would otherwise do by the threat of punishment. It consists of the threat of great harm, which will be imposed after the opponent has engaged in that behaviour. Japan’s deterrence efforts represent the deterrence-by-denial through the logic of elimination; since the 1947 promulgation of the peace constitution, Japan has renounced its right to punish opponents and made it illegal to use force as a means of settling international disputes.

The Japanese meaning of the term deterrence is the same as Western concepts of deterrence. This is mostly because it was adopted from the Western literature, e.g. Thomas Schelling’s *Arms and Influence* and Patrick Morgan’s *Deterrence*,⁴ according to Shuichiro Iwata, professor at the National Defence Academy.⁵ ‘Deterrence’ first showed up in Japan’s 1976 National Defence Program Guidelines. Every four years the Prime Minister issues an executive order that renews these guidelines to serve as a comprehensive defence doctrine; the word and meaning of deterrence has thus remained the same. Keitaro Ushirogata of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defence Force, argues that as Japan’s security environment evolved in recent years, the word has been used more frequently in government policy, academic publications, and policy discourse.⁶ However, change, if any, comes very slowly. It is important to keep in mind the unique strategic context in which Japan formulates its deterrence posture. The term has always been used in the context of extended deterrence and as part of the US-Japan security alliance where the United States was a senior ally and Japan junior. The concept of deterrence never made its way into an independent defence strategy in Japan. This is because Japan’s defence policy in the post-war era is different from the ideal-typical form of deterrence that

³Schelling 1968.

⁴Morgan 1983.

⁵Iwata 2015.

⁶Ushirogata 2015, pp. 21–23.

the concept illustrates. As such, the Japanese are closer to the idea of deterrence by denial than deterrence by punishment, although the most precise term for Japan's national security policy would be "defence by denial". It is because the coercive aspect of deterrence is deemed illegal due to a set of long-standing constraints on the use of force. This also comes from the fact that Japan's deterrence-by-denial effort is based on conventional deterrence without nuclear weapons.⁷ That poses a challenge for Japanese strategists; they would need to achieve deterrence-by-denial through the threat of force when the option for punishment is not available.

The deterrence by denial posture has not fundamentally changed even though its strategic environment has changed. Japan consistently used US extended deterrence as an instrument to deal with security challenges from Russia, North Korea, and China, all nuclear neighbours with sizable conventional and cyber forces. Russia remains technically at war with Japan due to disagreement of ownership on the Northern Territories/Kurile Islands. North Korea's military power inflates Japan's threat perception by way of its medium-range ballistic missiles, nuclear weapons, and cyber forces. At the same time, however, the Japanese know that these programs would serve Pyongyang's primary goal of deterrence and national survival, not to be used pre-emptively to attack Japan. The main object of Japan's deterrence-by-denial posture is China. China poses the greatest multi-domain threats to Japan, including conventional, nuclear, and cyber forces backed by abundant economic and human resources. The Japanese perceive China's power as the most prominent determinant of their foreign policy.⁸ This comes in part from the fact that the core of East Asian security in the 21st century has seen two major forces shaping regional dynamics: China's growing power and the US presence along with its allies.⁹ The threat environment is tense, forcing close observers of East Asian security affairs like Thomas Christensen to consider China and Japan in the state of security dilemma.¹⁰

In fact, Japan has signalled its intent to balance China's military power via internal balancing and US extended deterrence. The actual output, however, is limited in nature, because some of the normative constraints that I discuss on the use of force in Japan have shaped the psychology of national leaders to tone down the threat element in favour of public opinion that predominantly supports non-military missions for Self-Defence Forces. Certainly, works of deterrence scholars like Robert Jervis offer a useful insight into the growing imbalance of threat perception. That is, the rising tension between Tokyo and Beijing may be a function of a chronic misperception and spiral of uncertainty stemming from the prevalent sense of insecurity on both sides of the Sea of Japan. If any, a misperception of mutual threats may have much to do with the way the two countries have interpreted each other's actions through the historical lens and a distorted projection

⁷Mearsheimer 1985, p. 15.

⁸Oros 2017; Samuels 2008.

⁹Katagiri 2015, p. 1170.

¹⁰Christensen 1999.

of one another's intent, making any rational move toward deterring the other by the threats of denial sufficiently threatening to undermine the semblance of a balance of power.¹¹ However, Japan has also worked hard to consistently signal its willingness to manage rivalry both diplomatically and peacefully, which is in part propelled by the commitment it has made to the deterrence-by-denial posture: a strategic posture designed to discourage China from using force through the show of sufficient force to deny Beijing's effort to undermine Japan's interests. This poses the challenge of dissuading China from taking provocative actions when Japan does not have the luxury of threatening the use of force for the purpose of denial. In other words, when Tokyo must demonstrate credible resolve in the eyes of Beijing officials that it is committed to deterring Beijing, it does not have the "teeth" to substantiate the resolve.

11.3 Determinants of Japan's Deterrence Posture

In this chapter, the two main sources of Japan's deterrence posture will be explored. The factors together ensure the continuation of post-war national security policy. The most important point about the constraints is its endurance that enables the continuation of deterrence-by-denial. This posture, however, comes at a cost. That is, it has made it hard for Japan to act as a "normal state"—a concept of state that is capable of using or threatening to use force as a means of national defence. This point is consistent with the literature of Japanese security policy. Scholars have noted the recent growth of Japan's defence capability, but not deterrence. Many observers also emphasize that the increase in defensive capability has not meant that Japan has become any more militaristic or nationalistic than the past. Only a small number of Japan scholars like Harvard professor Ezra Vogel correctly argue that "it's ridiculous to assume that changes in the policy for Japanese self-defence forces mean that Japan is going down the path of militarism. The entire situation is quite different than the 1930s and 1940s and there are many institutional barriers to the militarism of that era in place."¹² The reality is that while Japan undergoes technological and logistical upgrades, the socio-political foundation of national security policy remains remarkably pacifist. In this section, I discuss the legal and normative sources of such a posture.

¹¹Jervis 1982.

¹²Pastreich 2015.

11.3.1 Legal Constraints

The first determinant of deterrence-by-denial comes from the “peace” constitution of 1947 and associated laws governing the Self-Defence Force (SDF), Japan Coast Guard (JCG), and national police. The obvious issue with the constitution is its Article 9 that bans possession of offensive capability, which questions the SDF’s legality and legitimacy, and consequently undermines Japan’s ability to use force as a means of deterring other nations from challenging Japanese sovereignty. The constitution allows SDF to use weapons to defend the country for the purpose of self-defence but not for deterring other nations because it removes SDF’s ability to attack enemy forces. Further, the constitution bans use of force unless three conditions are met: (1) presence of imminent and illegal threat to the nation, (2) lack of appropriate alternative response, and (3) a minimum necessary amount of force to be used. Yet the constitution is hardly the only legal factor. Laws that govern SDF and JCG confine the defence forces to tight legal procedures, from tactical to operational to strategic levels. The legal constraint is doubly problematic because it puts psychological discomfort on defence personnel to feel unprotected for doing their job. The absence of offensive missions in their capability is critical in at least two ways. First, it forces Japan’s foremost defence treaty ally, the United States, to take responsibility for planning and, if necessary, executing all offensive missions for Japan’s war. This means that, for instance, a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) attack on Japan would draw the US Forces in Japan (USFJ) into war with China when SDF cannot use force in an offensive manner. This leaves the task to USFJ, which would escalate the conflict between China and the United States. Second, the absence of offensive missions in Japan allows China, North Korea, and Russia to spend more on buying offensive weapons and save resources on defensive weapons and training. This further undermines Japan’s ability to deter.

The legal constraint in Japan’s deterrence posture was manifested, for example, in early 2013 when an airborne Japanese anti-submarine helicopter observed a Chinese frigate sail through the disputed East China Sea. Armed with hellfire missiles, the helicopter was 28 km away when the frigate put a missile guidance system on it, an action one step short of firing a shot. While tense, nothing happened, and the Japanese helicopter left the area. Eleven days later, a 6000-ton Japanese destroyer *Yudachi* was sailing through the same sea when the 2400-ton Jiangwei II-class *Lianyungang* pointed a missile at it. *Yudachi* did nothing; it stood off for a few minutes before it sailed away. *Yudachi*’s armament—harpoons, Phalanx cannons, and torpedoes—went unused. Japan’s Foreign Ministry lodged a protest, followed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe criticizing China for violating international rules of behaviour, but he quickly sought to deescalate the crisis saying that the two nations should keep communications open and stay on the course of “strategic interdependence”. Facing a direct threat in a contested ocean from the smaller frigate, why did the Japanese destroyer not take action? The answer is that this was a routine; the destroyer was not authorized to fire because the Chinese ship did not shoot first. Rules of engagement disallowed the *Yudachi*

commander from acting in self-defence. *Yudachi*'s commander, Commander Kazuhiro Kuroki, was not disciplined but commended for doing his job. That Kuroki withheld fire was no surprise; the laws have long banned pre-emption.

The legal constraint also applies to cyber operations. Japan has made significant progress over the years to beef up national critical infrastructure, which involved institutional overhaul, bureaucratic reorganization, and training of personnel in the public and private sectors. On the offense side, however, Japan has faced tremendous legal hurdles in the use of cyber force to dissuade potential attackers from acting maliciously. The constitution does not permit offensive cyber operations explicitly because it does not consider cyber-attacks an act of war, and therefore it does not extend legal authority for acting in self-defence. The penal code, a set of regulations on law enforcement and police agencies, addresses duties in a manner that is consistent with the constitution; it disallows the use of force unless (1) there is an imminent and illegal threat to the nation, (2) there is no appropriate alternative response, and (3) as long as a minimum necessary amount of force is used. Japan's use of law in cyberspace is made complicated by the legal restrictions on SDF. Only an imminent security threat would mobilize the SDF, but the "threat" is commonly understood to be physical, not digital, even though cyber-attacks are essentially constant and "immediate" at all times. Similar restrictions hamper JCG's operations. A civilian body of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Telecommunications, JCG has seen a steady rise in Chinese aggressiveness, which also has much to do with law and notoriously strict rules of engagement. The law does not allow JCG crew to, for example, board suspicious vessel, arrest members of the vessel that enter Japan's territorial sea, or use force unless and until they are fired at. JCG Law's Article 18 permits JCG crew to stop suspicious ships *if* a "crime" is about to be committed in territorial waters. If the suspicious vessel does not stop after a warning, the JCG crew are not allowed to board the vessel.¹³ This creates another problem in that the law forces the crew under duress to quickly and accurately determine the illegality of the act before they respond. These restrictions as a whole challenge the confidence of JCG crew to use force.

11.3.2 Normative Constraints

The second factor consists of a set of four norms and principles of social behaviour. First is the doctrine of defensive defence, which bans offensive use of force even in wartime. It means that defensive force can only be used in the event of a foreign attack and is limited to the minimum necessary for self-defence. Since the 1970s it has informed Japan's deterrence-by-denial posture and affected weapons programs and operations. There are two problems with the doctrine. First, it keeps the government from procuring weapons that could be used in attack missions. Thus SDF

¹³Japan Coast Guard 2020.

is free of systems like aircraft carriers, attack helicopters, strategic bombers, and surface-to-surface missiles even if they are necessary to deter foreign aggression. Mid-air refuelling was banned until recently because “expeditionary” operations like that can be used to invade other countries and thus were considered offensive. The reason why Japan ended up having that capability was because airborne warning and control system (AWACS) needs mid-air refuelling to keep F15s—air-to-air combat aircrafts, which are not designed for ground attack—flying. The doctrine also indicates that once in war, Japan will not be able to move the battleground outside its soil. The war would have to be strictly a defensive war, which would generate a number of civilian casualties at home.

The second norm is the belief that SDF should devote itself to domestic humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions. This is consistent with the strong public support for SDF as a non-military force.¹⁴ Figure 11.1 shows that between 2010 and 2018, HA/DR was the most popular SDF task. Markedly fewer respondents support the SDF for real national security missions. For example, a small number of people support the SDF’s mission “toward suspicious ships and armed agents” when this is precisely what SDF and JCG are doing in the Senkaku area. Even fewer people support SDF’s “response towards ballistic missile attacks” even though North Korea has fired them near Japan for years.

The third norm is based on the tradition of heavy reliance on the United States for national defence. The norm is best articulated in the late diplomat Hisahiko Akazaki’s work—*What is Strategic Thought?*—in which he argues that essentially the only “strategy” Japan has is to rely on the United States.¹⁵ This “strategy”, consistent with the extended deterrence of the Cold War, has garnered a high level of public support for USFJ. Figure 11.2 shows that Japanese people have always felt “close” to the United States, much more than China, Korea, or Russia. Between 1978 and 2019, around 85% of respondents consistently favoured the combination of the alliance and the SDF for national defence. This reinforces the notion that the Japanese public sees no nation other than the United States as its security partner (Fig. 11.3).

The last norm is the domestic consensus that Japan needs no nuclear weapon of its own as long as the United States extends one through the alliance. The so-called three “non-nuclear” principles of 1967 bans the possession, manufacture, and introduction of nuclear weapons. Despite the oft-rumoured indigenous nuclear weapons capability, the Japanese have firmly rejected weaponisation. The anti-nuclear “allergy” has been firmly embedded in Japanese society. The non-nuclear norm appears to have strengthened after the 2011 triple crisis of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, forcing all civilian-use nuclear reactors to shut down across the Japanese archipelago for some time. Despite facing nuclear neighbours in China, Russia, and North Korea, Japan does not see an imminent need to go nuclear and is unlikely to see one anytime soon. As

¹⁴Oriki 2012.

¹⁵Okazaki 1983.

Fig. 11.1 Public expectation of SDF roles (*Source* Public Relations Office (Cabinet Office) (n.d.), p. 7)

Fig. 11.2 Japanese “feeling close” to the United States and other countries (*Source* Prime Minister’s Office 2019)

of April 2020, there is no Diet debate on whether Japan should go nuclear. Scholars indicate potential, but not a single lawmaker is putting forward bills. This makes Japan’s deterrence-by-denial posture nuclear-free and largely dependent on conventional and cyber resources.

Fig. 11.3 Japanese attitude to SDF and the US alliance (*Source* Prime Minister’s Office 2018)

11.4 Japan’s Deterrence-by-Denial Posture

Efforts to maintain deterrence-by-denial are sustained by the combination of internal balancing and multilateral hedging with the US alliance at its centre. As part of internal balancing, Japan has increased SDF’s operational flexibility by moving portions of ground forces from Hokkaido where it once anticipated Soviet attacks, toward its southwest region to confront the PLA in Japan’s airspace and defend administrative control of the Senkaku islands. Japan has checked China’s power by strengthening the US alliance and building security ties with partners outside, including with India and Australia. Considerable constraints remain on the use of force in a variety of security laws governing the SDF’s functions, which keep Japan in appreciation of extended nuclear deterrence. This is most apparent in the government’s approach toward North Korea, which combines the use of diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions designed to contain threats of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Japan resists taking aggressive military missions and continues to use force in a defensive manner.¹⁶ Despite the ongoing negotiation between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump, the Shinzo Abe government was adamant to press Pyongyang to denuclearize itself and to return alleged Japanese abductees as a condition for rapprochement.

The other part of Japan’s deterrence posture is the practice of multilateral hedging with the US alliance at its centre. The inclination toward this alliance is seen, for example, in Prime Minister Abe’s determination to stick to the alliance even when things appear problematic. One defining characteristic of Abe’s foreign policy was his effort to go along with Trump by making all kinds of concessions on imports of American automobiles and farm products and factory building to make

¹⁶Abe 2017.

more jobs for American people at the expense of Japanese taxpayers. Japan has also agreed to buy over 100 F-35 jets and several batteries for Aegis Ashore missile defence systems from the United States. Note that few in the Japanese parliament (the Diet) or the media have launched any serious resistance to these measures led by the prime minister's office and these measures were supported loyally by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All of this was in stark contrast to other Asian countries like China, which have confronted the United States in the ongoing trade disputes, and South Korea, whose negotiators have refused to meet the US demand to pay more for US troops stationed on Korean soil.

Multilateral hedging boosts the diplomatic aspect of Japan's deterrence-by-denial posture. It revolves around non-US countries, especially India and Australia. The involvement of these key maritime partners is what makes Japan's deterrence posture multilateral in nature. These partners, furthermore, play a part in Japan's strategy of hedging in case the alliance becomes weakened for some unexpected reasons. But the multilateral hedging strategy is nothing new. In fact, Japan began to pay a great deal of diplomatic attention to India during the administration of Prime Minister Taro Aso (2007–2008). Among other achievements he made, Aso promoted ties with India through his trademark "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity", which reinforced shared interests in democracy, freedom, and human rights. Japan and India share a common strategic interest in checking and balancing Chinese power in Asia. For India, China and Pakistan pose a powerful joint challenge because they dispute India's claims over the Kashmir region, and the Belt and Road Initiative challenges its survival and prosperity. Thus India and Japan share a sense of purpose in balancing China and maintaining the freedom of sea-lanes. India and Japan have also secured close ties with Australia (and the United States) through the "democratic security diamond (DSD)". This is critical because Australia has built its own hedging strategy to counter China's influence in the south Pacific. Japan and Australia formed the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) in 2002 to deal with threats including North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs and China's power through intelligence cooperation and joint exercises.

To deter cyber-attacks, Japan is going cross domain by combining military, cyber, diplomatic, and economic means of statecraft and by making its defence system more robust. One of the best government documents that shows such a development is the 2018 National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG). In it, the Abe administration contended that Japan considers using conventional, space, and cyber means to retaliate against an armed attack.¹⁷ The cross-domain deterrence posture is progress in the right direction, but it comes with at least two shortcomings. First, it does not address cyber-attacks to retaliate against, therefore doing little to deter foreign cyber attackers. The other problem is that the NDPG falsely assumes that Japan would be *able* to retaliate after absorbing the first strike. Instead, the strategy should assume that the military strike would impair Japan's retaliatory

¹⁷The Government of Japan 2018, p. 12.

capability in a single blow. There is no denying that the NDPG represents Japan's work in progress. One important difference between cyber deterrence and the hedging strategy, however, is that the cyber dimension is mostly unilateral when the hedging strategy is multilateral by nature. The relatively cautionary stance in cyberspace has much to do with the difficulty of working together with foreign governments because of the inherently deceptive nature of cyberspace operations.

11.5 Conclusion

In this section, the three most important conclusions about Japanese concepts of deterrence will be presented. First, there are both changes and continuities in the Japanese understanding of deterrence over time. On the one hand, throughout the Cold War and today, the meaning of deterrence, denial, and punishment remain the same as that in the Western world, but the strategic and domestic environment has been different. The fundamental stance of Japanese deterrence posture—deterrence-by-denial—survives the changes in Japan's security environment characterized by the threats of Russia, North Korea, and China. This is in large part because the basic political structure of the country characterized by the legal and normative constraints on the use of force remains firmly intact. Furthermore, Japanese concepts of deterrence have continuously been used in the context of US extended deterrence and heavily toned down in terms of intensity to maintain a semblance of defence-by-denial.

Second, there have been some changes. In recent years, we have seen the word used more frequently in government policy, academic publications, and policy discourse. This has coincided with the expansion of this posture into diplomatic spheres. That is, Japan has invested heavily in garnering coalitional support to reinforce its deterrence posture by working closely with its maritime partners, such as India and Australia. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that these changes are mostly at tactical and operational levels of deterrence and remain subordinate to the political foundation of defence policy that is characterized by the legal and normative constraints on the use of force. All this makes a highly challenging environment for the country to adopt a drastically different approach toward the strategy of deterrence. It also requires strategists in Tokyo to ensure that the current posture is well aligned with the threats they face today.

Finally, this chapter demonstrates that Japanese interpretation of deterrence presents a unique discovery in the practice of deterrence-by-denial and deterrence-by-punishment. While Japanese concepts of deterrence are drawn from the academic contribution of deterrence theorists, the actual application of the concepts is quite different. It is because the policy of deterrence must be exercised in a distinctive political and strategic setting that Japan is in in East Asia. As such, this chapter is designed to contribute to promoting the greater understanding of the *width* of deterrence concepts in the context of a growing diversity in the practice and interpretation of deterrence in global politics.

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