

Paul K. Huth's "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War"

Headline Summary: Huth argues that successful deterrence requires a combination of (1) military capabilities and (2) bargaining behavior that (a) enhances credibility and (b) does not provoke the potential attacker.

Definition of "Extended Deterrence": "A confrontation in which the policymakers of one state ('defender') threaten the use of force against another state ('potential attacker') in an attempt to prevent that state from using military force against an ally – or territory controlled by an ally ('protégé') – of the defender" (p. 424).

Summary: Huth presents and tests hypotheses about the military conditions and political/diplomatic conditions (bargaining behavior) under which extended deterrence is most likely to succeed or fail. Huth is concerned with the affect of four sets of variables on the credibility and stability of a deterrent threat: (1) the military balance; (2) the value of the protégé to the defender; (3) the bargaining behavior of the defender; (4) the past behavior of the defender. "These four sets of variables represent two fundamental components in the potential attacker's calculus of deterrence: (1) the military capabilities of the defender to protect the protégé and (2) the likely intention of the defender to use force to protect the protégé" (p. 435).

Huth determines that the military capability of the defender to deny the potential attacker a quick and decisive victory enhances deterrence. The immediate and short-term balance of forces are hypothesized and found to be positively related to deterrent success. The long-term balance of forces is hypothesized to have little affect on the success of deterrent threats because "policymakers do not generally initiate an armed conflict with the intention of engaging in a war of attrition" (p. 428). Data analysis confirms this hypothesis. The possession of nuclear weapons by the defender is hypothesized and found to have no significant impact on outcomes. Huth theorizes that this is for three reasons: (1) the use of nuclear weapons would risk provoking strong domestic and international criticism; (2) the use of nuclear weapons might spur horizontal proliferation; (3) the likelihood of collateral damage to civilians would act as a constraint.

Success also depends on whether the potential aggressor believes that the defender has sufficient interests at stake to justify the costs of making good on its threat. If the defender does not have sufficient interests at stake, then the credibility of the threat will be questioned. Huth hypothesizes that success increases when (1) the defender has an alliance with the protégé; (2) when the protégé relies on the defender for arms transfers (and success increases as reliance increases); and when (3) the protégé's share of the defender's foreign trade increases. The empirical results do not support these hypotheses. Huth theorizes that this is because bargaining behavior has such a strong impact on the potential attacker's estimate of the defender's interests at stake.

Bargaining behavior gives the potential attacker an indication of the defender's interests and intentions. Huth hypothesizes and determines through his empirical testing that the most effective bargaining behavior is the pursuit of a policy of reciprocity. Reciprocity involves both a tit-for-tat strategy of military escalation (as opposed to responding to the potential attacker with greater or less-than-equal levels of military preparedness) and a firm-but-flexible negotiation strategy (as opposed to a bullying or conciliatory policy). Reciprocity signals the determination of the defender to protect the protégé while at the same time signaling that the defender (1) does not intend to be an offensive threat to the potential aggressor and (2) will not force the potential attacker to accept a one-sided settlement. Additionally, a firm-but-flexible approach may offer a way for a potential attacker to back-down in the confrontation with minimal damage to its bargaining reputation. A policy of reciprocity best achieves the goals of both credibility and stability, that is, the defender's threat is seen as credible without provoking the potential attacker to action.

Huth hypothesizes that the past behavior of the defender also influences the success or failure of a situation of extended deterrence. Huth hypothesizes and finds that the past behavior of the defender in confrontations with the current potential attacker will matter more than the past behavior of the defender in confrontations with other adversaries. Following the same logic as his theory on the affect of bargaining behavior, Huth argues that a past record of firm-but-flexible bargaining should increase the probability of deterrence success in comparison to a past record of bullying or conciliation (but the empirical results do not support this hypothesis). The empirical results do support his predictions that a policy of bullying or conciliation will increase the likelihood of failure. A past record of bullying will have already imposed reputational costs on the potential attacker so the attacker should be even more determined to protect its bargaining reputation. This should lead the attacker to try to avoid another retreat. A past record of conciliation will lead the potential attacker to doubt the credibility of the future threats by the defender.