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Cultivating Intellectual Capital – Linking Deterrence Practitioner to Academician

Dr. Keith B. Payne
Dr. Keith B. Payne is a co-founder of the National Institute for Public Policy, professor emeritus and former Department Head of the Graduate School of Defense and Strategic Studies at Missouri State University, and a former deputy assistant secretary of defense.

I would like to thank General Weidner and Strategic Command for inviting me to participate here today, and General Evans for your kind introduction.

I have long believed that those in government responsible for deterrence and those in academia have much to offer each other. I would like to focus my brief remarks directly on two of our assigned questions in this regard:

First, what might be the challenges to the academic's collaboration with what I will refer to as the official deterrence community, and how might we overcome those challenges?

And, second, what practical measures would make collaboration with the deterrence community of value to the academic?

This *Information Series* draws from Dr. Keith B. Payne, Prepared Remarks, United States Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium, September 13, 2021, Panel No. 1.

I should start by noting that, since the beginning of the nuclear age, there has been considerable de facto collaboration between the deterrence and academic communities. Collaboration in the development of deterrence policy is not new.

For example, since the beginning of the Cold War, the broad outlines of U.S. nuclear deterrence policy have followed from the brilliant work of a very small number of academics, notably including: Bernard Brodie; Alexander George; Colin Gray; Michael Howard; Robert Jervis; Herman Kahn; James Schlesinger; Thomas Schelling; Kenneth Waltz, and Albert Wohlstetter.

More recently, an even smaller number of academics has again led the rethinking of Cold War approaches to deterrence to fit the great changes in the threat environment described earlier today by ADM Richard.

In the other direction, members of the national security community have produced outstanding works used in university courses. For example, I have recommended ADM. J.C. Wylie's classic text, *Military Strategy, A Theory of Power Control* and ADM Rich Mies' published work on deterrence to graduate students.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the engagement of these two communities would require little deconfliction. After all, we work on the same general subject matter and typically speak the same language.

However, let me suggest that it is critical to recognize that these two communities work in very different contexts, have different professional cultures, different modes of operation, different measures of professional merit, different professional languages, different goals, and very different measures of success.

For example, academics ideally educate each new generation of students and push the boundaries of conventional thinking, offering hypotheses for the further accumulation of knowledge. This is a never-settled process, as new ideas are put forward, taken apart, deconstructed, demolished, and occasionally reaffirmed over time. It is, and is meant to be, rough and tumble intellectually. Every nuance is open to question in this remarkably decentralized process. It is an intellectual free-for-all, governed by little more than generally shared norms of process integrity.

Before I became a university department head in 2005, a dean at Harvard explained in this regard that a university department is like a solar system without a sun. There is no final authority that adjudicates among conflicting hypotheses. I soon learned the enduring truth of that observation.

Professional success for the academic in terms of earning tenure often is determined by the level and visibility of one's participation in this rough and tumble process, measured largely by the number of publications and conference appearances in academically-accepted venues.

The development of U.S. deterrence policy and practice is a wholly different matter altogether. It is not a forum for testing hypotheses and building knowledge, per se. The deterrence community's goal is much more directed and the process much more structured: it is responsible for the policies and practices needed to deter external threats with available resources. There is a well-defined hierarchy of executive authority that must end discussion by deciding what effectively is the correct policy and practice, i.e., civilian political leaders who may or may not be knowledgeable about the subject are responsible for deciding what the correct answers are. This deterrence community must carry out its task under a bright and often critical public spotlight, but with classified information that typically cannot be shared and in the context of real time constraints. This process is foreign to that of the academy and often is the subject of commentary that is largely ignorant of it in important detail.

Major deterrence policy developments that guide practice happen occasionally, but often only after a contentious process that typically is compelled by shifting external threats and/or national political transitions. Perhaps most importantly, decisions about the direction of deterrence policy and practice carry enormous potential real-world regrets for getting it wrong, while spectacular deterrence success is marked by nothing much appearing to happen.

The academic searching for knowledge and the national security community seeking practical answers should be a natural match. But, it is hard to imagine more different professional contexts. My 43 years of experience in each community tells me that if these differences are not seriously taken into account, collaboration may be limited and mutually frustrating.

There are numerous examples of how the mutual lack of understanding can lead to problematic engagement. An ongoing example revolves around their generally differing perspectives about the foreseeable feasibility of cooperative global nuclear disarmament.

Yale professor Paul Bracken observed about the campaign for nuclear disarmament: "All were on board to oppose nuclear arms… Academics, think tanks and intellectuals quickly jumped on the bandwagon. For a time, it really looked like there was going to be an antinuclear turn in U.S. strategy."

Yet, the late Oxford Professor Sir Michael Howard—a person with considerable experience in national security and academia—commented on how the different professional contexts can shape views on the subject of nuclear disarmament:

> Nobody who has been brought into contact with that inner group of civil and military specialists who are responsible for the security of this country can fail to notice the almost physical pressure exerted on them by that responsibility, affecting their processes of thought (and often their manner of speech) in much the same way as the movements of a man are affected when he tries to walk in water….they share a common skepticism as to the possibility of disarmament, or indeed of the creation of any effective international authority to whom they can turn over any portion of their responsibilities.

Sir Michael then added his observation that, "the impatient onlookers, who have never themselves been plunged into that element, cannot understand why."

If one has lived and worked inside both communities—if one has dual citizenship so-to-speak—it is easier to truly understand: 1) how different these two communities are; 2) how these differences can impede useful close collaboration; and, 3) perhaps, how to help mitigate them.

Unfortunately, the number of individuals with extensive experience as academicians and in senior deterrence community positions is not large. If one were to draw a venn diagram of each community, I suspect those with significant experience in both worlds would be relatively small. The late Dr. James Schlesinger, a featured speaker at one of Strategic Command's past annual deterrence conferences, is a good example of this relatively small group. He taught at the University of Virginia and worked in a national security-oriented NGO, but also served as Secretary of Defense, Director of the CIA, and Secretary of Energy.

Mutual engagement certainly can be fruitful, but it is likely to be easier when both communities appreciate the challenges each side faces in the process. I have had the honor of serving extensively in both communities over the past 43 years. While my experience laboring in both communities is nothing comparable to that of James Schlesinger's, it has taught me just how different they are, and that a consequence of limited shared experience is limited mutual understanding. If we consciously seek to mitigate the effects of their differences, they need not be an unbeatable barrier to mutually useful engagement. That mitigation, however, will not happen without conscious efforts.

Allow me to illustrate with a real-world example how the interaction of these two different cultures can lead to questionable results. There are many such examples, but I'll mention just one here. I'll then offer a few suggestions as to how we might take steps to bridge the gap.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a key question the deterrence community faced was: why does Soviet nuclear doctrine appear to be so different from that of the United States? The answer to this question held serious real-world policy implications.

A prominent academic answer to that question was called "Convergence Theory." It suggested, in short, that Soviet nuclear doctrine was very different because the pertinent Soviet technology lagged that of the United States. But, as that technology gap narrowed, Soviet nuclear doctrine would converge with the balance of terror ideas popular in the United States as these were the only option rational leaders would pursue—hence the name "Convergence Theory." The heart of this hypothesis was that differences in U.S. and Soviet doctrine were temporary and could be traced to differences in technology—not that rational leaders could otherwise hold fundamentally different views about nuclear weapons. Soviet doctrine would converge with that of the United States when technology permitted as a common rationality had its effect. This convergence theory both reflected and reinforced what has been called mirror-imaging in U.S. deterrence policy—the presumption that all rational thought regarding nuclear doctrine must ultimately follow the course set by that of United States.

Mirror imaging and this related notion of a technologically determined convergence were perfectly coherent possibilities and were offered up as an academic hypothesis open to the usual intellectual back and forth of the academy. Some in authority responsible for U.S. deterrence, however, effectively embraced this hypothesis and adopted it as a settled truth, which in turn led to U.S. government policy positions which were highly resistant to change— after all, it had been declared a truth by those in authority. It led many in the United States to see the U.S. strategic mission as one of tutoring Moscow's leaders on correct thinking about nuclear weapons.

For example, Paul Warnke, Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the Cold War, famously remarked that "primitive" Soviet nuclear doctrine indicated the need for U.S. tutorials: "This kind of [Soviet] thinking is on a level of abstraction which is unrealistic. It seems to me that instead of talking in these terms, which would indulge what I regard as the primitive aspects of Soviet nuclear doctrine, we ought to be trying to educate them into the real world of strategic nuclear weapons…." This was simply a matter of showing Soviet leaders the way to proper thinking.

Within a decade, however, mirror-imaging and the expectation of convergence were recognized widely as fallacious and contrary to deterrence best practice. The unavoidable facts of Soviet doctrinal and force development made it abundantly clear that Moscow's thinking was not a reflection of primitive technology and thinking; it was instead a reflection of a deeply-embedded Russian strategic culture far different from that of the United States. This reality was very different than that suggested by mirror imaging and the "Convergence Theory," and that difference held enormous policy implications. Yet, once embraced by those in authority over the formulation of deterrence policy, mirror imaging and the expectation of doctrinal convergence were highly-resistant to change. Indeed, change came only after major threat developments compelled new thinking.

This case reflected the differences in the professional cultures of the academy and the deterrence policy community. A better understanding of academia and its intentional lack of discipline in the airing of ideas would have suggested greater caution in adopting so readily a particular academic hypothesis as the basis for policy—no matter how reassuring it was.

That said, I don't know of a better avenue to greater mutual understanding than for academics to have serious professional experience in the deterrence community, and for members of the deterrence community to have equally serious experience in the academy. There are potential steps that can help contribute to this goal.

One example is greater use of an existing program, the 1970 Intergovernmental Personnel Act, or IPA. It is an excellent vehicle that allows university academics to work for a period ranging from weeks to 2 years inside the official deterrence world, including in DoD, without separating from their academic homes. I know from direct personal experience that for the academic this work is a far cry from the scholarly research and writing expedition that many associate with a sabbatical. But it can give the academic invaluable insight into the realities of the deterrence community.

I would be remiss if I did not identify some of the potential challenges that academics, particularly younger faculty members, face when working in close collaboration with the official deterrence community. Addressing these possible challenges could help make collaboration of greater value and more attractive.

One example of these challenges is that working within the deterrence community, even temporarily, can include complications for and restrictions on writing for external publication—which is the traditional route to academic tenure. The associated restrictions might seem a small concern if you are not seeking tenure, but they can be decisive to how a young academic looks on the prospect of working within the official deterrence community. I am not overstating this situation: a brilliant young PhD in the field recently told me that for this very reason they turned down a plumb position in OSD to work in this specific topic area.

In particular, holding a security clearance is a great privilege, and may be necessary to work within the official deterrence community. But for the academic who typically must be free to write for external, academically-recognized publications to earn tenure, it can be a mixed blessing.

In addition, for the academic who chooses to spend serious professional time in a military or other defense-oriented context, the possibility of being viewed by some senior faculty member as part of the so-called military-industrial-complex—rightly or wrongly—may not be an advantage for the younger faculty member who aspires to tenure. As a senior, highly-regarded academic recently observed, "Being known as a [political] conservative is the kiss of death in

academia." Working in or for the defense establishment can type-cast an academic in this regard, whether or not the type-casting bears any resemblance to reality. Those who already enjoy tenure may not be overly concerned about this possibility, but for some younger academics, it can be a real impediment.

To make the academic's collaboration with the practitioner more valuable, the experience needs to contribute to the academic's professional success, *not add potential challenges*. There are many steps that may help the academic in this regard, such as focusing on work that does not require a security clearance and is available for open publication, and working in an institutional context other than DoD (although that may reduce the practical value of the experience). There are other possible steps to consider, but I must conclude my opening remarks here to fit within my allotted time.

Thank you very much for your attention, I look forward to our question and answer session.