



A Deterrence Case Study:
Analysing Ukraine's Loss Of Crimea To Russia
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ABSTRACT

In today's information-centric world, potential aggressors can be discerned if a country possesses the actual means to retaliate and exercise their deterrence stance. The two pillars of Singapore's defence policy built on diplomacy and deterrence relies on the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to back up the deterrence posture. This case study examines Ukraine's loss of Crimea from a deterrence viewpoint and argues that the possible failure of her deterrence strategy was largely attributed to the military imbalance between Ukraine and Russia; a miscalculation in the extended deterrence afforded to Ukraine by the United States (US), Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the inability to fully grasp Russia's valuation of Crimea to foresee her intent. Deterrence cannot be achieved without proof of retaliatory means. Instruments of national power are often required to complement and strengthen the deterrence efforts and therefore, make sense to code the national strategy into the DIME framework and exercise deterrence through the areas of Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic, thus enabling a comprehensive approach towards developing a robust security strategy.

Keywords: *Deterrence, Aggressor, Threat, Interest, Warfare*

INTRODUCTION

'To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skills. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence.'

- Sun Tze

The annexation of Crimea shocked the world as it unfolded, with Russia moving into Crimea in the guise of hostile militants ('little green men') followed by formal military forces on the pretext of defending Crimea against these militants and giving support to Ukrainian separatists through the provision of weapons to destabilise the country. Russia's use of insurgent tactics, information propaganda and political manipulation showcased the use of hybrid warfare and how conventional deterrence strategy may no longer work against such fourth-generation warfare. Integration of deterrence strategy with the national instruments of power as part of a broader strategy is necessary in order to counter non-traditional threats and ambiguous warfare in today's security environment.

This essay examines Ukraine's loss of Crimea from a deterrence viewpoint and argues that the possible failure of her deterrence strategy was largely attributed to the military imbalance between the two countries, a miscalculation in the extended deterrence afforded to her by the US, Europe and NATO, and the inability to fully grasp Russia's valuation of Crimea to foresee her intent. In the end, Ukraine's failure to maintain a capable military coupled with the political instability within the country led to civil unrest and the disintegration of the government. This gave Russia the opening that was needed to seize Crimea from under her nose, as the whole world watched in horror and distaste, both unable and unwilling to intervene.

This essay will 1) examine the definition of deterrence, and how conventional deterrence strategy needs to evolve in order to remain relevant and applicable in the 21st century, 2) use Lebow and Stein's four guiding principles for analysing deterrence. This will be used to examine Ukraine's loss of Crimea to Russia, which is mainly attributed to a) its poor military strength vis-a-vis Russia, b) Russia's appetite for loss as assessed



Signing of the Treaty on the adoption of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia. Left to right: Sergey Aksyonov, Vladimir Andreyevich Konstantinov, Vladimir Putin and Aleksei Chaly.

through her interests in Crimea and how these outweigh Ukraine's deterrence effort. This essay will highlight the limitations of current deterrence strategy against fourth-generation warfare and lastly, show that in order to have a robust national strategy, deterrence needs to work in tandem with national instruments of national power alongside other security strategies.

DEFINING DETERRENCE

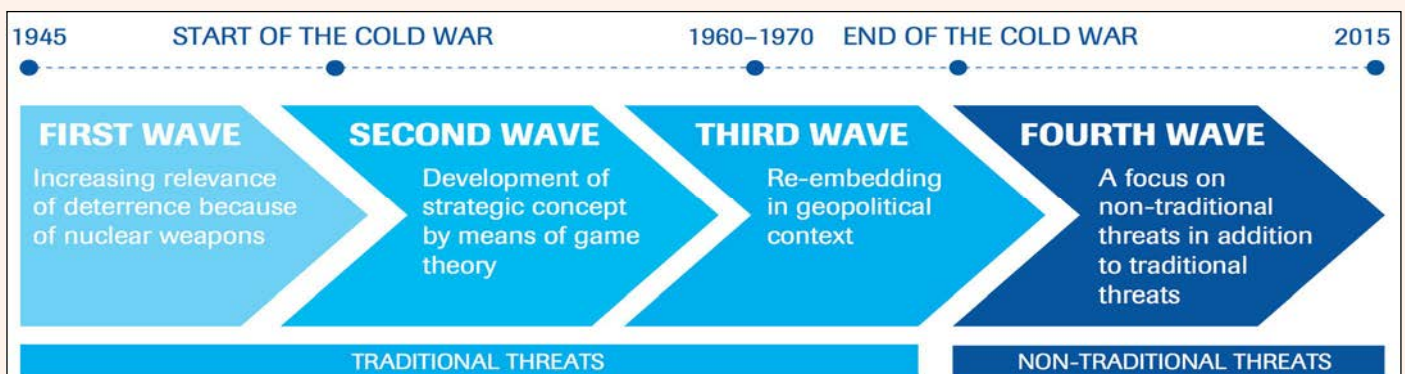
The concept of deterrence exists as early as the start of the Cold War. This age-old strategy works only if the adversary fears the consequence. In this aspect, deterrence is more an art than science. After years of practice by the world's great powers and widely expounded by both theorists and strategists, a definitive method has yet to be established to calculate the effectiveness of the various deterrence concepts. It is widely accepted that we can neither say with certainty nor fully discount that a particular war was fought or avoided because of the deterrence strategy that had been put in place. There could be other factors that have a more significant reason to influence the

adversaries' decisions.¹ Nevertheless, the concept of deterrence and the function it serves in the strategic domain of the art of war continues to endure.

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The study on deterrence as a security concept revealed three key findings. Firstly, there are various deterrence theories (Rational, Deductive, Classical and Perfect) which seek to identify the critical factors which would prevent any ill intent on a nation's sovereignty. Secondly, despite the forty or more years of research in the field of security studies, no definitive method is established to calculate the effectiveness of various deterrence concepts. Thirdly, there is a shift in the application of deterrence concepts to counter non-traditional military threats such as terrorism and ambiguous warfare (as deployed by Russia in the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine).²

The general definition of deterrence can be summarised as the use of strategy to encourage an adversary to refrain from the use of force to subjugate the defender's territory, resulting in the belief that doing so would cause the defender to inflict unbearable harm or loss in return. The core principle of deterrence strategies includes the application of Denial and Punishment concepts.³ Other classifications also include concepts such as General and Immediate Deterrence and Direct and Extended Deterrence.⁴



Evolution of Deterrence⁵

Denial and Punishment Deterrence. Denial refers to the prevention of the aggressor from physically gaining access to its desired territorial goals, achieved through the physical defence of the coveted territory to the extent whereby the aggressor has to suffer disproportionate loss in order to overcome the defending forces. Punishment is the inferred possible loss that could be inflicted onto the aggressor, should he choose to pursue his chosen course of subjugation of the deterrer's territory. In order to apply the strategy of punishment, the ability of the deterrer to cause grievous hurt to the aggressor must be credible. Possession of the means to do so must be evident, as well as the conviction to enforce the punishment.⁶

General and Immediate Deterrence. General deterrence, usually employed as a peacetime strategy, refers to the use of an armed force to regulate geopolitical relationships and may not be directed at any specific opponent although profiling of potential opponents can be used. Immediate deterrence is effective when an aggressor surfaces with an impending challenge or perceived intention to provoke and the deterrer is required to counter this by mounting a threat of retaliation.⁷

Direct and Extended Deterrence. Direct deterrence refers to the deterrer's attempts to prevent an opponent from subjugating their home territory while extended deterrence refers to the efforts of another state to prevent an attack on a third party.⁸

While deterrence theorists and strategists have proposed several methods to assess the effectiveness of deterrence strategies, the scope of this essay will adopt Lebow and Stein's four guiding principles for analysing deterrence to assess the extent of Ukraine's failure to defend Crimea against Russia. Notably, Russia did not declare war on Ukraine in the conventional way but instead deployed a form of hybrid warfare, which included deploying her instruments of national power, towards her subjugation of Crimea. This form of warfare is hard to defend against as it is asymmetrical and invokes the use of non-military domains.⁹

The four guiding principles are:¹⁰

(1) Clarity, potency, and credibility of commitment. The defender's deterrence messages are analysed for credibility, clarity in communication and the ability of their military to inflict unacceptable loss;

(2) Opportunity versus need. The interest of the adversary is examined to determine if they are motivated by opportunity or need, or a combination of both;

(3) Deterrence and Reassurance. The third principal analyses the use of reassurance strategies to alleviate the fear and perceived vulnerabilities of the adversary and;

(4) Perception and context. The perceived roles of the defender and adversary is examined as part of the deterrence analysis.¹¹

ANALYSING UKRAINE'S LOSS OF CRIMEA

Clarity, potency, and credibility of commitment. When assessing whether to proceed with a challenge, Russia would have to consider if the Ukrainian military would be able to deny her adversary's access to Crimea or to inflict unacceptable cost in return. A comparison is made between the military strength of Ukraine and Russia in 2014. By numbers alone, Russian military forces outnumber Ukrainian forces by approximately four to one. Adding on to the equation, by comparing Russian military assets and firepower, the Russian military appears better equipped such that the Ukrainian forces do not pose a substantial threat and therefore lacked the strength to deter. The Ukrainian military also faced challenges with obsolete equipment from the Soviet era, insufficient training and dwindling recruitment numbers. Inadequate funding due to low GDP (less than 1% of GDP in 2013) and poor economic status over the past several years also resulted in low combat readiness.¹² In comparison, the modernised Russian military was far superior even if they were not able to utilise its full force due to the need to maintain positions at its North Caucasus region, its border with China and the Pacific.¹³

In addition, as argued by Mearsheimer that 'Ukrainian nuclear weapons are the only reliable deterrent to Russian aggression', Ukraine's voluntary nuclear disarmament and transfer of its tactical nuclear weapons to Russia in 1992 meant that they are unable to inflict unacceptable loss to the Russians as a form of punishment.¹⁴ Prior to 1994, Ukraine had the third largest nuclear weapon arsenal but gave them up in the 1994 Budapest memorandum. Mearsheimer assessed that, 'Ukraine cannot defend itself against a nuclear-



Map of The Black Sea and Sevastopol

armed Russia with conventional weapons, and no state, including the US is going to extend to it a meaningful security guarantee.¹⁵ The 1994 Budapest memorandum aside, Ukraine could be relying on the US and NATO for extended deterrence but these sources lacked commitment, which is a pre-requisite of effective deterrence strategy. Perhaps Putin had read and agreed with Mearsheimer's 1993 analysis because Russia had correctly predicted or took the gamble that the international community, particularly US, European Union (EU) states and NATO which Ukraine could be relying on to exert pressure against Russia, would not intervene militarily. Ukraine was not a full NATO member but only a partner country and was not protected by NATO's security guarantees. The US and EU states each had their own interests with Russia to preserve such as the US military supply route into Afghanistan, reliance on Russian gas and trade in Europe. The evidence in the lack of extended deterrence is apparent and Ukraine had failed to develop any vested interest from nations with stronger military strength and any form of threat to Russia was limited only to economic and political sanctions.

The lack of a capable Ukrainian military and nuclear deterrent to exert either deterrence by denial or punishment does not lend credibility to any threats issued by Ukraine to Russia, despite any communication in their commitment to defend Crimea. Based on the

trend of deterioration in its military, Russia could have interpreted Ukraine's weak military posture as a signal that they could easily be overcome by her own forces. Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia gave quite a clear indication of their ambitions to her neighbours, and signalled Ukraine as the next likely target.¹⁶ On the contrary, Ukraine did not provide strong signals of her retaliatory intent should Russia choose to engage.

By sheer size alone, Russia dwarfs Ukraine and has no need for her land mass. Her interest in Crimea appears to be motivated by a complex mix of strategic, security and political interests.

In order to examine Ukraine's loss of Crimea to Russia from a deterrence viewpoint, it is important to first understand Russia's interest in Crimea as this will determine the extent of her motivation and her appetite for loss should she fail in her attempt.

Securing of Russia's Military Sea Power

The military-strategic importance of Crimea as a base for Russian naval operations was that it allowed Russia to exercise sea power and exert influence over the Mediterranean, Balkans and Middle East against the US via the Black Sea, through a naval base in Sevastopol, Crimea. Headquartered in Sevastopol and under agreement from Ukraine, Russia's Black Sea Fleet

allowed her to project her naval forces against the US' 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean. This was also the only warm water port from which Russia could showcase her sea power to global audiences and engage in multilateral defence arrangements.¹⁷ Although she was allowed to maintain her naval base in Crimea under the 1997 treaty after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where Crimea came under Ukrainian sovereignty, the impermanence of this arrangement remained a source of discomfort. In addition, Russia's increasing naval activity via the Black Sea, crucial to strengthening her global defence role over the past ten years, further increased the value of Crimea as the home base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet.¹⁸ Crimea remains the key to Russia extending its military sea power through the Black Sea despite the expansion of an alternative base in Novorossiysk, which is hindered by several limitations.¹⁹ Thus, the threat of possible eviction became a national concern and interest.

The geographic positioning of NATO alliances on Russia's south to west borders with the exception of Ukraine, meant that their combined forces could counter her own military strength if properly co-ordinated, and is seen as a potential threat towards her expansionism goals. It could also simply be seen as a threat to their sovereignty and territorial integrity.²⁰ As expressed by the Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a speech at the 2007 Munich Conference on Security Policy, NATO expansion 'represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust.'²¹ If military conflict were to occur between Russia and the countries to her south-western border, the fighting would be done at the Black Sea where the naval forces would converge. Therefore, it is essential that Russia is able to permanently secure the naval base at Sevastopol, Crimea for her sole utilisation, to deploy her forces when needed.

Economic (Trade and Resource)

Russia relied on physical access to Crimea in order to access the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea for her seaborne trade. The trade routes through these seas are used by about half of her merchant fleet and also carries the bulk of her seaborne oil exports to the rest of the



Russian Ships in Sevastopol, Crimea, 2015.

world.²² The maintenance of presence and control in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea was of great economic importance to Russia not only because of the trading routes but also because of the potential oil deposits to be harvested in the Black Sea.²³

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Economic (Eurasian Customs Union)

The success of the Russian initiative to establish a parallel customs union to rival EU, relied heavily on the participation of Ukraine due to its economic potential. The invitation to Ukraine to sign Association Agreements with the EU in November 2013 threatened the survival of the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU). However, the decision by then-Ukrainian President Yanukovich to accept a US\$15 billion bailout from Russia instead of accepting financial aid from EU triggered the Ukrainian revolution known as the 'Euromaidan' crisis, leading to the establishment of an interim government that was pro-EU and Western oriented.²⁴ The Ukrainian intent to break away from Russian influence (via the EACU) by joining the EU threatened the economic interest of Russia and the economic impact that could potentially result from the loss of access to Crimea and may have played a part in Moscow's decision to annex Crimea.

Ideology and Politics

Post-Ukrainian crisis, the Russian leadership has been labelled under three main perspectives as 'revisionist Russia', 'victim Russia' and 'troublemaker Russia'.²⁵ As observed in the Clingendael Monitor 2015, '... Russia is no longer willing to accept the starting points of territorial integrity and recognition of sovereignty that crystallised in post-war Europe during the Cold War and especially in the years following the Cold War. In addition, Russia is turning its back on the West, particularly in terms of the values fostered by the EU, since these values are a potential threat to those in power in Moscow.'²⁶ Whichever the argument, there lies the motivation to reunite Ukraine under the Russian empire. Concerns over the western influence over Ukraine and her pro-Western and pro-European course is certainly cause for concern. Ukraine's keen interest in joining NATO meant that NATO's further expansion along Russia's western border could become reality and the fear of the loss of Ukraine and especially Crimea, to NATO and the West (Ukraine's Western integration) was seen as a triggering point for her subjugation of Crimea.

Opportunity: Sieze the Moment

The Euromaidan crisis in Ukraine on November 2013 provided Russian President Vladimir Putin with the opportunity to justify the use of force to annex Crimea, by condemning the transitional government in Ukraine post-Euromaidan, as illegal and extremist and to support the desire of Crimean to be in the Russian Federation.²⁷ The unrest erupted in November 2013 following Ukraine's ex-president, Mr Yanukovich's last-minute decision to reject a landmark association and trade deal with the EU in favour of a Russian bailout offer.

Reassurance

The Russian threat against Ukrainian sovereignty was present since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with most 'former Soviet satellites anxious that they might be gobbled up again without the protection of alliance'.²⁸ Over the years, most of the former Soviet states have joined NATO in an effort to establish the necessary support and protection. Ukraine is one of the last few remaining post-Soviet states yet to join NATO

or the EU. While Ukrainian society was divided between pro-West and pro-Russia sentiments, up till 2014, Ukraine still actively sought to reassure Russia by working to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties through the renewed leasing of the Sevastopol naval base, signing of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.²⁹ Notwithstanding, the events of the Euromaidan crisis led to the forming of the interim pro-EU government which threatened Russia's interests and motivated the use of force.



The largest pro-European Union protests outside Kyiv have taken place at the Taras Shevchenko monument in Lviv

Perception and Context

While Ukraine is clearly the defender and Russia the aggressor in the annexation of Crimea, the effectiveness of Ukraine's deterrence strategy may be weakened if Russia also see themselves as defending against the security threats imposed upon them should Ukraine successfully become a NATO and EU member. The stakes are high for Russia as the threat to her national security and economy hinges on Ukraine's NATO and EU membership. The implication as highlighted above could also mean losing Crimea and consequently, the strategic military basing and access to the Black Sea both economically and militarily. At the same time, Russia made opportunistic use of the Euromaidan crisis to, 'protect the rights of the Russian-speaking population in the East and South-East of Ukraine' and to support the Crimean desire for unification with Russia, as a reason for the annexation of Crimea and the establishment of military forces in Ukrainian territory.³⁰

HYBRID WARFARE AND THE INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

The Russia-Ukraine conflict saw the use of fourth generation warfare by Russia, also known as hybrid warfare. This comes in the form of unconventional, irregular warfare and tactics—the rapid concentration of regular forces at Ukraine’s border, the employment of unmarked Special Forces in Crimea, support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine, an increase in the gas price and a massive propaganda campaign that sought to obscure the events on the ground.³¹ As Peter Pindj  k describes in the NATO Review,

‘Hybrid conflicts involve multi-layered efforts designed to destabilise a functioning state and polarize its society. Unlike conventional warfare, the “centre of gravity” in hybrid warfare is a target population. The adversary tries to influence influential policy-makers and key decision makers by combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts. The aggressor often resorts to clandestine actions, to avoid attribution or retribution.’³²

The use of hybrid warfare can render deterrence by threat of force ineffective as it is ambiguous and subtle. This is due to the absence of clearly recognisable aspects associated with military and state intervention.³³ There are instances where the defender may not even realise they are being targeted or under attack.

Because hybrid warfare tactics include deploying one’s own instruments of national power to target the Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economy domains (DIME) of the defending country, it is therefore crucial to consider how strengthening the DIME framework could enhance deterrence against hybrid warfare. In addition, it is assessed that military capability is inextricably linked to the state of a country’s economy and the assessment of Ukraine’s failure to defend Crimea now arrives at the discovery that deterrence is also dependent on factors such as the strength of a country’s economy as well as how deterrence can be strengthened or weakened through the use of her instruments of national power.

Instruments of national power refers to the tools a country uses to influence other countries or international organisations or even non-state actors.³⁵ While deterrence traditionally refers to the use of military power to dissuade others from preying on a country’s territory, military might alone is not sufficient. The instruments of national power is often required to complement and strengthen the deterrence effort. It therefore makes sense to code the national deterrence strategy into a country’s DIME framework in order to exercise deterrence through the areas of Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic.

D (Diplomatic)	I (Informational)	M (Military)	E (Economic)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embassies/ Ambassadors• Recognition• Negotiations• Treaties• Policies• International forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Military information• Public diplomacy• Public affairs• Communications resources• International forums• Spokespersons, timing, media and venues for announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Military operations• Engagement, Security Coop• Show of force• Military technology• Size, composition of force	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trade policies• Fiscal and monetary policies• Embargoes• Tariffs• Assistance

Instruments of National Power³⁴

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

The factors that contribute to Ukraine's failure to deter Russia, resulting in the loss of Crimea are as follows:

(1) Lack of a capable and credible military, attributable to poor management and lack of defence budget due to weak economy, resulting in the inability to deny or punish the aggressor;

(2) Unrealistic in their dependence on external deterrence;

(3) Political instability from weak leadership and governance resulting in civil unrest, internal strife and opportunity for assault from external threats;

(4) Lack of awareness or suspicion of Russian intent due to a lack of information (or weak information management). No doubt Ukraine was fully aware of Russian interests in Crimea and even the desire for unification of the country under Russian control but they were unable to discern her motives and intentions following the Euromaidan crisis clearly enough to put in place an effective immediate deterrence policy against Russia;

(5) Underestimation of Russia's interest in Crimea and Ukraine;

(6) Challenge in deterring against hybrid warfare which requires the use of a diversity of instruments ranging from economic, social, information, political and military. As highlighted by Lebow and Stein:

*'Deterrence is most likely to fail when challengers are motivated by needs, and see these needs as expressions of vital state or political interests. . . . Leaders are far more likely to resort to force if they believe that their strategic and political problems will become more acute in the future, that the military balance will deteriorate, and that there is little or no possibility of achieving their goals through diplomacy.'*³⁶

To Russia, the imminence of Ukraine's NATO and EU membership, exacerbated by the Euromaidan crisis and hostility of the interim government, and the

perceived likelihood of the loss of the use of Crimea as a strategic base from which to defend against NATO's encroachment could mean that the cost of inaction substantially outweighs the probable cost of action. Their anti-Western sentiments—the ideation that Ukraine had been negatively influenced, coupled with the perception that this was part of a larger conspiracy theory to undermine and weaken the Russian empire—led the Russian leadership to view the events in Ukraine as a form of provocation and threat to their national interests.

Whether Moscow's actions after the annexation of Crimea—by using insurgent forces in eastern Ukraine to work with local militants to take over administrative and police buildings in various key towns—indicated an ongoing plan to take over the rest of Ukraine or served only to reinforce their defence of Crimea, remains uncertain to the international community.³⁷ In order to strengthen her deterrence strategy, Ukraine needs to expeditiously rebuild her government and economy so as to support the build-up of her military capability to adequately deter against further Russian aggression. At the same time, there is a need to strengthen her extended deterrence strategy by seeking alliance with NATO in order to leverage on her combined military strength against Russia. Alternatively, Ukraine could seek to reassure Russia by collaborating to promote joint economic growth through partnership initiatives with Russia, while at the same time pursue her NATO and EU membership interests subtly. If Russia's economic survivability was tightly integrated with Ukraine's, there will be less motivation for forceful subjugation to avoid adverse impact to their own economy.

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CONCLUSION

While deterrence traditionally refers to the use of military power to dissuade others from undermining one's sovereignty and preying on their territory, military might alone is insufficient. The instruments of national power are often required to complement and strengthen the deterrence effort through the DIME framework. It therefore makes sense to code the national deterrence strategy into a country's DIME framework and exercise deterrence through the areas of Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic. This would enable a comprehensive approach towards developing a robust security strategy for the nation. In addition, military capability, which is a critical tool for deterrence, hinges on the strength of a country's economy and national interests. Economy, social and

political stability plays an important role in strengthening deterrence. In retrospect, deterrence requires continuous effort and can only be built up over time. Resources must be invested and deliberate effort is needed to establish credibility while broadcasting clear communication. Strong leadership and cohesive government are also paramount to prevent potential aggressors from attempts to seize upon any weakness or internal conflict to gain a foothold in their expansionism goals.

Lastly, deterrence needs to evolve to counter each specific threat and must be based on a detailed profiling of the adversary.³⁸ From a deterrence viewpoint, Ukraine's loss of Crimea can be attributed to her failure to provide an adequate deterrence strategy to counter Russia's appetite for loss.

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