

***DETERRENCE THEORY AND PRACTICE***

***(DT5510)***

**SYLLABUS**

**AY 26**

**SCHOOL OF ADVANCED NUCLEAR DETERRENCE STUDIES**

**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

**AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE**

***Twenty-first Century Leaders for Twenty-first Century Challenges***

**AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE**

**MAXWELL AFB, AL**

**FOREWORD**

This syllabus for the Deterrence Theory and Practice course for the School of Advanced Nuclear Deterrence Studies (SANDS) at the Air Command and Staff College, October - December 2025, provides both an overview of the course narrative, objectives, and questions, as well as a detailed description of each lesson to assist students in their reading and preparation for lecture and seminar. Included herein is information about course methods of evaluation, the schedule, and the fulfilment of joint professional military education core goals.

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**DETERRENCE THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION/OVERVIEW**

This course is designed to introduce students to the origins and evolution of modern deterrence theory, strategy, and policy. This course traces the evolution of deterrence theory and practice from its classical origins to the modern day, with a particular focus on developing an understanding of the role and impact of nuclear weapons in and on the formation of strategy in its various forms (grand, national security, military, etc.). It provides a foundational basis in both classical and conventional deterrence theory and practice before moving to a detailed examination of modern rational deterrence theory and its various extensions and implications, including the logic of mutually assured destruction and the stability-instability paradox. The course additionally examines alternatives to rational deterrence theory, including those based in psychology and behavioral economics.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the development and evolution of modern deterrence theory, its principal alternatives, and their resultant implications.
2. Comprehend the role that nuclear weapons play in grand, national, and military strategies for the various nuclear weapons possessing states.
3. Assess the utility of nuclear weapons for in the current geostrategic environment.

**COURSE QUESTIONS**

1. What is the relationship between classical deterrence and modern deterrence theory?
2. What is rational deterrence theory? What are its principal extensions, implications, and alternatives?
3. How was US nuclear strategy and policy-making shaped by theories of influential nuclear strategists such as Thomas Schelling, Bernard Brodie, and Herman Kahn?
4. Was the introduction of nuclear weapons revolutionary in terms of national security strategy and decision-making or the conduct of international relations more broadly? How do we know?
5. What is a nuclear crisis? How is it managed?
6. How do the nuclear strategies of the other nuclear weapons-possessing states compare with that of the United States?

**COURSE ORGANIZATION AND NARRATIVE**

This course provides students with knowledge of deterrence principles and a comprehension of the thought it. Students will have the opportunity, through various case studies, to assess the basics of deterrence theory and assess the validity of the theory and evaluate if the operationalization of the theory was successful.

As this course traces the origin and evolution of both deterrence theory and practice, it is divided into multiple parts. It begins with an exploration of the foundations of modern deterrence theory, as well as its classic origins. It pays particular attention to its logic and assumptions so that students gain an understanding of the differences and similarities between classic deterrence theory and its modern variants.

The course then engages the classic writings on the subject of deterrence, including works by Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, Herman Kahn, and Robert Jervis to provide a solid knowledge of the theoretical debates that came to both dominate and define the field. Students will analyze how these theoretical ideas influenced the creation of policy since their inception and assess what role they may play, if any, in an era of strategic competition.

The course then introduces students to what Jervis termed deterrence theory’s “third wave,” which includes both tests and criticisms of rational deterrence theory. The psychological aspects of deterrence are discussed, in detail, including such concepts as cognitive bias and mirror imaging. Alternatives to the classic form of deterrence will also be evaluated, including, but not limited to, prospect theory.

The course then transitions to a broader discussion of the relationship between and influence of nuclear weapons and/on grand, national security, and military strategy. This is done in a comparative context with explorations conducted of the various nuclear weapons states; placing a particular emphasis on the great powers (USA, Russia, China).

**ACSC RESIDENT PROGRAM LEARING OUTCOMES**

ACSC produces air-minded graduates who are able to. . .

• (Apply) …demonstrate creative thinking, critical analysis, and persuasive communications in operational problem solving.

• (Apply) …demonstrate leadership and ethical decision-making based on the shared values of the profession of arms.

*-DT510 reinforces the role of leaders and the importance of ethical decision-making in lessons DTP-501, 502, 503, 504, 510, 511, and 512.*

• (Understand) …describe the capabilities, limitations, and integration of the instruments of national power across the spectrum of competition, conflict, and war, and their integration with allies and partners.

• (Analyze) …analyze operational environments marked by complexity, uncertainty, and surprise within the continuum of competition, conflict, and war.

*-DT510 requires students to formally assess how issues of complexity, uncertainty, and surprise in nuclear, conventional, and integrated operational environments to some extent in every lesson presented in the course.*

• (Apply) ...apply military theory, doctrine, strategic guidance, and joint warfighting principles to plan for all-domain, globally integrated operations.

*-DT510 requires students to formally assess relevant theories of deterrence and the strategies, posture, and doctrine both derived and informed by them in every lesson presented in the course.*

• (Understand) …explain the conduct of contemporary and emerging warfare, to include adaptation and innovation.

*-DT510 introduces students to the study and practice of contemporary and emerging warfare, with a particular focus on nuclear and integrated battlefields.*

ACSC concentrations produces graduates who, in addition to the aforementioned program learning outcomes, are able to. . .

• …develop subject matter expertise in given concentrations and/or specializations.

**JPME SPECIAL AREAS OF EMPHASIS Note: DT in bold**

1. Irregular Warfare
	1. Not addressed in this course
2. **Nuclear Capabilities and Concepts**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE
3. **Strategic Deterrence in the 21st Century**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE
4. **Data, Analytics, and Artificial Intelligence**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE
5. **Global Force Management**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE.
6. **People’s Republic of China**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE.
7. **Interagency Cooperation**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE
8. **Russia/North Korea/Iran**
	1. All lessons presented in this course address this SAE.

**ACSC RESIDENT PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES**

ACSC produces air-minded graduates who are able to:

1. (Apply) demonstrate creative thinking, critical analysis, and persuasive communications about airpower and operational problem solving;
2. (Apply) apply principles of leadership and ethics to decision-making based on the shared values of the profession of arms;
3. (Understand) apply the capabilities, limitations, and integration of the instruments of national power across the spectrum of competition, conflict, and war;
4. (Analyze) analyze operational environments marked by complexity, uncertainty, and surprise;
5. (Apply) apply military theory, doctrine, strategic guidance, and joint warfighting principles to plan for all-domain, globally integrated operations;
6. (Understand) explain the conduct of contemporary and emerging warfare.

ACSC concentrations produces graduates who, in addition to the aforementioned program learning outcomes, are able to:

1. Develop subject matter expertise in given concentration and/or specialization.

**SANDS CONCENTRATION OUTCOMES**

1. Obtain an accredited Master’s Degree
2. Obtain JPME Level 1 credit
3. Understand, Comprehend, and Apply Strategic Deterrence throughout the ROMO
4. Understand and comprehend the uniqueness of nuclear planning and operations
5. Comprehend current issues within the Nuclear Enterprise and Nuclear Stockpile

**COURSE DELIVERABLES and EVALUATION**

1. **SEMINAR PARTICIPATION (20 percent) -** Before attending seminar,students should complete all assigned readings for the day. Students are encouraged to read the explanation given in the syllabus before reading the assigned books and articles. Participation in the seminar discussions is vital to the success of the course, as it will demonstrate student knowledge and comprehension of the material; therefore, each member of the seminar is expected to contribute to the discussion. That being said, I understand that it is difficult for some to speak in class on a regular basis.  I thus think of participation more broadly.  Students can participate by speaking in class, talking to me about the course material outside of class, or even participating in the online discussion board.  I just want each student to take an active role in shaping the course.
2. **DTP-602E: MID-TERM EXAMINATION (40 percent):** There will be a take-home, open-book, open-note, examination covering the foundations of deterrence section of the course due by 23:59 on November 6, 2025. The exam will be handed out during the first day of class and will provide detailed instructions regarding length, format, and other requirements.
3. **DTP-601E: NUCLEAR STRATEGY ASSESSMENT & BRIEF (40 percent):** The second requirement of this course is an assessment of the past, present, and future of the nuclear strategies & postures of one of the nuclear weapons-possessing states (the US is only available to non-US students). Further details on this requirement will be made available on Day 7. The written portion of this assignment is due at the beginning of the last day of class and the oral brief will be conducted on the day of the class session corresponding to the students’ chosen country.

**COURSE ADMINISTRATION**

There are two types of readings in this course: 1) selections from books issued by SANDS; and 2) chapters and articles posted on canvas. To avoid confusion, the syllabus denotes all readings posted online as “**[EL]**” (“electronic”). Students can access the syllabus, course calendar, and selected readings as well as other supplemental materials online.

SANDS provides students with the following books, which do not have to be returned upon the conclusion of the course:

Adamsky, Dmitry Dima. The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War. Stanford University Press, 2023.

Bell, Mark S. *Nuclear reactions: How nuclear-armed states behave*. Cornell University Press, 2023. https://d119vjm4apzmdm.cloudfront.net/open-access/pdfs/9781501754173.pdf

Black-Branch, Jonathan L. The Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons: Legal Challenges for Military Doctrines and Deterrence Policies. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Available at https://dspace.ashoka.edu.in/bitstream/123456789/7800/1/cambridge-core\_the-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons\_28Sep2022.pdf.

Brodie, Bernard. *Strategy in the Missile Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Cunningham, Fiona S. Under the Nuclear Shadow: China’s Information-Age Weapons in International Security. Vol. 214. Princeton University Press, 2025.

Freedman, Lawrence. *Deterrence*. Cambridge*,* UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Gavin, Francis J. *Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2020.

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| Harrington, Anne I., and Jeffrey W. Knopf, eds. *Behavioral Economics and Nuclear Weapons*. University of Georgia Press, 2019. |

Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.

—. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics: New Edition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Jackson, Van. *On the Brink: Trump, Kim, and the Threat of Nuclear War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Jervis, Robert, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Kroenig, Matthew. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Lieber, Kier and Daryll Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020.

Narang, Vipin. *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Panda, Ankit. *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb: Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Rubin, Lawrence, and Adam N. Stulberg, eds. *The End of Strategic Stability?: Nuclear Weapons and the Challenge of Regional Rivalries*. Georgetown University Press, 2018.

Schelling, Thomas C. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

—. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

Sechser, Todd S., and Matthew Fuhrmann. *Nuclear weapons and coercive diplomacy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

*PART I – FOUNDATIONS OF DETERRENCE*

Day 1 – Classical Foundations of Modern Deterrence

Day 2 – Nuclear Weapons: Evolution or Revolution?

Day 3 – Rational Deterrence Theory and the Brinkmanship Game

Day 4 – The Logic of Nuclear Superiority

Day 5 – The Psychology of Deterrence

Day 6 – Behavioral Economics and Deterrence

Day 7 – Nuclear Law and Ethics

*PART II – STRATEGY & NUCLEAR WEAPONS: THEORY*

Day 8 – Nuclear Strategy, Posture, and Operations

Day 9 – Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy

Day 10– Nuclear Crises and Escalation Dynamics

Day 11 – The Why of Deterrence: Strategic Stability

Day 12 – Extended Deterrence & Assurance

*PART III – STRATEGY & NUCLEAR WEAPONS: APPLICATION*

Day 13 – Russia’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy

Day 14 – China’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy

Day 15 – Europe’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy (UK, France, NATO)

Day 16 – Regional Nuclear Powers and their Approach to Nuclear Strategy (Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea)

*PART IV – CONCLUSION*

Day 17 – Evaluating the Case for and Against Nuclear Weapons

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**DAY 1**

**DTP-501 (S) – CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN DETERRENCE**

**DATE: October 6, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the classical origins of modern deterrence theory.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-501 (S) – Classical Foundations of Modern Deterrence**

**Overview:** This lesson introduces students to classic deterrence theory, as developed by utilitarian thinkers in the mid to late eighteenth century. Students will gain exposure to the works of Cesare Beccaria and Jeremey Bentham, and in particular their writings on criminal deterrence and rational choice, in order to develop an understanding of the historical foundations of modern deterrence theory. It then introduces the logic of conventional deterrence and the various implications thereof.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Freedman, *Deterrence*, SKIM pgs. 27-74.
2. Mueller, Karl P. "Conventional Deterrence Redux: Avoiding Great Power Conflict in the 21st Century." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 76-93. **[EL]**

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Stone, John. "Conventional Deterrence and the Challenge of Credibility." *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 1 (2012): 108-123. **[EL]**
2. Haffa Jr, Robert P. "The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 94-115. **[EL]**
3. Wirtz, James J. "How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2018): 58-75. **[EL]**
4. Jacobs, Bruce A. "Deterrence and Deterrability." *Criminology* 48, no. 2 (2010): 417-441. **[EL]**
5. Piquero, Alex R., Raymond Paternoster, Greg Pogarsky, and Thomas Loughran. "Elaborating the Individual Difference Component in Deterrence Theory." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 7 (2011): 335-360. **[EL]**

**DAY 2**

**DTP-502 (S) – NUCLEAR WEAPONS: EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?**

**DATE: October 9, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the logic of the nuclear revolution argument and assess its validity in light of the historical record.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-502 (S): Nuclear Weapons: Evolution or Revolution?**

**Overview:** The introduction of atomic weapons at the end of WWII led many to speculate that the conduct of warfare might change as a result. Central among them was Bernard Brodie whose oft-cited axiom about the avoidance of war in a world in which nuclear weapons exist suggests a fundamental change in the way that strategists and policy-makers should think about the role of warfare itself. Robert Jervis extends this argument with the introduction of his “Nuclear Revolution” thesis. Daryll Press and Kier Lieber further update this argument in a recently published work. This lesson will challenge students to analyze the impact of nuclear weapons on the conduct of international relations and predict whether this effect, if found, may continue in an era of strategic competition.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, Chapter 11.
2. Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, chapter 1.
3. Lieber and Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age*, 1-119. (SKIM!!!)

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Jervis, Robert. "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 36-60. **[EL]**
2. Howard, Michael E. "On Fighting a Nuclear War." *International Security* 5, no. 4 (1981): 3-17. **[EL]**
3. Trachtenberg, Marc. "Robert Jervis and the Nuclear Question." In *Psychology, Strategy and Conflict* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 115-134. **[EL]**
4. Waltz, Kenneth N. "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities." *American Political Science Review* 84, no. 3 (1990): 730-745. **[EL]**

**DAY 3**

**DTP-503 (S) – RATIONAL DETERRENCE THEORY AND THE BRINKMANSHIP GAME**

**DATE: October 16, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the basic concepts of game theory and its application to the study of conflict.
2. Comprehend the logic and implications of rational deterrence theory.
3. Understand the governing dynamics of the brinkmanship game and its relevance to the study of nuclear strategy.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-503 (S) – Rational Deterrence Theory and the Brinkmanship Game**

**Overview:** Considered the father of rational deterrence theory, Thomas Schelling used game theory to demonstrate a unique solution to the brinkmanship game, likened to “the game of chicken.” Schelling’s solution demonstrated how something seemingly irrational, the threatening of the use of nuclear weapons, could be made rational. Students are introduced to basic concepts of game theory before moving on to a detailed discussion of the brinkmanship game and its unique solution. This segues into a discussion of rational deterrence theory and its many variations and implications.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1-125 (excluding the portion assigned during MT).
2. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 187-229.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Nalebuff, Barry. "Brinkmanship and Nuclear Deterrence: The Neutrality of Escalation." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 9, no. 2 (1986): 19-30. **[EL]**
2. Powell, Robert. "The Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Nuclear Deterrence." *Political Science Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (1985): 75-96. **[EL]**
3. Krause, Keith. ` In *Contemporary Security and Strategy*. London, UK: Palgrave, 1999, 120-149. **[EL]**

**DAY 4**

**DTP-504 (S) – THE LOGIC OF NUCLEAR SUPERIORITY**

**DATE: October 20, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the case for nuclear superiority as an approach to making deterrence threats credible.
2. Assess whether nuclear superiority should be adopted as the guiding principle for US nuclear strategy in an era of strategic competition.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-504 (S): The Logic of Nuclear Superiority**

**Overview:** Renowned scholar Robert Jervis famously assessed that US nuclear strategy as it was practiced during the Cold War was “illogical.” This lesson introduces students to a recent book by Matthew Kroenig which argues that nuclear superiority, a concept originally introduced by Herman Kahn, is the only way to guarantee the ability to manage escalation dynamics, in stark contrast to the arguments of Thomas Schelling discussed earlier in the term. Students will assess this argument in light of historical evidence and evaluate whether its veracity suggests the adoption of its principles as a guiding principle for US nuclear strategy in an age of GPC.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Kroenig, Matthew. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters*, all.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Jervis, Robert. "Why Nuclear Superiority Doesn't Matter." *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (1979): 617-633. **[EL]**
2. Blechman, Barry M., and Robert Powell. "What in the Name of God is Strategic Superiority?" *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (1982): 589-602. **[EL]**
3. Kroenig, Matthew. "Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes." *International Organization* (2013): 141-171. **[EL]**
4. McDonough, David S. "‘Nuclear Superiority’ and the Dilemmas for Strategic Stability." *Adelphi Papers* 46, no. 383 (2006): 63-84. **[EL]**

**DAY 5**

**DTP-505 (S) – THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DETERRENCE**

**DATE: October 23, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the psychological approach to deterrence decision-making.
2. Assess both its validity as an alternative theory to rational choice and its impact on policy-making in the nuclear age and predict its effect on decision-making in an era of strategic competition.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-505 (S): The Psychological Approach to Deterrence**

**Overview:** Perhaps the most well-known alternative to rational deterrence theory, the psychological approach to the study of deterrence decision-making has been a hallmark of the field for decades. Students develop an understanding of its intellectual origins as well as comprehend its more recent advances and their impact on policy-making. Then they assess both its validity as an alternative theory to rational choice and its impact on policy-making since the introduction of nuclear weapons in 1945.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, chapter 11.
2. Jervis et al., *The Psychology of Deterrence*, 1-88, 125-152.
3. Schaub, Gary. "Deterrence, Compellence, and Prospect Theory." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2004): 389-411. **[EL]**

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Maccoby, Michael. "Social Psychology of Deterrence." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 17, no. 7 (1961): 278-281. **[EL]**
2. Thayer, Bradley A. "Thinking About Nuclear Deterrence Theory: Why Evolutionary Psychology Undermines its Rational Actor Assumptions." *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 4 (2007): 311-323. **[EL]**
3. Haas, Mark L. "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis*." International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2001): 241-270. **[EL]**

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**DAY 6**

**DTP-506 (S) – BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND DETERRENCE**

**DATE: October 27, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the application of behavioral economics to deterrence decision-making.
2. Assess both its validity as an alternative theory to rational choice and its impact on policy-making in the nuclear age and predict its effect on decision-making in an era of strategic competition.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-506 (S): Behavioral Economics and Deterrence**

**Overview:** An alternative to both rational deterrence theory and psychological approaches, behavioral economics and the theories that guide it has emerged as a field that has much to say about deterrence specifically and human behavior more broadly. Students will comprehend a behavioral economic theory of deterrence and assess its validity in light of the historic record and predict its utility in crafting strategy in an era of strategic competition.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Harrington and Knopf, 1-232. (Students will divide the edited volume amongst themselves)

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Snyder, Jack L. "Rationality at the brink: The role of cognitive processes in failures of deterrence." *World Politics* 30, no. 3 (1978): 345-365.
2. Scheber, Thomas. "Evolutionary psychology, cognitive function, and deterrence." *Comparative Strategy* 30, no. 5 (2011): 453-480.
3. Berejikian, Jeffrey D. "A Cognitive Theory of Deterrence." *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 2 (2002): 165-183. **[EL]**

**DAY 7**

**DTP 507 (S) – NUCLEAR LAW AND ETHICS**

**DATE: October 30, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the legal aspects of nuclear deterrence.
2. Comprehend the ethical arguments around both the practice of deterrence and the necessity of nuclear disarmament.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-507 (S): Nuclear Law and Ethics**

**Overview:** This lesson introduces students to the legal frameworks governing, and in some instances not, the practice of nuclear deterrence and the use of nuclear weapons for security. It further introduces students to the ethical dilemmas facing policy-makers and practitioners when it comes to the practice of nuclear deterrence, as well as presenting the counter-argument against such practice by those within the nuclear abolitionist movements.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Black-Branch, Jonathan L. The Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons: Legal Challenges for Military Doctrines and Deterrence Policies. Chapters 2, 6, & 7.
2. Press, Daryl G., Scott D. Sagan, and Benjamin A. Valentino. "Atomic aversion: Experimental evidence on taboos, traditions, and the non-use of nuclear weapons." American Political Science Review 107, no. 1 (2013): 188-206. **EL**
3. Kehler, C. Robert. "Nuclear Weapons & Nuclear Use." Daedalus 145, no. 4 (2016): 50-61. **EL**
4. Nye, Joseph S. "Nuclear Ethics Revisited." Ethics & International Affairs 37, no. 1 (2023): 5-17. **EL**
5. Rathbun, Brian C., and Rachel Stein. "Greater goods: morality and attitudes toward the use of nuclear weapons." Journal of conflict resolution 64, no. 5 (2020): 787-816. **EL**
6. Pelopidas, Benoît, and Kjølv Egeland. "Thinking about What People Think about Nuclear Weapons." Security Studies 32, no. 1 (2023): 188-194.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Sheldon, Jill M. "Nuclear weapons and the laws of war: does customary international law prohibit the use of nuclear weapons in all circumstances." Fordham Int'l LJ 20 (1996): 181. **EL**
2. Abdullah, Sannia. "Nuclear Ethics? Why Pakistan Has Not Used Nuclear Weapons… Yet." The Washington Quarterly 41, no. 4 (2018): 157-173.
3. Sauer, Tom, and Mathias Reveraert. "The potential stigmatizing effect of the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons." The nonproliferation review 25, no. 5-6 (2018): 437-455.
4. Williams, Heather. "Why a nuclear weapons ban is unethical (for now) NATO and the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons initiative." The RUSI Journal 161, no. 2 (2016): 38-47.

**DAY 8**

**DTP-508 (S) – NUCLEAR STRATEGY, POSTURE, AND OPERATIONS**

**DATE: November 3, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the relationship between grand strategy and nuclear strategy.
2. Assess whether nuclear weapons facilitate different grand strategies for states that possess them than those that do not.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-508 (S): Nuclear Strategy, Posture, and Operations**

**Overview:** This lesson requires students to comprehend the relationship between grand strategy and nuclear strategy. It then asks them to assess whether the possession of nuclear weapons facilitates different grand strategies for states that possess them than those that do not. It pays particular attention to the recent work by Mark Bell and others who argue that they allow states to pursue more revisionist aims than those that do not possess them.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Lissner, Rebecca Friedman. "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield (November 2018)." *Texas National Security* Review (2018). < <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/73735/TNSRVol2Issue1_Lissner.pdf?sequence=2>>
2. Bell, Mark S. "Beyond emboldenment: How acquiring nuclear weapons can change foreign policy." *International Security* 40, no. 1 (2015): 87-119.
3. Bell, Mark S. "Nuclear opportunism: A theory of how states use nuclear weapons in international politics." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42, no. 1 (2019): 3-28.
4. Robinson, Todd C., and James Platte. "Nuclear armed aggressor or ultimate doomsday prepper? Assessing the grand strategy of a nuclear-armed North Korea." *Comparative Strategy* 40, no. 3 (2021): 315-335.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Cohen, Michael D. "Fear and Loathing: When Nuclear Proliferation Emboldens." *Journal of Global Security* Studies 3, no. 1 (2018): 56-71.
2. Narang, Neil, and Rupal N. Mehta. "The unforeseen consequences of extended deterrence: Moral hazard in a nuclear client state." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 1 (2019): 218-250.

**DAY 9**

**DTP-509 (S) – NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND COERCIVE DIPLOMACY**

**DATE: November 6, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the argument of the utility, or lack thereof, of nuclear weapons in the practice of coercive diplomacy.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-509 (S): Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy**

**Overview:** This lesson requires students to comprehend the argument of the utility, or lack thereof, of nuclear weapons in the practice of coercive diplomacy to determine whether they have benefits beyond that of deterrence alone, either for the US or the other nuclear-weapons possessing states.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Sechser, Todd S., and Matthew Fuhrmann. *Nuclear weapons and coercive diplomacy*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. ALL.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Jervis, Robert. "Getting to Yes With Iran: The Challenges of Coercive Diplomacy." *Foreign Affairs*. 92 (2013): 105.
2. Avey, Paul C. "MAD and Taboo: US Expert Views on Nuclear Deterrence, Coercion, and Non-Use Norms." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 2 (2021).

**DAY 10**

**DTP-510 (S) –NUCLEAR CRISES & ESCALATION DYNAMICS**

**DATE: November 10, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend what constitutes a nuclear crisis.
2. Comprehend the theoretical underpinnings of nuclear escalation, including such key concepts as escalation management, control, and dominance.
3. Analyze examples of escalatory behavior (Kargil Crisis & the 2017 US-DPRK Nuclear Crisis).

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-510 (S): Nuclear Crises & Escalation Dynamics**

**Overview:** Perhaps the principal concern of the great powers during the Cold War was how to prevent escalation by either party to the level of nuclear weapons use while simultaneously signaling a willingness to do so if necessary. This dynamic gave rise to a vast literature on how to both manage and take advantage of crisis escalation. This lesson provides students a comprehension of the underlying dynamics of escalation and nuclear crises, before moving on to a discussion of how these concepts may apply in an era of strategic competition.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Bell, Mark S., and Julia Macdonald. "How to Think About Nuclear Crises (February 2019)." *Texas National Security Review* (2019). < https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/74831/TNSRVol2Issue2\_Bell-Macdonald.pdf?sequence=2>
2. Sechser, Todd S., and Matthew Fuhrmann. "Crisis bargaining and nuclear blackmail." *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013): 173-195.
3. Bell, Mark S., and Julia Macdonald. "How Dangerous Was Kargil? Nuclear Crises in Comparative Perspective." *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2019): 135-148.
4. Jackson, Van, On the Brink, Chapters 4&5.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Trachtenberg, Marc. "The influence of nuclear weapons in the Cuban missile crisis." *International Security* 10, no. 1 (1985): 137-163.
2. Powell, Robert. "Crisis stability in the nuclear age." *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 1 (1989): 61-76.

**DAY 11**

**DTP-511 (S) – THE WHY OF DETERRENCE: STRATEGIC STABILITY**

**DATE: November 17, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the concept of strategic stability as the outcome of successful deterrence.
2. Assess its continued validity as a concept and its changing meaning in an era of strategic competition.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTP-511 (S): Strategic Stability**

**Overview:** Deterrence is often treated as an end unto itself, yet this ignores the fact that it is a means, rather than an end. During the Cold War, the goal of deterrence was the maintenance of what has been termed “strategic stability.” This lesson will introduce students to this important concept as it was developed in the Cold War period before moving on to the presentation of a more modern approach to strategic stability where escalation occurs not in ladders, but in wormholes. And not just in a given domain, but potentially across them.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Robinson, Todd, *Seeking (in)Stability in an (in)Stable World*, draft manuscript

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

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| --- |
| 1. Nitze, Paul H. "Assuring strategic stability in an era of détente." *Foreign Affairs* 54, no. 2 (1976): 207-232.
2. Yost, David S. “Strategic stability in the Cold War: Lessons for continuing challenges.” NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY CA, 2011. < <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA557632.pdf>>
3. Altmann, Jürgen, and Frank Sauer. "Autonomous weapon systems and strategic stability." *Survival* 59, no. 5 (2017): 117-142.
4. Wilkening, Dean. "Hypersonic weapons and strategic stability." *Survival* 61, no. 5 (2019): 129-148.
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**DTP-512 (S) – EXTENDED DETERRENCE & ASSURANCE**

**DATE: November 20, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the dual logics of extended deterrence and assurance and the relationship between them.
2. Review the United States’ policy of extending nuclear umbrellas and its place in US foreign policy.
3. Assess the continuing utility of extended deterrence and assurance agreements as a tool of US foreign policy in an era of strategic competition.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-512 (S): Extended Deterrence and Assurance**

**Overview:** This seminar asks students to understand and comprehend the dual logics of extended deterrence and assurance and the relationship between them. For the former, the lesson explores the question of whether deterrence can be extended and what it means, in both a theoretical and strategic sense, to do so. Students are additionally asked to assess whether extended deterrence relationships still have a place in the era of strategic competition. For the latter, students will explore the logic of nuclear assurance from both a theoretical and practical/historical perspective.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Huth, Paul K. "The Extended Deterrent Value of Nuclear Weapons." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34, no. 2 (1990): 270-290. **[EL]**
2. McManus, Roseanne W. "Making it Personal: The Role of Leader-Specific Signals in Extended Deterrence." *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 3 (2018): 982-995. **[EL]**
3. Narang, Neil, and Rupal N. Mehta. "The Unforeseen Consequences of Extended Deterrence: Moral Hazard in a Nuclear Client State." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 1 (2019): 218-250. **[EL]**
4. Fuhrmann, Matthew, and Todd S. Sechser. "Signaling Alliance Commitments: Hand‐Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence." *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 4 (2014): 919-935. **[EL]**
5. Roehrig, Terence. "The US Nuclear Umbrella over South Korea: Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence." *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 4 (2017): 651-685. **[EL]**

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Huth, Paul K. "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War." *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (1988): 423-443. **[EL]**
2. Danilovic, Vesna. "The Sources of Threat Credibility in Extended Deterrence." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (2001): 341-369. **[EL]**

*PART III – STRATEGY & NUCLEAR WEAPONS: APPLICATION*

**DAY 13**

**DTP-513 (S) – RUSSIA’S APPROACH TO NUCLEAR STRATEGY**

**DATE: December 1, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend Russia’s approach to nuclear strategy.
2. Assess whether US strategy mirrors or diverges from Russian nuclear strategy, both historically and in a modern context.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-513 (S): Russia’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy in an Era of Strategic Competition**

**Overview:** What role do nuclear weapons play in the grand strategy of Russia? What differences and similarities exist between how Russia thinks about nuclear weapons when compared to the US? This lesson introduces students to a number of authors that have sought to answer these questions and to address, in a robust way, how US nuclear and conventional military strategy should be shaped to address the threat posed by Russia’s nuclear arsenal in an era of strategic competition.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Adamsky, Dmitry, The Russian Way of Deterrence, ALL.
2. Smetana, Michal, and Michal Onderco. "From Moscow with a mushroom cloud? Russian public attitudes to the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict with NATO." Journal of Conflict Resolution 67, no. 2-3 (2023): 183-209.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Sienkiewicz, Stanley. "SALT and Soviet Nuclear Doctrine." *International Security* 2, no. 4 (1978): 84-100. **[EL]**
2. Adamsky, Dmitry. “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy,” *Proliferation Papers* 54, November 2015. **[EL]**
3. Adamsky, Dmitry. "Nuclear Incoherence: Deterrence Theory and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014): 91-134. **[EL]**
4. Ven Bruusgaard, Kristin. “Russian Strategic Deterrence,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 58, no. 4 (2016): 7-26. **[EL]**
5. Ven Bruusgaard, Kristin. "Russian Nuclear Strategy and Conventional Inferiority." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2020): 1-33. **[EL]**
6. Schneider, Mark B. "Russian Nuclear “De-escalation” of Future War." *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 5 (2018): 361-372. **[EL]**
7. Kroenig, Matthew. *A Strategy for Deterring Russian Nuclear De-Escalation Strikes*. Washington, D.C. : Atlantic Council, 2018. **[EL]**

**DAY 14**

**DTP-514 (S) – CHINA’S APPROACH TO NUCLEAR STRATEGY**

**DATE: December 4, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend China’s approach to nuclear strategy.
2. Assess whether US strategy mirrors or diverges from Chinese nuclear strategy, both historically and in a modern context.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-514 (S): China’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy**

**Overview:** What role do nuclear weapons play in the grand strategy of China? What differences and similarities exist between how China thinks about nuclear weapons when compared to the US? This lesson asks students to comprehend China’s nuclear strategy and assess whether it mirrors or diverges from that of the US and Russia.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Fiona Cunningham, Chinese Strategy in the Info Age, ALL.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Roy D. Kamphausen ed., “Modernizing Deterrence: How China Coerces, Compels, and Deters,” National Bureau of Asian Research (Feb. 16, 2023) ALL <https://www.nbr.org/publication/modernizing-deterrence-how-china-coerces-compels-and-deters/>
2. Talmadge, Caitlin. "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States." *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 50-92. **[EL]**
3. Cunningham, Fiona S., and M. Taylor Fravel. "Assuring Assured Retaliation: China's Nuclear Posture and US-China Strategic Stability." *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 7-50. **[EL]**
4. Fravel, M. Taylor, and Evan S. Medeiros. "China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of Chinese Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure." *International Security* 35, no. 2 (2010): 48-87. **[EL]**
5. Riqiang, Wu. "Certainty of Uncertainty: Nuclear Strategy with Chinese Characteristics." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 579-614. **[EL]**
6. Schneider, Mark. "The Nuclear Doctrine and Forces of the People's Republic of China." *Comparative Strategy* 28, no. 3 (2009): 244-270. **[EL]**
7. Lewis, John W., and Xue Litai. "Making China’s Nuclear War Plan." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 68, no. 5 (2012): 45-65. **[EL]**

**DAY 15**

**DTP-515 (S) – EUROPE’S APPROACH TO NUCLEAR STRATEGY**

**DATE: December 8, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the nuclear strategies of the UK and France and how they have evolved in response to the new geostrategic environment.
2. Comprehend the NATO nuclear mission.
3. Assess the likelihood and possible outcomes of changes in NATO’s nuclear strategy, posture, and operations in the new strategic environment.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-515 (S): Europe’s Approach to Nuclear Strategy**

**Overview:** This lesson will introduce the students to the nuclear strategies of the UK, France, and NATO. It will explore how each has evolved in response to the rapidly changing geostrategic environment. It will then require the students to assess whether and how it should continue to evolve to meet future challenges.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Egeland, Kjølv, and Benoît Pelopidas. "European nuclear weapons? Zombie debates and nuclear realities." European Security 30, no. 2 (2021): 237-258.
2. Reif, Kingston, and Shannon Bugos. "UK to increase cap on nuclear warhead stockpile." Arms Control Today 51, no. 3 (2021): 18-19.
3. Horovitz, Liviu, and Lydia Wachs. "France's nuclear weapons and Europe: Options for a better coordinated deterrence policy." (2023): 7.
4. Von Hlatky, Stéfanie, and Émile Lambert-Deslandes. "The Ukraine War and nuclear sharing in NATO." International Affairs 100, no. 2 (2024): 509-530.
5. Egeland, Kjølv. "Spreading the burden: How NATO became a ‘nuclear’ alliance." Diplomacy & Statecraft 31, no. 1 (2020): 143-167.
6. Verstraete, Wannes. "Why emerging and disruptive capabilities are a mixed blessing for NATO as a nuclear alliance." Defense & Security Analysis (2024): 1-14.

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

**DAY 16**

**DTP-516 (S) – REGIONAL NUCLEAR POWERS AND THEIR APPROACH TO NUCLEAR STRATEGY**

**DATE: December 11, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend the role that nuclear weapons play in the strategies of so-called “regional” nuclear powers.
2. Assess whether these strategies and their associated posture and operations reflect or diverge from those of the so-called “legacy” nuclear weapons states.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-516 (S): Regional Nuclear Powers and their Approach to Nuclear Strategy**

**Overview:** What role do nuclear weapons play in the strategies of Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea? What role might nuclear weapons play for Iran if it decides to acquire them? This lesson will ask students to comprehend the past, present, and future of the so-called “regional” nuclear powers to determine whether they are similar or dissimilar to those of the “legacy” nuclear states.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Bar, Shmuel. "Israeli strategic deterrence doctrine and practice." Comparative Strategy 39, no. 4 (2020): 321-353.
2. Ben Levi, Raphael. "The evolution and future of Israeli nuclear ambiguity." The Nonproliferation Review (2023): 1-23.
3. Narang, Vipin. “India’s nuclear strategy twenty years later: From reluctance to maturation.” India Review 17, no. 1 (2018): 159-179.
4. Anderson, Robert S. "Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence." Pacific Affairs 89, no. 1 (2016): 215-217.
5. Noor, Sitara. "Pakistan’s evolving nuclear doctrine." Arms Control Today 53, no. 8 (2023): 12-17.
6. Klingner, Bruce. "The Troubling New Changes to North Korea’s Nuclear Doctrine." Heritage Foundation Backgrounder 3729 (2022): 2.
7. Narang, Vipin, and Ankit Panda. "North Korea: Risks of Escalation." In Survival: Global Politics and Strategy (February-March 2020): Deterring North Korea, pp. 47-53. Routledge, 2023.
8. Kahl, Colin H., and Kenneth N. Waltz. “Iran and the Bomb: Would a Nuclear Iran Make the Middle East More Secure?” Foreign Affairs. 91 (2012): 157.

**DAY 17**

**DTPI-517 (S) – EVALUATING THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

**DATE: December 16, 2025**

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

1. Comprehend alternative histories that may challenge the impact of the role of nuclear weapons in Cold War history.
2. Assess whether and to what extent our incomplete understanding of the effects of nuclear weapons, as Gavin claims is the case, should impact future US nuclear strategy and policy-making.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

**DTPI-517 (S): Evaluating the Case For and Against Nuclear Weapons**

**Overview:** Francis Gavinargues that scholarly and popular understanding of many key issues about nuclear weapons is incomplete at best and wrong at worst. Among these important, misunderstood issues are: how nuclear deterrence works; whether nuclear coercion is effective; how and why the United States chose its nuclear strategies; why countries develop their own nuclear weapons or choose not to do so; and, most fundamentally, whether nuclear weapons make the world safer or more dangerous.

*CONTACT HOURS: 3.0-hour seminar*

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Gavin, Francis J. *Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy*, Chapter 3.
2. Mueller, John. "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World." *International Security* 13, no. 2 (1988): 55-79. **[EL]**
3. Wilson, Ward. "The Myth of Nuclear Deterrence." *Nonproliferation Review* 15, no. 3 (2008): 421-439. **[EL]**
4. Robinson, Todd, “The Myth and Meaning of Nuclear Deterrence,” working paper

**SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

1. Gavin, Francis J., James B. Steinberg, Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller. "The Vision Thing: Is Grand Strategy Dead?" *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (2020): 187-195. **[EL]**
2. Gavin, Francis J. "Strategies of Inhibition: US Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation." *International Security* 40, no. 1 (2015): 9-46. **[EL]**