SS491: International Affairs Senior Project

Course Overview

Course Description:

Welcome to SS491: International Affairs (IA) Senior Project! This course will serve as the culmination of your education and experience as an IA major at West Point, providing a unique experience to develop a research project—in teams—that address important questions for the US military’s primary tool for deterrence and assurance: US Strategic Command (STRATCOM). The mission of STRATCOM is to, “deter strategic attack and employ forces, as directed, to guarantee the security of our Nation and our Allies.”¹ We will be working with STRATCOM’s “Deterrence and Assurance Academic Alliance,” which is the organization’s initiative to develop an academic community that encourages students to “advance deterrence and assurance thinking beyond Cold War era narratives,” and “stimulate rigorous academic research into deterrence, assurance, and other concepts of strategic thought for the 21st century.”² Therefore, STRATCOM will serve as the “client” for our research projects and the course will be focused on three core topics of interest to the organization: great power competition, deterrence, and assurance.

The goal of the course is to provide a venue for 3-5-person teams to develop research papers and presentations that answer one of STRATCOM's research questions (listed in Annex B). Teams will present their findings and submit their research papers to STRATCOM at the end of the semester. In pursuit of this goal, every assignment for this class will serve as building blocks toward the final paper and presentation. Individual lessons will be focused on either topical issues or research methods.

As a capstone course, this class requires students to demonstrate initiative, critical thinking, teamwork, and diligence toward developing a suitable research paper for a preeminent military organization. Students will harness the tools of political science, international relations, and comparative politics learned over the course of his or her academic career to offer insight and policy recommendations grounded in sound theory and methods. Roughly two-thirds of the course is devoted to in-depth readings and analysis of theories of great power competition, deterrence, and assurance, while about one-third of the course is designed to allow students the space and structure to conduct research and develop the paper and presentation.

Course Objectives

1. **Think and Read Critically**: This course will encourage you to approach questions of strategy and policy from a theoretical and evidence-based perspective. In order to think clearly about vital topics such as great power competition and deterrence, you must question and explore the logic of current and

historic approaches to strategy using your knowledge of international relations theory and other relevant fields of academic inquiry.

2. **Conduct Research:** In order to evaluate policies and develop recommendations for US strategy, students will apply political science research methods. The course will provide structured time to review and sharpen students’ understanding of methods, which will build a greater appreciation for the usefulness of a systemic approach at policy and strategy analysis.

3. **Develop Theoretically-Informed Policy Recommendations:** The goal of the capstone project is to answer an important question for STRATCOM. Toward that end, the research papers and presentations will provide useful insights and recommendations to guide STRATCOM’s approach to great power competition, deterrence, and assurance.

4. **Work and Communicate in Effective Teams:** As future Army officers that will lead soldiers and partner with other armies and agencies, it is vital that students combine critical thinking with team dynamics. Developing research in teams is challenging, but the final products will be far superior to any individually-developed projects. Seventy-Five percent of the course points are allocated to team projects, to include the vast majority of the final research paper “building blocks” and the presentation.

**Requirements**

**Grading Scale**

The following grade scale will be used to assess cadet work:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>QP</th>
<th>Subjective Interpretation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97.0-100.0</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>Above standards of writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.0-96.9</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Mastery of concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0-92.9</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>Applies concepts to new situations</td>
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<td>Proficiency</td>
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<td>87.0-89.9</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>Meets standards of writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>83.0-86.9</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Solid understanding of concepts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0-82.9</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>Strong foundation for future work</td>
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<td>Passing</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77.0-79.9</td>
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<td>Acceptable understanding of concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Below Standard</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0-72.9</td>
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<td>Failed understanding of concepts</td>
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**Graded Assignments**

The course is worth 1,000 points, evaluated as either individual or team assignments; details for assignments are located in Annex A and B. Each written assignment is due before 2400 on Blackboard:

- Two Response Papers (Individual, 100 points total, 50 points each)
- Research Question (Individual, 50 points): 28 January 2020
- Literature Review and Revised Question (Team, 150 points): 17 February 2020
- Revised Literature Review and Research Design Section (Team, 50 points): 26 February 2020
Course Readings

The vast majority of readings will be excerpts from scholarly books and journals, which will be made available by the instructor on Blackboard. Students are authorized to use their computers during class to read these documents and to take notes. The only hard-copy book in which you are required to purchase is:

Course Material and Assigned Lesson Readings

Block 1: Great Power Competition

LSN 1: Introduction and Overview (Thursday, 9 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** Introduce students to the course, create teams, discuss syllabus and course expectations, and conduct overview of great power competition, deterrence, and assurance.

- **Readings**
  - SS491 Syllabus
  - Introduction to the 2017 US National Security Strategy
  - Summary of the 2018 US National Defense Strategy
  - Mazarr- “This is Not a Great-Power Competition: Why the Term Doesn’t Capture Today’s Reality” (2019)

LSN 2: Theory and Research Methods in IR (Monday, 13 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objective Questions:** Is theory necessary in International Relations (IR)? What separates the main theoretical traditions in IR? Do we need these theoretical traditions? What are the major steps in the research process? What methods are available to conduct research in IR and political science more generally?

- **Readings**
  - Roselle and Spray (2019)- Part I and Chapter 1 (pgs. 1-26)
  - Lake- “Why Ism’s are Evil” (2011) (excerpt)

LSN 3: Power (Thursday, 16 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objective Questions:** What are the different conceptions of “power” in international relations? Given these definitions of power, how powerful are the US, China, and Russia in contemporary politics?

- **Readings**

LSN 4: Great Power Competition: Structural Factors 1 (Tuesday, 21 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What causes competition in international politics? What are the sources of alliance formation? Why do alliances sometimes fail to form? Can we apply traditional IR theories of alliance formation to great power politics today?

- **Readings**
  - Christensen and Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks” (1991) (excerpt)
  - Gregory and Sherlock, “How Russia and China View Each Other and America: The Perceptions of Students at Elite Universities” (2019)
  - Wishnick- “In Search of the ‘Other’ in Asia: Russia-China Relations Revisited” (2017)
LSN 5: Great Power Competition: Structural Factors 2 (Friday, 24 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** Why do we fear great power transition? Is the US today in relative decline to other great powers? If so, does the US have options to manage this decline? Or, is the conventional wisdom on power great power transition incorrect? What does the historical record say?
- **Readings**

LSN 6: Research Workshop 1: Puzzle/Question Development (JH301, Tuesday, 28 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objective:** As individual students, develop a research question and research proposal. Due by 2400 on Blackboard.
- **Readings**
  - Roselle and Spray (2019)- Chapter 2

*LSN 7: Great Power Competition: Domestic Factors 1 (Thursday, 30 JAN 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** How do domestic factors affect great power competition? What are the sources of a great power’s foreign policy? Why have great powers failed to effectively balance other great powers in the past? What does German, French, and British domestic behavior on the eve of World War I teach us about the role of nationalism in competition? How should these lessons guide US foreign policy?
- **Readings**

*LSN 8: Great Power Competition: Structural Factors 3 (w/ Dr. Margulies) (Tuesday, 4 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What are the non-material explanations for great power competition? How does German behavior prior to World War I suggest ideational factors for great power competition? Do great powers today only seek security, or other non-material goals? If great powers seek non-material goals, what are the implications for US grand strategy?
- **Readings**
  - Murray- “Identity and Insecurity” (2010) (excerpt)

LSN 9: Great Power Competition: Domestic Factors 2 (Thursday, 6 FEB 2020) (IPR #1)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** How do nationalism and culture affect great power competition? How does Chinese public opinion affect China’s foreign policy and interactions with the US? Is the same true in Russia? Is public opinion a source of caution or catalyst for aggression?
- **Readings**
  - Sherlock- “Russian Society and Foreign Policy: Mass and Elite Orientations After Crimea” (2019)
*LSN 10: Great Power Competition: Domestic Factors 3 (Monday, 10 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is the impact of bureaucracies and organizations on the behavior of great powers? Do the interests of bureaucrats and organizations align with the “national interest”? What was the role of these actors in the Cuban Missile Crisis? How do militaries view great power relations and how does this behavior shed light on the causes of World War I?
- **Readings**

*LSN 11: Research Workshop 2: Literature Review and Research Question Refinement (JH301, Friday, 14 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, develop a literature review and revised research question. Due by 2400 on Blackboard.
- **Readings**
  - Roselle and Spray (2019)- Chapter 3

**Block 2: Deterrence**

*LSN 12: Deterrence 1: Concepts (Wednesday, 19 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is deterrence and how do great power exercise deterrence? What is the difference between different types of deterrence: conventional, nuclear, extended, general, and immediate? What was the role of nuclear weapons during the Cold War? What is the impact of nuclear weapons on great power competition and the likelihood of war today?
- **Readings**

*LSN 13: Research Workshop 3: Research Design (JH301, Friday, 21 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, develop a research design by describing the research question, variables, hypothesis, and research method. Due by 2400 on Blackboard.
- **Readings**
  - Roselle and Spray- Chapter 4
LSN 14: Deterrence 2: Rational Theories (Tuesday, 25 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is rational deterrence theory and what are the assumptions? What makes deterrence successful (in theory) and has deterrence been successful in the past? What are some of the challenges with studying deterrence? What is the relationship between deterrence and “hybrid war,” and how does this type of competition affect US-Russian relations?

- **Readings**
  - Jervis- “Rational Deterrence Theory” (1989) (excerpt)
  - Lanoszka- “Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe,” (2016) (excerpt)

LSN 15: Deterrence 3: Credibility and Reputation; Sanctions (Thursday, 27 FEB 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is credibility and does it affect the success of deterrence? Do great powers assess credibility based on reputation? Was German behavior prior to World War II based on an assessment of credibility? If credibility matters, what are the implications for great power competition? Are economic sanctions an effective tool of great power competition?

- **Readings**
  - Weisiger and Yahri-Milo- “Revisiting Reputation” (2015) (excerpt)
  - Ashford- “Not So Smart Sanctions: The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia” (2016)

LSN 16: (Drop for Research) Deterrence 4: Psychological and Neurological Theories (Tuesday, 3 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What are the main critiques of rational deterrence theory? How do psychological biases undermine rationality? How does psychology explain British behavior during the Falklands War? Do statesmen get “emotional?” How did emotion affect US and Iraqi perceptions in 2002-2003?

- **Readings**

LSN 17: Deterrence 5: Nuclear Escalation (Thursday, 5 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is escalation? What do great powers gain by threatening escalation? Are there opportunities to de-escalate? Could political crises or conventional war escalate to nuclear war? Would the US, China, or Russia escalate differently? What is the role of misperceptions in escalation?

- **Readings**
  - Kahn- *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (1965) (excerpt)
LSN 18: **(IPR #2 w/ STRATCOM)** Deterrence 6: Offense-Defense Theory and Net Assessment (Tuesday, 17 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is the Offense-Defense Balance and how does it relate to net assessments? How do militaries and policymakers measure the balance? What are the assumptions of these types of assessments? Is the balance useful for predicting the causes (or outcome) of war? Should the US today use net assessment as a tool to predict Chinese or Russian behavior?
- **Readings**

LSN 19: Research Workshop 4: Case Study Development (**JH301**, Thursday, 19 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, conduct research and develop a case study or case study comparison to test the hypothesis in the research design. Due by 2400 on Blackboard.
- **Readings**

**Block 3: Assurance**

LSN 20: Assurance 1: Concepts and Practices (Tuesday, 24 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is assurance and its different variants (positive assurance, negative assurance, reassurance, non-proliferation-related assurance)? What is the relationship between assurance and deterrence? In what ways has the US assured its allies? Have these measures been effective?
- **Readings**

LSN 21: Assurance 2: Alliance Politics (Thursday, 26 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** Are allies a net benefit to the US? What are some of the benefits of alliances? What are some of the potential negative consequence of providing security commitments to allies? Have allies been a net gain or net detriment to US security? How does allies affect US relations with China and Russia?
- **Readings**
  - Wohlforth, Brooks, and Ikenberry- “Don't Come Home America” (2012) (excerpt)
LSN 22: (Drop for Research) Assurance 3: Nuclear Proliferation and Prevention (Monday, 30 MAR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** Why does the US seek to prevent other states from acquiring nuclear weapons, even if it allies? What are the ways in which the US prevents proliferation? Why did the US withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and what is the future of nuclear competition among the great powers? Is a great power war (with nuclear weapons) imaginable?
- **Readings**
  - 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (excerpt)
  - Gavin- “Strategies of Inhibition” (2015) (excerpt)

LSN 23: Assurance 4: “Reassurance” and Adversaries (Friday, 3 APR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives Questions:** What is the logic of “reassurance” as a strategy to manage competition with adversaries? What are the ways in which states have used strategies of reassurance to reduce competition? What technologies or other structural conditions cause reassurance to be more or less effective? Should the US apply this strategy in its relations with China or Russia; if so, how?
- **Readings**

**Block 4: Final Project Preparation**

Tues

LSN 24: Research Workshop 5: Paper Draft Development (JH301, Tuesday, 7 APR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, develop a final draft of the research paper by combining and improving the other research building blocks from the course.
- **Readings**
  - Roselle and Spray (2019)- Chapter 5

LSN 25: Research Workshop 6: Peer Review Papers (JH301, Friday, 10 APR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** Teams will read each other’s papers and provide constructive feedback during class.

LSN 26: Submit Final Paper (Drop, Tuesday, 14 APR 2020)

- **Lesson Objectives:** Submit the final paper by 2400 on Blackboard.

LSN 27: Research Workshop 7: Create Research Presentation (Thursday, 16 APR 2020)
• **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, create a research presentation using PowerPoint or another visual display.

• **Readings**

* Drop on Tuesday, 21 APR 2020 to Develop Research Presentation

LSN 28: Final Research Presentation Rehearsal (Friday, 24 APR 2020)

• **Lesson Objectives:** As teams, rehearse the research presentation and entertain questions from the class.

LSN 29: Projects Days Presentation (Thursday, 30 APR 2020)

LSN 30: Publishing, AAR, and Closeout (Tuesday, 5 MAY 2020)

• **Lesson Objectives:** Discuss potential avenues for publishing and conduct an AAR of the projects day presentation and the course in general.

• **Readings**
  - American University- “Publication Opportunities for Undergraduate Research,” https://www.american.edu/sis/undergrad/research/publication.cfm
Annex A: Graded Assignment Guidelines

- **Research Question** (Individual, 50 points)
  - 2-3 pages, double spaced. Select the general STRATCOM research question, describe a more specific research question (and using evidence to support why you think it’s important for STRATCOM to understand), select initial variables (and how they will be measured), and develop an initial hypothesis.

- **Literature Review and Revised Question** (Team, 150 points)
  - 6-8 pages, double-spaced. State the initial research question. Then, develop a literature review that summarizes and reports the findings of major scholarly works that engage your question, organized into “groups” or “camps.” You will need to analyze not only some of the literature covered in class, but also books and scholarly articles beyond the syllabus that more directly engage your topic. The review should clarify concepts, assumptions, theories, and methods to reveal how the major works diverge. Identify strengths, weaknesses, shortcomings, and conflicts in the current literature on your topic. Do the major works disagree over which theory is most persuasive in explaining an outcome, how to define a certain concept, or the method most appropriate for testing? What does the literature not tell us or fail to explain? Finally, develop a refined research question based on the “gaps” in the literature.

- **Research Design Section** (Team, 50 points)
  - 2-3 pages, double spaced. State your refined research question, describe your variables (and how you measure them), develop an initial hypothesis, and propose a research method (most likely a single case study or case study comparison) for testing your hypothesis.

- **Casey Study and Results Section** (Team, 150 points)
  - 10-15 pages, double spaced. Develop a single case study or case study comparison that serves as a test for your hypothesis. If you select a case study comparison, the values of the variables (IV or DV) should vary for each case and you should engage with any alternative explanations for the outcome. If you select a single case, you must propose at least two alternative explanations for the outcome and describe what the “counterfactual” outcome would have been. This case study should not only describe the events and/or decision-making that led to a certain outcome, but also identify why this case was selected, how the variables are being measured, and whether this case provides evidence in support of or against the hypothesis.

- **Final Research Paper with Policy Recommendations** (Team, 200 points)
  - 32-40 pages, double spaced (approximately 8,000 to 10,000 words excluding footnotes and Works Cited). The final paper integrates all the “building block” assignments above; however, the paper’s organization and writing style is re-configured to create a seamless single research paper. Additionally, the final paper will include a “policy recommendations” section to provide useable information for STRACOM. Include an abstract of 150-200 words at the beginning.

- **Research Presentation** (Team, 200 points)
  - The research presentation will delivered in either Powerpoint or a poster-board format. The presentation will be evaluated in substance (effectively delivery of the research question, literature review, research design, case study, alternative explanations, results, and policy recommendations), as well as style.

- **Class Participation** (Individual, 100 points)
  - Class participation is evaluated on the student’s preparation for class and thoughtful contributions to class discussion and the assignments.
Annex B: Response Paper Format

- **Response Papers** (Individual, 100 points total, 50 points each)

The purpose of these papers is to encourage a thorough analysis of the readings, enhance note taking skills, and promote informed and active discussion. During each lesson, we will look to cadets who wrote papers for that day to play an especially active role. We will also use your discussion questions to help guide our seminar sessions.

**On Lesson 3, you will sign up for two lessons for which you must submit discussion papers.**

Discussion paper format will be the following:

(Cadet Name)

Lesson:

Topic:

1. **Author’s (Authors’) Central Question(s):**
   - Should be phrased as a question.
   - Should be a question for each assigned reading.

2. **Brief Summary of the Argument(s):**
   - Should be a brief summary for each assigned reading.
   - Approximately a paragraph.

3. **Analysis and Critique:**
   - Here you may address what you see as insightful points in the readings as well as reasons that you might have to be skeptical (logic, evidence, etc.) This should be approximately two to three paragraphs.
   - If there are multiple articles with competing points of view, this section should synthesize, compare, and contrast the articles.
   - This section may also be used to relate the readings for this lesson to other readings or concepts in the course.

4. **Proposed Discussion Questions for Class:**
   - List three (separate from the lesson objective questions listed on the syllabus)

Discussion papers should be approximately three pages long, double-spaced. Document your work IAW the standards set forth in the Dean’s *Documentation of Academic Work* being sure to document course texts as well as other sources. **Upload the paper to Blackboard NLT 0800 the morning of the lesson.**
Annex C: Questions from STRATCOM

a) Threat assessment has traditionally focused on adversary intentions and capabilities (i.e., Threat = Intent + Capability), reliant more on the latter to determine the former. In addition to these factors, how does introduction of adversary will into the threat equation change the focus of strategic threat assessment, and consequently understanding adversaries from a deterrence perspective?

b) What is the future of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and what should be the U.S. course if it is dissolved? What challenges will dissolution pose to deterrence and assurance priorities?

c) The President, Secretary of Defense, and Commander of USSTRATCOM have each been quoted as stating “space is a warfighting domain.” What does this imply for national security strategy? What changes in national- and Department of Defense-level organization, policy & guidance, and doctrine should follow from these statements?

d) Do improvements in U.S. and allied missile defenses actually drive modernization of Russian and Chinese strategic forces, or are they a convenient excuse? Explain.

e) Given such huge disparities in nuclear weapon and delivery system numbers, is there actually a viable mechanism for multilateral strategic arms control agreements that could be acceptable to all parties? What would actually motivate states other than Russia and the U.S. from joining such an agreement?

f) What are true “Grey Zones?” How should the U.S. employ operations, activities, and investments to achieve strategic deterrence objectives in and through “Grey Zones?”

g) Defined as “conflicts that fall outside of the traditional peace-or-war construct,” so-called “gray zone” warfare challenges “traditional views of war,” and thus how such aggression can be traditionally addressed. Are there deterrence solutions to “gray zone” challenges? Explain. What are the most effective ways the U.S. can offer partners/allies to build deterrence capacity and resilience against “gray zone” aggression – especially in situations where traditional U.S. military intervention is not perceived as credible?

h) How might familiarity with adversary “master narratives” optimize kinetic targeting and/or non-kinetic deterrent options/courses of action (COA)? Moreover, how can such familiarity inform options/COAs to avoid strategic blowback?

i) In both real world deterrence planning and wargame scenarios, the concept of de-escalatory “off ramps” is often regarded as a means to resolve international crises. Frequently however, proposed off ramps offer terms and/or concessions (i.e., carrots & sticks) meant to reestablish the status quo ante, yet do little to address original political, economic, security, and other conditions anti-status quo complainants deem unacceptable to their interests. Examined through the lens of either a hypothetical or real world case study, how can these conflict dynamics be addressed to achieve mutually feasible “win-win” off ramps and compromises? Research should focus on how “off ramps” can both defend and advance status quo interests yet still assuage anti-status quo grievances.

j) How does the U.S. implement a multilateral strategic approach in the Asia-Pacific region vice a “hub and spoke” (i.e., bilateral) security alliance construct as it exists today?

k) Per an examination of China’s national interests and four decade long modernization trajectory, does Beijing as a global super power in 2049 look and act differently than today?
l) Examine the tangible and intangible political-military considerations associated with deterrence strategy development and execution. How do such considerations enhance and/or complicate achievement of deterrence and assurance objectives within in a rapidly changing, multi-domain global threat environment?

m) Reference is often made to Herman Kahn’s “escalation ladder.” Is this and similar metaphors (e.g., vortexes, lattices, cubes, etc.) germane to 21st Century deterrence thinking, or an irrelevant relic of the Cold War? What is the value/risk of referring to such metaphors as deterrence and assurance analytic and decision-making tools?

n) How might stress, emotions, and other features characteristic of human frailty be mitigated to lessen their impact on crisis decision-making situations? Conversely, how might they be leveraged to benefit deterrence and assurance objectives?

o) How do emotions associated with revenge and retribution impact deterrence success and/or failure? To the degree decision makers are conscious of the influence such emotions have over their thinking, should such emotions be allowed into/leveraged by the decision-making cycle?