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Discipline and threatened punishment: the theory of nuclear deterrence and the discipline of strategic studies, 1946-1960

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**DISCIPLINE AND *THREATENED* PUNISHMENT:
THE THEORY OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE
AND
THE DISCIPLINE OF STRATEGIC
STUDIES, 1946-1960**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

MARK DAMIAN RIX, BA (HONS)

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES

1997

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree to any other university or institution.

MARK DAMIAN RIX

ABSTRACT

This thesis reconstructs the history of the theory of nuclear deterrence and the discipline of strategic studies in the period 1946 to 1960. The key elements of the theory were the view that nuclear weapons were qualitatively different from conventional weapons, that “deterrence” was the sole purpose of nuclear weapons, and that in order to fulfil this purpose the weapons’ retaliatory *capability* had to be protected from enemy attack. This amounted to a prescription for the non-use of nuclear weapons in any capacity by either side. It is argued that the theory of deterrence underwent a process of systematisation and formalisation during the 1950s. This process involved the application of systems analysis and game theory to strategic analysis and led to the emergence of strategic studies.

It is also argued that strategic studies was developed in emulation of economics, particularly neo-classical and quantitative economics. The strategic theorists who were responsible for the development of the theory and discipline equated quantitative strategic analysis with good strategic analysis. Both systems analysis and game theory served as vehicles for the application of the methods of quantitative economics to the analysis of “deterrence” and its requirements. As the systematisation and formalisation of the theory took the view that “deterrence” was the sole purpose of nuclear weapons to a higher level of abstraction so did the theory, and the discipline, become increasingly irrelevant to the practical concerns of American policy makers and military planners. The policy makers and planners saw no qualitative difference between conventional and nuclear weapons. They therefore did not accept the view that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons was “deterrence” as the theorists understood the term. Moreover, by the mid 1950s the military planners in particular had come to the conclusion that the only way to “deter” an enemy nuclear strike was to pre-empt it. It is argued in the thesis that the theorists’ awareness of the yawning gap between their and the policy makers’ and planners’ conception of the purpose of nuclear weapons was of paradigmatic importance for the theory and the discipline.

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