



## Not Today: A Nuclear Deterrence Analogy

By

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My family is in the season of teenagers. Clearly the music I grew up on and what my kids listen to today could not be more different. That said, a closer look at the lyrics and purpose behind the music can offer a very telling story, especially when seeking to bridge the gap in one's understanding of deterrence, specifically nuclear deterrence.

"Not Today Satan" is a song (questionable by my earlier generation) by KB and Andy Mineo, drawing on the roots of one's faith and the daily battle of one's temptations (my words, not theirs). But breaking down the lyrics can teach us a ton about the world of deterrence.

Deterrence, in general, draws back to the earliest battles recorded in history. Being able to create an opposing force without ever lifting a sword is often how I think of deterrence. Having a force that is willing, alongside a proven capability, is a powerful pair, and one that makes up today's most reliable deterrent—the American nuclear triad. But the triad's effectiveness goes beyond what I know it can do. Others must know and understand its value as well. This is where KB steps in with some relevant lyrics:

Yeah, I live my life on the regular  
 But his attacks are perpetual  
 Forbidden fruit seem so edible  
 You try to resist like ellipticals.

An understanding of our world is an interest of mine. As I walk through KB's lyrics, I cannot help but see the parallel he paints for his listener. We are all regular people under consistent attack. Though carefully crafted, this "attack" does not appear as an attack. The subtle convincing, or slight shifts in one's core belief about a topic is altered with ease, slowly manipulating a person's core understanding, while creating a heavy load of resistance against what and how one might think, slowly shifting what we believe.

As a nation, better yet, a human race, we must understand the truth behind nuclear deterrence. What lives on our social feeds and livestream networks will not highlight these truths. Much of what is pushed today is developed using your search data, often repurposed with a subtle undertone and agenda, luring you in to want more; making the information you absorb feel like, in the words of KB, "forbidden fruit" appearing "so edible." Unfortunately, this information can be misleading, luring the reader to believe a message that is untrue.

The genesis of deterrence is found in some of the greatest writings of military strategists such as Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz. How nations prepare and think about war began on the rumination of the words muttered by these men and their predecessors. Beyond the expert understanding required by men and women who wear the uniform, the people that deterrence serves must also understand how it works and why it exists.

Today's nuclear deterrence is not mere jargon. In fact, it is the opposite. Just as KB and other lyricists carefully craft the words in a song, senior leaders, strategists, and policy developers carefully craft deterrence strategy and deliver capability that, like a good song, speaks to the emotions of the intended audience.

For American deterrence, it is not merely the ability to tug at the heart strings of the listener that is its power, unlike a song. Instead, it is the new B-21 raider, *Columbia*-class



ballistic missile submarine, and the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that make it effective.

These three legs of the nuclear triad work together to make deterrence effective, just as the combination of KB's lyrics, instrumentation, and beat work together to make a song great. With impeccable timing, these assets deliver the desired effects. Just as a musician must deliver a performance for an audience to experience the desired emotions, sailors and airmen must perform as expected to make these systems effective in conveying their message to the Chinese, North Koreans, and Russians.

Keeping with the music analogy, effective deterrence requires the American military to offer a daily performance similar to Queen's performance at Live Aid in 1985—often considered the greatest performance of all time. As a country, the United States seeks to protect an international order where democracy and personal freedoms thrive and allow artists like KB to create the kind of music that moves listeners.

In doing so, the United States must understand how to deter those who seek to challenge that order. If Americans do not want to see "Satan today," as KB's lyrics say, we better understand what it means to keep the adversary away. It is not moving lyrics or a great performance that will accomplish this goal, but a ready nuclear arsenal and the willingness to employ its weapons that keeps the peace.

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