



Coercive Diplomacy: A Theoretical and Practical Evaluation

Sayde-Hope Crystal

Abstract:

What are the primary factors favouring the success of coercive diplomacy? Why has U.S. military primacy not translated into greater coercive leverage against asymmetric adversaries? What can account for this paradox in international crises management? This paper investigates these related questions by examining the U.S. use of coercive diplomacy against Libya (1981-2003). Having promoted global radicalism, engaged in terrorism, and pursued weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for years, Libya's abandonment of its WMD program in 2003 and other key shifts in policy make it the strongest case of coercive diplomacy success since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. This paper explores the concept of coercive diplomacy within the broader framework of bargaining strategies. Following a theoretical and conceptual analysis of the main models of coercive diplomacy, the analytic framework developed by Bruce Jentleson and Christopher Whytock is employed to investigate the three phases of U.S. coercive diplomacy against Libya. It can be determined from this case example that successful strategies of coercive diplomacy require five main components: (1) a proportional, reciprocal, and credible coercive strategy, (2) limited objectives which, do not engage the vital interests of an adversary, (3) strong multilateral support and coalitional coercion, (4) a consideration of target vulnerability (as shaped by its political and economic domestic conditions), and (5) the use of positive inducements to increase an adversary's motivation to comply. Following a presentation of these analytic conclusions, the final section of the paper discusses implications for both theory and policy.

Résumé :

Quels sont les facteurs principaux qui favorisent la réussite de la diplomatie coercitive? La primauté militaire des États-Unis, pourquoi n'a-t-elle pas connu plus de succès contre les adversaires plus faibles? Quelle est la cause de ce paradoxe dans la gestion des crises internationales? Cette dissertation cherche à répondre à ces questions en examinant la diplomatie coercitive utilisée par les États-Unis contre la Libye (1981 à 2003). Comme la Libye favorisait le radicalisme global, s'engageait dans le terrorisme et recherchait les armes nucléaires pendant des années, sa cessation du programme nucléaire en 2003 et d'autres renversements de la politique représentent le plus grand succès de la diplomatie

coercitive depuis la crise des missiles de Cuba en 1962. Cette dissertation explore le concept de la diplomatie coercitive au sein du cadre plus large des stratégies de négociation. Cet exemple nous montre que les stratégies de négociation réussies exigent cinq éléments principaux: (1) une stratégie coercitive proportionnelle, réciproque et crédible; (2) des objectifs limités qui n'engagent pas les intérêts essentiels de l'adversaire; (3) un fort soutien multilatéral et une coercition de coalition; (4) une considération de la vulnérabilité de la cible (déterminée par des conditions domestiques en politique et économie) et (5) l'usage des incitatifs positifs afin d'augmenter la motivation de se conformer de la part de l'adversaire. Après la présentation de ces conclusions, la dernière section de l'essai discute les implications pour les théories et la politique.

Diplomacy is the main instrument of state interaction. Through bargaining, states seek outcomes that, while not ideal for either party, are better for both than some of the alternatives.¹ The history of international conflict has been characterized by the recurrence of bargaining with threats of force. Relations between city-states, empires, and nations have seen the recurrence of innumerable instances of threats used to influence the calculations and behaviour of others in international relations. Since the end of The Cold War, coercive diplomacy has become a prominent tactic of crisis management. The exploitation of potential force to induce an adversary to comply with one's demands is an attractive alternative to traditional military strategies in the contemporary post-Cold War international environment. The nature of modern warfare, instability, and conflict has evolved dramatically beyond the scope of the 20th century security paradigm. Conventional conflicts have become an anomaly, substituted with irregular or asymmetric warfare, as well as a proliferation in the amount of weak and failing states.² Traditional military strategies, such as annihilation and exhaustion, are no longer effective in combating these unique new threats. American foreign policy, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in the absence of a rival power player, has grown more risk-averse. As a result, conflict resolution using conventional military responses has been replaced by crises management objectives. As such, coercive diplomacy has become a favourable approach as it provides leaders with a chance to achieve reasonable objectives, while simultaneously avoiding unwanted military escalation. For the purpose of this

1 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1.

2 There exists no real consensus on the definition of a "failed-state". It is most generally understood as a state which is perceived as having failed at some of the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government, such as the loss of control of its territory, the erosion of legitimate authority, the inability to provide public services, or the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.

paper, coercive diplomacy is understood as the threat or use of force to encourage an opponent to undertake an action they do not wish to, and can include a wide range of instruments from diplomatic (sanctions) to military operations (e.g. airstrikes or strategic bombings).

The essentials of coercive diplomacy are as old as the arts of diplomacy and warfare themselves and have been known for centuries. The use of force, or the threat of force as a means of bargaining, has become a necessary instrument of diplomacy and a part of the conventional wisdom of statecraft. A number of writers and philosophers, attempting to explore the role of threats of force in international politics, have detailed this common phenomenon. Thucydides, writing in his *Peloponnesian War*, provides many examples of Athens and Sparta threatening to use their power to influence the behaviour of others. In a classic example of coercion, the powerful Athenians issued demands upon the weaker Melians, and threatened that failure to comply would result in complete devastation.³ Sun Tzu, who wrote his famous *The Art of War* twenty-three hundred years ago, observed the importance of threatening punishment to influence an adversary's will.⁴ The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his masterpiece *Leviathan*, emphasized the importance of power in creating "a fear of the consequences" and in providing "some coercive power to compel men equally to the performance of their Covenants by the terror of some punishment greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their Covenant."⁵ Those engaged in statecraft during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries increasingly made coercive diplomacy an integral part of their conventional wisdom and practice. Although subject to serious limitations,

³ Paul Lauren, *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, 184.

⁴ Alexander George and William Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

they recognized that attempting to gain their objectives by threatening, rather than actually using force, provided a valuable alternative to full-scale war.

Research Methods

To date, Western use of coercive diplomacy to stop and undo acts of military aggression has achieved little success. Of the thirty-six coercive diplomacy exchanges that have occurred between 1990 and 2008, only five achieved lasting success.⁶ Given the overwhelming military superiority of the United States, these results are confounding. The experience of the United States and of other strong powers suggests that qualitative measures of power seldom determine the outcome of strategies of coercive diplomacy. Robert Art notes, “If military superiority alone guaranteed success, then the United States should have a 100 percent success rate.”⁷ Why, in cases against less militarily powerful targets, has U.S. coercive diplomacy failed more often than it has succeeded? These results go against a long-standing principle of international relations theory, which suggests that coercive threats are more effective, on average, when they come from powerful states.⁸ Ironically, historical record demonstrates that the failure of asymmetric compellent threats has been a persistent feature of international crises.⁹

In the interest of explaining these results and determining what factors account for successful coercive diplomacy, this paper will investigate the three phases of U.S. coercive diplomacy towards Libya: first, the Ronald Reagan presidency, characterized

6 Peter Jakobsen, “Coercive Diplomacy” in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins, 291, identify five cases of coercive diplomacy success between: (1) Serbia and the BSA (1995), (2) the U.S. and the Haitian military (1994), (3) the U.S. and Iraq (1996), (4) the NATO intervention in Serbia (1999), (5) and the U.S. conflict with Libya (1997-2003).

7 *Ibid.*, 291.

8 Todd Sechser, *Goliath’s Curse*, 627.

9 *Ibid.*, 628.

principally by U.S. sanctions and military force (1981-1988); second, shifts toward a more multilateral and sanctions-based strategy during the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administration's (1989-1998); and third, negotiation agreements which culminated in the December 19th agreement on WMD (1999-2003).¹⁰ This investigation will employ the analytic framework developed by Jentleson and Whytock as a tool for analysis.

Jentleson and Whytock in "Who "Won" Libya: The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its Implications for Theory and Policy" (2006) conducted a more modern study of the relationship between force and diplomacy than their predecessors. Focusing on Libyan policy changes, specifically in regards to international terrorism and WMD proliferation, Jentleson and Whytock explore the role of U.S. coercive diplomacy in achieving these important changes. By analyzing the three phases of U.S. coercion, they identify two key sets of factors for a workable model of coercive diplomacy: (1) a coercer state strategy that balances credible coercion and skilled diplomacy consistent with the three criteria of proportionality, reciprocity, and coercive credibility, and (2) target state vulnerability as shaped by its domestic political and economic conditions, including the transmission belt or circuit-breaker role of elites and other key political actors.¹¹ They argue that both the coercer's strategy and the target state's domestic politics and economy are essential to coercive diplomacy success or failure.¹²

Most standard explorations of coercive diplomacy rely on a cost-benefit model to explain outcomes of success or failure. These models predict outcomes by comparing the expected costs and benefits of a particular action. In broad terms, coercion will be successful when the anticipated suffering associated with a threat exceeds the anticipated

10 Bruce Jentleson and Christopher Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 50.

11 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 79

12 Ibid., 50.

gains of defiance.¹³ To achieve this balance, Jentleson and Whytock argue that a coercer's strategy must meet the conditions of proportionality, reciprocity, and coercive credibility. Concerning proportionality, a successful strategy is one in which the scope and nature of the demand is equal to the instruments and tools used to achieve it. A coercing state can choose between three different defensive objectives: (1) stopping an action, (2) undoing an action, and (3) a cessation of the opponent's hostile behaviour through a demand for change in the composition of the adversary's government or in the nature of the regime.¹⁴ The logic of the model of coercive diplomacy suggests that the strength of an adversary's disinclination to comply is strongly related to the magnitude of the demand made. As such, the more a coercer demands of the target, the higher the costs of compliance are for the adversary. Therefore, depending on what is demanded of the target, the coercer must proportionally increase the costs of noncompliance, and the benefits of compliance, so that the ends are equal to the means.¹⁵ The second necessary component of a coercer's strategy is reciprocity. Reciprocity involves a mutually understood connection between positive inducements (carrots) and the target's concessions. The target must believe that they cannot achieve the benefits of inducements without reciprocation in the form of compliance. Coercive credibility is the final necessary component of a successful coercion strategy. Coercive credibility is achieved when the coercing state successfully conveys to the target the costs of noncompliance. The actual use of force, threats, and other coercive instruments, such as economic sanctions, must be sufficiently credible to raise the target's perceived costs of noncompliance. Perceived costs, as well as actual costs, influence an adversary's decision

13 Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, "The Dynamics of Coercion," 10.

14 George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 8.

15 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 50.

calculus. The perceived costs are the product of the magnitude of the dangers and profits the adversary envisions for a given path and the likelihood of their occurrence.¹⁶

The second set of variables posited by Jentleson and Whytock concern the target state's domestic politics and economy. The necessary variables included within this category are usually not included in studies of coercive outcomes. They do, however, highlight the importance of understanding the dynamics of the target state. The motivations and interests of an adversary can help determine its potential vulnerability to coercion. According to this framework, if the maintenance of power is taken as the main goal of both democratic and nondemocratic regimes, sustaining coercive diplomatic pressure depends on three interrelated domestic factors. The first factor concerns how the target state weighs the costs of compliance versus noncompliance. The target state must determine whether internal political support and regime security are served by defiance, or if there are domestic political gains to be made from improving relations with the coercing state.¹⁷ This suggests that the stronger the domestic support a target government enjoys, the less effective coercive instruments are on the target's leadership. Conversely, when there is less regime support, the same instruments and political costs are likely to have more influence.¹⁸ The second factor concerns the adversary's economic calculation of the costs that military force, sanctions, and other coercive instruments can impose, and the benefits that trade and other economic incentives may carry.¹⁹ This calculation is dependent on the strength and flexibility of the target's domestic economy and its ability

16 Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 11.

17 *Ibid.*, 54.

18 *Ibid.*, 54.

19 Welzel, *The Art of Combining Force and Diplomacy*, 18.

to absorb or counter such costs and reduce its economic vulnerability.²⁰ The final factor is related to a problematic inherent assumption of coercion theories. These theories incorrectly perceive all actors as single units (e.g. as single and coherent actors). This assumption oversimplifies the process of state-level decision making. Rather than individuals, the coercer and target are actually governments. To resolve this issue, Jentleson and Whytock include the role of elites and other key domestic political and societal actors in their analytic framework. They argue that even dictatorships “usually cannot fully insulate themselves from elites within their own governments and societies.”²¹ This means that if elite interests are threatened by compliance with the coercing state’s demands, such groups, can act as buffers or “circuit breakers” by blocking the external pressures on the regime.²² Conversely, when their interests are better served by the policy changes demanded, they become “transmission belts,” carrying forward the coercive pressure on the regime to comply.²³

Analysis and Findings

To explain the outcome of U.S. coercive diplomacy attempts against Libya and determine what factors favour the success of the strategy, this paper will rely on a dynamic model of coercion success, using the analytic framework developed by Bruce Jentleson and Christopher Whytock.

The U.S. strategy of coercive diplomacy, conducted between 1981 and 2003, against Libya can be divided into three phases, spanning three U.S. presidencies.

20 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who “Won” Libya*, 55.

21 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who “Won” Libya*, 55.

22 Welzel, *The Art of Combining Force and Diplomacy*, 18.

23 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who “Won” Libya*, 55.

Following the 1969 coup against Pro-U.S. King Idris that brought Muammar Qaddafi to power, the United States became increasingly concerned about Libya's foreign policy, particularly its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and its involvement in international terrorism.²⁴ Although a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Qaddafi's Libya attempted on numerous occasions to acquire nuclear weapon capabilities by courting other nuclear capable powers. These efforts, repeatedly rebuffed, led Qaddafi to procure equipment and technology from the Soviet Union, which he later used to develop an indigenous nuclear weapons program.²⁵

Stage One (1981-1988)

Background

In the early stages of U.S. coercive diplomacy against Libya, the Reagan administration relied on the gradual turning of the screw variant of the strategy. During this time, the government focused on incremental escalations in economic coercive pressures, which included embargoes on crude oil imports and refined petroleum products.²⁶ A decisive change in policy occurred in 1986, following a series of airport attacks in Vienna and Rome, which were linked to Abu Nidal, a terrorist organization sponsored by Qaddafi. The attack, which killed twenty-five people (including five Americans),²⁷ prompted resolve among many members of the administration to respond strongly to Qaddafi's public support and advocacy of terrorism. The decision to escalate the administration's

24 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 56.

25 Ibid.,56.

26 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 58.

27 George and Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy, 202.

strategy to the use of military force as an instrument of reprisal was settled, in part, due to the loss of American lives, the administration's credibility, and the credibility of the United States as a superpower and world leader.²⁸ This decision was exercised in 1986, following the unsuccessful use of economic sanctions to pressure Qaddafi to abandon his pursuit of WMD and renounce his support of international terrorism. Although unilateral military action was possible, at this stage the U.S. administration did not have the support of its European allies and did not wish to risk international isolation. On April 14, 1986, after it had been determined that all alternative measures had been exhausted without success, (Libya continued its pursuit of WMD largely unabated), the United States conducted strategic airstrikes against Libya.

Analysis

According to Jentleson and Whytock, a successful strategy of coercion requires balance between the costs of noncompliance and the benefits of compliance.²⁹ To succeed, the coercer must be willing to induce compliance by offering the target state greater benefits than would be gained by its defiance. This balance is dependent on the coercer's strategy being proportional, reciprocal, and credible. The following is an evaluation of the U.S. strategy of coercion according to these criteria.

Proportionality

A proportional coercive strategy requires the nature of the demand to be equal to the instruments or tools used to achieve it. In this first phase of coercion, the coercing state,

²⁸ Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 58.

²⁹ Ibid.,51.

the United States, limited its stated objective to the cessation of its opponent, Libya's, behaviour. Policy change here is distinguished from regime change, the former being less ambitious but more easily attainable. The administration's underlying objective, however, was in fact a demand for change in the composition of the adversary's government through a change in regime. The existence of an alternative agenda is supported by a 1984 CIA assessment report, which concluded "no course of action short of stimulating Qaddafi's fall will bring any significant and enduring change in Libyan policies."³⁰ As previously explained, this objective is extremely difficult to achieve. The more a coercer demands, the higher the costs of compliance are for the adversary. As such, a coercer must proportionally increase the costs of noncompliance and the benefits of compliance so that the ends are proportional to the means. Jentleson and Whytock consider this line between policy change and regime change to be a crucial proportionality threshold.³¹ In regards to the Libya case, the expansiveness of the administration's goals was highly disproportional to the limited means it was willing and able to apply, due to both domestic constraints and a lack of multilateral support.

Reciprocity

During this stage of coercion, there existed minimal grounds for agreement. While the Reagan administration tried unsuccessfully to remove Qaddafi from power, the Libyan dictator was determined to maintain his position, his sponsorship of international terrorism, and his continued pursuit of WMD. Reciprocity was further limited by the U.S. government's strict policy against negotiating with terrorists or terrorist entities. By

30 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 59.

31 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 52.

failing to change the balance of incentives through offering Qaddafi positive inducements (a carrot to compliment its demands), they failed to consider the motivations and interests shaping their adversary's decision calculus. Any change in behaviour in response to U.S. pressure would invariably entail some loss of prestige, which evidently concerned Qaddafi was evidently more concerned with than the costs of defiance.³²

Coercive Credibility

While the Reagan administration was unable to meet the requirements of reciprocity and proportionality, it did succeed in creating coercive credibility. In January 1986, President Reagan, with two U.S. aircraft carriers at his disposal in the Mediterranean, ordered a week of naval flight operations to begin off the coast of Libya. This order marked the beginning of the second phase of the gradual turning of the screw approach and is distinguished from the first phase by the show of military force.³³ The deliberate U.S. naval presence off the coast of Libya was intended to enhance the credibility of the United States and to demonstrate its resolve to use force to stop Qaddafi if necessary. The intended goal was to not only intimidate Qaddafi, but also to convince both radical and moderate states in the region that Washington was losing patience with state-sponsored terrorism and was prepared to back up rhetoric with action.³⁴ This resolve was finally demonstrated on April 14, 1986. The U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps carried out an aerial attack in response to the 1986 Berlin discotheque bombing, during which Libyan agents killed three people and injured 229 people.³⁵ This incident provided all the

32 Ibid.

33 George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 209.

34 Ibid., 209

35 Ibid., 213.

provocation the U.S. Government needed to decide to launch a limited bombing raid against key Libyan targets, so as to maximize the coercive impact of the raid while minimizing the political fallout.³⁶ The choice of an aerial attack was based on considerations of public and international support. Airstrikes were increasingly seen by the American public and many policy-makers as a low-cost, low-commitment tool.³⁷ The use of airstrikes and the administrations emphasis on minimizing civilian casualties by targeting terrorist-related facilities turned out to be an important factor in receiving allied support.³⁸

Libya's Domestic Political and Economic Situation

In the beginning of Qaddafi's regime, Libya's domestic oil revenues provided enough income to permit Qaddafi to deter domestic opposition through a distribution policy, which financed repression. Although American sanctions were beginning to cause an economic downturn, Libya was able to maintain its oil production at OPEC quota levels, with shifts in exports to other trade partners to compensate for the U.S. ban.³⁹ This method of circumvention was a large contributor to the strategy's failure in this first stage. Without European allied support in the form of economic sanctions, countries benefited from the U.S. embargo and greatly undermined its intended effect by increasing their share of Libyan oil imports. Italy's share for example rose from 19 percent in 1980 to 33 percent in 1987.⁴⁰ In regards to the Libyan domestic political environment, the U.S. government's coercive use of exemplary force (naval demonstrations) functioned

36 Ibid, 213.

37 Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 20.

38 George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 215.

39 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 60.

40 Ibid., 60.

contrary to its intended effect by galvanizing support for the Libyan leader and fermenting hatred towards the United States.

Stage Two (1989-1998)

Background

During the 1990's, clear, substantial shifts in key areas of Libyan policy could be observed. Qaddafi pursued more cooperation and engaged in less subversion, reconciling with a number of regional allies, such as Egypt and Chad, and opened back channel negotiations twice in early 1992 with two former high-ranking U.S. government officials.⁴¹ These developments are widely attributed to decisive changes in U.S. policy under Presidents George W.H. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Analysis

Proportionality

The coercive strategy employed by these leaders was significantly more balanced and proportional than earlier strategies. Under the leadership of both presidents, the United States shifted its objective from regime change to the more limited, but statistically more successful, policy change. The demands made in November 1991 regarding Libya's policy on terrorism, though stiff, did not challenge the regime's continued survival. Additionally, this change constituted a significant improvement in the clarity of U.S. objectives. According to George and Simons, clarity with respect to what is to be achieved is important because it helps persuade the opponent of the coercing power's

41 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 63.

strength and purpose, as well as clarify its specific expectations. Previous U.S. coercive diplomacy campaigns in Nicaragua and North Vietnam suffered from unclear objectives and demands, which contributed to the difficulties encountered by the United States in both confrontations.⁴² The demands of the U.S. concerned the Pan Am 103 bombing. In negotiations, the United States, supported by Britain, demanded that Libya needed to (1) surrender for trial the suspects charged with the bombing, (2) accept responsibility for the actions of the Libyan officials involved in the bombing, (3) disclose all it knew of the bombing and allow full access to witnesses and evidence, (4) pay appropriate compensation, and (5) commit itself to cease all forms of terrorist action and all assistance to terrorist groups and promptly, by concrete actions, prove its renunciation of terrorism.⁴³

Reciprocity

During this stage of the strategy, the U.S. administration still lacked reciprocity. Despite indications that Libya may have been open to negotiations, the United States was still not ready to negotiate with Qaddafi.⁴⁴ This reluctance was due, in part, to the widespread condemnation of any compromise with the Libyan regime from the families of the victims of the Pan Am bombing. Anti-Libyan resolutions and bills were created and passed rampantly due to widespread media coverage, which, contributed to fostering strong bipartisan sponsorship, most likely as a demonstration of solidarity with the American public.

42 George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 280.

43 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who “Won” Libya*, 63.

44 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who “Won” Libya*, 65.

Coercive Credibility

Coercive credibility in this stage was greatly enhanced by the multilateralization of sanctions. In 1992, the Security Council passed resolution 748, which, imposed the first set of multilateral sanctions against Libya, and marked the first time in the history of the international struggle against modern terrorism that a broad multilateral coalition had succeeded in imposing and enforcing effective sanctions against a terrorism-sponsoring state.⁴⁵ This marked increase in allied cooperation can be attributed to a variety of factors, however, the most prominent of which was the shift in U.S. policy objectives. Policy change, contrary to regime change, was a more acceptable objective for the European allies to embrace.⁴⁶

Libya's Domestic Political and Economic Situation

The April 14th bombing raids constituted the strongest measure of coercive pressure in the Libyan case. In addition to causing significant physical costs, the raids resulted in considerable unrest and dissent among the Libyan military and by the general public. The economic problems that began in the 1980s grew worse in the early 1990s. Libya's gross domestic product plummeted, unemployment reached 30 percent, and inflation was as high as 50 percent in 1994.⁴⁷ The combination of falling world oil prices, Qaddafi's economic mismanagement, and economic sanctions took a heavy toll on the Libyan economy.⁴⁸ As a result of this political and economic instability, Qaddafi's regime became gradually more susceptible to U.S. coercive diplomacy.

45 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 64.

46 *Ibid.*, 64.

47 Jentleson and Whytock, *Who "Won" Libya*, 65.

48 Meghan O'Sullivan, "Shrewd Sanctions," 204.

Stage Three (1999-2003)

Background

Between 1999 and 2003, the culminating political, military, and economic coercive efforts came together. Libya's policy on its nuclear weapons program shifted greatly, as indicated by its agreement of full WMD disarmament in 2003. Additionally, Qaddafi agreed to international inspection to ensure Libya's compliance with the NPT.⁴⁹ Regarding its sponsorship of international terrorism, the Libyan government expelled the Abu Nidal Organization, and other radical Palestinian groups, closed training camps, and extradited suspected terrorists to Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen.⁵⁰ These major shifts in policy were arguably the result of decades of mounting U.S. coercive diplomacy and increased multilateral support.

Analysis

Proportionality

In accepting civil liability for the Lockerbie bombing, Qaddafi was increasingly concerned with the threat the United States posed to his regime. Throughout the negotiation process, Libya sought constant reassurance that the terms of the agreement were policy change, not regime change. In the 1998-1999 deal for the surrender of the two Libyan suspects of the Lockerbie bombing, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan assured the Libyan leader that the trial "[would] not be used to undermine the Libyan

49 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 67.

50 Jentleson and Whytock, Who "Won" Libya, 68.

regime.”⁵¹ Additionally, in settling the Lockerbie deal and accepting civil responsibility, the Libyan government required the assurance that its acceptance would not be used as grounds for future legal action against its government. In order to maintain proportionality between the ends and means, the decision to extend assurances against future demands was an important step by the U.S. government, as it helped encourage Qaddafi to comply.

Reciprocity

In the last stage of coercive diplomacy against Libya, the U.S. government finally established meaningful reciprocity. The negotiation strategy consisted of measured linkages between the carrots offered and the concessions demanded. UN sanctions were suspended, for example, in exchange for the surrender of the Libyan suspects involved in the Lockerbie attack.⁵² Further, EU diplomatic sanctions were lifted in response to Libya’s renunciation of terrorism, and U.S. economic sanctions were eased in exchange for the implementation of the 2003 WMD agreement.

Coercive Credibility

The coercive credibility of the United States was greatly enhanced by the Iraq war. Key U.S. officials stressed that the use of force in Iraq had a “[demonstrative] effect” that Qaddafi could not dismiss. This external factor helps explain the acceleration of key changes in policy in this third stage of coercion.⁵³ The coercive credibility of the United

51 Jentleson and Whytock, Who “Won” Libya, 76.

52 Ibid., 77.

53 Ibid., 75.

States was also greatly enhanced by the multilateralization of sanctions through the United Nations, which provided greater legitimacy and increased their economic impact.

Conclusion

Following his February 1998 mission to Iraq, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked to the Security Council, “If diplomacy is to succeed, it must be backed both by force and fairness”.⁵⁴ Coercive diplomacy is the embodiment of this idea. A political-diplomatic strategy, coercive diplomacy is an age-old instrument of statecraft that integrates threats, the limited use of force, persuasion and positive inducements into an effective crises bargaining strategy. The defensive use of coercive diplomacy to stop and/or undo acts of military aggression has been increasingly used to combat the growing number of weak or failed states in the international system since the end of the Cold War. U.S. coercive diplomacy against Libya’s state-sponsored terrorism and weapons of mass destruction program (1981-2003) has proven to be the most successful use of this strategy since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Supported by the conceptual, theoretical, and practical analysis of the existing literature on the strategy conducted herein, this paper concludes that five main factors favour the success of coercive diplomacy strategies. First, the Libya case illustrates the importance of a coercer strategy that balances credible coercion and deft diplomacy consistent with the three criteria of proportionality, reciprocity, and coercive credibility. Second, the case displays the significance of multilateral support and the necessity of coalitional coercion. Third, contrary to the common method of black-boxing the opponent, the Libya case clearly conveys the consequences of ignoring the impact of target vulnerability, as shaped by its domestic

⁵⁴ Carl Bildt, “Force and Diplomacy,” 141.

political and economic conditions, on coercion success. These considerations are imperative to predicting the response of a state to coercive pressure. Without a clear understanding of the target's domestic vulnerabilities, it is difficult to ascertain whether he can be coerced at all, or which threats will be most effective. Fourth, the Libya case demonstrates the importance of limiting one's demands to only what is essential to protect one's own vital interests. Further, coercers should abstain from those demands, which engage the vital interests of an adversary in order to maximize the potential for success. As demonstrated in the Libya case, pursuing regime change, for example, can be counterproductive to achieving policy change. Finally, concerning the relative motivation of both sides, effective coercion must include the use of positive inducements that increase an adversary's incentive to comply.

These findings, in addition to the comprehensive theoretical analysis provided, highlight several important characteristics of the strategy, which have obvious practical implications for policy makers. For instance, the analysis demonstrates that successful coercion is extremely difficult to predict, and is highly context-dependent. What works in one case will not necessarily produce the same results in another. Policy makers must, therefore, tailor abstract models to specific situations. Due to these, and other theory limitations, the main factors established in this study cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, they provide useful insights for more general propositions about the scope and limits of balancing diplomacy and coercive force.

In addition to these contributions, this investigation has highlighted certain areas that could be explored for future study. Further study, for instance, might explore the concept of punishment itself. Most studies of coercive diplomacy do not explore this

concept in terms of its ethical justifications or whether the use of military force to punish states for noncompliance fits within a legal institutional order. An ethical reading of coercive diplomacy could be used to investigate punitive uses of force in Iraq and Kosovo for example, and discuss issues of agency, responsibility, and justice.

Appendix A: Definitions and Clarifications

The concept of coercive diplomacy belongs to a broader category of foreign policy strategies normally labeled ‘strategic coercion’. An alternative to brute-force strategies, strategic coercion involves the act of inducing or compelling an adversary to do something to which they are averse. Any presentation of coercive diplomacy theory must first begin with Thomas Schelling’s discussion of compellence in *Arms and Influence*, published in 1966. The foundations of the theory of coercive diplomacy developed from this work on strategic deterrence and compellence studies. Schelling was concerned with creating a systemic theoretical analysis of how states use threats and limited force to change the behaviour of other states. Schelling believed that force should be used to communicate with an opponent. He argued, “Military strategy can no longer be thought of [...] as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation, and deterrence.”⁵⁵ In examining the concept of coercion as tool of bargaining power, Schelling introduced the term compellence, to describe an act “intended to make an adversary do something.”⁵⁶ He distinguished between two types of coercive tools, deterrent and compellent threats, to explain how a coercer could exploit the “bargaining power that comes from the physical harm a nation can do to another nation.”⁵⁷ For Schelling, the difference between the two concepts is their distinct functions and the timing in which they are used. While both strategies rely on “the deliberate and purposive use of overt threats to influence another’s strategic behaviour,”⁵⁸ deterrent threats are passive, whereas compellent threats are reactionary in nature.

⁵⁵ Anthony Lang, “Punitive Justifications or Just Punishment?” 395.

⁵⁶ Martin Welzel, *The Art of Combining Force and Diplomacy*, 11.

⁵⁷ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3.

⁵⁸ Peter Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy*, 11.

Deterrent threats, for example, are used to keep an adversary from starting an undesired action, such as a nuclear war. In contrast, compellent threats such as a call to withdraw are used to persuade a target to stop or undo an action already taken. Although the lines between compellence and deterrence are easily blurred, the main premise of these ideas is that force can be used not only to destroy, but also to send messages.⁵⁹ The more challenging of the two coercive strategies, compellence requires an adversary to make an obvious change in behaviour in order to acquiesce to the demands of the coercer. In comparison, deterrence requires only that the target to maintain the status quo, and as such, is more likely to succeed. Schelling distinguishes these strategies from those that rely on brute force to gain compliance. This distinction concerns the role of force. Whether seeking to compel or deter, the coercer uses the threat of force, or the limited use of force, to exploit the potential risks the opponent faces in resisting the coercer's demands. Latent violence, or the "power to hurt", is used as bargaining power to influence an adversary's behaviour.⁶⁰ Limited force of an appropriate kind can be used to demonstrate resolve and to give credibility to the threat of punishment for noncompliance. According to Schelling, force used in coercive strategies is intended to hurt an opponent, but not as much as it might, leaving open the threat of even more pain if the opponent continues to resist. In contrast, brute force strategies rely on the use of force to bludgeon and destroy an opponent in order to force compliance.

The concept of compellence can be further divided into two similar, yet distinct concepts: blackmail and coercive diplomacy. These concepts can be distinguished according to the ways in which threats are used as an instrument of policy. Blackmail

59 Anthony Lang, "Punitive Justifications or Just Punishment?" 395.

60 Thomas Schelling, "The Diplomacy of Violence, in *Arms and Influence*, 240.

strategies rely on the offensive use of coercive threats, which are intended to aggressively persuade a target to give up something of value without putting up resistance.⁶¹ In contrast, coercive diplomacy refers to the defensive use of coercion to stop or reverse an opponent's actions. For the purpose of this paper, the definition of compellence will be restricted to defensive uses of the strategy – coercive diplomacy.

Building on the work of Thomas Schelling, the concept of coercive diplomacy was first systemically theorized by Alexander George and William Simons in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (1971). Employing an inductive research strategy with the objective of developing a policy-relevant theory of coercive diplomacy, George and Simons relied on case-study analysis to identify nine factors favouring the outcome of coercive diplomacy attempts. Acknowledging the difficulty of using a large number of variables, George and Simons reduced their factors to four, which they regarded as being particularly significant. These include: (1) the existence of an asymmetry of motivation, (2) a sense of urgency, (3) the opponent's fear of unacceptable escalation, and (4) clarity concerning the precise terms of the settlement of the crisis.⁶² George and Simons use the term favour to suggest that no single condition can be regarded as sufficient for the success of the strategy. In addition to identifying these conditions, they derived a typology of four variants of the strategy and devised four-component questions, which are intended to guide policy makers in choosing an appropriate form of the strategy. Policy makers must consider: (1) what to demand of the opponent, (2) whether and how to create a sense of urgency for compliance with the demand, (3) whether and what kind

61 George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 7.

62 Jakobsen, "Coercive Diplomacy" in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins, 282.

of punishment to threaten for non-compliance, and (4) whether to also offer positive inducements.

At the extreme of the coercive diplomacy spectrum are the ultimatum and tacit ultimatum. The former approach includes a demand on the opponent, a time limit for compliance, and a specific threat of punishment for noncompliance.⁶³ This is considered to be the most dangerous variant. If it fails, the coercer must choose between backing down and/or increasing the ante, which can subsequently lead to an escalation of violence. When no specific time limit for compliance is given and the threat of punishment is implicit, rather than explicit, this is referred to as a tacit ultimatum.⁶⁴ Other variants of the strategy include the try-and-see and the gradual turning of the screw. Somewhat stronger in coercive impact than the former, the gradual turning of the screw relies on the threat of gradual and incremental increases in coercive pressure rather than threatening decisive military action for noncompliance.⁶⁵ The weakest of the four approaches, the try-and-see approach, includes neither a time limit, nor the threat of escalation. Instead, this strategy involves waiting to see whether a limited threat will suffice to persuade an opponent.⁶⁶

Attempting to devise a less abstract theory than Schelling's, while simultaneously offering more guidance to policy-makers and analysts, Peter Jakobsen expanded on George and Simon's work with his development of an ideal policy in *The Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy* (1998). Relying on the factors used in George and Simon's study, Jakobsen developed four necessary conditions required for coercive diplomacy to

63 Jack Levy, *Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy*, 540.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, 540.

66 Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy*, 19.

succeed: (1) a threat of force to defeat the opponent or deny them their objectives with little cost, (2) a deadline for compliance, (3) an assurance against future demands, and (4) an offer of carrots for compliance.⁶⁷ The first condition for success is concerned with intimidation. The coercing state must convince the opponent of its credibility. To make noncompliance too costly, the threat must contain the intent to defeat the adversary or deny him his objectives. Generally, it is not enough to issue a threat of force. Coercers must be capable of executing the threat. In practice, this requires the coercer to enjoy military superiority.⁶⁸ Coercers, however, can demonstrate their capabilities by nonviolent military demonstrations. Provocative military exercises in sensitive areas are often used to apply pressure on an opponent and to demonstrate resolve. During the nineteenth century, for example, American naval demonstrations combined with implicit threats were often used to intimidate an opponent.⁶⁹ By demonstrating a fraction of a coercer's available power,⁷⁰ such measures exploit the fear of an attack and shape the opponent's perception of the coercer's capabilities. If successful, these measures will influence the opponent's future behaviour. In addition to the need to quickly defeat an opponent with little cost, successful coercive strategies require a deadline for compliance. Time limits provide explicit evidence of a coercer's resolve and convey a sense of urgency and pressure. Historically, an unwillingness to set a deadline for compliance has been perceived as a sign of weakness.⁷¹ To further enhance the prospects of success, opponents must be assured against future demands. Such an assurance increases the opponent's incentive to comply because it mitigates the fear that compliance will merely

67 Ibid.

68 Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy*, 29.

69 Paul Lauren, "Ultimata and Coercive Diplomacy," 148-149.

70 Lauren, "Ultimata and Coercive Diplomacy," 148-149.

71 Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy*, 29.

result in new demands.⁷² Finally, the fourth condition of success is concerned with lowering the costs of compliance. The function of inducements or “carrots” is to increase an opponent’s incentive to comply. During the 1962 missile crisis, for example, the United States offered the Soviet Union a promise to terminate the naval quarantine in effect in exchange for the removal of missile bases.⁷³

72 Jakobsen, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 284.

73 Lauren, “Ultimata and Coercive Diplomacy,” 143.

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