

COERCION THEORY AND UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY

Much of U.S. foreign policy, and most of U.S. security policy, is built either directly or indirectly around coercion. *Coercion* is causing someone to choose one course of action over another by making the choice preferred by the coercer appear more attractive than the alternative, which the coercer wishes to avoid. In the international arena, coercion seeks to change the behavior of states (or occasionally significant nonstate actors),¹ for example by deterring aggression or by compelling an enemy to surrender, although it may involve far less serious stakes. Regardless of the nature of the enemy and the objective of the policy, however, coercion takes the form of an explicit or implicit message that the target actor should do A rather than B because the consequences of B will be less favorable to him than the consequences of A.

Each of the instruments of national power—military, economic, diplomatic, and other informational tools—can be, and often is, employed coercively. This report concentrates on the use of military

¹Most of the following discussion will refer to coercive targets as “states,” because it is states that are most often the targets of U.S. military coercion. However, it is important to note that virtually everything true about coercing states also applies to international coercion directed against significant nonstate actors, such as revolutionary or insurgency movements, substate groups involved in civil wars or wars of secession, or major terrorist organizations. At the lower end of the spectrum of conflict (for example in SASO) it is common for such nonstate actors to be the coercive targets, as reflected in the case studies included in this project.

force to achieve important security objectives, but readers should keep in mind that most of what is true about military coercion also applies to the coercive use of economic sanctions and other tools of international policy.² Within the military arena, however, a good definition of coercion from which to proceed is that of a recent RAND study: “Coercion is the use of threatened force, including the limited use of actual force to back up the threat, to induce an adversary to behave differently than it otherwise would.”³

As shown in Figure 2.1, coercion can be distinguished from two other categories of statecraft: persuasion and pure force. *Persuasion* is more subtle than coercion. Instead of trying to convince the target that complying with the coercer’s demands will serve the adversary’s own interests better than defying them would, a persuasive policy seeks to change what the target values or believes more fundamentally. Many relatively low-profile military activities have persuasive effects on other states and thus shape the strategic environment, but their effects are usually gradual, and they normally play little role in strategies to deal with crises. However, military strategists should not neglect them, for they may have a great deal to do with whether future crises occur in the first place.⁴

Unconditional action—*pure force* or *physical defeat*, in the military realm—is more direct than coercion. Instead of making the target choose one course of action over another, it seeks to eliminate altogether the target’s ability or opportunity to do anything other than

²Jonathan Kirshner, “The Microfoundations of Economic Sanctions,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 1997), pp. 32–64.

³Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-1061-AF, 1999), p. 10.

⁴The distinction between coercion and persuasion can perhaps be illustrated more clearly in the context of the other major field of deterrence policy: deterring crime. Threats of punishment for criminals are obviously coercive and so are efforts to either convince potential wrongdoers that crime does not pay or bribe them to obey the law: Telling a teenager that he will end up wealthier by pursuing a lawful career than by turning to crime seeks to alter his expectations about which course will better serve his needs as he perceives them. Persuasion would involve making him place a lower value on whatever he might expect to gain from crime and causing him to place a higher value on the benefits to be expected from a noncriminal path. The third option, simply preventing him from having access to the tools or opportunities required for a criminal career, would fall into the realm of unconditional action.

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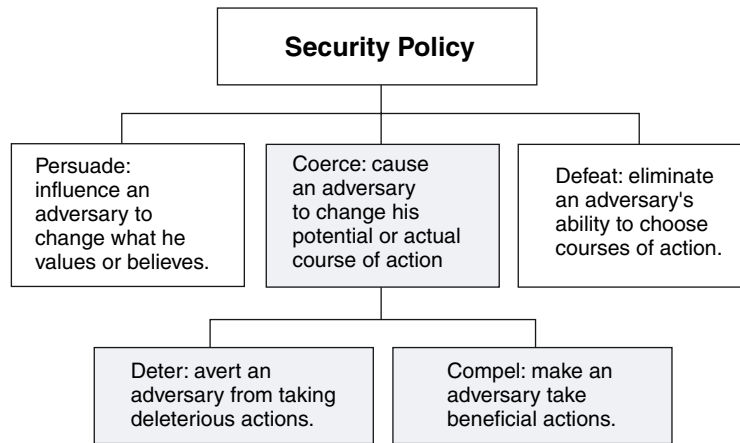


Figure 2.1—Components of Security Policy

what the attacker demands, or else it simply seizes or eliminates the subject of the dispute.⁵ Armed forces have been employed to achieve major objectives through pure force in situations ranging from the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 to Israel's 1981 attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor.⁶ More often, however, substantial wars are won—or prevented—through coercion for the simple reason that it is usually less expensive to convince someone to surrender, or not to attack in the first place, than it is to make aggression or resistance physically impossible. Therefore, in most conflicts against capable adversaries, the primary strategic objective is to make the enemy accede to one's

⁵Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966). Of course, some direct military actions do not involve the application of force at all, such as delivering humanitarian assistance to victims of famine or natural disasters.

⁶The Osirak raid was intended to destroy the target and thus temporarily cripple Iraq's nuclear weapons program, and Israel presumably did not expect it to discourage Baghdad from continuing to pursue nuclear weapons development or to intimidate Iraq into a less anti-Israeli foreign policy (although Israeli leaders may have hoped that it would have a secondary coercive effect by discouraging other Middle Eastern states from building their own nuclear weapons facilities).

coercive demands, even if this is a demand for unconditional surrender.⁷ However, if the stakes are very high for the enemy, for example when surrender is likely to mean certain death for the enemy leadership, it may be very difficult or even impossible to make the adversary give up short of utter defeat, and victory may only be achieved in the end through pure force.⁸

Deterrence

Within the realm of coercion, it is customary to distinguish between *deterrence* and *compellence*. According to one widely used definition, deterrence is “the persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits.”⁹ However, because this definition does not explicitly consider the opponent’s expectations about what will happen if it does not act, it may be clearer to describe deterrence as convincing someone not to take a contemplated action, such as attacking you, by making the expected results of the action appear worse than the expected consequences of not acting.

Perhaps no other concept in international politics has been the subject of as much academic and policy discussion as deterrence, so it is not surprising that other definitions of the term exist.¹⁰ Some theo-

⁷Pure force objectives may exist within a coercive strategy, however, as exemplified by U.S. strategy in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The primary goal was to coerce Iraq into withdrawing from Kuwait, but in the process the United States hoped to destroy Iraq’s facilities for developing WMD and to wreck its conventional offensive military capabilities.

⁸“A vivid example of this distinction appears in the 1964 James Bond movie ‘Goldfinger.’ After being captured in the middle of the film, Bond is seen strapped to a table as a sinister-looking industrial laser cuts its way towards his center of gravity. Observing the beam’s approach with considerable unease and misinterpreting it as a coercive threat, Bond asks the title villain ‘Do you expect me to talk?’ ‘No, Mister Bond,’ Goldfinger replies, ‘I expect you to die’” (Karl Mueller, “Strategies of Coercion: Denial, Punishment, and the Future of Air Power,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 [Spring 1998], p. 184n).

⁹Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, p. 11.

¹⁰For overviews of the development of deterrence theory, which a study of this size cannot begin to provide, see Robert Jervis, “Deterrence Theory Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (January 1979), pp. 289–324; Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983); Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, second edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989); and John Har-

rists have argued that deterrence must involve threats of military force in particular,¹¹ or even more particularly only threats of nuclear attack,¹² or only threats of punishment directly against civilian populations and governments.¹³ However, the most useful definitions of deterrence are broad ones, which acknowledge that such actions as aggression may be deterred by many means; never has this been truer than in the post-Cold War era.¹⁴ These means may even include promises of rewards for complying with coercive demands because making compliance with one's demands more attractive has essentially the same effect as making defiance less attractive.¹⁵

Although deterrence is most often discussed in the context of deterring potential aggressors from launching invasions or committing other breaches of the peace, deterrence is not something that occurs only at the boundary between peace and war. Security policymakers may also work to deter target states—both enemies and friends—from such peacetime actions as acquiring WMD or entering into threatening alliances. In wartime, deterrent efforts often occur within the conflict, as belligerents and nonbelligerents seek to deter other states from such actions as escalating to higher levels of violence, expanding the war into new arenas, or violating the laws of armed conflict or neutrality.

vey, *Conventional Deterrence and National Security* (Canberra, Australia: RAAF Air Power Studies Centre, 1997).

¹¹Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1983), pp. 20–22; Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 15.

¹²Until the late 1970s, most deterrence scholarship focused primarily—and often exclusively—on issues of nuclear strategy. Prominent steps toward serious consideration of purely conventional deterrence include George Quester, *Deterrence Before Hiroshima*, and John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983). For an overview of conventional deterrence theory, see Harvey, *Conventional Deterrence and National Security*.

¹³Stephen J. Cimbala, *Strategy After Deterrence* (New York: Praeger, 1991), pp. xi–xii.

¹⁴For example, Thomas W. Milburn, “What Constitutes Effective Deterrence?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 1959), pp. 138–145; Samuel P. Huntington, “The Renewal of Strategy,” in Samuel P. Huntington, ed., *The Strategic Imperative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1982), pp. 14–17; and Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁵Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference,” *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (July 1990), pp. 469–471.

Deterrence, like all coercion, occurs in the mind of the adversary. Reality matters in deterrence only insofar as it affects the perceptions of those who will choose whether or not to be deterred. Thus, a fundamental difference exists between the concepts of deterrence and defense: deterrence seeks to make conflict look bad to the enemy, while defense seeks to make conflict better for oneself if conflict occurs. Bluffs may deter, but they will not contribute to defense if deterrence fails, while military capabilities kept secret from the enemy may provide defense, but cannot deter.¹⁶ The psychological nature of coercion greatly complicates the problem of anticipating when coercive strategies will succeed or fail. Traditional assessments of the adversary's capabilities are of only limited predictive value unless accompanied by sound understanding of what the enemy values, how it perceives the conflict, and how it makes decisions—to name but a few of the critical variables.

Because of its focus on U.S. security concerns, this study emphasizes *extended deterrence*—that is, deterring attacks against allies and other external interests rather than direct attacks against the deterring state. In general, extended deterrence is more difficult than simple self-protective deterrence because a potential aggressor is more likely to doubt that costly threats will actually be carried out in response to an attack against a far-flung or less-than-vital interest.

It can also be useful to distinguish between *strategic* and *tactical deterrence*. Most deterrence of concern to military strategists is strategic-level: efforts to cause changes in the behavior of states or other major entities that operate in the international arena.¹⁷ However, tactical deterrence, which involves the immediate behavior of individual people or small groups—the sort of deterrence that most police officers (and parents) routinely deal with—sometimes can have outcomes with important strategic implications, especially in

¹⁶Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), Chapter 1.

¹⁷This does not necessarily require that the adversary be a unitary actor. Deterring an adversary might involve changing the policy preferences of several different, perhaps even competing, substate actors or interest groups within it, which may respond in different ways to particular deterrence measures. On the need to disaggregate the enemy, and the challenges of doing so, see Kirshner, “Microfoundations of Economic Sanctions.”

peacekeeping and related operations. Although strategic and tactical deterrence have many similarities, the two can differ significantly because of the nature of the actors involved and the kinds of pressures that can be applied to them. In particular, psychological factors are likely to loom larger and work differently in shaping the results of tactical coercion against individuals than they do in coercion of states or large groups that are governed by more complex decisionmaking bodies.¹⁸ In some conflicts, both types of deterrence will be important. In others, central authorities may have virtually complete control over the tactical actions of their subordinates, so only strategic deterrence will really matter. But when the policy objective depends on shaping the behavior of individuals or small groups operating independently of higher authority, the tactical level of deterrence may be the only one in play.

Compellence

Whereas deterrence seeks to dissuade the target from doing something the coercer wishes to avoid, compellence attempts to make the target change its behavior in accordance with the coercer's demands—for example, to halt an invasion, to withdraw from disputed territory, or to surrender.¹⁹ However, almost everything true about deterrence applies to compellence as well, though not always in exactly the same way. Moreover, the line separating the two categories is not always clear. For example, as Thomas Schelling observes, a demand that an invader not proceed beyond a particular geographic threshold can be interpreted with equal plausibility

¹⁸This is not a true dichotomy, of course. When national decisions are made by a single individual, strategic deterrence is likely to resemble tactical deterrence more than when national decisions are in the hands of a large, bureaucratized government, for example. On the role of psychological factors in coercion, see, for example, Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, eds., *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); and Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making* (New York: The Free Press, 1977).

¹⁹Some theorists (for example, Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996]) refer to compellence (a term coined by Thomas Schelling) simply as coercion, on the grounds that this is consistent with the colloquial meaning of coercion. However, doing so leaves no term to attach to the combined category of coercion (i.e., deterrence and compellence) as described here, which is the reason Schelling introduced the new word in the first place.

either as compelling the enemy to halt his advance or as deterring him from advancing further.²⁰

In compellence, as in deterrence, successful threats do not have to be carried out. However, violence may be used to make the threat, particularly in compellence. While deterrent threats take the form “if you do A, I will do B,” compellent threats are often open-ended: “until you do X, I will do Y.”²¹ This approach to compellence is risky because it cedes the initiative to the adversary, who can choose how long to resist the coercer’s demands and thus how high the cost of the compellent policy will be. Because of this, it may be more attractive to threaten discrete compellent actions, along the lines of “unless you do X by my deadline, I will do Y.”

Other things being equal, compellence tends to be more difficult than deterrence. It is usually easier to make a potential aggressor decide not to attack in the first place than it is to cause the same aggressor to call off the attack once it is under way, for a variety of fairly obvious reasons, such as the political and psychic costs of reversing a policy after it is publicly embarked upon. If the coercer is demanding that the adversary abandon a war or some other effort that has already cost a great deal of blood or treasure and the pursuit of which has involved intense mobilization of nationalist or religious sentiment, success may be especially hard to achieve. Once a conflict is over, observers almost always conclude that the war should have ended sooner than it did, if only the losing side had been less reluctant to admit that the situation had become hopeless.²²

The characteristic perhaps most often associated with compellence in the popular imagination is the gradual escalation of force, as discussed prominently in the work of Thomas Schelling. This approach was famously used during Operation Rolling Thunder, the U.S.

²⁰Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 77; Byman, Waxman, and Larson, *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument*, pp. 11–12.

²¹An equally important but often ignored element of the coercive threat is its second half: “and if you comply with my demands, I will not do B (or will stop doing Y).” If the target does not expect that punishment is conditional upon its behavior, there is no incentive to comply. Thus, any coercive threat also involves a corresponding promise, and the credibility of each matters (as will be discussed below).

²²Pape, *Bombing to Win*, pp. 32–35.

bombing of North Vietnam in 1965–1968, and its spectacular lack of success in that costly campaign permanently discredited gradual escalation, and with it the compelling use of force more generally, in the eyes of many American military strategists.²³ However, this is an intellectual mistake on two levels. First, the failure of Operation Rolling Thunder stemmed from many factors, and while some of them related to the particular ways in which gradualism was applied against Hanoi, the outcome of this single campaign by no means demonstrated that gradual escalation is always doomed to fail.²⁴ Second, and more important in the context of this report, compellence need not involve gradual escalation. Indeed, coercive force can be applied in virtually unlimited ways, although when states perceive that they can achieve their objectives through limited (and thus typically less costly) use of force, they are likely to take advantage of the opportunity.

COERCIVE STRATEGY

Coercion depends on making the target decide that acquiescence is a better course of action than defying the coercer's demands. In deterrence, this means making the expected value of aggression (or whatever else is being deterred) appear worse than the expected value of the status quo. In compellence, it means making the value of resistance appear worse than the value of compliance. How attractive aggression or resistance appears will depend in turn on three factors: the expected benefits if the action is ultimately successful, the expected costs of the policy, and the expected probability of succeeding at it.²⁵

²³On Rolling Thunder, see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), and Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1980).

²⁴Peter W. Huggins, *Airpower and Gradual Escalation: Reconsidering the Conventional Wisdom* (master's thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 2000).

²⁵This can be represented symbolically, for those who are so inclined, in the following inequality:

$$B_C - C_C > P_S(B_{SR} - C_{SR}) + (1 - P_S)(B_{UR} - C_{UR}),$$

where B is expected benefits, C is expected costs, C_C indicates the results of complying with the coercive demands, $_{SR}$ and $_{UR}$ indicate the results of successful and unsuccessful resistance, and P_S is the estimated probability that resistance will succeed.

There are thus three principal approaches to coercion. *Accommodation*, also known as “positive deterrence,” offers incentives for complying with the coercive demands.²⁶ Although this approach is often the most effective and efficient way to achieve coercive objectives, either alone or in a “carrot and stick” combination with other coercive measures, it does not typically involve a large role for military forces, so it will not be a major focus of this study.

Punishment is the strategy most strongly associated with coercion: threatening to impose high costs on the adversary if it does not comply with the coercive demands. Punishment may involve threatening to kill or harm civilian populations, to kill soldiers in combat, or virtually any other threat to inflict harm against something that the enemy decisionmakers value. In its purest form, punitive coercion does not limit the enemy’s ability to act but instead seeks to destroy the will to do so by making the effort appear too expensive to be worthwhile.²⁷

Coercion by *denial*, in contrast, seeks to convince the adversary that resisting the coercer’s demands will be unsuccessful. This typically involves threatening to defeat an enemy on the battlefield, although denial may take other forms instead, depending on the enemy’s

Coercion should be successful if the left side of the inequality is greater than the right. For the specific case of deterring aggression, substitute S_Q (status quo) for C , V (victory) for S and S_R , and D (defeat) for U_R . Extreme risk acceptance or aversion can be represented by increasing or discounting the values attached to the appropriate costs and benefits. (See Karl Mueller, “Strategy, Asymmetric Deterrence, and Accommodation,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1991.)

In using such formulas, however, Glenn Snyder’s timeless caveat should be borne firmly in mind: “The numerical illustrations are intended simply to set out as starkly as possible the essential logic of deterrence; there is no intent to light a torch for the ‘quantifiability’ of the factors involved, which are of course, highly intangible, unpredictable, unmeasurable, and incommensurable except in an intuitive way” (Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, p. 16n).

²⁶Milburn, “What Constitutes Effective Deterrence?” As noted above, many deterrence theorists reject including reassurance or promises of reward under the heading of coercion. This prejudice is less common among scholars of international political economy. See also David A. Baldwin, “The Power of Positive Sanctions,” *World Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (October 1971), pp. 19–38, and Mueller, “Strategy, Asymmetric Deterrence, and Accommodation.”

²⁷Schelling, *Arms and Influence*; Quester, *Deterrence Before Hiroshima*; and Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.

strategy.²⁸ Where punishment seeks to coerce the enemy through fear, denial depends on causing hopelessness. Of course, punishment and denial strategies often overlap because defeating an enemy almost always inflicts damage along the way, while many forms of punishment will also make some contribution to convincing the enemy that defeat is inevitable.²⁹

Because coercion depends on the adversary weighing the expected results of several courses of action and then choosing the more attractive one, it presumes that policy decisions are made with some degree of rationality.³⁰ However, the adversary need not behave with perfect rationality for coercion to be applicable, its behavior simply must not be totally irrational. The more rational the adversary, the more predictable its behavior may be, but departures from ideal rationality may make it either easier or more difficult to coerce. In practice, no state acts perfectly rational, stemming from such factors as incomplete information, limited time to make decisions, bureaucratic politics and organizational processes, and leaders' personalities. Yet states (and significant nonstate political entities) rarely act in ways that appear truly unreasoning on close analysis.³¹

It is far more common for states' actions to be branded as irrational when they are actually being driven by logical and consistent sets of preferences, but these are not well understood by others.³² It is not

²⁸Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*; Adam Roberts, *Nations in Arms*, second edition (London: Macmillan, 1986); Pape, *Bombing to Win*.

²⁹There is a fourth possible approach to coercion: convincing the enemy that even if it succeeds, the benefits will be small, for example by threatening to destroy assets that an invader covets. Although there have been interesting cases of such coercion strategies, they typically depend upon the existence of relatively unusual circumstances. For further discussion of these approaches, see Mueller, "Strategies of Coercion."

³⁰See George Downs, "The Rational Deterrence Debate," *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (January 1989), pp. 225–237.

³¹On the problems of assessing an adversary's interests and inclinations in the face of real-world obstacles, and some approaches to overcoming them, see Paul K. Davis, "Improving Deterrence in the Post-Cold War Era," in Paul K. Davis, ed., *New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much Is Enough* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-400-RC, 1994), pp. 197–222.

³²Kenneth Watman, Dean Wilkening, John Arquilla, and Brian Nichiporuk, *U.S. Regional Deterrence Strategies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-490-A/AF, 1995); Yehezkel Dror, *Crazy States: A Counterconventional Strategic Problem* (Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1980).

irrational to either prefer death before dishonor or to prefer the opposite. Because coercion depends entirely on the target state's choices, a poor grasp of what the adversary values and how it makes decisions can easily be a recipe for strategic failure, as well as bewilderment. Such misperceptions may not only cause coercion to fail where it is expected to succeed but may also lead to policies that have effects opposite to those intended.³³

Coercion Outcomes

Assessing whether a coercion policy was successful can be a difficult task. Compellence results are often ambiguous, especially when some of the coercer's demands are met but others are not. Even when coercion succeeds, deciding how much to credit the coercion policy can be a problem because it is often difficult to be sure that the same outcome would not have resulted from a different policy or even no policy effort at all. This issue arises particularly in cases of successful deterrence, such as the U.S. effort to deter an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia in 1990, where it may not be clear whether the potential aggressor was seriously considering attacking in the first place. Even when a coercion strategy can clearly be credited with success, which of its elements were necessary to produce the outcome and which were superfluous may remain the subject of active debate for years or decades afterward, even when the leaders who made the key decisions provide firsthand testimony.³⁴

When assessing the merits of coercion strategies, it is also important not entirely to conflate the success or failure of coercion with the

³³Of course, inadequate understanding of one's own strengths, weaknesses, and values can also be a recipe for failure.

³⁴For example, Pape, *Bombing to Win*; Barry D. Watts, "Ignoring Reality: Problems of Theory and Evidence in Security Studies," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 115–171; Robert A. Pape, "The Air Force Strikes Back: A Reply to Barry Watts and John Warden," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 191–214; Mueller, "Strategies of Coercion"; Barton J. Bernstein, "Compelling Japan's Surrender Without the A-Bomb, Soviet Entry, or Invasion: Reconsidering the US Bombing Survey's Early-Surrender Conclusions," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 101–148; Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, "Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), pp. 5–38; and Stephen T. Hosmer, *The Conflict over Kosovo: Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-1351-AF, 2001).

success or failure of the overall strategy. For example, a strategy may fail to coerce the adversary, yet make a significant contribution to a larger effort that achieved its objectives, as in the case of the Allied air campaign against Germany in World War II.³⁵ Or a strategy may fail to coerce its apparent target (or never have been truly intended to do so), yet have important coercive effects on other audiences.³⁶ On the other hand, a strategy may achieve its coercive objectives yet be accounted a failure in the long term because of its indirect results or the fleeting nature of its success.³⁷

Although many studies have sought to identify factors that can explain and predict the success or failure of coercion strategies, none has identified a simple and reliable recipe for success.³⁸ However, a number of patterns have emerged. As a first approximation, it can be said that the effectiveness of a coercive threat is a function of the target's perception of the coercer's capability, the credibility of the threat, its severity relative to the stakes in the confrontation, and the target's ability to respond to the strategy with coercion of its own.

Capability

Capability was not the central concern of U.S. deterrence theorists during the height of the Cold War, because the ability of the superpowers to carry out their nuclear threats was often, though not always, taken for granted. The less a coercion situation resembles the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff, however, the more important assessments of capability become, for two reasons. One is that the milder a threat is, the more willing the target state may be to take a

³⁵Richard J. Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995).

³⁶Thomas P. Ehrhard, *Making the Connection: An Air Strategy Analysis Framework* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 1995).

³⁷Examples in this category range from the Soviet defeat of Finland in 1940 to the 1991 UN intervention in Somalia, which initially was a spectacular success, saving many lives at very low cost.

³⁸For example: George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*; Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, second edition (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994); Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*; Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*; Pape, *Bombing to Win*; Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy After the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

chance that it cannot actually be carried out, a subject to which we will return shortly. The other is that conventional military threats are, on the whole, more vulnerable to being foiled by defensive measures than are threats of nuclear attack, which encourages targets not only to question coercers' ability to carry out their threats, but also to develop countermeasures instead of accepting their own vulnerability.³⁹

It is also important to note that what matters is not raw military capability in the purest sense, but instead the capability that the coercer can realistically bring to bear in a particular situation. A variety of domestic and external factors may effectively limit one's capabilities and, although these constraints are likely to be less severe the higher the stakes are for the coercer, rarely are they entirely absent. For example, in many crises it is inconceivable that the United States would employ nuclear weapons, so the U.S. nuclear arsenal becomes irrelevant to assessments of U.S. capabilities in those cases.

Credibility

The credibility of coercive threats is central to deterrence theory because the efficacy of a threat depends not only on whether the coercer appears capable of carrying it out but also on whether it appears likely to do so. (As discussed earlier, whether the coercer actually will carry out its threat is irrelevant, the question is what the target believes that it will do.) Coercive threats need not be entirely believable, however. Even a very small chance that a coercer will follow through on a threat to inflict great harm, such as launching a nuclear attack, may carry considerable coercive weight. Generally, the more frightening a threatened action is, the less credible it needs to be. Conversely, more severe threats are typically (but not always) more expensive to carry out. When this is so, they are less likely to be entirely credible than milder ones because the coercer has greater incentives to renege on costly threats than inexpensive ones.⁴⁰

³⁹Richard J. Harknett, "The Logic of Conventional Deterrence," *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 86–114, refers to this property as "contestability."

⁴⁰Not all threats are expensive to execute, however. See, for example, Jonathan Kirshner, *Currency and Coercion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), Chap-

With many deterrent threats, credibility depends not only on the apparent will to act, but also on an apparent will to act with persistence. If the target believes that the coercer will deploy troops, establish a blockade, or impose economic sanctions but expects that the coercer will soon tire of the policy and abandon it, the credibility of the initial threat is likely to count for little.⁴¹

Coercers seek to increase the credibility of their threats by a wide variety of means.⁴² Many of these involve making it harder not to carry out their threats by creating situations in which it would be politically costly or physically impossible to back down. For example, to bolster extended deterrence, states may deploy “trip wire” forces in the line of a potential aggressor’s advance against an ally, signaling that once lives had been lost, the deterrer could not fail to continue fighting against the enemy that had attacked its own troops.⁴³ In some cases, giving the enemy information about one’s plans or capabilities may enhance credibility because what is not known cannot coerce. In others cases, coercive credibility may benefit from ambiguity. For example, if accurate information would reveal the actual weakness of one’s strength or resolve, capabilities or intentions left unclear may be more frightening.

What Is at Stake for the Enemy?

There is more to coercion than making credible threats and having the apparent ability to carry them out, however. It is also necessary to threaten the target with something worse than the results of complying with the coercive demands. This requires the coercer to understand what the enemy values: not only how much it values what is being threatened, but also how committed it will be to resisting the coercion. Some demands may be so severe than no possible

ter Three. Conversely, making a threat less costly to carry out will not necessarily make it more credible—the target may interpret very inexpensive threats as a signal that the coercer lacks the will to act at all.

⁴¹William E. Herr, *Operation Vigilant Warrior: Conventional Deterrence Theory, Doctrine, and Practice* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 1997).

⁴²See especially Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.

⁴³Of course, if the foe believes that inflicting casualties against the deterrer will instead break its will to fight, such a strategy would be far less appealing.

coercive pressure will be sufficient to produce compliance.⁴⁴ Indeed, in many cases of unsuccessful coercion, the coercer's threats were entirely credible and were even carried out exactly as promised but simply were not substantial enough to tip the target's calculus in favor of surrender.⁴⁵ When the stakes are very high, punishment strategies will rarely succeed, at least on their own, because even a very small chance of eventually prevailing may well be enough to motivate the target to resist, even if this requires paying a high price.⁴⁶

Success may also depend on creating a sense of urgency in the adversary, a belief that not only is complying with the coercer's demands sensible but that doing so quickly will be better than delaying the capitulation.⁴⁷ This may be accomplished by presenting a deadline or ultimatum, after which the conflict will escalate or the demands will increase, or by inflicting high ongoing costs that the target will be anxious to bring to an end. However, in some cases a deadline might instead provoke an opponent into a preemptive attack or other actions intended to head off the approaching disaster before the window of opportunity closes.⁴⁸

Coercion and Countercoercion

Finally, coercers should recognize that coercion, particularly compellence, is a two-way street. While the coercer seeks to compel the

⁴⁴Michael Brown, *Deterrence Failures and Deterrence Strategies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, P-5842, 1977).

⁴⁵Classic examples include Israel's failure to deter Egyptian attack in 1973, the U.S. grain embargo and Olympic boycott against the Soviet Union following the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan (although Washington can hardly have expected compellence to succeed in that case), and the UN sanctions to coerce Iraq into giving up its chemical and biological weapons in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War.

⁴⁶Pape, *Bombing to Win*; Mueller, "Strategies of Coercion."

⁴⁷George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*.

⁴⁸Richard Ned Lebow, "Windows of Opportunity: Do States Jump Through Them?" *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 147–186, but see also Dan Reiter, "Exploding the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars Almost Never Happen," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 5–34. Japan's decision to attack the United States in 1941 is the archetypal example of such a case; see Scott Sagan, "From Deterrence to Coercion to War: The Road to Pearl Harbor," in George and Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*.

adversary to comply with its demands, the target will usually attempt to make the coercer abandon its effort or perhaps comply with its own set of more extensive demands.⁴⁹ Whichever party gives up first loses.⁵⁰

A wide range of countercoercion strategies is possible. The target may seek to punish the coercer by striking at its military forces, its homeland, or anything else it values, using military, economic, or other means. It may concentrate its energies simply on resisting the coercive pressure applied against it, developing defenses and countermeasures and hoping to hold out longer than the coercer is able or willing to persist. Or it may seek to change the situation at the outset—for example, by striking quickly and presenting the coercer with a *fait accompli* before it can carry out its own preparations for the campaign.

Capability, vulnerability, will, and external constraints all matter in deciding the outcome of the contest. A state that cares far more about the issue in dispute than its adversary has a considerable advantage, but so does a state that can bring greater capabilities to bear or that faces fewer limitations in its employment of them. Any edge can help. In the end, coercion is most likely to succeed when the coercer can convince the target that resistance will be costly, success will be impossible, and the cost of complying with the coercive demands is a price that it can afford to pay. Coercion may succeed without achieving all of these conditions, particularly if the stakes are low, but failure to fulfill any of them may be sufficient to make a coercive strategy fail.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO COERCE?

To determine how and with what means to coerce an adversary, one must make two fundamental assessments. One is partly quantitative: an assessment of the capabilities possessed by the adversary

⁴⁹Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, "Defeating U.S. Coercion," *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 107–120.

⁵⁰Of course, in practice such victories may be Pyrrhic and defeats may turn out to be for the best in the long run. Coercion is a competitive game but not always a simple one.

relative to those of the coercer. The other assessment is qualitative: an analysis of the adversary's deterrence/compellence threshold vis-à-vis the issue at stake (the context).⁵¹ From this appreciation, a net assessment can be conducted to determine the adversary's strengths and weaknesses and what means will likely be necessary to coerce or defeat him.⁵² In short, one must understand the adversary's will and his capabilities to be able to determine the resources and capabilities necessary to coerce him and, if coercion fails, to force him to meet your demands.

⁵¹Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 2-0: Doctrine for Intelligence Support* (Washington, D.C., 2000) and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 2-02: National Intelligence Support to Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C., 1998) contain detailed descriptions of the U.S. intelligence agencies and of the processes and joint doctrine for intelligence support to interagency, joint, and multinational operation. See also Ashley J. Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-1110-A, 2000). This study proposes a different analytic framework to understand "true" national power, noting the failure of existing frameworks to accurately measure the relative power of nations. As evidence, the authors note that the "Soviet Union and Iraq, classified as relatively significant powers by some aggregate indications of capability, either collapsed through internal enervation or proved utterly ineffectual when their capabilities were put to the test in war" (p. iii).

⁵²See Department of Defense, Office of Net Assessment, "Fact Sheet: What Is Net Assessment?" (undated). This document offers the following definition of net assessment: "Broadly defined, a net assessment is an evaluation of the strengths and weakness of two or more competitors. In particular, net assessments involve a long-term and comprehensive *diagnosis* of that competition. These assessments are designed to highlight existing or emerging problem areas, or important opportunities that deserve top-level attention to improve the future US military position. Net assessments are inherently eclectic. In addition to models and simulations used in traditional systems analyses, a net assessment may be informed by contributions for the fields of demographics, economics, science and technology, sociology, political science, business, history and anthropology. Thus, the general characteristics of a net assessment are that of a long-term, holistic, multi-disciplinary study of national-level competition, rather than a simple 'snapshot' of the current situation and a prescriptive solution to the challenge at hand. Net assessments are designed primarily to inform senior decisionmakers responsible for long-range national security planning. The net assessment frames the state of the competition by identifying key long-term trends, major asymmetries in the capabilities of nations, as well as the operational concepts and strategies of the US and its adversaries that are relevant to the continuing competition. In the end, the decisionmakers are presented with the *net balance* of the strengths and weakness that emerges from this broad-based comparison, as well as a set of issues that are important for top-level officials to address concerning emerging threat areas or important opportunities. . . . The office [OSD Office of Net Assessment] provides the Secretary of Defense, military commanders, and other Department of Defense officials with assessments of military balance by major geographic theater or functional mission area." (Emphasis in the original.)

RAND senior scientist Paul Davis has analyzed the factors that contribute to an adversary's propensity for risk-taking behavior as a crucial factor in assessing his potential for aggression (Figure 2.2).⁵³

Davis identifies several factors that shape the cost-benefit analysis used by a protagonist contemplating aggression, which represent important, specific manifestations of the general principles presented earlier in this chapter:

- **An assessment of the current situation and trends in the future.** If the assessment results in the conclusion that the status quo is unacceptable (or likely to become so) and that military action offers greater payoffs with acceptable risks, then aggression is more likely.

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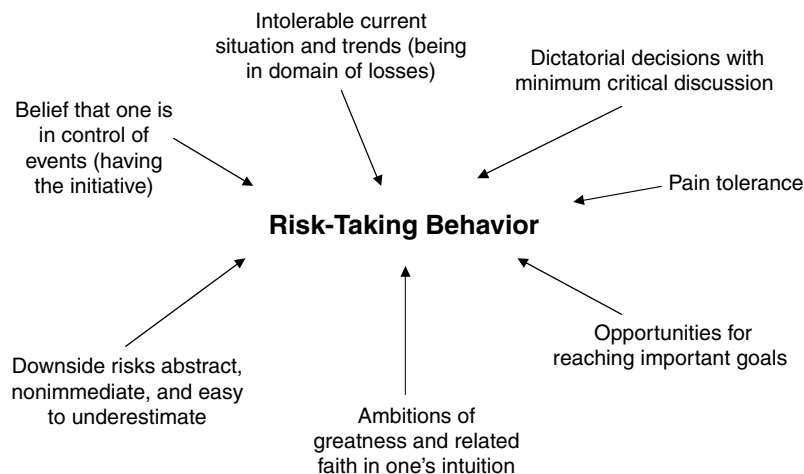


Figure 2.2—Factors Contributing to Risk-Taking Behavior by an Adversary

⁵³Davis, *New Challenges for Defense Planning*, pp. 209–210.

- **The degree to which decisions can be taken unilaterally (limiting discussion that might change perceptions).** The classic example here is that of Adolf Hitler, who made unilateral decisions about strategy (the invasion of the Soviet Union in particular) and did not allow discussion of potential risks, despite the existence of a professional German general staff, which rapidly came to understand Hitler's authority and assumed a largely sycophantic role.
- **Ability to tolerate pain.** The higher an adversary's tolerance for pain, the greater is his propensity to take risks. For example, the ability of the North Vietnamese to absorb years of bombing and attrition of their ground forces during the Vietnam War greatly exceeded the estimates of U.S. planners.⁵⁴
- **The potential to achieve important goals.** The greater the prize, the more likely an aggressor will be to risk action. Paul Huth has noted the heightened propensity for aggression if "the decision to dispute territory could be linked to the expected political benefits of increased popular support and legitimacy when claims were directed at achieving national unification, the recovery of lost national territory, or gaining access to valuable economic resources."⁵⁵
- **Ambition.** The more ambitious the adversary, the more likely he is to commit aggression. Davis cites the example of Saddam Hussein: "This is often underestimated in thinking about adver-

⁵⁴See John E. Mueller, "The Search for the 'Breaking Point' in Vietnam: The Statistics of a Deadly Quarrel," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24 (December 1980), p. 499. Mueller notes that "American strategies for success in Vietnam were based on the central assumption that if the Communists sustained enough military punishment they would finally relent, forsaking (at least temporarily) their war effort." In short, the North Vietnamese had a "breaking point." Unfortunately for U.S. strategy, the North Vietnamese were committed to a protracted war, no matter how much pain was inflicted upon them. A statement by Vo Nguyen Giap, a principal North Vietnamese leader, showed the level of this commitment and his nation's ability to absorb pain: "Every minute, hundreds of thousands of people die all over the world. The life or death of a hundred, a thousand, or tens of thousands of human beings, even if they are our own compatriots, represents really very little" (quote from commentary by Robert Kromer in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell, eds. [New York: Crane, Russak, 1977], p. 77).

⁵⁵Paul K. Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 182–183.

saries in crisis and conflict. Status-quo powers fairly comfortable with their own circumstances are especially likely to underestimate others' ambitions. So it is that Saddam Hussein was erroneously assumed to be 'pragmatic' and to be merely looking for a way to improve Iraq's economic situation 'somewhat,' when in fact he had grandiose goals."⁵⁶

- **The abstractness of risk factors.** The more remote or abstract the risk, the more it may be underestimated by someone who is yearning for action. This encourages quick and decisive action by aggressors because the perceived risks of immediate action are mitigated by the potential for gain, while longer-term abstract risks can be obscured by the present. For example, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait based on an assessment of the immediate risks of that action—without giving full consideration to the more remote and thus abstract risk of an eventual war with the United States.⁵⁷
- **The belief that one is in control of events and has the initiative.** An adversary who believes he can "make his own luck" is more likely to commit aggression. The most obvious example is Adolf Hitler, who came to believe intensely in his own ability to overcome almost any obstacles in the path of his designs for German victory.⁵⁸

Davis's theoretical construct provides a useful method for assessing an adversary's willingness to suffer costs and accept risks and thus

⁵⁶Davis, *New Challenges for Defense Planning*, p. 209. On the subject of national ambition, see also Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁵⁷See also Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, p. 74. Huth notes "potential attackers seek quick and decisive results with the use of force at relatively low cost. It follows that the most effective military deterrent is the capacity of the defender to repulse an attack and deny the adversary its military objectives at the outset and early stages of an armed confrontation. The capabilities of the defender and its protégé to prevail in a prolonged struggle are not an effective deterrent because the potential attacker does not initiate the use of force with the intention to engage in a war of attrition. Deterrence based on the threat of denial is much more effective than the threat of punishment in a protracted war."

⁵⁸Davis, *New Challenges for Defense Planning*, pp. 209–212. Davis's model is most applicable to state actors, but it can also provide useful insights into nonstate actors as well, e.g., the leadership of the Kosovo Liberation Army and its aspirations in the Balkans or the willingness of Osama bin Laden to continue his campaign of terrorism.

provides a basis for crafting a coercion regime to modify his potential or actual behavior.⁵⁹ In short, accurately understanding your adversary's motivation will give you a better appreciation for his perceived stake in the issue at hand—and an indication of the probable level of effort needed to coerce him. Sun Tzu's advice that "The prosecution of military affairs lies in according with and [learning] in detail the enemy's intentions" still merits attention.⁶⁰

The second key element in beginning to craft a coercion strategy is an assessment of the adversary's capabilities—i.e., his means to achieve his aims and to resist your coercive efforts. This should include both quantitative and qualitative analyses of his capabilities in the four military operational domains (ground, sea, air, and space), as well as his infrastructure and population, to achieve his aims and resist coercion—and his centers of gravity or vulnerabilities in each of these areas.

Table 2.1 depicts a matrix that incorporates the dimensions of adversary will and capability. This matrix provides a simple framework for estimating the level of effort likely required for a successful coercion strategy and the basis for the military dimension of the net assessment that will determine the joint or coalition force packages necessary to achieve it.

Categorizing the Adversary's Coercion Threshold

Column A of Table 2.1 represents the normal peacetime relations among nations where there is little, if any, threat of military aggression, even though the "adversary"—or, perhaps more appropriately, the "competitor"—might possess significant military capabilities. Thus, competition is largely confined to the diplomatic, economic, and information realms, and such cases will not be discussed further here. Entries in Columns B through E, however, represent the cases

⁵⁹It also has value for analyzing one's own mind-set or those of allies and other third parties.

⁶⁰Ralph D. Sawyer, translator, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), p. 182.

Table 2.1
Assessment Matrix—Adversary Will and Capabilities

	Coercion Threshold vis-à-vis the Issue at Stake				
	A Responds to Nonmilitary Means (Economic, Diplomatic, Information)	B Coercion Requires Modest Military Means (Show of Force)	C Coercion Requires Physical Pres- ence of Sub- stantial Mili- tary Means	D Coercion Requires Application of Substan- tial Military Force	E Not Co- ercible— Must Be Defeated by Military Means
1 Negligible	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1
2 Modest	A2	B2	C2	D2	E2
3 Intermediate	A3	B3	C3	D3	E3
4 Substantial	A4	B4	C4	D4	E4

where military capability is potentially a necessary component of a coercive strategy (usually in concert with some or all of the other elements of power as well).

Adversaries in Column B are sufficiently committed to achieving their objectives that purely nonmilitary coercive pressure will not cause them to comply. However, a relatively minor show of force or other military threat may do so. This is often the case in peacekeeping operations, for example. Typically, actors in this category are unwilling to risk armed conflict at any level in pursuit of their goals, either because the stakes do not appear high enough or because they are highly averse to the risks entailed in military confrontation. In Column C are states against whom significant military means must be brought to bear to coerce—typically capabilities sufficient to defeat the enemy in the event of conflict. Coercion may require little or no actual use of force if the capability is clear, but the adversary must face the prospect of substantial costs before it will choose to comply. This was the level of commitment that many Western leaders attributed to Slobodan Milosevic prior to the 1999 bombing of Serbia, when President Bill Clinton and others expected that a few

days of token air attacks would be sufficient to make Milosevic agree to the terms of the Rambouillet agreement.⁶¹

In fact, it turned out that Serbian commitment to resisting NATO's demands actually fell into Column D: cases where very substantial military force must be brought to bear, to the point of threatening the survival of the enemy state or regime, in order to achieve coercion. Faced with the prospect of such dire costs, even vital interests may appear to be worth sacrificing, but, unless the adversary is extremely weak, as in Haiti, this will likely require great effort on the part of the coercer. Finally, the cases in Column E are those in which the coercer is demanding that the target state or leader give up what it holds most dear, typically national survival or the political or personal survival of the enemy leaders. If in these cases, as in the Soviet effort to subdue Afghanistan or the U.S. effort to arrest Manuel Noriega, compliance will never be more attractive than resistance for the enemy, so victories will only be achieved through brute force.

Columns B, C, and D represent domains where an adversary can plausibly be coerced. Actually coercing him, however, depends on developing and applying a strategy that communicates your capability to prevail (based on an assessment of his capability [rows 1–4]), and your commitment (political will) to do so. Column E represents a domain where the extreme determination of the adversary makes a successful deterrence or compellence strategy essentially unachievable. In these cases, the adversary will have to be physically defeated to impose your will on him.

Assessing an Adversary's Capabilities to Resist Military Coercion

In the Table 2.1 matrix, we have arbitrarily classified adversary capabilities relative to those of the United States in four broad categories: negligible, modest, intermediate, and significant. For the purposes of this study, we have used the following definitions for these categories, focusing on the categories in Columns B through E that require military action as a component of a coercive strategy.

⁶¹See Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), and Hosmer, *The Conflict over Kosovo*.

- **Negligible:** The potential adversary, although possibly capable of resisting diplomatic, economic, and informational coercion, does not have the capability to resist the application of military force and, if not coerced, can usually be defeated through a strike.⁶² An example of an adversary in this category is Grenada during Operation Urgent Fury. Another example of a case where the adversary has negligible capability is the ongoing peacekeeping operation in Kosovo, where violence between poorly armed Serb and Albanian Kosovars has largely been deterred by lightly armed KFOR peacekeepers.
- **Modest:** The potential adversary has sufficient capabilities to require the application of low-level SSC military effort to defeat him if coercion failed. An example of this is the fielded forces of the Bosnian Serb Army, who conceded to NATO's coercive demands, embodied in the 1995 Dayton Accords, only after air strikes and battlefield defeats by their Croat and Bosnian enemies.
- **Intermediate:** The potential adversary has capabilities that would require the application of high-level SSC military effort to defeat him if deterrence failed. An example of this type of capability is Serbia during Operation Allied Force.
- **Significant:** The potential adversary has capabilities that would require the application of MTW-level effort to defeat him if deterrence failed. An example of this level of capability is North Korea.

In addition to assessing what level of capability a potential adversary possesses, one should identify centers of gravity and key vulnerabili-

⁶²See Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-07: Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War* (Washington, D.C., 1995), III-15, for the following definition of strikes and raids: "**Strikes are offensive operations conducted to inflict damage on, seize, or destroy an objective for political purposes.** Strikes may be used for punishing offending nations or groups, upholding international law, or preventing those nations or groups from launching their own offensive actions. **A raid is usually a small-scale operation** involving swift penetration of hostile territory to secure information, confuse the enemy, or destroy installations. It ends with a planned withdrawal upon completion of the assigned mission. **An example of a strike** is Operation URGENT FURY, conducted on the island of Grenada in 1983. **An example of a raid** is Operation EL DORADO CANYON conducted against Libya in 1986, in response to the terrorist bombing of US Service members in Berlin." (Emphasis in the original.)

ties. For example, Operation Allied Force took advantage of the ability of NATO air power to operate with virtual impunity from high altitude against Serbian targets—a Serbian vulnerability. Finally, strategists should also consider whether adversaries possess asymmetric capabilities for countercoercion that are not captured in a purely quantitative assessment of military strength. For example, regardless of what other capabilities a potential adversary may possess, having the ability to strike the U.S. homeland or allies with nuclear or biological weapons could fundamentally alter the net assessment calculus for the United States.

Insights from a Matrixed View of Potential Adversaries

Combining the assessments of a potential adversary's coercion threshold and of his capabilities yields a perspective that gives a better indication of what an adversary will do and what will be necessary to deter or defeat him than can be derived from a simple comparison of military capabilities alone. This is particularly important in deterrence because the relative military strength of a potential adversary is not necessarily an accurate predictor of his propensity to commit aggression.⁶³ Still, “size does matter,” and the most difficult deterrence cases are in the domains where the United States faces an implacable foe that cannot be dealt with in a rapid manner. This inability can be caused by a number of factors. First, as in the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (E2), the adversary (the mujahideen), although possessing only modest military means, may be difficult to defeat because of complex terrain, external support, their commitment to protracted guerrilla warfare, and the absence of a center of gravity vulnerable to the means employed by the coercer. Second, as in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam (E3), the adversary (North Vietnam) may be willing to bear more pain than the coercer can or will inflict on him because of his commitment to nationalism, access to external support, and the availability of sanctuary from the coercer's capabilities—coupled with U.S. concerns of involving other actors (principally China in this case) in the conflict. Third, the scale of the effort required because of an adversary's (Iraq's) capabilities, as in Operation Desert Storm (D4), may require a substantial buildup of

⁶³Huth, *Standing Your Ground*, pp. 103–149, 182.

forces and protracted “softening-up” before an attack is launched, thus precluding a quick result.

What is important about the E2, E3, and E4 cases is that misreading the will of an adversary—even if one has an accurate assessment of his capabilities—can result in an “undeterrable” or “uncompellable” conflict, one that requires far greater capabilities and resources to resolve than one would expect from a purely capabilities-based assessment. Various U.S. agencies have been successful—and are becoming more so—in the process of quantitative and qualitative assessment of the military capabilities of potential adversaries. Nevertheless, as will be shown in the case studies, there has often been considerably less success in assessing adversaries’ intent and consequently the amount of force necessary to cause their accession to coercive demands.

As this discussion suggests, the matrix is intended to serve as a cognitive tool for strategy-making, not as a device for generating specific coercion strategies or force-sizing prescriptions.⁶⁴ Because coercion is a political process, its results depend to a significant degree on variables that defy quantitative measurement. Moreover, so many factors affect coercion outcomes that even if all those that were important in past cases could somehow be quantified, it would still be impossible to insert them into a deterministic model capable of producing consistently accurate predictions and reliable policy prescriptions for future situations.⁶⁵ Of course, historical experience still has much useful guidance to offer policymakers, but it means that searching for simple algorithms to tell the strategist exactly what sort or how many forces to employ in a particular coercive effort will be

⁶⁴This is reflected by the fact that the columns refer to will, not merely to the value the enemy places on the issue in dispute. A state in cell D1 presumably cares more about the stakes than one in D4 because it has a comparable will to resist in spite of being far weaker.

⁶⁵Political scientists have systematically applied quantitative methods to the study of deterrence and war since the 1960s, and, although some of their findings have been important, this enterprise has consistently been hampered not only by problems of measurement but also by the fundamental limitations inherent in using overly simple methods to analyze highly complex events. The results of this scholarly effort have fallen far short of the hopes of those who originally launched it. For an overview, see Jack Levy, “Quantitative Studies of Deterrence Success and Failure,” in Paul C. Stern, Robert Axelrod, Robert Jervis, and Roy Radner, eds., *Perspectives on Deterrence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

fruitless.⁶⁶ In short, the practice of coercion, like the practice of war, remains as much an art as it is a science.⁶⁷

⁶⁶See Watts, "Ignoring Reality," and the response in Pape, "The Air Force Strikes Back."

⁶⁷See Bernard Brodie, "Strategy as a Science," *World Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 1949), pp. 467–488 and *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), Chapter 10.