

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 57  
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 14

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2004

# The United States and Coercive Diplomacy

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### Recommended Citation

Norton, Richard; Art, Robert J.; and Cronin, Patrick M. (2004) "The United States and Coercive Diplomacy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 57 : No. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol57/iss2/14>

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split-second pressures and an unprecedented barrage of information that was often ambiguous, uncertain, contradictory, or quite often wrong.” The authors acknowledge a number of changing characteristics in war, including the emphasis on speed, precision, simultaneity, and the need for modular force structure, interdependence between service units, and jointness at lower levels. Yet they also stress that true knowledge was rare. No matter how sophisticated the intelligence collection, a real picture was rarely formed until a human being laid eyes on the target. Finally, the authors adroitly connect the growing complexity of today’s battlefield with the need for high-quality leaders who have been immersed in an intensive training and education regimen. The adaptability of U.S. commanders made up for strategic and intelligence inadequacies. It was this mental agility that permitted the creative, quick thinking that was so evident as American forces transitioned from deliberate planning at Central Command to reacting to real but unforeseen circumstances on the ground.

This final chapter overlooks a critical shortfall in U.S. strategic readiness. The U.S. military must become adept at “multidimensional operations” to combat insurgencies and prop up failed states. Murray and Scales admit that the United States could have been better prepared for the transition to stability operations, and they admit that its military is inclined to “avoid the messy business that lies beyond clear-cut, decisive military operations.” The U.S. military excels at *combined arms*—the combination of infantry, armor, and artillery to enable fire and maneuver. It is not as good at *combined means*—

employing other instruments of national power, including the full panoply of the interagency community toward a desired end state. The American way of war is unsurpassed at the fighting aspects of war, but this does not necessarily translate to winning the peace. This shortfall was manifested by the failure of both the Bush administration and the military to prepare fully for its occupation of Iraq and the continuing need to conduct the sort of nation-building activities that are occupying the U.S. armed forces in Asia. The Pentagon is now examining innovative organizational and doctrinal changes to address the problem. However, the solution lies beyond that five-sided structure and must include a maladroit national security architecture that has resisted substantive post-Cold War realignment.

This is a remarkably impressive work, especially since it was produced so close to the fighting. Undoubtedly, a more comprehensive assessment of the war will eventually be produced, probably years from now when distance, objectivity, and primary source material are available. For the foreseeable future, however, *The Iraq War* will be the definitive history of this complex and multifaceted campaign.

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Art, Robert J., and Patrick M. Cronin, eds. *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2003. 442pp. \$19.95

The threat of force is an instrument of statecraft—an instrument that U.S. presidents have not been afraid to use. When successfully employed, the threat of force can deter an adversary from embarking upon an unwelcome course of action or coerce an adversary to cease undesirable activities. Scholars and practitioners both acknowledge that of these two means of force, coercion is by far the more difficult to execute.

*The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* attempts to increase our understanding of coercive diplomacy by building upon works of other scholars of international relations, in particular Alexander George, the noted scholar of international relations. The appearance of this book is especially timely, since the 1990s witnessed numerous attempts on the part of the White House to employ coercive diplomacy—a trend that has continued to the present day. Given such potentially contentious issues as the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs, Chinese-Taiwanese relations, and the global war on terror, it appears that coercive diplomacy has a high probability of continued use.

The editors take a straightforward approach to their subject. A brief introduction by Robert Art defines the term “coercive diplomacy,” discusses its use by national leaders, and describes the structure of the book. In the following seven chapters, contributing authors present seven case studies that have involved U.S. efforts to employ coercive diplomacy. Each study seeks to determine whether coercive diplomacy was successful and why success or failure resulted. These studies are followed by a concluding chapter in which Art reviews the contributors’ findings and

provides his own comparisons. He then offers general conclusions regarding coercive diplomacy and several recommendations that national leaders should consider.

Taken in its entirety, *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* is a worthy book, deserving attention from those in both academia and government. The writing is articulate, the chapters well organized, and the conclusions reasonable. More importantly, this book belongs to the all-too-small family of books that contribute to, as Alexander George once wrote, “bridging the gap” between academicians and national leaders, between theory and practice.

That said, there are some drawbacks to this work. Structurally, it would have benefited if the contributors had followed a common format when presenting and analyzing their various cases. Also, the definition of the term “coercive diplomacy” lacks precision, as Art readily admits. However, it is clear that coercive diplomacy employs a threat of force, and sometimes the use of force, to get a target (the recipient of the coercive threat) to do something that the coercer wants but that the target does not. The editors make a point of distinguishing between coercive *efforts*, which do not involve the threat of force, and coercive *diplomacy*, which does. While the inclusion of the threat of force clearly marks a coercive threshold, a deeper discussion of coercive efforts would have been of significant interest to those who may have to use coercion as part of statecraft. Even more problematic is the question of the degree of force required to distinguish coercive diplomacy from war. Robert Art notes that the line is not easily drawn or distinct; the discussion and case studies

reinforce that observation. Presumably the distinction is an important one, and potentially there are different cautions and prescriptions to be followed for the different strategies.

The cases examined in the book are well chosen and have been studied at the Naval War College. They examine the efforts made by the Clinton administration to use coercive diplomacy in Somalia, Bosnia/Kosovo, and Haiti; in the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation; to coerce the North Koreans into abandoning their nuclear weapons program; and several attempts to use coercive diplomacy against Saddam Hussein from 1990 to 1998. The final study discusses the use of coercive diplomacy in the U.S. response to terrorism. Interestingly, and perhaps inadvertently, the cases are presented in ascending order of quality.

The Somalia case, written by Nora Bensahel, concludes that providing security for humanitarian relief efforts was a success for U.S. coercive diplomacy. As Art points out, there can be a fine line between compellence and deterrence. Bensahel's study would seem to make a stronger case for a successful deterrent strategy being initially employed, not a coercive one. However, there can be no doubt that this turned into an attempt to use coercive diplomacy as a tool in the nation-building efforts that subsequently followed, and that it failed.

Both the Somalia and Bosnia/Kosovo discussions suffer from brevity. Of course, a certain degree of editing is inevitable for these complex and lengthy cases, but too much has been left out, most notably a detailed discussion of the impact of the Croatian ground

offensive that occurred in conjunction with the NATO air campaign in 1995. It could also be argued that the Kosovo campaign was an exercise in coercive diplomacy from beginning to end and never truly transitioned into a "war." The meticulous selection of targets, some of which were chosen more for psychological than purely military impact; the extremely limiting rules of engagement employed by NATO; and the eventual introduction of the threat of a ground campaign make Kosovo appear to be a case of "tightening the screw" vice a failure of coercive diplomacy. Of course, both conclusions are debatable.

Robert Pastor was privileged to be present at the last-minute, face-to-face negotiations between General Raul Cedras (the leader of the Haitian coup), Jimmy Carter, Colin Powell, and Sam Nunn. Pastor's account is spellbinding, but it can be argued that he overstates the importance of these negotiations in his presentation of the Haitian case. Art again deflects much of the criticism associated with this observation when he admits that the Haitian case is not easy to categorize. Is it a case of successful coercive diplomacy at the last minute, or one of the shortest and least sanguinary combats on record, given that Cedras did not capitulate until after receiving positive confirmation that an invasion force was en route?

Jon B. Alterman's discussion of Iraq, like that of Somalia and Bosnia/Kosovo, covers much temporal ground in relatively few pages. Among the more significant questions addressed is whether the Tomahawk missile attacks conducted against Iraq in response to the discovery of a plot to assassinate former president Bush were truly an example of coercive diplomacy. It seems at least

equally likely that the attacks had nothing to do with coercion and were simply a form of reprisal.

Three of the final four cases, written by William Drennan (Korea), Robert S. Ross (China-Taiwan), and Martha Crenshaw (war on terror), are very good. Both Drennan's and Crenshaw's work deserve special mention. Drennan advances the argument that it was North Korea, not the United States, that successfully employed coercive diplomacy in the Korean nuclear crisis, and he offers compelling justification for his conclusion. Crenshaw takes on the extremely topical and thorny issue of whether coercive diplomacy has even a remote chance of success when employed against extremely dedicated nonstate actors. The well laid out conclusion is that it is not possible to use coercive diplomacy directly against such actors but it is possible to use coercive diplomacy against state actors that may also be involved.

In many ways Art's final chapter is the capstone piece of the book—as it should be. One of his major conclusions is that efforts to use coercive diplomacy fail two out of every three times. To his credit, he takes care to temper this finding with caution. For example, he admits that leaders may embrace a strategy of coercive diplomacy to convince a domestic audience that “everything has been tried” to gain support for war, rather than any effort to truly change the target's behavior. Thus some historical examples of “failures” of coercive diplomacy may have been initiated with no expectation of international success. He also

tangentially touches another potential category of “failure” that should have been explored in greater depth and might skew the percentage of failures attributed to coercive diplomacy. One of Art's prescriptions for policy makers is that coercive diplomacy should never be attempted unless one is willing to go to war if the effort fails. Sound advice, but even a state that has already decided to go to war should perceive a long-shot attempt at coercive diplomacy not as a policy failure per se but merely as an option with a chance, however small, of a large payoff with potentially no cost.

Art distills the findings of this book into six guidelines for practitioners who wish to employ coercive diplomacy. Four of these were initially postulated by Alexander George; their wisdom is reconfirmed by the research in this work. Two additional guidelines are described as prerequisites for having a chance at successfully utilizing coercive diplomacy. “Demonstrative denial” is a form of coercive diplomacy that works better than “limited punishment.” The other type of coercive diplomacy has already been mentioned. These guidelines are far more than just a reiteration of “common sense” or “good diplomatic practices,” but true aids and cautions to decision makers and should not be taken lightly.

The United States Institute for Peace should be commended for backing this project, which deserves an audience both inside academia and inside the Beltway.

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