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*The Limits of
Coercive Diplomacy*

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Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics

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THE CONCEPT OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

First we need to clarify how we are using the concept of coercive diplomacy in this study and to differentiate it from other ways in which threats are used as an instrument of policy.¹ In this study, we restrict the definition of the term *coercive diplomacy* to defensive uses of the strategy—that is, efforts to persuade an opponent to stop or reverse an action. Defensive uses are quite distinct from offensive ones, wherein coercive threats can be employed aggressively to persuade a victim to give up something of value without putting up resistance. Such offensive uses of coercive threats are better designated by the term *blackmail strategy*.

Coercive diplomacy also needs to be distinguished from deterrence, a strategy that employs threats to dissuade an adversary from undertaking a damaging action not yet initiated. In contrast, coercive diplomacy is a response to an action already undertaken.

The term *compellance*, which Thomas Schelling introduced into the literature almost thirty years ago, is often employed to encompass both coercive diplomacy and blackmail and sometimes deterrence as well. I prefer not to use this term for two reasons. First, it is useful to distinguish between defensive and offensive uses of coercive threats; compellance does not. Second, the concept of compellance implies exclusive or heavy reliance on coercive threats, whereas I wish to emphasize the possibility of a more flexible diplomacy that can employ rational persuasion and accommodation as well as coercive threats to encourage the adversary either to comply with the demands or to work out an acceptable compromise.

As defined here, then, coercive diplomacy is a defensive strategy that is employed to deal with the efforts of an adversary to change a status quo situation in his own favor. We have found it useful also to distinguish among three quite different defensive objectives coercive diplomacy can pursue. The aim may be limited to merely stopping the action. A more ambitious aim is the reversal of what has already been accomplished. An even more ambitious aim, as Bruce Jentleson notes in his case study, is a cessation of the opponent's hostile behavior through a demand for change in the composition of the adversary's government or in the nature of the regime. This type of demand stretches coercive diplomacy to its outer limits since it may blur the distinction between defensive and offensive uses of threats. And, quite obviously, the more ambitious the demand on the opponent, the more difficult the task of coercive diplomacy becomes. Table 1 differentiates among these three types of defensive coercive diplomacy and illustrates their primary distinction from the strategy of deterrence.

OTHER NONMILITARY STRATEGIES

Coercive diplomacy is only one of several nonmilitary strategies that may be resorted to by the "defender" when confronted by an adversary's attempt to change an existing situation to his own advantage. Some other strategies the defender can employ are listed below.²

1. *"Drawing a line."* When confronted by an adversary's efforts to alter an existing situation in his own favor, the defender may respond by drawing a line to indicate that further action would provoke a strong response.

2. *Buying time to explore a negotiated settlement.* This defensive strategy may be resorted to when the defender (1) is operating under political, diplomatic, or military disadvantages; (2) recognizes that the adversary's dissatisfaction with the status quo has some merit; or (3) believes that the most important of his own interests might first be safeguarded through negotiation before contemplating more forceful strategies.

3. *Retaliation and reprisals.* In some situations this strategy may be preferable to weaker or stronger responses to the adversary's provocation. Carefully measured reprisals, chosen to match but not exceed the adversary's actions, may be necessary to communicate clearly an intention to resist and, hence, offer the possibility that the opponent will desist or that the crisis may then enter a stage of negotiations. Retaliation or reprisals, however, may have to be accompanied by deterrent threats to dissuade the opponent from escalating to stronger action.

4. *Engaging in a "test of capabilities."* When the defender is confronted by a relatively low-level, controlled challenge to the status quo—a blockade, for example—he may forego coercive diplomacy or military action and instead

TABLE 1 Three Types of Defensive Coercive Diplomacy

| <i>Deterrence</i> | <i>Coercive Diplomacy</i> | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| | <i>Type A</i> | <i>Type B</i> | <i>Type C</i> |
| Persuade opponent not to initiate an action | Persuade opponent to stop short of the goal | Persuade opponent to undo the action | Persuade opponent to make changes in government |

attempt to meet the challenge within the framework of the ground rules associated with the opponent's challenge. Even though at that early stage the ground rules seem to favor the opponent's eventual success, the defender may hope that the expected outcome can be reversed through hard work, skill, improvisation, and efficient use of available resources, thereby forcing the adversary to decide whether to engage in a risky escalation of the crisis or to accept the failure of his initiative. The defender may also have to undertake measures to deter the opponent from escalation. Two examples of this strategy, both successful, were the response of the West to the Berlin Blockade of 1948 by using an airlift and the U.S. response to the Chinese artillery blockade of Quemoy and Matsu in 1958.

Thus, coercive diplomacy is not the only nonmilitary option available to the defender when confronted by an action that encroaches on his interests. Any of these four strategies may be preferable to an immediate resort to coercive diplomacy. And coercive diplomacy may be tried (as in the Persian Gulf crisis) before resorting to war.

THE APPEAL OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Coercive diplomacy is an attractive strategy because it offers the defender a chance to achieve reasonable objectives in a crisis with less cost, with much less—if any—bloodshed, with fewer political and psychological costs, and often with less risk of unwanted escalation than is true with traditional military strategy. A crisis resolved by means of coercive diplomacy is also less likely to contaminate future relations between the two sides than is a war.

However, precisely because of these attractions, coercive diplomacy can also be a beguiling strategy. Leaders of militarily powerful states may be tempted at times to believe that they can, with little risk, intimidate weaker opponents into giving up their challenge to a status quo situation. But the militarily weaker state may be strongly motivated by what it has at stake and refuse to back down, in effect calling the bluff of the coercing power. The latter, then, must decide whether to back off or to escalate the crisis into a military confrontation.

Moreover, as illustrated in the case studies, militarily powerful states may encounter other constraints, risks, and uncertainties in attempting to employ

a coercive strategy. Finally, it should be noted that coercive diplomacy is sometimes chosen by the defender not because of its attractions but rather (as in the Bush administration's response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait) because at the inception of the crisis, political-diplomatic support, or military readiness, for a resort to force is lacking.

COERCIVE DIPLOMACY: AN ALTERNATIVE TO MILITARY STRATEGY

Coercive diplomacy, then, offers an alternative to reliance on military action. It seeks to persuade an opponent to cease aggression rather than to bludgeon him into stopping. In contrast to the blunt use of force to repel an adversary, coercive diplomacy emphasizes the use of threats of punishment if the adversary does not comply with what is demanded. If force is used in coercive diplomacy, it takes the form of an exemplary or symbolic use of limited military action to help persuade the opponent to back down. By "exemplary" I mean just enough force of an appropriate kind to demonstrate resolution and to give credibility to the threat that greater force will be used if necessary.³ Even a relatively small exemplary action (as, for example, President Kennedy's ordering U.S. "civilian advisers" in Laos in April 1961 to put on their uniforms) can have a disproportionately large coercive impact if it is coupled with a credible threat of additional action. The strategy of coercive diplomacy, however, does not require use of exemplary actions. The crisis may be satisfactorily resolved without an exemplary use of force; or the strategy of coercive diplomacy may be abandoned in favor of full-scale military operations without a preliminary use of exemplary force. Hence, in coercive diplomacy, if force is used at all it is not part of conventional military strategy but rather a component of a more complex political-diplomatic strategy for resolving a conflict of interests, which is why *coercive diplomacy* is an appropriate description.

Coercive diplomacy, then, calls for using just enough force of an appropriate kind—if force is used at all—to demonstrate one's resolve to protect well-defined interests as well as the credibility of one's determination to use more force if necessary. To this end, both the threat and employment of force should be coupled with (that is, preceded, accompanied, or followed by) appropriate communications to the opponent. The coercive strategy necessarily includes the signaling, bargaining, and negotiating that are built into the conceptualization and conduct of any military alerts, deployments, or actions—features that are not found or are of secondary interest in traditional military strategy.

Coercive diplomacy seeks to make force a much more flexible, refined psychological instrument of policy in contrast to the "quick, decisive" military strategy, which uses force as a blunt instrument. In coercive diplomacy,

the goal is to persuade the opponent to stop or to undo encroachment instead of bludgeoning him into doing so or physically preventing him from continuing.

NOTES

1. I remind the reader that the definitions offered here—as is true of most definitions of complex phenomena—tend to oversimplify reality and are best regarded as a starting point for empirical analysis of a particular phenomenon that should go beyond the confines of the definition.

2. These alternative defensive strategies, their uses and limitations, and examples of each are discussed in A. L. George, ed., *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 383–392.

3. The concept of exemplary use of force presented here as a possible component of coercive diplomacy is not always easily distinguishable in historical situations from the practice of retaliation and reprisals. Strictly speaking, the term *reprisal* should be reserved for an action that is limited in purpose to punishing an opponent for a transgression in some appropriate way. Retaliation and reprisal may also constitute what some writers refer to as *active deterrence*. In contrast, the purpose of an exemplary use of force in coercive diplomacy is to convey a willingness to do more, if necessary, to persuade the opponent to stop or to undo his transgression. When the offended state does not make clear whether its action is merely a reprisal or an exemplary component of coercive diplomacy, the historian will have difficulty determining the purpose of that action.

Theory and Practice

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THE ABSTRACT MODEL OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY: ITS USES AND LIMITATIONS

The abstract model identifies the general characteristics of coercive diplomacy and the basic "logic" on which its presumed efficacy rests. The logic of coercive diplomacy postulates that such diplomacy will be successful if demands on an adversary are backed with a threat of punishment for noncompliance that will be considered credible and potent enough to encourage compliance. It should be evident that the logic of coercive diplomacy rests upon the assumption of a "rational" opponent; that is, it assumes that the adversary will be receptive to and will correctly evaluate information that is critical to the question of whether the costs and risks of not complying will outweigh the gains to be expected from pursuing the course of action.

I discuss under "Task 3" in this chapter the various limitations of this assumption of rationality and here address three other characteristics and limitations of the abstract model. First, it gives the policy maker only limited help in devising an effective version of coercive diplomacy for any specific situation; second, it cannot be used to predict whether coercive diplomacy will be successful in a specific situation; and third, it is not a *strategy* of coercive diplomacy.

The first of these three limitations means, quite simply, that the abstract model identifies only the general logic of successful coercive diplomacy and does not include what must be done to inject that logic into the adversary's calculations and lead him to comply with the demand made. To achieve that result, the policy maker must tailor the abstract model to the specific configuration of each situation in which coercive diplomacy is attempted, a task discussed more fully under "Task 4" in this chapter.

Second, to achieve the possibility of predicting outcomes of coercive diplomacy, a specification of the conditions under which its general logic can

be achieved in a variety of situations would have to be added to the abstract model. Only if such specificity is added to the model—thereby making it a fully developed, robust deductive theory—could individual situations be analyzed to predict the success of coercive diplomacy. To achieve this predictive capability, the abstract model would have to be operationalized, which requires specification of ways of measuring or assessing the value of the key variables that enter into the particular interaction between the coercer and his opponent and also of the relationships that must exist among these variables in that specific situation for coercive diplomacy to be successful. These key variables are the magnitude of the demand(s) made on the opponent, the magnitude of the opponent's motivation not to comply, and the factor of whether the opponent will feel the threatened punishment is sufficiently credible and potent to cause him to comply. Operationalizing the model by means of such specifications is such an extremely complex task that it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.¹ It has not been done, for example, for the abstract rational model of deterrence,² and it would be equally, if not more, difficult to perform for the abstract rational model of coercive diplomacy.

The abstract model of coercive diplomacy that exists at present is at best only a quasi, incomplete deductive theory. The logic of the model indicates in a general way what must be achieved in any particular situation for coercive diplomacy to be effective, which is indeed useful. This logic at least identifies what some "necessary" conditions may be for successful coercive diplomacy, albeit under the questionable assumption of pure rationality on the part of the adversary. But the abstract model does not provide either a basis for judging whether in any particular situation the conditions for success already exist or, as already noted, for judging whether and how they can be created by the coercing power in implementing the strategy.

The third limiting characteristic of the abstract model is that it is not in and of itself a strategy. Rather, the abstract model is only a starting point—to be sure, a useful and relevant one—to assist policy makers in considering whether a particular version of coercive diplomacy can be designed that might be effective in a specific situation. In other words, for policy makers to make use of the abstract model, they must transform it into a specific strategy.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this logic of coercive diplomacy has several general implications that are relevant in various aspects of policy making: first, in the process of judging whether coercive diplomacy may be a viable strategy in a particular situation and, second, in the attempt to design and implement an effective version of the strategy for that situation. These implications become self-evident once we look more closely at the central task of coercive diplomacy, which is to cause the adversary to expect sufficient costs and risks to cause him to stop what he is doing.³ To have this impact we may ask how much of a threat, or of a combination of threat and pos-

itive inducement, will be necessary to persuade the adversary to comply with the demand made. The logic that underlies the abstract model tells us, by implication, that the answer will depend on two variables and on the relationship between them: first, what the coercing power demands of the opponent and, second, how strongly disinclined the opponent is to comply with that demand. From the logic of the model we also discern that these two variables are not independent of each other. That is, the strength of the adversary's disinclination to comply is highly sensitive to the magnitude of the demand made by the coercing power. Thus, asking relatively little of the opponent should make it easier for him to be coerced. Conversely, demanding a great deal of an opponent will strengthen his resistance and make the task of coercive persuasion more difficult.

Another important implication of the model's basic logic is that the coercer's choice of a demand will influence not only the strength of the opponent's motivation to resist but also the strength of the coercer's own motivation and, hence, the relative motivation of the two sides. *Motivation* in this context refers to each side's conception of what it has at stake in the dispute, the importance each side attaches to the interests engaged by the crisis, and what level of costs and risks each is willing to incur on behalf of those interests. If the coercing power demands something that is more important to it than to the adversary, then the coercer should benefit from what may be called an *asymmetry of interests*. Conversely, if the coercing power pursues ambitious objectives that go beyond its own vital or important interests, and if its demands infringe on vital or important interests of the adversary, then the asymmetry of interests and balance of motivation will favor the adversary and make successful application of coercive diplomacy much more difficult.

The way in which asymmetry of interests and relative motivation will be perceived by the two sides and what influence this will have on the outcome in real-life cases is more complicated than is suggested by the general logic of the abstract model, as our case studies demonstrate. Nonetheless, the logic of the model is important because it demonstrates that there is an important strategic dimension to the choice of the demand the coercing power makes on its adversary. Quite simply, strategic interests affect the motivation of both sides and the balance of motivation between them, variables that will likely influence both the interaction between them and the efficacy of the attempt at coercive diplomacy.

We see in the case studies in Part Two that these implications of the model's logic do indeed manifest themselves in practice and that they can play an extremely important role in determining the ease or difficulty of conducting coercive diplomacy. But we also see that various impediments to information processing, and political and psychological variables not encompassed by the abstract model's assumption of rationality, can have an important impact on

the way the model's logic actually operates in the real world, often making it more difficult for the coercing power to use the strategy effectively.

Another characteristic of coercive diplomacy is the possibility that the coercing power may couple its threat of punishment for noncompliance with positive inducements to encourage the adversary to comply with the demand. When this is done, the resulting variant of coercive diplomacy is often referred to as an example of the "carrot-and-stick" approach. As with threats of punishment, positive inducements and reassurances must also be credible. When both negative sanctions and positive inducements are employed, the adversary must make a more complex calculation of the utility of complying with the demand, although the logic of the model operates in the same way.

CONVERTING THE ABSTRACT MODEL INTO A STRATEGY: FOUR TASKS

I have noted that the abstract model of coercive diplomacy is not in and of itself a strategy. The model is only a starting point for designing a particular strategy of coercive diplomacy for a specific situation and also for helping to assess whether that strategy or variant of it would likely be successful in that situation.

How, then, is the abstract model transformed by the policy maker into a specific strategy? To achieve this, four tasks must be accomplished.

Task 1: Fill in the Four "Empty Boxes" *(Variables) of the Model*

To design a specific strategy of coercive diplomacy, the policy maker must make decisions regarding the four variables, or empty boxes, of the abstract model:

1. what to demand of the opponent
2. whether and how to create a sense of urgency for compliance with the demand
3. what punishment to threaten for noncompliance, and how to make it sufficiently potent and credible
4. whether also to offer positive inducements and, if so, what "carrot" to offer together with the "stick" to induce acceptance of the demand

I have indicated that what is demanded of the opponent is of critical importance in determining the balance of interests and motivation that will create ease or difficulty in carrying out coercive diplomacy. The case histories illustrate the importance of this variable in determining the success or failure of the strategy on different occasions.

The strategy one chooses in any particular situation may include an effort to convey to the adversary a sense of urgency for compliance with one's demand. It is generally presumed that a sense of urgency generally adds to the coercive impact the strategy has on the adversary. But, as is noted in Chapter 3 and in Part Three, risks are sometimes associated with creating urgency, and other reasons may exist for not placing the adversary under undue time pressure. There are different ways of transmitting a sense of urgency, most notably by setting an explicit and relatively brief time limit for compliance with the demand. However, a sense of urgency may also be conveyed by actions such as alerts and deployments of military forces, which may be coupled with verbal communications indicating that time is short.

The fact that coercive diplomacy functions on two levels of communication—both words and actions—is also evident in addressing the third variable in the model. The threat of punishment in the event of noncompliance may be signaled through military actions or political-diplomatic moves as well as by explicit verbal warnings. As is seen in the cases in Part Two, however, the defender's actions in any given situation can either strengthen or detract from the credibility of verbal threats. Hence, actions intended to convey a specific threat must be chosen carefully, in sensitive accord with the structure and evolution of the particular situation.

Another important decision to be made in designing and implementing a specific strategy of coercive diplomacy is whether to rely solely on a threat of punishment or also to offer positive inducements, concessions on behalf of a compromise settlement, or reassurances in order to secure the adversary's acceptance of the demand. The "carrot" in such a strategy can be any of a variety of things the adversary values. The magnitude and significance of the carrot can range from a seemingly trivial face-saving concession to substantial concessions and side payments that bring about a stable settlement of the crisis. Such a settlement may take shape either as a genuine, balanced quid pro quo or in the form of concessions that favor the opponent and do little more than permit the coercing power to save face and avoid an outright defeat.

Whether coercive diplomacy will work in a particular case may depend on whether reliance is placed solely on negative sanctions or on whether threats are coupled with positive inducements. This point has considerable practical as well as theoretical significance. What the threatened stick cannot achieve by itself, unless it is formidable, can possibly be achieved by combining it with a carrot. Indeed, in some cases the hard-pressed defender may rely more on offering a substantial carrot than on making a strong threat to achieve a minimal success.

Finally, the decisions made in specifying these four ingredients of a strategy at the outset are subject to change during the course of the crisis. The coercive power may stiffen or dilute its demands, enhance or relax the sense of urgency initially conveyed, strengthen or soften the threat of punishment

and its credibility, and move from reliance only on threats to a carrot-and-stick variant of the strategy.

Task 2: Identify the Preferred Variant of the Strategy of Coercive Diplomacy

Depending on what choices the policy maker makes with regard to the four variables of the model, the resulting combinations will define significantly different variants of the strategy. For analytical purposes, I have identified four such variants: the classic ultimatum, the tacit ultimatum, the "gradual turning of the screw," and the "try-and-see" approach.

The starkest variant of the strategy includes all three ingredients of a full-fledged classic ultimatum: (1) a demand on the opponent; (2) a time limit or sense of urgency for compliance with the demand; and (3) a threat of punishment for noncompliance that is credible and sufficiently potent to convince the opponent that compliance is preferable to other courses of action. An ultimatum, although the starkest variant of coercive diplomacy, is not necessarily the most effective. Moreover, as is seen in Chapter 3, ultimatums may take a variety of forms. An ultimatum may be inappropriate, infeasible, or even highly risky in a particular situation. (We return to this in some of the case studies and in Part Three.)

When a time limit is not set forth explicitly but a sense of urgency is nonetheless conveyed by other means, this variant of the strategy is referred to as a *tacit ultimatum*. Similarly, when the threat of punishment is not specifically set forth but is nonetheless credibly conveyed by actions, this variant may also be referred to as a *tacit ultimatum*. If a strategy incorporates an implicit rather than an explicit form of one of the three components of a classic ultimatum, however, it is not necessarily less potent. Before delivering an explicit ultimatum, a state may find it preferable—as John F. Kennedy did in the Cuban Missile Crisis—to convey the gist of that ultimatum through some combination of military preparations and stern warnings.

Other variants of coercive diplomacy exist in which one or another of these components of an ultimatum is diluted or absent. One is the *try-and-see approach*. In this version of the strategy, only the first element of an ultimatum—a demand—is made; the coercing power does not announce a time limit or convey a strong sense of urgency for compliance. Instead, it employs one limited coercive threat or action and waits to see whether it will persuade the opponent before making another threat or taking another step. There are several versions of the *try-and-see approach*, as is evident in some of the case studies in Part Two.

Stronger in coercive potential, though still falling well short of the ultimatum, is the variant of coercive diplomacy that relies on a gradual turning of the screw. This differs from the *try-and-see approach* in that a threat to grad-

ually step up pressure is conveyed at the outset and is carried out incrementally. At the same time, the gradual turning of the screw differs from the ultimatum in that it lacks a sense of time urgency for compliance and relies on the threat of a step-by-step increase in coercive pressure rather than of escalation to strong, decisive military action if the opponent does not comply. In practice, the analytical distinction I have just made between the *try-and-see approach* and the gradual turning of the screw may be blurred if the policy maker wavers or behaves inconsistently.

Several observations about these variants of coercive diplomacy are made in the next section, "Needed: An Empirical Theory and Generic Knowledge." It is sufficient to note here that when an ultimatum or a tacit ultimatum is not appropriate or feasible or is considered premature or too risky, a *try-and-see* or gradual turning of the screw approach may better fit the political-diplomatic-military configuration of the conflict. It is also true that, as happened in some of our historical cases, policy makers may shift from one of these variants to another. Sometimes, in fact, such strategy shifts may be inadvertent—especially if the policy makers do not maintain a consistent sense of operational purpose.

Indeed, helping to maintain a clarity of purpose is the main reason we distinguish among these four different forms the strategy of coercive diplomacy may take. These brief characterizations help sharpen the focus on the combination of policy choices made in Task 1. Still, although such a distinction is useful, it would be misleading to imply that the form of the strategy alone determines the likelihood of its success. Certainly from a formalistic standpoint, the ultimatum is a stronger, or starker, variant of the strategy than are the gradual turning of the screw and the *try-and-see approaches*. But the coercive impact of any particular form of the strategy and whether it will be effective depend on other factors to be discussed under "Needed: An Empirical Theory and Generic Knowledge."

Task 3: Replace the General Assumption of a "Rational" Opponent with an Empirically Derived Behavioral Model

The abstract model of coercive diplomacy, as noted earlier, assumes pure rationality on the part of an opponent. But in real life decision makers are not attentive to and do not correctly perceive all incoming information; various external and internal psychological factors influence their receptivity to new information and its assessment, and these factors also affect their identification and evaluation of options.

It is clear, therefore, that a specific behavioral model of the adversary is needed that will characterize in a more discriminating way how that opponent tends to approach the task of rational calculation—for example, how his values and beliefs influence his processing of information and evaluation of

options, and how political factors and organizational variables enter into his policy making.⁴ In sum, policy makers making use of a strategy of coercive diplomacy must replace the assumption of pure rationality with sensitivity to the psychological, cultural, and political variables that may influence the adversary's behavior when he is subjected to one or another variant of the strategy.

Task 4: Take into Account Contextual Variables

The abstract model of coercive diplomacy spins out its general logic without reference to the characteristics of any particular situation. In this sense, the abstract model is context-free. But in transforming the model into a variant of the strategy to be used in an actual situation, the policy maker must pay close attention to whether and how the logic associated with successful coercive diplomacy can be achieved in that particular set of circumstances. Many different situational-contextual factors vary from one crisis to another. The policy maker faces the difficult but necessary task of adapting the strategy of coercive diplomacy to the special configuration of the situation.

That this task is an important one quickly becomes evident when we study and compare different historical cases in which some type of coercive diplomacy was attempted. A number of the important contextual variables that were identified in the case studies are reported and discussed in Part Three. It will suffice here to emphasize that coercive diplomacy is a highly context-dependent strategy.

NEEDED: AN EMPIRICAL THEORY AND GENERIC KNOWLEDGE

Why does coercive diplomacy succeed on some occasions and fail on others? The abstract model provides only limited help in answering this question. It does offer a useful, though incomplete, framework that can serve as a starting point for such an inquiry. The model helps to identify some, though not all, of the variables that may account for success or failure of the strategy. Familiarity with the abstract model and its logic can also help investigators to raise some relevant questions and to formulate hypotheses as to why coercive diplomacy succeeded or failed. But the model itself cannot identify all possible explanations or assess explanatory hypotheses.

The abstract model lacks not only the ability to predict the outcome of efforts at coercive diplomacy but also adequate explanatory power. True, *after* the outcome of any attempt at coercive diplomacy is known, the model can be invoked to explain it. For example, one might be tempted to say that coercive diplomacy failed in a particular case because the threatened punishment was not credible or potent enough. Such pseudo-explanations lack relevant

supporting data and have a circular character. Post-facto "explanations" of this kind violate methodological canons and are not acceptable. A satisfactory explanation is possible—and then only possible—if adequate data are available on the decision-making processes of the two sides and the interaction between them that led to the success or failure of the coercive diplomacy. But even then, such data must be adequately analyzed and interpreted before valid conclusions can be drawn.

To understand why the strategy succeeds on some occasions and fails on others, we need to develop an empirical theory of coercive diplomacy by studying and comparing in a systematic way actual historical cases of success and failure. *Theory* in this context refers to the cumulation of generic knowledge about the conditions under which different variants of the strategy have succeeded or failed.

The policy maker who knows from the abstract logic of coercive diplomacy what must be accomplished in general terms can turn to generic knowledge of the strategy's past applications to diagnose its potential in a current situation. Judging from past cases, what kinds of circumstances favor the use of specific variants of coercive diplomacy? What possible obstacles and constraints to its success are likely to be encountered? How have specific opponents reacted to its use in different kinds of situations?

In sum, the abstract theory does not provide the policy maker with a basis for judging whether coercive diplomacy is likely to be effective in a particular situation. Rather, policy makers must turn to the generic knowledge derived from study of a variety of past cases for help in making such judgments.

NOTES

1. The difficulty or virtual impossibility of fully operationalizing the model stems from the fact that the outcomes of strategic interaction in a conflict situation are indeterminate.

2. For a discussion of the lack of a fully developed, "rational" deductive theory of deterrence and the difficulty in achieving it, see A. L. George and R. Smoke, "Deterrence and Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 170-182.

3. These implications of the abstract model emerged as analytical conclusions from the empirical case studies reported in the 1971 study by A. L. George, David K. Hall, and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). It is now possible, as I have done, to identify them as logical implications of a more fully stated abstract model.

4. For a more detailed discussion, see A. L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980), pp. 66-72. Also see George's *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice of Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1993).