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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> Throughout history, naval forces played a prominent role in supporting foreign policy objectives. Navies can support political objectives through cooperative diplomacy and the use of soft power, or they can support them through coercive naval diplomacy, often referred to as "gunboat diplomacy". Although in recent years, the United States Navy is increasingly focusing on the role of soft power in the prevention of war; coercive diplomacy is still an effective way in which to leverage naval power in support of foreign policy. The mobility, flexibility and combat potential of navies remain an effective coercive instrument of foreign policy. However, it is no longer possible to coerce a nation into doing one's bidding by simply stationing a man-of-war off the coast. The availability of modern naval weapons grants lesser maritime powers the ability to inflict significant harm on the most powerful navies. Furthermore, the importance of domestic and international public opinion must be considered before using naval forces for coercion. Coercive diplomacy can achieve tangible foreign policy objectives; however it requires a fusion of political, diplomatic and naval skills for success.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Coercive Naval Diplomacy**

**by**

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**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

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## **Abstract**

Throughout history, naval forces played a prominent role in supporting foreign policy objectives. Navies can support political objectives through cooperative diplomacy and the use of soft power, or they can support them through coercive naval diplomacy, often referred to as “gunboat diplomacy”. Although in recent years, the United States Navy is increasingly focusing on the role of soft power in the prevention of war; coercive diplomacy is still an effective way in which to leverage naval power in support of foreign policy. The mobility, flexibility and combat potential of navies remain an effective coercive instrument of foreign policy. However, it is no longer possible to coerce a nation into doing one’s bidding by simply stationing a man-of-war off the coast. The availability of modern naval weapons grants lesser maritime powers the ability to inflict significant harm on the most powerful navies. Furthermore, the importance of domestic and international public opinion must be considered before using naval forces for coercion. Coercive diplomacy can achieve tangible foreign policy objectives; however it requires a fusion of political, diplomatic and naval skills for success.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, naval forces have played a prominent role in supporting foreign policy objectives. Sir Julian Corbett describes the first function of the fleet as “to support or obstruct diplomatic effort”<sup>1</sup>. Naval forces can achieve political objectives through cooperative diplomacy and the use of soft power, or they can achieve them through coercive naval diplomacy, often referred to as “gunboat diplomacy”. Although the United States Navy is increasingly focused on the role of soft power in the prevention of war;<sup>2</sup> coercive diplomacy remains an effective way in which to leverage naval power in support of foreign policy. In spite of the pejorative connotation with which the term “gunboat diplomacy” is often used, coercive naval diplomacy is relevant today.

In many ways, navies are effective instruments of cooperative diplomacy. Coalition building, good-will port visits, regional presence, humanitarian assistance, and the building of national prestige are just some of the roles which navies conduct as a matter of course. With the release of the “Maritime Strategy. A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower” in 2007, the United States maritime services acknowledged the importance of a “cooperative approach to maritime security” in the prevention of war.<sup>3</sup> Less provocative than deployment of land forces, and possessing mobility and freedom of movement within international waters, the advantages of naval forces are obvious. With cooperative naval diplomacy, navies exercise naval influence, defined as “the ability to move others...through promises or grants of benefits.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Till, *Seapower: A guide to the Twenty-First Century*, 271.

<sup>2</sup> Axe, "Soft Power for Hard Problems; in Latin American Locales", 1.

<sup>3</sup> US Navy Strategy Document. "Maritime Strategy. A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower." 8.

<sup>4</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 27.

Naval forces are also an effective tool of coercion. Not all foreign policy objectives can be achieved through cooperation and the promise of benefits. Coercive naval diplomacy can persuade an adversary to change their behavior, enforce peace, obtain concessions, or expose weakness. Simply put, coercive diplomacy is “intended to influence behavior through the threat of pains and penalties.”<sup>5</sup> The threat can be implied by the latent combat power of warships, or it can be explicitly stated in terms of an ultimatum. Where cooperative naval diplomacy is an exercise in naval influence, coercive naval diplomacy is an expression of naval power, “the ability to move others by the threat or infliction of deprivations.”<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the political and technological changes that have occurred in the world since the gunboats of Western powers patrolled the rivers of China, the coercive role of naval power has survived.<sup>7</sup> The mobility and flexibility of navies remain an effective means of leveraging military strength in support of a wide variety of foreign policy objectives. However, it is no longer possible to coerce a nation into doing one’s bidding by simply stationing a man-of-war off of the coast. The availability of modern naval weapons grants lesser maritime powers the ability to inflict significant harm on the most powerful navies. Furthermore, the importance of domestic and international public opinion must be considered before using naval forces for coercion.

Gunboat diplomacy is not the right solution for every situation. Getting it wrong can lead to consequences contrary to the foreign policy objective. Coercion is much more complicated than simple naval presence. Coercive naval diplomacy can achieve tangible

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<sup>5</sup> Dismukes, Bradford, and McConnell, *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Murfett, “Gunboat Diplomacy: Outmoded or back in Vogue”, 81.

foreign policy objectives; however it requires a “fusion of political, diplomatic and naval skills”.<sup>8</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

The great utility of coercive naval diplomacy is made apparent through the variety of objectives for which it can be applied. Potential objectives range from general expression of foreign policy at one extreme, to the outright expulsion of a foreign government at the other extreme. Often coercive naval diplomacy is used to persuade an adversary to change their behavior. Naval forces are also used to enforce peace between two adversaries by a third party. However, if coercive diplomacy is to be successful, the coercing power must not upset the “asymmetry of motivation”, defined by Alexander George as the “belief that the assailant is more motivated to carry out the threat than the victim is motivated not to comply.”<sup>9</sup> The objective must be limited, focused and realistic. Coercive naval diplomacy is most likely “to be successful if the objective selected – and the demand made – by the coercing power reflects only the most important of its interests.”<sup>10</sup>

Coercive naval diplomacy is often employed to change the policies of an adversary. Throughout the 1980s, the United States exercised coercive naval diplomacy in order to alter the behavior of Libya. The United States Navy conducted provocative exercises in the Gulf of Sidra to challenge Libya’s claim to excessive territorial seas and to express displeasure of Libya’s support of terrorism.<sup>11</sup> The US Navy’s battle group operations in the Gulf of Sidra acted as a demonstration of naval power in order to change the behavior of an adversary.

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<sup>8</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991* 1994, 97.

<sup>9</sup> George 1991, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Murfett, “Gunboat Diplomacy: Outmoded or back in Vogue”, 86.

For relatively weak naval powers, coercive naval diplomacy is an effective method of obtaining political advantage over a more powerful adversary. In 1968, North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo* in international waters. In spite of a massive deployment of naval force, the United States did not obtain the release of the crew until eleven months after their capture, and only then after making humiliating concessions. North Korea humbled the most powerful maritime power in the world with a small navy and a few fighter aircraft. They succeeded in obtaining their limited objectives because of clear asymmetry of motivation. To the United States, a humiliating apology was the lesser evil when compared to possibly provoking war with North Korea with a more kinetic military response.

Coercive naval diplomacy is also used expressively. Naval forces are employed to “emphasize attitudes, to lend verisimilitude to otherwise unconvincing statements, or to provide an outlet to emotion.”<sup>12</sup> Such was the case when the United States deployed Seventh Fleet to the Sea of Japan following the destruction of a US aircraft in 1969. Following the failure of the same tactic a year earlier in securing the release of the *USS Pueblo*, President Richard Nixon “was merely assuaging US indignation by a gesture of expressive force.”<sup>13</sup>

The objective of coercive diplomacy can be more definitive, as in the case of the John F. Kennedy’s use of gunboat diplomacy against the Dominican Republic in 1961. The dispatch of a naval task force facilitated the expulsion of the ruling Trujillos family, and the establishment of a government acceptable to the United States.<sup>14</sup> “US representatives ashore made it quite clear that they might intervene if the surviving relations of the dictator Trujillo failed to facilitate the establishment of a government acceptable to the United States by

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<sup>12</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991* 1994, 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Crandall, *Gunboat Democracy*, 48..



leaving the Dominican Republic.”<sup>15</sup> The success of this operation is representative of the upper limit of what can be achieved through coercive naval diplomacy.

Although coercive naval diplomacy is used to achieve a wide variety of objectives, success is limited by the perception and reaction of the adversary. Moderation in the objective is a key to success. “The target, unless he panics easily, is unlikely to comply if the known costs of acquiescence are significantly greater than the hypothetical costs of resistance.”<sup>16</sup> For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1961, John F. Kennedy wisely limited his demands to the removal of missiles from Cuba. “Had Kennedy chosen more ambitious objectives...Khrushchev’s motivation to resist would have been greater, and quite possibly the variable of relative motivation would have operated in his favor.”<sup>17</sup>

## METHODS

Naval forces derive their diplomatic utility from their military character; therefore the common aspect of all methods of coercive naval diplomacy is the demonstration of naval power.<sup>18</sup> The flexibility and strategic mobility of naval forces offer many options to the coercing power. Methods include quarantine, show of force, preventive deployment, port visits and fleet concentration. Gunboat diplomacy can also be exercised by *fait accompli*, as in the case of the *USS Pueblo* incident. The coercing power may combine incentives with coercion in order to increase the motivation of the adversary to comply.

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<sup>15</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991* 1994, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Dismukes, Bradford, and McConnell, *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, xiii.

<sup>17</sup> George 1991, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 16.

## **Show of force in the Taiwan Strait**

During Taiwan Strait confrontation of 1995-1996, China utilized demonstrations of naval force in order to achieve tangible foreign policy objectives. Although not entirely successful, The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) did succeed in influencing a change in United States foreign policy.

In 1995, the PRC interpreted a series of actions by the US government, as supporting the Taiwanese independence movement. The Chinese leadership believed the sale of fighter aircraft to Taiwan, as well as the approval of visas for Taiwanese government officials, as a gradual shift in US policy towards support of Taiwanese independence. Alarmed by this perceived threat to the PRC's "one China policy", as well as increased independence rhetoric by Taiwanese politicians, the PRC sought to coerce the United States and Taiwan away from independence.<sup>19</sup>

In order to coerce the United States into formally committing to a one-China Policy, the PRC used demonstrations of military power. In July of 1995 the PRC conducted missile tests and naval exercises in the Taiwan Strait. Throughout the remainder of the year, and into March of 1996, the PRC gradually increased the frequency and size of their military demonstrations in the Taiwan Strait. Chinese exercises included a simulated blockade of Taiwanese port cities, amphibious landings, missile tests 20 miles from the coast of Taiwan, and the massing of over 100,000 troops opposite the strait. Furthermore, the PRC openly stated that the purpose of these exercises was to resist the independence activities of the Taiwanese.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Scobell, "Show of force: Chinese soldiers, statesmen, and the 1995-1996 Taiwan strait crisis", 228.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, "The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation", 15.

Although PRC military exercises failed to influence elections in Taiwan, China achieved some success in altering US foreign policy. Following the confrontation, Washington started to curtail the activities of Taiwanese politicians while visiting the United States. In addition, the Clinton administration increased bilateral negotiations with the PRC. Finally, in 1998 President Clinton made public assurances explicitly stating that the United States did not support Taiwanese independence, a first for an American administration.<sup>21</sup> The coercion of the PRC also led to “a more chastened and less boisterous Taiwan independence movement.”<sup>22</sup> Although the Clinton administration never believed the threat of PRC force to be credible, the PRC’s actions were sustained and strong enough to convince the United States of the PRCs resolve against Taiwanese independence.

### **Preventive Deployment of forces in the Taiwan Strait**

The provocative activities of the PRC initially failed to influence the behavior of the United States. “Despite China’s succession of exercises and missile tests, the Clinton administration remained confident that the PLA [People’s Liberation Army] would not attack Taiwan.”<sup>23</sup> Washington did eventually respond to the Chinese military activities; however this did not occur until March of 1996. In response to increased Chinese provocation, the United States responded with the deployment of two carrier battle groups to the region in order to observe Chinese exercises.

For the United States, coercive naval diplomacy achieved some success. The deployment of forces in support of Taiwan helped maintain US credibility as an ally, and signaled to the PRC the clear intentions of the United States to support Taiwan militarily

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<sup>21</sup> Ross, “The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation”, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Scobell, “Show of force: Chinese soldiers, statesmen, and the 1995-1996 Taiwan strait crisis”, 245.

<sup>23</sup> Ross, “The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation”, 19.

against the use of Chinese force.<sup>24</sup> The preventive deployment of two aircraft carriers, including one redirected from the Arabian Gulf, effectively ended the crisis. Both sides had effectively made their point; each drawing a red line not to be crossed.

### ***Fait accompli in the Arabian Gulf***

Traditionally, gunboat diplomacy is used by the strong versus the weak. However, a weak maritime nation can overcome a more powerful adversary by applying superior force locally. The 2007 abduction of Royal Navy and Marines personnel by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) is an example of this method. Iran successfully extracted concessions from a greater maritime power by establishing local naval superiority through a carefully planned operation. The Iranian government understood what the United Kingdom was willing to give in return for their servicemen, and exploited the situation accordingly, thus “humiliating Britain, long regarded as the chief schemer in Persia’s affairs”.<sup>25</sup>

In March 2007, the IRGCN successfully captured a 13 man Royal Navy boarding party. As the boarding party disembarked a merchant vessel following a routine inspection, they were met by IRGCN forces, and subsequently surrendered to them. The superiority of IRGCN forces were such that the Officer in Charge of the captured Royal Marines stated that “had we resisted, there would have been a major fight, one we could not have won, with consequences that would have had a major strategic impact.”<sup>26</sup>

Following the capture of the British sailors and marines, the Iranian government immediately exploited the incident for both domestic and international propaganda. Within

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<sup>24</sup> Freeman, “Preventing War in the Taiwan Strait”, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Economist, “Hostages to Fortune; Iran versus the West”, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Cowell, “Britons say they Feared for Lives in Iran Captivity”, 1.

days, the British servicemen appeared on international television apologizing for violating Iranian territorial waters, in spite of the British Prime Minister's protestations.<sup>27</sup> No doubt, this propaganda struck a chord amongst the developing world, historically the victims of British gunboat diplomacy. The Iranians portrayed themselves as "assertive Islamic crusaders and victims of Imperialism" to a world audience frustrated by an unpopular war in Iraq.<sup>28</sup> Iran released the prisoners twelve days later as a "gift to the British people on the occasion of the birthday of the great prophet and the passing of Christ."<sup>29</sup>

The motivations of the Iranian government are not known, however there are several possibilities. The capture of the British servicemen coincided with the passing of a second security resolution tightening sanctions on Iran.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that the IRGCN conducted this operation for a public audience. With a bad economy destined to get worse, the humiliation of a historic enemy helped the regime. Another possible motivation for the capture of the British servicemen is that the Iranians were merely asserting their claim to the contested area around the Shatt al Arab. There is no formal agreement delineating the distinction between Iraqi and Iranian territorial waters, as acknowledged by the British Ministry of Defense.<sup>31</sup> It is also likely that the IRGCN conducted this operation as an expressive use of gunboat diplomacy. The capture coincided with an American naval exercise occurring involving two aircraft carrier battle groups off the coast of Iran.<sup>32</sup> The Iranians proved that they were not impotent in the face of such overwhelming force.

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<sup>27</sup> Economist, "Hostages to Fortune; Iran versus the West", 69.

<sup>28</sup> Hastings, "Iran, the Vicious Victim", 27.

<sup>29</sup> Cowell, "Britons say they Feared for Lives in Iran Captivity", 1.

<sup>30</sup> Economist, "Hostages to Fortune; Iran versus the West", 69.

<sup>31</sup> UK Ministry of Defense Report, "UK Boarding Operations by CTF 158 in the NAG", 1

<sup>32</sup> Economist, "Hostages to Fortune; Iran versus the West", 69.

The Iranians exploited their adversary's weakness, and focused naval power to achieve a *fait accompli*. The Iranian government understood the limited ability of the British government to respond kinetically. The United Kingdom was unlikely to use force in responding to their actions, due to other military commitments. The Iranian government used the situation for propaganda purposes, exploited the situation, and ended the confrontation on their terms. They embarrassed their adversary, gained political capital at home and in the Islamic world, and forced the British government to acknowledge the unsettled border on the Shatt al Arab.

### **Port Visits in Support of an Ally**

Port visits by naval forces is a method of coercive naval diplomacy frequently used to reassure an ally as well as deter an adversary. The arrival of a Soviet task force in Port Said, Egypt in 1967 and the visit of USS Missouri to Istanbul in 1946 are examples of this method.

Following the end of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Soviet Union dispatched a powerful task force of ships to Port Said and Alexandria. In the aftermath of the war, the objective of the Soviet Union was, according the on-scene commander Rear Admiral I. N. Molodtsov, "to cooperate with [Egyptian] armed forces to repel any aggression."<sup>33</sup> These forces remained in port until the situation had stabilized.<sup>34</sup> More than just "showing the flag," the timely port visit both re-assured regional allies and deterred further hostilities between the Egyptians and Israelis. The Soviets would continue to use this tactic throughout the Cold War.

The United States also uses port visits to support allies and deter adversaries during crisis. In 1946 President Truman dispatched the USS Missouri to Istanbul and Greece in a

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<sup>33</sup> Dismukes, Bradford, and McConnell, *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, 118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

show of force designed to support their allies against Soviet pressure. The port visits encouraged Turkey and Greece to resist territorial demands made by the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> The USS Missouri also sent a clear message to the Soviets that the United States would support Turkey and Greece, and intended to keep both nations in the US sphere of influence.

### **The Carrot and the Stick**

Provocative acts of coercive naval diplomacy sometimes require a positive inducement to tip the balance in favor of the coercing power. The offer of conditional benefits introduces a bargaining element that creates greater incentive for the adversary to submit to the demands of the coercing power.<sup>36</sup> A positive inducement allows both sides to claim victory, thus granting the adversary a way in which to “save face”. President Kennedy’s response to the Soviet deployment of ballistic missiles to Cuba in 1962, is an example of the “carrot and stick” approach to coercive diplomacy. This incident also demonstrates the importance of coordination between naval force and political leadership.

In October 1962, the United States discovered partially completed Soviet missile bases in Cuba. Opting for a coercive strategy, President Kennedy declared a naval quarantine of Cuba. The quarantine acted as one part of a coordinated response which included preparations for air strikes, mobilization of land forces, and clear diplomatic communications. Although the quarantine would prevent further missile components from arriving in Cuba, it would not remove the missiles already on Cuba. The objective of the quarantine was to “demonstrate [Kennedy’s] resolution and exert enough pressure to induce Khrushchev to remove the missiles.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cable, *The Political Influence of Naval Force in History*, 178.

<sup>36</sup> George 1991, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Initially unsuccessful in persuading the Soviets to remove the missiles from Cuba, President Kennedy added incentives for compliance. The United States made a non-invasion pledge in return for the removal of the Soviet missiles. President Kennedy also included a secret agreement to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey.<sup>38</sup> These additional incentives, combined with the blockade, strong diplomatic communications and mobilization of the US military, proved to be successful.

The Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates several principles of successful coercive diplomacy. The Kennedy administration used the naval quarantine as part of a coordinated approach in coercing the Soviets to submit to their demands. This example also demonstrates the importance of giving your adversary a way in which to “save face”. The Soviet Union could claim success, thus maintaining credibility with their allies. Finally, the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates the importance of asymmetry of motivation and clear communication of intentions. The United States made it very clear to the Soviet Union that the removal of missiles from Cuba was more important to the US than the presence of the missiles was to the Soviets.

## COMPLICATIONS

With the availability of modern naval weapons to virtually every third-world nation, some would argue that gunboat diplomacy is an anachronism of a by-gone era. It is no longer possible to simply over-awe a population with naval might. The proliferation of effective cruise missiles and sea mines give nations with little or no naval forces the ability to strike back against the strongest maritime powers. The bombing of the *USS Cole* in 2000 illustrates that even non-state actors can inflict harm on the most modern warships. It can be argued that the utility of coercive naval diplomacy has “decreased because of the increasing

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<sup>38</sup> George 1991, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, 35.



capability and hence threat represented by the self-defense naval forces of many Third World nations.”<sup>39</sup>

The modern concept of unassailable sovereignty is also an obstacle to the success of gunboat diplomacy. The perceived violation of sovereignty may generate international sympathy for the coerced.<sup>40</sup> Nationalism emboldens the adversary to resist coercion. Most importantly, in the world of public opinion, the coercing power can be seen as a regressive force of colonialism. The longer the adversary resists the demands of the coercing power, the more likely public opinion may turn against the coercer.

Coercive naval diplomacy is also imprecise and completely dependent on the reaction of the adversary. “Its definitions, purposes and mechanics remain vague, and often the coercive effectiveness of an action only becomes clear afterwards.”<sup>41</sup> Mistakes made by the on-scene commander can result in a consequence counter to the objective.

Misinterpretation of the political situation can lead to long-term problems. The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis illustrates this point. Although the United States did achieve their short-term objective of stopping further Chinese provocation, it is probable that the US naval response created unintended consequences. Following the confrontation, the PRC started to acquire increased military capability in order to overwhelm Taiwanese defenses, regardless of American intervention.<sup>42</sup> As part of this effort, the PRC began negotiations to purchase Sovremeny class destroyers from Russian in 1996 shortly after the confrontation in the Strait of Taiwan.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991* 1994, 80.

<sup>41</sup> Till, *Seapower: A guide to the Twenty-First Century*, 287.

<sup>42</sup> Freeman, “Preventing War in the Taiwan Strait”, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ross, “The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation”, 26.

Finally, it can be argued that recent gunboat diplomacy failures give proof to its ineffectiveness. One needs look no further into the past than the launch of a North Korean ballistic missile in April 2009 to see a failure of coercion. In spite of the deployment of Ballistic Missile Defense ships by Japan, the United States, and Korea, and threats by Japan to intercept the missile, Kim Jong Il called the bluff and proceeded with the launch.<sup>44</sup>

### **MAKING IT WORK**

The political sanctity of national sovereignty and the military effectiveness of modern naval weapons complicate coercive naval diplomacy, but do not invalidate it. Greater care must be taken in the application of coercion in terms of public opinion. Modern anti-ship cruise missiles give small nations “a degree more of diplomatic freedom in their dealings with countries possessing larger navies”<sup>45</sup>, but do not make them invulnerable to coercion by superior naval force.

As an alternative to war, coercive diplomacy can be an effective way in which to support foreign policy objectives, however the proper conditions must be met for its effective use. A coercing power must have a clear objective, the strength to follow through with the threat, sufficient domestic and international support, and most importantly asymmetry of motivation. Success is “based upon the aggressor’s perceptions of the victim’s vulnerabilities and vital interests, and, conversely, upon the victim’s perceptions about the aggressor’s intentions, capabilities and convictions”<sup>46</sup>.

In naval diplomacy, there must be a clear foreign policy objective. Without clear political purpose, naval operations create unintended consequences. Naval forces must serve political ends, and naval forces engaged in coercive diplomacy must have clear guidance.

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<sup>44</sup> Economist, "Making a Splash; North Korea's Rocket", 22

<sup>45</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 100

<sup>46</sup> Dunaway, *Gunboat Diplomacy in the New World Order*, 45

The limited nature of the objective requires commander's guidance and rules of engagement suitable for the situation. Without a clear objective, navies can cause embarrassment, loss of national prestige or unintended loss of life. In the worst case, naval forces can make foreign policy, rather than serve it.<sup>47</sup>

Without credible strength to enforce the threat of force, coercive diplomacy is just a bluff. In the age of information, it is relatively easy to discern the true capabilities of navies, and thus that much more difficult to deceive a victim. In terms of coercion, the greater the perceived force, the more likely the chance of success.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, gunboat diplomacy is a weapon of the strong used against the weak. However, strength must not be misconstrued to mean absolute naval strength of a state. More importantly, it is the ability to apply "appropriate force about the point at issue."<sup>49</sup> In this way, a relatively weak maritime state can achieve success over a stronger foe.

Another requirement for successful coercive diplomacy is support both domestically and internationally. This is particularly important when the coercing power is a democratic government which is answerable to public opinion. If a victim perceives weakness in support for the assailant at home or abroad, it may increase the conviction of the victim to resist. This is particularly true in cases where coercion must be applied over an extended or indefinite period of time, such as is the case in sanctions and embargoes.<sup>50</sup> It is in the best interest of the victim to draw the length of the crisis out, hoping for a loss of domestic or international support. The coercing power must keep public opinion on its side; therefore coordination between military and civilian authorities is essential.

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<sup>47</sup> Till, *Seapower: A guide to the Twenty-First Century*, 275

<sup>48</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919-1991* 1994, 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Murfett, "Gunboat Diplomacy: Outmoded or back in Vogue", 84

For the coercing power to achieve its diplomatic objectives, asymmetry of motivation is critical. If coercive diplomacy is to be successful, the coercing power must be more highly motivated to achieve its objective than its adversary is motivated to prevent it.<sup>51</sup> The *USS Pueblo* crisis of 1968 clearly illustrates this concept.

To achieve diplomatic success in the use of coercive naval diplomacy, the victim must perceive that the coercing power possesses both the force necessary and the conviction to use force if the victim does not accede to the demands.<sup>52</sup> If the coercing power fails to adequately express strength of conviction, or if the force of the assailant is inadequate to the task, the victim may perceive the entire affair as bluff.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the coercing power must very clearly express his intentions in ways which cannot be misinterpreted.

## CONCLUSIONS

Coercive naval diplomacy is not an anachronism. Under the right conditions, the persuasive value of naval forces is still an effective alternative to war. In spite of the critical role of naval coercion, it is little understood and easy to get wrong.

Although there are significant limitations to its applicability, coercive naval diplomacy is an effective method in which to achieve limited foreign policy objectives. The objectives of gunboat diplomacy vary from the overthrow of a government to general expressions of support or displeasure. The objective must be limited and realistic, and the asymmetry of motivation must be in favor of the coercing power.

The methods of coercive naval diplomacy are just as varied as the objectives, with the common theme being demonstrations of naval power coupled with an implied or explicit

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<sup>51</sup> George 1991, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War*, 77

<sup>52</sup> Dunaway, *Gunboat Diplomacy in the New World Order*, 46.

<sup>53</sup> Murfett, "Gunboat Diplomacy: Outmoded or back in Vogue", 84.

threat. Port visits, fleet concentration, quarantines, show of force and preventative deployment are just a few of the possibilities. Incentives may be coupled with threats to further tip the balance of motivation into the favor of the coercing power. The projection of naval power must be part of a larger diplomatic effort.

Modern anti-ship weapons and changes in the political landscape have made the execution of coercive naval diplomacy more complicated. However, the principle of coercion through the threat of naval force, is timeless. So long as navies retain the ability to threaten the vital interests of a nation, naval coercion will remain a legitimate method of foreign policy. Although it is unlikely that the mere presence of a warship will alter a foreign power's decision making process, the threat of force from the sea can still support foreign policy objectives. The planning and execution of coercive naval diplomacy is more complex than it once was, but the basic principle of coercion naval diplomacy has not changed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the complexity of coercive naval diplomacy, and the potential negative effects of its misapplication, it is imperative that the subject receive further study. The United States Navy requires theory and doctrine regarding the planning and execution of coercive naval diplomacy. It is not enough to merely send a warship into a crisis situation and hope that the combat potential inherent in the ship and crew will force the adversary to react as expected. Commanders require clear guidelines for the use of coercion.

In addition to new doctrine, commanding officers require training on the political aspects of presence. If captains of warships understand potential second and third order effects of the presence of their ship, they will be less likely to act at cross purpose to national

interests. Training needs to be on general principles of coercive diplomacy as well as targeted training for particular contingencies.

Finally, combatant commanders should establish a permanent board that examines the planning and execution of coercive naval presence. It is critical that the State Department play a prominent role in this board. Long term effects, methods of implementation, assigned forces, and rules of engagement should be closely examined.

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