

HOLLOW THREATS:  
WHY COERCIVE DIPLOMACY FAILS

BY

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## APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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## ABSTRACT

Despite possessing overwhelming military superiority, the United States fails more often than it succeeds when it attempts to coerce an adversary with the threat of force. This study identifies four factors that explain successful coercion: relative menace, credibility, consistency, and the cumulative factor. To appear menacing, the US must shape its ultimatum in such a way that the adversary expects to suffer enough pain from resisting to offset the costs of acquiescing. The adversary must also believe America's threat is credible and it will remain consistent in its demands and assurances. The cumulative factor transcends individual scenarios, affecting America's reputation and influencing future adversaries to either resist or acquiesce. This study examines three cases of coercion, Somalia, Libya, and Syria, uncovering that during coercion, the US is not as menacing, credible, or consistent as it would like to believe. The conclusions present practical recommendations for improving these factors in future American coercion. More importantly, this work highlights the lack of a long-term policy and strategy for coercion. Instead, Washington's policy is defined by short-term, isolated reactions that undermine its perceived reputation for coercion and condition future adversaries to resist American demands. By using the cumulative factor as the foundation, policy will disregard short-term benefits with long-term detriments and create a unified, global coercive strategy. A final conclusion is that the US must use coercion less often. Although military force is the most responsive and visible instrument of power, using threats for marginal interests inevitably leads to fighting conflicts over those same marginal interests. If an issue is not worth fighting a war, we must not threaten force in the first place.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*The daily presence of force and recurrent reliance on it marks the affairs of nations. Since Thucydides in Greece and Kautilya in India, the use of force and the possibility of controlling it have been the preoccupations of international-political studies.*

Robert J. Art and Kenneth Waltz

### The Problem with Coercion

Some politicians seem to think that solving international crises is as simple as being a superpower. One can imagine policymakers reducing complex international situations to such simple platitudes as, “Throw America’s weight around; surely no one is foolish enough to challenge our might; all we have to do is threaten the use of force and the adversary will give in.” The problem is, the more the US defaults to threatening force, the more it seems to engage in unwanted conflicts. Since the US is clearly stronger and able to enforce its will, why do adversaries resist when we threaten force?

I attempt to answer this question: “Why does coercive diplomacy fail?” Accordingly, I strive to provide worthwhile answers. Does coercion often fail, and if so, is its failure important? In answering these questions, I provide conclusions for coercion in general by specifically drawing on US experiences. This chapter first demonstrates that coercive diplomacy fails too often, with severe international ramifications. Then, it provides an introduction into coercive diplomacy, a transition to my theoretical construct, and an overview of the path ahead.

Although a state as powerful as the US has various instruments with which to coerce, I focus on the threat and use of military force during coercion. While this is the focus, it does not diminish the importance of economic, diplomatic, or informational coercive instruments. As coercion theorists Robert Art and Patrick Cronin wrote, “Coercive diplomacy is difficult when there is primarily coercion and little diplomacy.”<sup>1</sup> However, my research question strives to answer why some threats go un-heeded. This

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1. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 291.

requires a segregation of the military instrument from other instruments of power to isolate lessons learned and policy suggestions.

In its simplest sense, coercion orbits around influencing another's actions. More specifically, it involves threats or the use of force designed to: convince another to do something they do not want to do, not do something they want to do, or to stop another from doing something that they have already begun doing. One can coerce through reward or threat. We are coerced every day by both means. We work long hours and are absent from loved ones because of the reward of a stable pay check. Domestically, governments coerce through the threat of force. Most citizens do not drive recklessly, loot, or pillage because of the known consequences of such actions. The state can only maintain this law and order through its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. This is no different on the international stage. Coercive diplomacy takes place when one state attempts to influence the actions of another state; usually through an implied or stated threat of force.

Not only does the US use these implied or stated threats in coercive diplomacy, but they are an important part of its foreign policy. Kenneth Waltz believed that international force is most useful when it is not used; the non-use of force is actually a sign of strength. This led him to the conclusion that international politics tends towards coercion, backed by the specter of force.<sup>2</sup> Seldom has force, and the threat of its use, been more consciously used as an instrument of national power than today.<sup>3</sup> The US has been using force for roughly two out of every three years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>4</sup> This seems to confirm the American foreign policy emphasis on threatening, and subsequently using, force.

Perhaps this would be a less interesting topic, if the US were able to translate this military use into receiving concessions and acquiescence from an opponent. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case. In the words of Robert Art, "Washington's coercive diplomatic gambits have failed more often than they have

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2. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), 186.

3. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 188.

4. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 2014), xii.

succeeded.”<sup>5</sup> One study encompassing US coercive diplomacy from 1960 until the fall of the Berlin Wall showed that of six clear cases of coercion, only two succeeded.<sup>6</sup> This record did not improve after the Cold War. Another study examined 16 cases of post-Cold War US coercive diplomacy and found only four successes.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, recent history indicates that the US achieves success with its preferred foreign policy instrument less than one-third of the time.<sup>8</sup>

The increase on America’s reliance on force is not entirely surprising. With the absence of the Soviet Union, the US became the world’s sole superpower. According to Alexander George, leaders of militarily powerful countries will naturally be tempted to believe that they can, with little risk, intimidate weaker opponents.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult for Americans to watch injustices around the world and know their nation has the power to stop them. Since the end of the Cold War, policymakers have felt domestic pressure to stop those injustices, support global stability, and uphold the international system. This is apparent with the US today, but with an added paradox; an exhausted national will for interventions and prolonged conflict is at tension with a political sentiment that “something must be done” in cases of oppression overseas and “wrongs must be righted.” However, the American people take for granted how easily the US can influence other actors and achieve its goals. Many times, “righting a wrong” is not worth a significant risk to blood and treasure, and “doing something” does not mean doing something major. This tension results in US coercion backed by limited force.

However, an understanding of the concept of international prestige demonstrates that the risks and costs of such an endeavor can be higher than many policymakers perceive. To Robert Gilpin, prestige is not synonymous with power. Rather, prestige is a state’s reputation for power, as judged by other states. Prestige, not power, is the

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5. Robert J. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 374-375.

6. Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2d ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 270.

7. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 386.

8. This percentage becomes worse if you include the three failed cases of this case study with the failures to coerce Iraq in 2003 and North Korea in the early 2000s.

9. Alexander L George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 74.

everyday currency of international relations.<sup>10</sup> Although prestige is partly a function of economic and military capabilities, a state achieves prestige through the successful use of power.<sup>11</sup> The reverse implication is that if a state's prestige diminishes through the unsuccessful use of coercion, or through military defeat, it is weakened in a future diplomatic conflict. Therefore, a decline in prestige is an injury to be avoided.<sup>12</sup>

When viewed through the lens of prestige, America's history with coercive diplomacy is seen as a foreign policy problem worth investigating. It appears that the US uses coercive diplomacy more often since the end of the Cold War. The increased willingness to use coercion combined with its low success rate causes the US to use force more often. Though most everyone knows the US is the most powerful nation on earth, this is not the true measure of international influence. American strategists must be aware that threatening or using force becomes a prestige gamble that, although it may not deplete actual power, may exhaust prestige and therefore the true ability to influence and achieve foreign policy goals.<sup>13</sup>

The military in particular must become more versed on this. Thomas Schelling wrote that military strategy must grow beyond just the concept of the science and art of military victory. Strategists must base a greater part of planning and strategy on the art of coercion.<sup>14</sup> Coercive diplomacy, the threat or use of force to influence an adversary, is clearly an important part of US foreign policy. However, its poor historical track record diminishes American international prestige and damages the nation's international influence.

My research leads me to conclude that once the US decides to coerce another state, it must focus on presenting the adversary with a menacing expectation of pain while simultaneously offering it benefits and low costs for acquiescence. If the US is unable to do so, it should expect an adversary to resist and prepare for open conflict. Therefore, the US must only begin a coercive diplomacy campaign when the national interests at stake warrant risking the lives of its sons and daughters. The following

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10. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 31.

11. Gilpin, *War and Change*, 32.

12. Ralph Hawtrey quoted in Gilpin, *War and Change*, 32.

13. Major Jeremy Putman, SAASS Class XXIV, first introduced me to the idea of "prestige gambles" in the context of Gilpin's prestige.

14. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 34.

chapters highlight Washington's short-term, isolated decision-making process in deciding to coerce or communicating certain messages during coercion. Moving away from such reactionary measure and towards a long-term, consistent coercion strategy will increase the future likelihood of successful coercion by building reputation and prestige. Yet, I believe such a comprehensive strategy can only be built if Washington ceases to rely on threatening force as its default solution and on the military as an "easy button."

### **Coercion is Difficult**

Coercion involves one state influencing the behavior of another. For this reason, coercion theorists agree that coercion is not easy for anyone. When explaining the meaning of sovereignty, Waltz wrote, "To say a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself."<sup>15</sup> Coercion therefore involves influencing an adversary's decision-making. Robert Art and Patrick Cronin wrote, "Coercive diplomacy is directed at a target's resolve...resolve, however, is notoriously difficult to estimate."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, scholars universally accept that convincing an adversary to change its behavior is inherently more difficult than deterring it from committing an action it has not yet carried out.<sup>17</sup> "Affecting changes in the behavior of the target is difficult because there is greater humiliation for the target if it changes its behavior in the face of a [coercive] action than if it does not change its behavior in the face of a deterrent threat" and "a target finds it difficult to give in to a Coercer because both its credibility and its power are at stake...[it] loses some of its reputation [and]...appears weaker than thought."<sup>18</sup>

This causes some to conclude that coercion is something so difficult that no state should attempt it at all.<sup>19</sup> While I do not share that conclusion, the implication of such reasoning is that politicians, strategists, and scholars should not expect much from attempts at coercion. *Coercion is difficult.* Although there is evidence to support such a

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15. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 96.

16. Art and Cronin, "The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy," 274.

17. Robert J. Art, "The Fungibility of Force," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 12.

18. Art and Cronin, "The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy," 274.

19. Rob De Wijk, Sumit Ganguly, and Michael R. Kraig quoted in Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits of Military Coercion Theory," *International Studies Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (May 2011), 154.



claim, coercion can be useful, even worthwhile, and analysis that may improve US policy's use of strategic coercion is also worthwhile.

### **The Argument**

I aim to provide such an analysis. By synthesizing disparate theories of coercion, I specify four factors that are necessary in influencing coercion's success or failure. The four factors also provide policy implications and recommendations that will aid in the construction of a coherent US coercive strategy. The factors are: (1) relative menace, (2) credibility, (3) consistency, and (4) the cumulative factor.

#### **What type of coercion?**

I focus on cases that occurred after the Cold War ended. Why? On the surface, it would appear easier for the US to coerce because there exists no state strong enough to balance against it. Therefore, the target state cannot rely on the aid of a third party to relieve US coercive pressure.

Second, I am exclusively concerned with conventional coercion. Although nuclear weapons could be used in all facets of coercion (blackmail, coercive diplomacy, exemplary uses of force, and coercion in war) the US does not do so. Taking the nuclear card off the table makes coercion more difficult, but since that is the current policy, US strategists must understand non-nuclear coercion.

#### **Who is the adversary?**

I also narrow the focus by selecting an appropriate way to characterize the adversary. The viewpoint of the adversary is decisive in analyzing coercion's success or failure. It matters not if the US believes it is presenting a menacing, consistent, and credible coercion. If the adversary perceives weakness, inconsistency, and unreliability it will most likely resist.<sup>20</sup> Coercive diplomacy is "replete with opportunities for miscommunication and miscalculation."<sup>21</sup> Since I analyze opponent decisions in the context of American threats, I must select a manner in which to conceptualize that opponent.

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20. The US may prevail in the conflict, but this paper is concerned with the success or failure of coercion, not the military campaign.

21. George, "Coercive Diplomacy," 76.

Questions arise concerning the correct viewpoint of the adversary's identity given that coercion involves one state influencing the behavior of another state. Does the coercing state attempt to influence an individual, an organization, the citizens, or some other entity? Schelling wrote that during coercion it is "important to know who is in charge on the other side, what he treasures, what he can do for us and how long it will take him."<sup>22</sup> Does referencing an individual, as Schelling does, create a model that is too simple to account for reality?

Graham Allison presented three compelling models to analyze this question. Allison's Model I simplified the state to a rational actor. This singular actor rationally makes its choices through value-maximization consistent with its beliefs and values. Allison's Model II described a state's action as a function of the output of the state's important organizations. State behavior can thus be understood through organizational theory of self-interested bureaucratic entities. Allison's Model III presented state decisions as outputs of the struggle and compromise of various political sub-units or individuals.<sup>23</sup>

Adversaries of US coercive diplomacy rarely write memoirs or give frank interviews that reveal decision-making processes. A known weakness of my work is the attempt to assess the selected factors using the opponent's mindset. Interests and motivations of the adversary, when known, prove helpful. Beyond that, the best method appears to be the rationale actor model (RAM), Allison's Model I. Allison did present weaknesses in RAM but also admitted, "Most contemporary analysts (as well as citizens) proceed *predominantly*...in terms of this framework when trying to explain international events."<sup>24</sup> Robert Jervis also refused to eschew RAM and its unitary actor. While acknowledging that application of RAM may create inaccurate conclusions through simplification, he wrote, "[it] still may be the best that can be made under most circumstances."<sup>25</sup> Gilpin also agreed to an extent that is helpful. He wrote that the state or people's interests are less important than the ruling elite. Those interests of the ruling

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22. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 175.

23. Graham Allison and Phillip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York, N.Y.: Longman, 1999), 13, 143, 255.

24. Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 15.

25. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 341.

elite will form the perception used in cost/benefit analysis and decision-making.<sup>26</sup> This aids theoretical acceptance of RAM, since it is more logical for a select set of ruling elite to act as a singular actor than all the disparate organizations and political sub-units of a state.

### **The way forward**

The argument proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical landscape of coercive diplomacy. After presenting the most distinguished theorists and their claims, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical lens that best explains coercion's success or failure. Though theories cannot predict with certainty or explain every historical event, they should explain events in the real world and offer useful tools for what lies ahead.<sup>27</sup> Chapter 3 details the unsuccessful coercive diplomacy in Somalia that ended in military defeat. Although coercion was initially successful in Somalia, it ultimately failed because the US was not menacing enough. Lack of credibility was fundamental to the explanation for why the US could not be menacing enough to the Somali warlords.

Chapter 4 presents the unsuccessful coercive diplomacy against Libya that resulted in military victory but strategic setback. In Libya, coercion began with a rushed and vague threat that inferred a much lower expectation of hurt than what the Coercer actually had in mind. Other mistakes lowered Qaddafi's expectation of hurt and produced insufficient relative menace. The US also damaged its own credibility by having a conspicuously low commitment to use force.

Chapter 5 describes the unsuccessful deterrence and successful coercive diplomacy against Assad in Syria that did not result in the use of force. The situation in Syria is ongoing as of April 2015, the writing of this thesis. Therefore, I will only consider and discuss events up to and including April 2015 in my analysis. Washington attempted to deter Assad from using chemical weapons and undertaking mass killings of his population. During this deterrence, the US displayed extremely deficient relative menace and credibility. When deterrence failed, the US responded with coercive diplomacy that, although successful, damaged the trustworthiness of America's word and

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26. Gilpin, *War and Change*, 51.

27. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, xvi, 6.

reputation. All three of the case studies conditioned others to question America's menace, credibility, and consistency in future coercion, decreasing future likelihood of acquiescence. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes my findings and provides policy recommendations to increase the likelihood of future coercive success.



## Chapter 2

### The Theorists and Their Claims

*The central notion of coercive diplomacy is that it is “forceful persuasion,” to borrow Alexander George’s apt phrase, and the task is to “persuade an opponent to cease his aggression rather than bludgeon him into stopping.”*

Robert J. Art

*Coercive diplomacy contests are equivalent to games-of-chicken crises in which the strength of the respective resolves of the coercer and the target are in play... consequently, mistakes are easy to make in situations where resolve is hard to estimate.*

Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin

This chapter has two purposes. The first is to examine existing theories and create a cogent structure of the theorists’ varied writings, terms, and opinions. Second, this chapter aims to use those theories to generate a theoretical model that will serve as the lens for the subsequent case studies, conclusions, and recommendations.

### The Existing Theories

Why does coercive diplomacy fail? Dissecting this question is problematic. One of the issues afflicting coercion theory is its lack of universally accepted definitions and terms. Coercion theory is somewhat unique since the theorists have not created an accepted framework; they have used different terms and discussed different facets of coercion. This section traces the introduction of terms and attempts to reconcile their use into one structure (See Figure 1).

#### Coercion: A Word Throughout the Years

While the idea of coercion is as old as conflict itself, systematic and theoretical study begins with Thomas Schelling. In his 1966 book, *Arms and Influence*, Schelling initially contrasted brute force with *coercion*. Whereas brute force makes an opponent do what we want, coercion makes a bargain of sorts; we arrange for the adversary to be better off doing what we want and worse off not doing what we want.<sup>1</sup> “What we want”

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1. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 4.

may entail either action or inaction on the part of the adversary. Coercion to Schelling, then, was the umbrella term for both *deterrence* and *compellence*. Deterrence attempts to prevent an action from occurring (an adversary's inaction), seeks maintenance of the status quo, and does not require the adversary to change its behavior. Compellence, on the other hand, requires the adversary to act—initiate or stop an action—and change its behavior.<sup>2</sup>

As odd as it may seem, after nearly 50 years scholars still cannot agree on a use of the word *coercion*. Today, few scholars use the term compellence unless they are specifically referring to Schelling. That is due to the work of Alexander George. George, motivated by the US failure to coerce North Vietnam during the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, set out to develop a policy-relevant theory of coercion.<sup>3</sup> George's first completed work, along with Schelling's, has characterized the field of coercion ever since.<sup>4</sup> In his writings, George redefined terms by eschewing compellence.<sup>5</sup> He broke the concept down into its offensive and defensive components. If the Coercer desires the Target to give up something of value, coercion happens *offensively*.<sup>6</sup> George called this offensive compellence, *blackmail*.<sup>7</sup> However, the bulk of his writings focused on the

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2. A metaphor and example from Schelling provided clarity on his concept. Picture a two-lane highway, with oncoming traffic each in its own lane. One vehicle has communicated to the other that it will stay in its lane, but will not stop regardless of what transpires. The other vehicle must simply maintain its lane, no alteration of behavior, to avoid a collision. However, if the second vehicle changes to its opponent's lane, it risks the collision the other warned about. This is deterrence. Now imagine only one lane exists. The first vehicle still announces that it will not leave the lane and the other must alter its behavior, initiate an action, and change its course to avoid a collision. This is Schelling's compellence. The clear example Schelling provided was the Cuban Missile Crisis. The US had communicated threats against the installation of Soviet weapons in Cuba ("do not perform this action"). That was deterrence. When deterrence failed, the US made a compellent threat that required the alteration of behavior and initiating an action; "Remove the missiles or face military action." Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 72.

3. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits of Military Coercion Theory," *International Studies Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (May 2011), 157.

4. Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits," 157.

5. George preferred to avoid using the term compellence for two reasons. First, he found it useful to distinguish, as compellence did not, between offensive and defensive uses of coercive threats. Second, the concept of compellence implied heavy reliance on coercive threats to influence the Target, whereas George wished to emphasize a more flexible diplomatic approach. Alexander L. George, "Coercive Diplomacy," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 73.

6. This paper uses the terms Coercer and Target to refer to the entity performing and receiving the coercion, respectively. It capitalizes the terms to avoid confusion when using the term "target" with other meanings.

7. George, "Coercive Diplomacy," 73. I will not consider blackmail. Blackmail has seemingly diminished in importance, especially for the US. G. John Ikenberry believed that the US helped create the current institutional international system to maintain its power over a longer period of time. In doing so, the US

*defensive* side of compellence; the Coercer attempts to persuade the Target to stop or undo an action it has already embarked upon. George restricted the term, *coercive diplomacy*, to this defensive use of the coercion strategy that is my focus.<sup>8</sup>

When thinking about coercion, it is also useful to discuss the type of behavior one seeks to change. Kenneth Waltz put the problem this way, “The threat of a nation to use military force...is preeminently a means of affecting another state’s external behavior.”<sup>9</sup> Yet the US has been actively involved in humanitarian missions that seek to change states’ internal behavior through the threat or use of force. Therefore, a Coercer can aim at either the Target’s internal or external behavior or both.

Two questions remain. If coercive diplomacy and blackmail are more common today than Schelling’s compellence, what should be used for Schelling’s umbrella term coercion? Lawrence Freedman presented an elegant, if simple, solution with the title of his 1998 volume, *Strategic Coercion*, to encompass deterrence, blackmail, and coercive diplomacy. Freedman, then, completes the theoretical structure presented in Figure 1. The remaining question asks how the actual use of force fits into coercion theory.

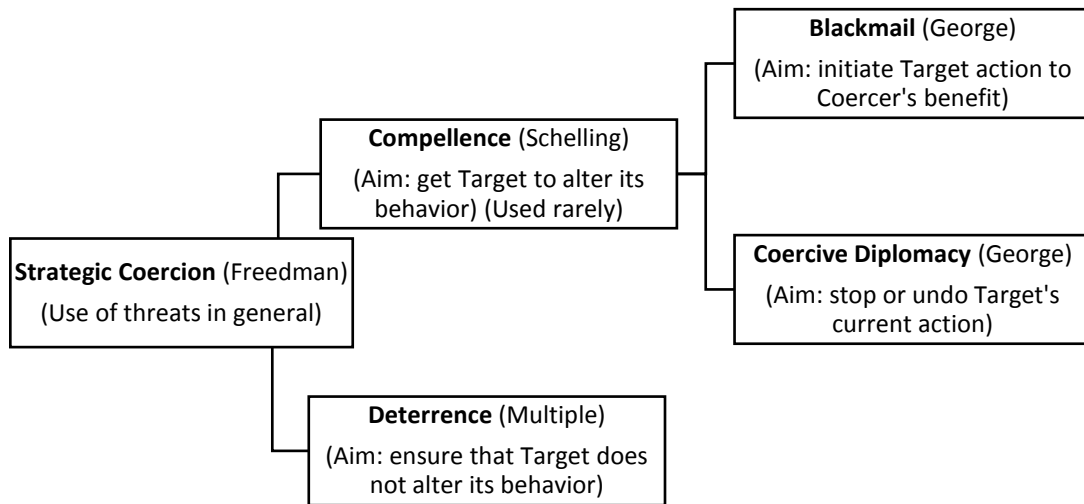
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constrained itself and placed low returns to power that reduced the risk of domination or blackmail of those other states within the international order (G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* [Princeton, CT: Princeton University Press, 2001], 266). Ikenberry thought that even should the US desire to use blackmail, it cannot do so without facing serious repercussions within the institutional system it helped create. Others believe that the US has an unaggressive nature which restricts it from using coercion in an offensive manner. Although the US may not be able to or want to use blackmail, it still merits continued study. John Mearsheimer believed China actively pursues a blackmail strategy. Mearsheimer provided two examples of China’s offensive compellence; its border dispute with India and the reclamation of Taiwan. He wrote, “Given the importance of these territorial disputes to China, coupled with the apparent difficulty of resolving them through... diplomacy, the best way for China to settle them on favorable terms is probably via coercion...to use military threats to force the other side to accept a deal largely on China’s terms... It seems likely that coercion or the actual use of force is the only plausible way China is going to regain Taiwan.” (John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* [New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 2014], 376) Mearhseimer’s words highlight two points. First, that the study of blackmail is important as one cannot discount its use completely in international relations (even though it is not a focus area of this study). Second, his use of the term coercion further points to the lack of standardized terms and definitions for the whole of coercion strategy.

8. George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 72. Jakobsen observed, “An increasing number of works are using the term military coercion rather than coercive diplomacy or compellence to refer to the use of threats” (Jakobsen, “Pushing the Limits,” 155); Robert Pape, Daniel Byman, and Matthew Waxman are the most prominent in this category. However, I do not use military coercion since it would lend confusion when attempting to separate between facets of coercion employed during the threat phase and the use of force phase. For example, even when fighting major combat operations, each side attempts to influence or coerce the other to do its will and the term, “military coercion” seems an apt description. Yet, this type of influence or coercion is not my focus (see “Coercion’s End and War’s Beginning on page 13 for a fuller explanation).

9. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), 189.





**Figure 1: Theoretical Structure of Coercion** (*Adapted from Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy After the Cold War: A Challenge for Theory and Practice* [New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998], 12.)

### Coercion's End and War's Beginning

One of the most pressing empirical puzzles left to resolve is this: Where does coercion stop and brute force, or war, begin? Is there any overlap between the two? The answers to these questions are as varied as the coercion writings themselves. As Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman wrote, “Distinguishing brute force from coercion is similar to the debate over what constitutes pornography or art: coercion is often in the eye of the beholder.”<sup>10</sup> Robert Pape is on one side of the extreme. He described coercion as *any* level of force aimed at convincing the adversary to acquiesce to the Coercer's will. To Pape, almost every use of force is coercion since only those campaigns aimed at a decisive and complete defeat of the enemy, so-called victory strategies, do not qualify as coercion. Some have adopted Pape's use of the term coercion, but for this work that definition goes too far. In fact, Pape mixes coercion with Clausewitz's definition of war

10. Daniel Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.



itself: “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”<sup>11</sup> Without care, one cannot ascertain the difference between coercion and war.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who believe coercion, specifically coercive diplomacy, has failed the moment the Coercer must use even the slightest level of force. As Art wrote, “The peaceful use of military power is intimidating... To use military power forcefully is to wage war; to use it peacefully is to threaten war.”<sup>12</sup> Others fall somewhere in between.

An *exemplary* or *demonstrative* use of force, sometimes referred to as *limited force*, could be part of coercive diplomacy. George fell in this camp. He wrote, “If force is used in coercive diplomacy, it consists of an exemplary use of quite limited force to persuade the opponent to back down. By ‘exemplary’ I mean the use of just enough force of an appropriate kind to demonstrate resolution to protect one’s interests and to establish the credibility of one’s determination to use more force if necessary.”<sup>13</sup>

Since I ask the question, “Why does coercive diplomacy fail?” the dependent variable of the case studies will be success or failure of coercive diplomacy. In order to define that success or failure, there must exist a clear delineation where coercive diplomacy ends and any force used after that is something more than coercion, i.e. war. If I adopted Pape’s stance on coercion there would be almost no chance of failure. For Pape considers even the strategic bombing of Japan in World War II and the coalition actions of Operation Desert Storm to be coercion.<sup>14</sup> In those extreme cases, coercion succeeded using Pape’s definition. This line of reasoning clearly does not get at the essence of the question; why the US must use force so often after threatening its use. To that end, I adopt George’s concept of coercive diplomacy including an exemplary use of force (Figure 2). It considers anything beyond that *coercion in war* and a failure of coercive diplomacy.

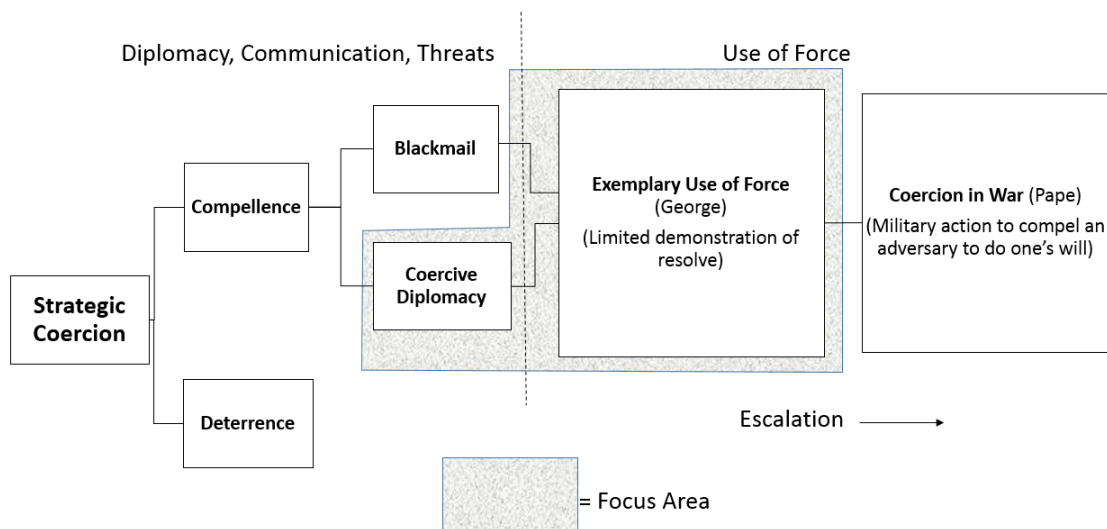
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11. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75.

12. Robert J. Art, “The Fungibility of Force,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 3.

13. George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 73.

14. In Pape’s analysis, the strategic bombing was the decisive factor towards Japanese capitulation; the Allies did not require total victory over the Japanese as they did over Nazi Germany. Similarly, since Desert Storm was conducted to remove Saddam Hussein’s forces from Kuwait and not completely defeat Saddam in Iraq, the force committed by the coalition aimed at coercing him to withdraw from Kuwait.



**Figure 2: Full-Spectrum Structure of Coercion**

*Source: Author's original work*

Practically speaking, defining where exemplary or limited force ends and coercion in war begins is a monumental task. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, referencing George's definition of limited force, wrote "The problem is that it is next to impossible to operationalize 'just enough [force]'... It can only be known after the fact."<sup>15</sup> All coercive theorists have struggled with this issue. For example, Art examined eight cases of coercive diplomacy in his volume, *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* but acknowledged that assigning success or failure was sometimes a "close call."<sup>16</sup> In the end, he created a category for those cases that were "borderline successes" because the level of force used perhaps surmounted the *exemplary* or *limited* level.<sup>17</sup> This important but difficult distinction in framing coercive diplomacy was a factor in the selection of cases, and the final say falls under "the eye of the beholder;" in this case, the author.

15. Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits," 162.

16. Robert J. Art, "Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?" in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 376.

17. Examples of borderline successes are Haiti in 1994, Bosnia in 1995, and China in 1996. Art, "Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?" 377.

I examine three cases: Somalia, Libya, and Syria. The case studies begin with a section on background to provide context for the reader. Next, the case studies present the nature of the coercive demands and threats. George wrote that two of the prerequisites a coercing state *must* decide upon before coercing are (1) what exactly to demand and (2) what punishment to use for resistance.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, George learned from his research that a Coercer must be crystal clear in communicating these two prerequisites to the Target. If the Coercer was vague about what it wanted, or if the Target did not understand...then coercive diplomacy was not likely to work. The second section of each case study highlights how well the US adhered to George's advice.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Theoretical Lens**

Since the extant literature on the subject lacks any agreed to definitions or theory, I focus on:<sup>20</sup> (1) *relative menace* (2) *credibility* and (3) *consistency*. The theorists' writings guided the selection and definition of the three variables that will fill the remainder of this chapter. The dependent variable is success or failure of coercive diplomacy. Target acquiescence during the coercive diplomacy or "exemplary use of force" phases defines "success." Resistance in those phases defines "failure."<sup>21</sup>

A fourth variable exists that does not affect the success or failure in the given case but is critical to coercive diplomacy. The (4) *cumulative factor* greatly affects the likelihood of success or failure of *future* coercive diplomacy. It *conditions* others. The cumulative factor is therefore essential to any comprehensive coercion theory, US coercion policy, or any lens through which one analyzes coercion. Unfortunately, the

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18. George, "Coercive Diplomacy," 74.

19. An important theoretical note on *communication* is necessary. Effective and clear communication from the Coercer to the Target is not one of the three selected factors, though it is critical, nonetheless. Clarity in communication permeates the three other variables, affecting their efficacy. For instance, if the Coercer does not clearly communicate the demand or threat, how can the Target make an accurate, or even ballpark, estimation of menace; how can it approximate the Coercer's commitment and credibility; and how can the Target assess the threat's consistency with previous communication? In other words, communication will either add to or take away from the quality of the other three factors. I analyze the efficacy of Coercer to Target communication, not as its own variable, but rather how it affects the other three variables. George believed coercive diplomacy operates on two levels of communication: words and actions. Schelling illustrated this reality when he used a 1965 quote from President Johnson regarding coercing the North Vietnamese: "I wish it were possible to convince others with words of what we now find it necessary to say with guns and planes." (Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 150.) One cannot discount the importance of actions or non-verbal communication during coercive diplomacy.

20. Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits," 153.

21. It is worth noting that acquiescence that occurs in the coercion in war phase, such as in Operations Desert Storm and Allied Force, counts as failure of coercive diplomacy for the purposes of my work.

cumulative factor has been relegated to the background by most theorists and, apparently, by those who craft US coercive diplomacy.

### **Relative Menace**

Relative menace is a function of costs and benefits. George went so far as to say the *central task* of coercion was to create in the opponent the expectation of costs of sufficient magnitude to erode his motivation to continue what he is doing.<sup>22</sup> I translate the spirit of that central task into a more concrete formula.

In conceptualizing a Target's decision calculus, many theorists confuse generic "costs" with "benefits."<sup>23</sup> However, there are more costs to the Target than simply the pain brought about by military force; acquiescence has second- and third-order effects. These cascading costs, explained below, are ill captured in many simple cost/benefit analyses. A statement by former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles provides a parallel. To deter aggression, Dulles said, "the probable hurt" need only "outbalance the probable gain."<sup>24</sup> That may be true for deterrence, but coercion is more difficult precisely because more factors exist beyond hurt and gain.

I focus on four factors to determine whether the Coercer presents enough menace in the cost/benefit analysis of the Target: the benefits lost from acquiescence (or simply *benefit*), the costs of acquiescence (*cost*), the Target's expectation of hurt (*hurt*), and inducements offered by the Coercer (*carrot*).

***Benefit.*** The benefits the Target loses by acquiescing are straightforward. These are mostly physical, though they might pass into the moral arena. For example, during Operation Desert Storm, the benefits Saddam Hussein would have lost by conceding to UN demands were those gained through the Kuwaiti territory, primarily increased prestige and oil revenue. Conversely, Waltz provided insight into the moral benefits. He

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22. George, "Coercive Diplomacy," 77.

23. Pape presented one such theory. Pape, although writing about *coercion in war*, presented the equation  $R = B p(B) - C p(C)$ . He focused on benefits and costs, where B was the benefit the Target receives from resisting (maintaining its current course) and p(B) was the probability of obtaining those benefits of resistance. C was the costs of resistance and p(C) was the probability of suffering those costs. When the value of the equation became negative, the Target should acquiesce. In Pape's mind, the Coercer can influence three of the variables: it could demonstrate that through its military actions, Target success was unlikely (low p[B]); it could threaten a high cost to the Target (high C); or it could warn of a high likelihood of suffering more pain (high p[C]).

24. Quoted in Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 118.

wrote, “War most often promotes the internal unity of each state involved... The state plagued by internal strife may...seek the war that will bring internal peace” and “External pressure tends to produce internal unity.”<sup>25</sup>

**Cost.** Cost does not refer to the destruction and pain of military action. It is “the often-substantial psychological and political costs of compliance with the demand.”<sup>26</sup>

One of the reasons that all scholars agree coercion is more difficult than deterrence is because the Target faces larger credibility stakes;<sup>27</sup> “there is greater humiliation for the Target if it changes its behavior in the face of a [coercive] action than if it does not change its behavior in the face of a deterrent threat.” Acquiescence yields second-order<sup>28</sup> effects because “both [the Target’s] credibility and its power are at stake...[it] loses some of its reputation [and]...appears weaker than thought.”<sup>29</sup> The loss of face or credibility that concession brings can have the cascading effects of loss of autonomy or regional influence, or the specter of facing regional challengers emboldened by a “sign of weakness”.

The costs of acquiescence may be giving something up that is of value. Generals Schwarzkopf and Powell crafted President Bush’s ultimatum to Saddam in such a way that Iraqi concession would require leaving much of their heavy weaponry in Kuwait, weakening Iraq militarily. In the words of Art, this demonstrates a profound insight: “when giving way means the Target’s future capacity to resist is significantly diminished, its incentives to stand firm go up dramatically.”<sup>30</sup> Sometimes, a Target associates a Coercer’s demand to give something up with a threat to the Target’s very survival. When this occurs, *the Target perceives a cost that is so high, acquiescence is nearly impossible.*

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25. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, The State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 81 and 149. Most likely, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in an attempt to achieve that unity and overcome its affliction of domestic discord. The *benefit* during British coercion of Argentina was this hoped-for internal unity.

26. George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 77.

27. Barry R. Posen, “Military Responses to Refugee Disasters,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 431-432.

28. A second-order effect is used to describe any resultant of either acquiescence or resistance that is not immediately apparent.

29. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 274.

30. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 367.

Realists insist that survival is the goal of all states.<sup>31</sup> If a Target connects acquiescence with survival, it should come as no surprise that coercion will be resisted. Art and Cronin explained how difficult coercive diplomacy is when issues of survival are involved. In analyzing cases of coercion, they concluded both Iran and North Korea believe nuclear programs are essential to their security—the most vital of a state’s national interests. Their implication was that coercion was too difficult to attain when the Target believed acquiescence would threaten that interest.<sup>32</sup> Schelling believed the prospect of certain death may stun the Target, but the Coercer leaves it with no choice but resistance.<sup>33</sup> Schelling, Byman, Waxman, and Mearsheimer all agree that this is why demanding regime change is so counterproductive to coercive diplomacy; if the demand threatens survival, it will not work.

Short of regime change, the Coercer must be careful to avoid presenting a cost that the Target could connect with threatening survival. Art and Cronin’s Iran and North Korea example falls into this category. Even though the Coercer does not demand regime change, the Target might associate acquiescence with losing the ability to defend oneself, thus inviting regime change. In other words, it might perceive that no choice exists. The Coercer must craft costs in such a way that a choice does exist. It must “help” the Target back down from resistance to concession, in part by a careful presentation of cost.<sup>34</sup> All states considering coercion must remember Sun Tzu’s dictum that “to a surrounded enemy you must leave a way of escape”, a road to safety, and an alternative to death.<sup>35</sup>

In summary, *a higher absolute value of Benefits and Costs will increase the Target’s desire to resist.* The Coercer can only offset and overcome these two factors by ones that increase the Target’s desire to concede: the hurt and the carrot.

**Hurt.** The Coercer communicates an expectation of hurt to the Target during coercion. Simply put, the expectation of hurt is the price the Coercer’s military forces will demand the Target “pays” for its resistance. The Coercer could use force to produce hurt against the population, regime, government, military, economy, infrastructure, or a

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31. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 31.

32. Art and Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” 290-291.

33. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 4.

34. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 125.

35. Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York, NY: Oxford, 2005), 168.



combination therein. The Target will not only estimate where the Coercer will direct hurt, but what its extent will be. The Target will make this appraisal based on the Coercer's verbal and non-verbal communication combined with its perception of the Coercer's reputation. An example of this would be President Bush's demands on Saddam Hussein in 1991. After hostilities had begun and Hussein had not removed his forces from Kuwait, Bush demanded that the Iraqis withdraw in 24 hours or face both an air and ground offensive.<sup>36</sup> In this case, the Target could accurately estimate hurt and appraise the Coercer's reputation—since Bush had been bombing Iraq for the previous five weeks, both the verbal and non-verbal communication was clear.

**Carrot.** In combination with a threat that carries an expectation of hurt, the Coercer may offer positive inducements to the Target in exchange for its acquiescence. These inducements, the proverbial “carrot” in comparison to the “stick”, are typically economic in nature. When not economic, or used in combination with other inducements, they usually take the form of diplomatic normalization or technology/military transfers. Both George and Art stressed the importance of positive inducements in their respective theories. Art even believed that a Coercer created difficulty during coercive diplomacy “when the balance between the threat and inducements is weighted more heavily toward the former.”<sup>37</sup>

In summary, *a higher value associated with hurt and carrot will increase the Target's desire to acquiesce.*

**The Equation.** My construct uses the following equation to present how the relative menace can anticipate coercion's success of failure:

$$\text{HURT} + \text{CARROT} \text{ VS } \text{COST} + \text{BENEFIT}$$

In many of the following pages, the equation shortens to  $\text{HURT VS COST} + \text{BENEFIT}$  when the Coercer does not use carrots or uses only minor carrots. When,

$$\text{HURT} > \text{COST} + \text{BENEFIT}$$

the Target perceives *more incentive to acquiesce*. In other words, its expectation of hurt from resistance exceeds the combination of its expected cost to pay for acquiescence and its lost benefits. On the other hand, when

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36. President Bush made this ultimatum on 22 February 1991, 36 days into the air campaign, and the ground invasion began on 24 February.

37. Art and Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” 287.

$$\text{HURT} < \text{COST} + \text{BENEFIT}$$

the Target perceives *more incentive to resist*.

During policy creation, a Coercer crafts benefits and costs by the demand it makes of the Target; it crafts carrots by its offer, if any, to the Target; it crafts hurt by its threat to the Target. The Coercer further communicates and solidified the Target's perception of all four factors by its actions during coercion. Using the presented factors and considerations, I ask the question, "*Was the US menacing enough for the Target to acquiesce?*"

***Escalation Dominance.*** Before proceeding, it is important to stress the meaning of *escalation dominance*. It refers to an actor's ability to intensify the conflict beyond what the adversary can match or withstand. One aspect of this is the Target's fear of unacceptable escalation. Although the theorists do not agree on the requisites for successful coercion, many have lists of conditions, requisites, factors, mechanisms, or lessons learned. Byman, George, and Jakobsen all agree on the importance of escalation dominance.<sup>38</sup>

When a Target holds escalation dominance, it interprets a lower expectation of hurt and perhaps tips the weight of the equation to the COST + BENEFIT side, which favors resistance.

The type of conflict affects escalation dominance. For example, the US typically removes nuclear escalation from all equations except those involving weapons of mass destruction.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, with the exception of high-intensity conventional conflict, the US finds difficulty in attaining escalation dominance. Byman and Waxman theorized about this difficulty across the spectrum of conflict. In all conflicts, America's sensitivity to casualties limits its ability to escalate the level of hurt it inflicts on Targets, thereby hindering coercion.<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, adversaries are typically unaffected by this sensitivity, granting them an immediate relative advantage in escalation. Among coercive cases that have a humanitarian goal, escalation is severely limited. It simply does not make sense to threaten widespread destruction as part of a mission meant to restore order to people's

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38. Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999), xiii.

39. This does not mean that US nuclear weapons do not affect the adversary's decision making calculus.

40. Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion* 184.



lives.<sup>41</sup> Against non-state or irregular actors escalation proves difficult because they seldom possess traditional military-industrial targets.<sup>42</sup> Hence, restrictions militaries face in so-called “limited wars” also create limitations in the creation of effective coercion. All these escalatory considerations work against the creation of a high enough expectation of hurt.

### **Credibility**

When the Coercer has scarce *credibility*, capabilities amount to little and there can be only modest expectation of hurt. The Coercer must convince the Target of its sufficiently high level of commitment to see the coercion through to a “bludgeoning victory” if necessary. Without believing in the Coercer’s credibility to do so, the Target will call its bluff by resisting. Asymmetry of motivation, alliance cohesion, and democratic values are among the various elements that affect a Coercer’s credibility.

**Asymmetry of Motivation.** Once again, various theorists agree on the importance of *asymmetry of motivation*.<sup>43</sup> George described asymmetry of motivation as stemming from an imbalance in interests.<sup>44</sup> If the Coercer pursues objectives that do not reflect its vital interests or makes demands that infringe on very important interests of the Target, the imbalance of interests is likely to favor the Target; the Target will have a higher level of motivation in comparison with the Coercer.<sup>45</sup>

George used the Cuban Missile Crisis as an explanatory example of asymmetry of motivation. President Kennedy limited his demand during coercion to removal of the missiles. That was an objective in which the US could credibly demonstrate more motivation than the Soviets. If the President had demanded something more ambitious—the elimination of Castro or removal of Soviet influence from Cuba—Soviet motivation to resist would have been greater, possibly enough to have relative motivation operate in their favor.<sup>46</sup>

Permitting the Target to possess motivation dominance can be dangerous for the Coercer. Usually, an asymmetry of motivation is conspicuous to the Target. When

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41. Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 185.

42. Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 190.

43. Art, George, and Jakobsen specifically.

44. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 382.

45. George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 78.

46. George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” 78.

recognized, the Target believes it has higher motivation and commitment to see its resistance through to victory. The Target questions the Coercer's credibility. The Coercer's military capabilities do not matter if the Target is convinced it does not have the motivation to see the coercion through to military victory. If the Coercer has very little (relative) interest, why should it be motivated to suffer casualties and hardships of war? The Target is encouraged to resist based on the lack of credibility that results from this asymmetry.

This highlights a relationship between menace and credibility. If the Coercer includes a great cost, such as regime change, in its coercion policy, it provides two theoretical motivations for resistance. The Coercer not only increases the wrong side of the relative menace equation, but hands the Target a clear asymmetry of motivation. The Target's motivation to resist increases (due to the cost factor of the menace equation) while the Coercer's *relative* interest, commitment, and motivation decreases in comparison with the Target's. The Target observes low Coercer credibility to sacrifice for victory, further persuading its resistance. Feeding on each other, a Coercer with less credibility translates into less military forces and less expectation of hurt which also fosters Target resistance. Thus, menace and credibility have a linked relationship whereby a single decision by the Coercer can have magnified effects on the Target's decision.

**Alliance or Coalition Coercion.** Alliance or coalition concerns also affect the Coercer's credibility. Freedman, Byman, and Art all agree that coercing in an alliance is typically more difficult than unilateral coercion. Freedman concluded that coercion is less credible when the Coercer's ability to establish and maintain a coercive coalition is dubious.<sup>47</sup> This is notable because Freedman also highlighted the Washington's historic problems in creating and maintaining cohesive coalitions. Byman echoed Freedman's sentiment. "Differences among coalition partners...[and] divergent member objectives...reduce the coalition's credibility" and hand the Target opportunities for effective resistance.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Art wrote that "more often than not, the coalition will be divided over the means to achieve the goal" or on the definition of the goal itself.

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47. Lawrence Freedman, *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.

48. Byman, Waxman, and Larson, *Air Power*, xv.

Actions taken to find the common ground among coalition participants diminish the perceived commitment to see the campaign through to military victory. Thus, both coalition credibility and coercive effectiveness decrease.<sup>49</sup>

**Democratic Coercion.** On its surface, this element presupposes that the nature of a liberal democracy not only reduces its credibility to administer a severe level of hurt, but damages its credibility of commitment in other ways. Waltz presented the possibility that “restrictions placed upon a government in order to protect...its citizens act as impediments to the making and executing of foreign policy...making difficult or impossible the effective action of that government for the maintenance of peace in the world.”<sup>50</sup> The case studies highlight examples of Waltz’s concern.

Kenneth Schultz examined how an open and democratic political system influences Targets in his book, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*. His analysis demonstrated how some US democratic processes cause the Target to question US commitment. Especially applicable is Schultz’s theory regarding domestic opposition. He maintained that since the Target can view political sentiment—the US cannot conceal support or opposition—it uses domestic politics as a gauge of credibility. For instance, political division presents a possible constraint to using force and the Coercer’s credibility decreases. Conversely, unified support credibly demonstrates resolve against the Target. Byman, Waxman, and George agreed that domestic support for coercive actions are a critical element of credibility and success.

In summary, to evaluate the influence credibility has on coercion’s success, I ask, “*Did the Target believe the US level of commitment was sufficient to see through to victory or did the Target clearly have more motivation and commitment?*”

### **Consistency**

Conventional wisdom regarding strategic coercion dictates the necessity of two prerequisites. That is, if one were forced to simplify the theory to a few factors, most would identify capability and will.<sup>51</sup> Capability roughly equates to my menace variable, since military capabilities are what drive the expectation of hurt high enough to offset the lost costs and benefits. Similarly, credibility has a correlation with will. A Coercer’s will

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49. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 367.

50. Waltz, *Man State and War*, 82.

51. Posen, “Military Responses to Refugee Disasters,” 434.

to use force provides it the necessary credibility in the eyes of the Target. Yet something is missing from this simplification. The Coercer must also demonstrate assurance or consistency to the Target. Imagine that a Coercer presents the Target with unflinching credibility to use the most menacing capability but the latter suspects that after acquiescing, the Coercer will demand more concessions. The Target would have motivation to resist now, before it gives up any strength to the Coercer. In the words of Art, “When giving way means that the Target’s future capacity to resist is significantly diminished, its incentives to stand firm go up dramatically.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, logic dictates that the Target must recognize some assurance that the Coercer will be consistent and not demand more concessions in order for coercion to succeed.

Schelling, Art, and Cronin agreed. Schelling’s theory of coercion (his “compellence”) specified five necessary conditions for success. One condition was that “the coercer must assure the adversary that compliance will not lead to more demands in the future.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Art and Cronin wrote that combining reassurances with threats and limited uses of force creates an increased chance of successful coercion.<sup>54</sup> Making various contradictory or changing demands removes the reassurance felt by the Target. As soon as the Target believes that the Coercer has made a second demand, or changed its first demand, the Target wonders how extensive this new *series* of demands might be.<sup>55</sup> Remember that the Target’s perception of the demands is what counts. Even if the Coercer believes it has been consistent but due to mistake or miscommunication, the Target perceives that the demand has changed, its doubts will persuade it to consider resisting coercion. Thus, changing or contradicting demands, whether real or perceived, are counterproductive to successful coercion.

A sense of trust underlies the concept of consistency in coercion. The less the Target trusts the Coercer, the less it will feel reassured by measures of attempted consistency by the Coercer. To that end, America’s actions must appear to be consistent with its espoused policies and values. If not, it generates a sense of mistrust within the adversary that, although it may not be causal for coercion’s failure, will only increase the

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52. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 367.

53. As referenced in Jakobsen, “Pushing the Limits,” 156.

54. Art and Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” 287.

55. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 366.

likelihood of Target resistance. Art and Cronin remarked, “Coercive diplomacy is difficult when there is primarily coercion and little diplomacy.”<sup>56</sup> When the US appears to use little diplomacy with a Target, it appears inconsistent with its image as a non-aggressive nation that uses force as a last resort. This appearance to a Target makes it suspect US intentions and wonder which demands or offers can be trusted. Inconsistency of this, or any, type only damages the chances of coercion succeeding. For that reason, I investigate Washington’s perceived consistency in the cases.

Just as menace and credibility are linked in a way, consistency and the cumulative factor have a relationship of sorts. Consistency is a subjective variable and one state cannot simply force another to believe it. Any number of Jervis’ cognitive factors that lead to misperceptions might cause the Coercer to appear inconsistent or unreliable to the Target. Schelling provided one of the few solutions; a solution originated in the cumulative factor. “The assurances that accompany a [coercive] action...are harder to demonstrate in advance, unless it be through a long past record of abiding by one’s own verbal assurances.”<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the only policy solution to appearing consistent and therefore influencing a Target’s acquiescence, is through deliberate attention to the cumulative factor of coercion.

Summing up, to assess a causal pattern between consistency and successful coercion I ask, “*Were the demands and threats assured to the Target and consistent with US values and policy? Or were they vague, contradictory, or changing?*”

### **The Cumulative Factor**

A key component of this theory is what I will refer to as *the cumulative factor*. Inherent to obtaining a Target’s acquiescence from coercion is a strategic policy for coercive diplomacy that sends the correct signals to outsiders and helps shape their future behavior and decision-making. For example, imagine a scenario in which the US sends a message that the Target receives as menacing, credible, and consistent within the specific context of that scenario. However, now imagine that the past use of coercive diplomacy by the US has repeatedly demonstrated to the current Target signs of weakness, lack of

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56. Art and Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” 291.

57. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 75.

commitment, or inconsistency. Will the current target not be more encouraged to resist based on the past? That is an interesting question worth exploring.<sup>58</sup>

Coercion theorists hinted towards a cumulative factor in their writing but few include it in their lists of “policy requirements,” “lessons learned,” or “preconditions for success.” An explanation for this absence is the theorists’ desire to avoid prescription and encourage tailoring the application of coercion to the specific context; every scenario is different, requiring the art of policy. Yet its absence does a disservice to policy because it de-emphasizes the need to cultivate a long-term and cumulative vision; the need to cultivate a reputation. States, like individuals, will form assumptions about other states based on their actions. These assumptions will inform the answer to the question: Can we trust what they say?

One theorist that recognized this was Schelling, possibly since his writing was mostly concerned with an international framework in which the US repeatedly confronted the same adversary, the Soviet Union. In Schelling’s mind, the repeated interaction with the same actor would cause conditioning. Extrapolating this, there is no reason to believe that other states turn a blind eye to US actions only until the US interacts directly with them. In other words, if conditioning the Soviet Union to expectations of behavior was important, it should be equally important to form a reputation in the international community as a whole. Schelling illuminated this point while discussing undoing US commitments. “The cost [of breaking a commitment] is the discrediting of other commitments that one would still like to be credited” since others learn from the whole body of actions and not just those within an isolated context.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Schelling wrote, “The assurances that accompany a compelling action...are harder to demonstrate in advance, unless it be through a *long past record* of abiding by one’s own verbal assurances (emphasis added).”<sup>60</sup> A final quote from Schelling provides the implication and importance of the cumulative factor: “Commitments and reputations can develop a

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58. Jonathan Mercer is one of the few opponents to the cumulative effect. He believed that whether a state stands firm in a crisis seldom affects its reputation for resoluteness with others and that others’ perceptions of resolve are not a function of its behavior in previous crises. As referenced in Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 322.

59. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 66.

60. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 74-75.



reputation of their own...what one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow.”<sup>61</sup>

The cumulative effect need not only have negative results on coercion. Coercion is already so difficult that a Coercer, much like a relief pitcher in baseball, is starting in a hole. The high costs to acquiescence, difficulty crafting an asymmetry of interest, and alliance and democratic restrictions work against successful coercion. Add to that the myriad of perception problems in international relations that Jervis wrote about and one wonders how it can be overcome. The cumulative factor provides a way to condition future Targets. They may look to past actions and know what a reasonable expectation of hurt will be. They know what the likelihood of carrot usage and assurances are. They see a reputation for credibility time and again. Hindsight shows them the Coercer making only one threat and adhering to it. The cumulative factor, if used in such a way, exposes the problems of perception and helps eliminate the hole from which the Coercer starts.

Thus, I ask the question, “*What do outsiders learn from each case that may alter their behavior and decision-making when faced with future US coercion?*”

### **The Case Studies**

I have selected Somalia, Libya, and Syria as case studies. Remember from Chapter 1 that coercion is a difficult endeavor. Successful coercion must not only influence a Target’s decision-making, but alter its behavior. Since coercion is directed at a target’s resolve, which is notoriously difficult to estimate, its success is never guaranteed.<sup>62</sup> If nothing else, these case studies highlight the difficulty of coercive diplomacy and imply that since it is so challenging, perhaps the US should reduce its use.

The three cases were selected for various reasons. First, they all occurred in the post-Cold War era where, theoretically, coercion should be easier by a sole superpower. These three case studies also avoid the difficulty in classification of the dependent variable. That is, none of the three were “close calls” or “borderline successes”, to use Art’s verbiage. All three provided clear results; Somalia’s first phase was a clear success, its next phase was a clear failure. Libya was a clear failure, as was the deterrence against

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61. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 93.

62. Art and Cronin, “The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy,” 274.

Syria. The coercion that followed in Syria succeeded, but the overall episode was a failure of strategic coercion. This highlights an important point; coercive success is not synonymous with military success and I do not focus on the latter. In fact, the case studies represent the spectrum of military success. Somalia was a military failure, Libya was a military success, and Syria is inconclusive.

Next, all three case studies contained involvement of alliances or coalitions. None consisted of unilateral US involvement. While the inclusion of alliances makes coercion more difficult, it appears to be the *modus operandi* for the foreseeable future. Although, the US reserves the right of unilateral military action, its actions have proved that coalition building has become a prerequisite for military involvement. Although the US would feel motivated to unilateral action against an existential threat, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty would ensure that America's NATO allies would come to its defense in that case, ensuring that all likely scenarios of coercion would include an alliance.

Finally, the three cases highlight the importance of the cumulative factor in coercion. While the reader may brand this as selection bias, the study of coercion has neglected the cumulative factor and is therefore worth bringing into the spotlight. As this my analysis demonstrates, focusing US policy on the cumulative factor is a resounding recommendation from Somalia, Libya, and Syria.

To illuminate the causal patterns across cases, each Chapter is organized around five sets of questions:<sup>63</sup> (1) What did the US want the Target to do/stop doing? What did it offer or threaten? (2) Was the US menacing enough for the Target to acquiesce? (3) Did the Target believe the US level of commitment was sufficient to see through to victory or did the Target clearly have more motivation and commitment? (4) Were the demands and threats assured to the Target and consistent with US values and policy? Or were they vague, contradictory, or changing? (5) What do outsiders learn from this experience about US coercion that may alter their future behavior?

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63. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 54.



## Chapter 3

### Case Study: Somalia 1992-1994

*A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp...all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified...they all ran from him in great fear.*

1 Samuel 17:3, 11, 24

*Friendship is but another name for an alliance with the follies and the misfortunes of others. Our own share of miseries is sufficient: why enter then as volunteers into those of another?*

Thomas Jefferson

This chapter addresses the United States' attempts to coerce Somali warlords between 1992 and 1994. Coercion initially succeeded because the US struck sufficient fear in the adversary compared to the costs it asked the warlords to bear. However, after the success, the UN, backed by the US, appeared much less menacing and demanded that the opponent pay higher costs. Throughout, the coercion was obstructed by America's low credibility and limited commitment, as well as the inconsistency of its shifting demand.

### Background

Both Somalia's global importance and importance to the US has shifted over time. The low significance that it held in the early 1990s meant that the US found only marginal interests inside the African nation. These marginal interests and minimal importance were at the root of many of America's setbacks during its coercion—it could not credibly demonstrate that it cared enough about any potential outcome to strike fear in the warlords or convince them of American commitment and motivation.

During the Cold War, Somalia's location on the Gulf of Aden and entrance to the Red Sea held strategic importance. Originally, its military dictator, Mohamed Siad Barre, aligned with the Soviet Union and received massive amounts of Soviet arms. After Barre invaded neighboring Ethiopia in 1977, the ties with the Soviet Union broke. Barre successfully sought further military support from the West and the US. By the end of the Cold War, Somalia was an 'arms market' that contained over 13 billion dollars worth of

Soviet and Western weapons.<sup>1</sup> As an anecdote put it, “Every Somali had a weapon he carried with him and two more at home.”<sup>2</sup> This surplus of arms spelled disaster for the African nation.

At the end of the Cold War, Somalia lost its strategic importance and its great power support. With the abundance of weaponry, various armed opposition groups began a civil war against the Barre regime in 1991. General Mohamed Farah Aidid led a main opposition group that was responsible for ousting Barre from the capital of Mogadishu. However, tribal differences caused an irreconcilable split in the armed factions and no semblance of government emerged. There was no government, police forces, law, or order. As a result, a humanitarian disaster quickly emerged.

An unusually severe drought combined with the civil war to set the conditions for mass starvation. Barre’s military destroyed and pillaged the country, bringing farming to a standstill. Warlords used a scorched earth policy to deprive their adversaries of food and water. Refugee movements caused a disruption in food production and distribution. By 1992, this combination of human and natural factors doomed hundreds of thousands to starvation.<sup>3</sup> That same year, the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance claimed 1.5 million more Somalis, or one quarter of the population, would starve in the near term if the situation did not change.<sup>4</sup>

Both the United Nations (UN) and United States began a period of marginal involvement during 1992. The UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) set out to deliver humanitarian supplies and monitor a cease fire to restore order. The US became the largest contributor of those relief supplies in addition to providing transportation for both the aid and UN peacekeeping troops to Somalia. The humanitarian aid quickly became the only source of currency, and therefore a means to power for Somalia’s clans and roving gangs. These Somalis prevented delivery of the food already in UN storehouses and in some cases thwarted aid-carrying ships from docking in ports. Five hundred

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1. Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia: August 1992-March 1994* (Washington DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2005), 6.

2. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 50.

3. George H. W. Bush, “Address to the Nation” (speech, Washington DC, 3 December 1992): 2:25, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgCeFXeuE4U> (accessed 9 December 2015)

4. James L. Woods, “U.S. Government Decisionmaking Processes During Humanitarian Operations in Somalia,” in *Learning From Somalia: The Lessons Of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 155.

Pakistani troops were among the first UN contingent to arrive. However, armed gangs run by warlords such as Aidid held the Pakistanis hostage at Mogadishu airport, refusing to allow them to leave. Meanwhile, the 3000 UN troops allocated for UNOSOM I remained a mystery. No one knew who they might be or when they might arrive.<sup>5</sup> The UN mission was on the road to failure before it had even begun.

The US decided to expand its involvement and end the humanitarian crisis. Working with the UN, American diplomats and military leaders received UN Security Council (UNSC) permission to lead an international coalition under the auspices of the UN to deliver the aid and use force if necessary. The UNSC passed Resolution 794, authorizing the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) on 3 December 1992 and President Bush publicly announced his country's involvement the next day. The US intended UNITAF to end the humanitarian crisis by rapidly establishing a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations.<sup>6</sup> UNITAF would then hand control to a new UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) to further stabilize and build the nation.

UNITAF succeeded even more quickly than expected. On 28 January 1993, it had ended the humanitarian crisis and UNITAF's commander declared the mission complete.<sup>7</sup> Logistic and administrative issues within the UN delayed the mission handover to UNOSOM II until 4 May 1993. Under this new mandate, the US provided logistics support and a quick reaction force (QRF). The UNOSOM headquarters abused the QRF, using them for "dangerous missions while many other national contingents either served in the much more stable countryside or stayed in garrison in Mogadishu."<sup>8</sup>

Not much time passed before UNOSOM II began to experience the same challenges to its authority as its predecessor. On 5 June 1993, General Aidid's men killed 24 Pakistani troops, provoking a strong response from the UN. The mission focus shifted to capturing Aidid; the enterprise that began as "the UN for Somalia" morphed into "the UN versus Aidid." A period of direct confrontation began which caused UNOSOM II to sustain increasing casualties until a Mogadishu raid on 3 October killed

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5. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 17.

6. UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 794* (3 December, 1992), 3.

7. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 32.

8. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 3.

18 US Rangers and Special Operations Forces (SOF).<sup>9</sup> The US subsequently announced its timetable to leave Somalia by March 1994. The US adhered to that timeline, as did many of its allies involved in Somalia. The UN stayed until March 1995 but was largely impotent. Near the end of the UN's time in Somalia, warlords began seizing aid distributions and physically disarming the UNOSOM II forces. Anarchy, tribal violence, and foreign casualties remain the legacies of the UN involvement in Somalia.

### **The Nature of the Threats**

The case of Somalia is initially puzzling because it seemed to be a perfect situation for coercive diplomacy. Conventional wisdom at the time believed the “new world order” was supposed to prevent humanitarian disasters, using coercion as its preferred mechanism. There was no other authority to balance America's might since it had emerged from the Cold War as the only superpower. Additionally, the US had just demonstrated both its overwhelming capability and will to use force during Operation Desert Storm. Twenty-two months prior to President Bush's announcement on Somalia, the US led one of the most decisive victories in contemporary history against an enemy far more powerful and well-armed than Somalia's warlords. The US was more than capable of being a Goliath compared to its adversaries in Somalia. However, the fact that both the US and UN carried out simultaneous coercive diplomacy complicated coercion in this case. The tension and interplay between the American and UN demands and goals is important in understanding both why coercion failed in this case and why the US is often unsuccessful in planning coercive endeavors.

Both Washington and the UN made demands and threats to the Somali warlords. I analyze this case by separating it into four distinct phases of coercion. The first phase was during UNOSOM I; the second during the US-led UNITAF; the third under UNOSOM II prior to the killing of the Pakistani soldiers and Resolution 837; and the final phase under UNOSOM II after Resolution 837 until the US withdrawal.

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9. This raid will subsequently be referred to as Blackhawk Down, after the well-known book and movie depicting the events of 3 to 4 October.

### **Phase 1: UNOSOM I - Pre-December 1992**

To refer to the entirety of the first phase as “coercive diplomacy” would be incorrect. The UN made no concrete threats. UNSC Resolution 751 governed the UN’s initial involvement in Somalia. The document, some of which communicated directly to the Somali factions, neither demanded nor threatened. The parties in Somalia were “called upon” to maintain a cease fire, “urged” to facilitate the UN humanitarian efforts, and “called upon” to cooperate.<sup>10</sup> The Security Council did not authorize the use of force and this was as plain to the UN troops as it was to the Somalis. Only near the end of UNOSOM I did the UN representatives in Somalia even begin to suggest that the approval for “enforcement” might appear in a future Resolution. In other words, the possibility of a future approval for the use of force became the only threat given during this first phase. Until that approval became a reality, the UN demanded nothing of the adversary.

### **Phase 2: UNITAF – December 1992 to May 1993**

The second phase of coercion began with President Bush’s address to the nation and UNSC Resolution 794, which authorized UNITAF. The US planned to open the supply routes, get the aid to the people that needed it, and prepare the way for UNOSOM II. Bush’s *demand* was straightforward: stay out of the America’s way while it accomplished those tasks and do not endanger US or coalition personnel. The president stressed that America’s involvement and its coercive demands focused on the humanitarian mission, not dictating political outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the president clearly communicated the *threat*: should the outlaws not meet his demand, the US forces would use military action, including the use of deadly force, to ensure coalition success and safety.<sup>12</sup>

Resolution 794 made the same demands but added a mandate that the Somalis adhere to a previously agreed-upon cease fire. The UN Secretary-General also threatened the use of deadly force in accomplishing this mission.<sup>13</sup> However, UNITAF’s actions clearly communicated that it would not hold the Somalis accountable to this specific

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10. UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 751* (24 April 1992), 58.

11. Bush, *Address to the Nation*, 7:00-9:18.

12. Bush, *Address to the Nation*, 7:00-9:18.

13. UN Security Council, *Resolution 794*, 3.

demand. The US kept the demand both constant and limited through this second phase. This was despite the UN Secretary-General's urgings for UNITAF to have a broader mission to enable a more manageable follow-on role for UNOSOM II.<sup>14</sup> In practice, US demands translated into lifting roadblocks, allowing unfettered access, never engaging coalition forces, and garaging the heavy Somali vehicles.

During this phase, the UN demanded "disarmament", but the US did not. Since the US commanded UNITAF, its desires for a more limited mandate won out. Heavy vehicles, also referred to as "technicals"—pickup trucks with machine guns mounted in the bed—had to be placed in cantonment areas. UNITAF did not confiscate these vehicles and they remained property of the warlords, but it did not permit them outside of the designated areas. Despite the UN urging widespread disarmament during UNITAF, these heavy weapons were the only disarming accomplished during this phase. The UNITAF leaders, regardless of UN statements, made it clear to the warlords that UNITAF only demanded disarmament of heavy "technicals".

Similarly, there were no demands for warlords or gangs to leave the cities, nor to cede power. UNITAF did not demand any type of political restructuring. In a sense, the lack of demand in these areas was an implied *offer*: "meet our demand and UNITAF will do nothing to remove you from power." The only outright offer made during this phase was a limited money-for-guns campaign which served as a minor carrot to the outlaws.<sup>15</sup>

### **Phase 3: UNOSOM II – May to June 1993**

When UNOSOM II took the reins from UNITAF in May 1993, the humanitarian crisis was no longer the focus of the mission. The *demands* in this phase were to implement the cease-fire fully, to continue disarmament of the gangs, and to permit political restructuring and nation-building. The *threat* remained the authorized use of deadly force to accomplish the mission.<sup>16</sup> Since the UN headquarters led UNOSOM II, the UN was able to stress those demands it had wanted to accomplish earlier. The demands in this phase were therefore more severe to the warlords.

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14. This was despite the UN SG's urgings for UNITAF to have a broader mission to enable a more manageable follow-on role for UNOSOM II. Woods, "US Decisionmaking in Somalia," 160.

15. Jane Perlez, "Somalia we are Here (Now what do we do)," *New York Times*, December 20, 1992, A3.

16. UN Security Council, *Resolution 794*, 3.



#### **Phase 4: UNOSOM II – June 1993 to March 1994**

During this fourth phase, coercion became contradictory and confused. The UNOSOM II demands and threats to most warlords did not change from the previous phase. After the attack on UN forces that killed 24 Pakistanis on 5 June 1993, the coalition demanded justice for those responsible. UNSC Resolution 837 authorized all necessary action to arrest, detain, try, and punish those responsible for the attack on the Pakistanis.<sup>17</sup> Although the UN did not name General Aidid outright, it did name the Somali National Alliance (SNA) as the Target.<sup>18</sup> Since Aidid was the known leader of the SNA, the UN named him as the Target by default. This resolution effectively ended coercive diplomacy against Aidid and began coercion in war.

In September 1993, coercive diplomacy against Aidid resumed, but not between him and the UN. Instead, the US expressed willingness to negotiate with Aidid and to include him in a proposed power-sharing arrangement. The US also began negotiations with Ethiopia and Eritrea to offer Aidid exile within their borders should political negotiations fail. In that sense, the *threat* to Aidid became: if you do not come back to the bargaining table, or leave the country, we will arrest you. Meanwhile, the US Secretary of State tried unsuccessfully to persuade the UN Secretary-General to change his objectives and deemphasize Aidid's capture to allow continued coercive diplomacy.<sup>19</sup> However, Blackhawk Down, which killed 18 US Rangers and SOF, overtook these events.

On 7 October 1993, President Clinton re-stated the US mission in Somalia: (1) to protect our troops and bases, (2) to keep open the roads, ports and lines of communication for the flow of relief supplies, (3) to keep pressure on those who would cut off relief and attack coalition soldiers, and (4) to help make it possible for the Somali people to govern themselves.<sup>20</sup> However, the US Senate, consisting of factions favoring either an immediate withdrawal or limitation of the "nation-building" mission, passed a

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17. UN Security Council, *Resolution 837*, 2.

18. UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 837* (6 June 1993), 1.

19. Elaine Sciolino, "U.N. Chief Warning U.S. Against Pullout of Force in Somalia," *New York Times*, 1 October 1993, A1.

20. William J. Clinton, "Address to the Nation" (speech, Washington DC, 7 October 1993): 5:58, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYTq8MOIJvo> (accessed 9 December 2014).



compromise that limited the US mission to only the first two objectives above.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the *demand* was again limited to that similar to Phase 2: let us deliver aid and do not threaten us.

### **Relative Menace**

The US initially presented sufficient relative menace to convince the warlords to acquiesce. During UNITAF, the second phase of coercion, the imposing scale of US forces conveyed a sizable expectation of hurt and low costs encouraged acquiescence. However, under UNOSOM II, these variables worked in opposite direction and relative menace disappeared. Low quantity and quality of troops decreased the expectation of hurt while the UN demanded much higher costs of acquiescence.

### **UNITAF**

The second phase of coercion took place from December 1992 until May 1993 when the US-led UNITAF operated in Somalia. Coercive diplomacy under UNITAF was a qualified success. The US correctly presented sufficient menace, given what it asked the warlords to accept in costs and lost benefits.

**Expectation of Hurt.** The US crafted coercion in a way that stressed hurt and downplayed costs and benefits, thereby facilitating acquiescence. Under UNITAF, the US deployed 28,000 troops.<sup>22</sup> Somalis were initially in awe of US forces.<sup>23</sup> This numerous and powerful force—it had just defeated a numerically superior Iraqi Army—convinced Aidid to fear the hurt implied by their massive presence. This force encouraged the warlords to acquiesce to President Bush’s demands.

By the end of January 1993, US forces had operated in Somalia for almost two months and the awe of US troops was declining. Aidid tested America’s response to minor resistance to better calculate his expectation of hurt. When probed by Aidid’s

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21. Harry Johnston and Ted Dagne, “Congress and the Somalia Crisis,” in *Learning From Somalia: The Lessons Of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 201.

22. The main combat sections were a Marine Amphibious Ready Group, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force from Camp Pendleton, California, and the 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum, New York.

23. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 34.

forces, the US responded quickly and decisively with unmatched firepower.<sup>24</sup> This differed from the warlords' experiences with the UN forces of only two months prior. The responses solidified Aidid's fear of a high expectation of hurt associated with UNITAF, pushing him to continue acquiescing.

**Costs and Benefits.** On the other side of the warlords' relative menace equation, the US did not ask its opponent to suffer high costs of acquiescing nor to lose many benefits. President Bush, followed by UNITAF's leaders, communicated that the US wanted the warlords to stay out of the way of relief deliveries and cease robbing aid. The US leaders also communicated the limitations of their demands. President Bush said the US did not plan to dictate political outcomes.<sup>25</sup> The US Ambassador to the special mission in Somali stated, "I'm not doing the political process" when speaking about diplomatic peacemaking or nation-building.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, UNITAF's commander, Lieutenant General Robert Johnston, publicly announced that the mission was strictly humanitarian and his soldiers would only use force to protect themselves or the food convoys.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the US would not seek to impose a cost that would greatly undermine the power of the warlords or exclude them from a future political system. Aidid did not believe the US would change the political balance to his detriment.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the US neither enforced a cease fire nor general law and order. Since the US only used deadly force when their lives or the food deliveries were at risk, the warlords realized that as long as they were only terrorizing other Somalis, UNITAF would not intervene.<sup>29</sup>

UNITAF did impose a cost to the warlords through limited disarmament. Since the existence of the warlords' heavy weaponry jeopardized the coalition troops' security, UNITAF forced the warlords to garage their "technicals" in cantonment areas. Yet, UNITAF limited this cost by allowing warlords to maintain ownership and access to these large armaments. Washington's statements advertising a limited time commitment also mitigated this cost. Both President Bush and the US Ambassador spoke of single-

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24. Woods, "US Decisionmaking in Somalia," 169.

25. Bush, "Address to the Nation," 9:12.

26. Perlez, "Somalia we are Here," A3.

27. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 128.

28. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 129.

29. Perlez, "Somalia we are Here," A3.

digit months as the realistic timeline.<sup>30</sup> This time limit augmented relative menace since requiring the warlords to give up their heavy weaponry permanently would have carried a higher cost. The expected quick withdrawal of UNITAF would permit them to use their heavy weaponry in a matter of months.<sup>31</sup>

In counting their costs, the warlords would have considered limited and short-term disarmament, limited freedom of maneuver to avoid disrupting the US troops and aid convoys, lost revenue from stolen aid, and the loss of face that always accompanies acquiescence. It would appear that these costs and benefits, when summed, were less than the expectation of hurt communicated by 28,000 US combat troops.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Aidid may not have liked UNITAF's intervention but he could understand that it would not interfere directly with his desire for political control.<sup>33</sup>

## UNOSOM II

When UNITAF transferred authority to the UN-led UNOSOM II in May 1993, the UN failed to coerce General Aidid.<sup>34</sup> Since the expectation of hurt decreased while expected costs to Aidid increased, the weight of the formula swung towards the side that favors resistance.

**Expectation of Hurt.** US combat power decreased from over 28,000 personnel under UNITAF to just over 4,000 under UNOSOM. Of those 4,000, only 1,200 were combat troops and the rest were logistics personnel. Similarly, the total level of coalition troops in Somalia decreased from 37,000 under UNITAF to 22,000 under UNOSOM. It is readily apparent from these two comparisons that the capabilities of the two missions

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30. Perlez, "Somalia we are Here," A3 and Bush, "Address to the Nation."

31. The warlords also faced lost benefits to acquiescing, though those were minor. They would have taken into account the loss of revenue associated from possible stolen aid when deciding whether to acquiesce or resist.

32.  $HURT > COSTS + BENEFITS$

33. Nora Bensahel, "Humanitarian Relief and Nation Building in Somalia," in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 46.

34. Hereafter in this section, "UNOSOM" will refer to UNOSOM II unless otherwise stated. One might dispute the correctness of including UNOSOM in a discussion on US coercive diplomacy. It was, after all, a UN operation. However, US forces were the main offensive force for UNOSOM and the Clinton administration was diplomatically involved with the situation. Therefore, the US is rightly associated with the UN's demands and coercion.

and the expectation of hurt they imply decreased dramatically. But numbers only tell half the story.

There was a qualitative decrease to the force, as well. During the transition between the two missions, the Australians and Canadians left Somalia. Besides the US, they were two of the more proficient and skilled troop-contributing nations. Additionally, the number of troops was a constantly changing statistic and even by August 1993, UNOSOM had not met its planned troop levels. Troop-contributing nations plagued UNOSOM by slowly meeting their promised contribution because of either a lack of will, logistics, or training issues. Most importantly, the Somalis had shown during UNOSOM I that they were not intimidated by just any UN soldier carrying a weapon. They had held 500 Pakistanis hostage inside Mogadishu airport and constantly harassed them with direct fire prior to UNITAF. In fact, the Somalis looked down on many of UNOSOM's troops. The outlaws thought the UN force possessed a third-world capability, not unlike their own, and recognized that the foreigners could not even arrive in Somalia without US assistance.<sup>35</sup> The Somalis did not misjudge their adversaries; Clarke and Herbst agreed that "the only serious war-fighting forces in Somalia were the 1,200 member [US QRF]."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Somalis did not fear the consequences of resisting this new force.

Aidid tested his expectation of hurt from UNOSOM as he had done to UNITAF—by conducting probes of its forces. His probes against UNOSOM, unlike those against UNITAF, did not receive the same rapid and forceful responses.<sup>37</sup> This further lowered his expectation of hurt and increased his willingness to resist.

*Escalation Dominance.* Aidid knew he possessed escalation dominance over UNOSOM, which made the UN forces relatively less menacing. First, escalation requires military targets that the Coercer can threaten in a risk strategy or destroy in a denial strategy. Except for a radio station and various weapons storage facilities, Aidid lacked significant military targets. Second, the US and UN forces had restrictive rules of engagement and requirements to use minimum force. When the adversary disengaged,

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35. Clement E. Adibe, "Strategic Coercion in Post-Cold War Africa," in *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 322.

36. Clarke and Herbst quoted in Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 101.

37. Woods, "US Decisionmaking in Somalia," 169.

UNOSOM ceased fire and did not pursue them. These restraints, which Aidid discovered from his probes, reduced the expectation of hurt and UNOSOM's relative menace.

Additionally, UNOSOM faced the problem with escalation that is inherent to all humanitarian missions—the emotional response to collateral damage. The images of causing destruction to bring order, or killing large numbers of people to prevent people from being killed, are paradoxical stopping points for the military commander. Aidid, on the other hand, could choose the time and place of engagements and could utilize human shields to prevent UN reprisals or escalation. For all these reasons, the warlords did not need to fear escalation.

The problem of escalation inferiority existed for UNITAF, but on a less pronounced scale due to the difference in mission and demand. Since UNITAF only needed to ensure aid delivery, it had less need for offensive missions and raids, and therefore, less need for escalation in general. There was also less chance of collateral damage. Escalation inferiority did exist for UNITAF, and therefore, it was not as menacing as it would have been otherwise. But the inferiority, that is the level of Aidid's escalation dominance, was more prominent under UNOSOM. This factor was another means of reducing the expectation of hurt to Aidid and made UNOSOM relatively less menacing than UNITAF.

**Costs and Benefits.** Not only did one side of the equation (hurt) decrease, but the other side (costs and benefits) increased. The cost to Aidid increased because the demands increased. Instead of demanding that the warlords permit humanitarian relief or liberty of movement of coalition troops, UNOSOM demanded increased disarmament and strict adherence to the cease fire. When trying to establish the costs of disarmament to a warlord, one can connect a clear line that threatens power, security, and survival. That is, the adversary associates disarmament with a very high cost, perhaps the highest. For Aidid, disarmament was a zero-sum game: each weapon he gave up reduced his firepower in relation to his chief rivals.<sup>38</sup> Remember that many theorists believe survival is the primary goal. Byman and Waxman, although writing about a generic Target, seem to sum up Aidid's situation perfectly: "The adversary is often willing to endure tremendous sacrifices and to take considerable risks because it fears that concessions will

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38. Nora Bensahel, "Humanitarian Relief," 46.

jeopardize its survival.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, UNOSOM asked Aidid to accept a cost that could affect his very survival—his most important need—which could only motivate him towards resisting.

Aidid also received increased benefits from resisting. Since he stood a more reasonable chance of surviving resistance against an underwhelming UNOSOM, Aidid found a way to generate increased popular support among the previously divided public. He effectively used domestic propaganda to paint UNOSOM as an invasion force. Each act of resistance increased Aidid’s ability to portray his forces as national liberators and augmented his support among the Somali people.<sup>40</sup> This created a perpetual cycle in the menace equation. Aidid perceived he held a better chance of successful resistance, motivating him to resist. He could translate every measure of resistance into increased benefit (popular support), which further increased his motivation to resist.

Meanwhile, the cost of acquiescing continued to rise in Aidid’s mind. Due to diplomatic dealings that occurred during and prior to UNOSOM I, the warlord was convinced the UN was more closely aligned with his chief rival, Ali Mahdi Mohamed. Aidid was certain that the UN actively tried to marginalize him.<sup>41</sup> This mindset provides some context for his more aggressive actions. In late May and early June 1993, UNOSOM accused him of using “Radio Aidid” for political incitement.<sup>42</sup> Aidid also knew his radio tower and station were among his few conventionally targetable assets. Since the expectation of hurt had decreased and the expectation of cost and benefits associated with disarmament, his radio tower, and resistance had increased, the relative menace equation favored resisting.<sup>43</sup>

UNOSOM was therefore not menacing enough for Aidid to acquiesce. On 5 June 1993, Pakistani forces conducted a scheduled inventory of an Aidid weapon storage site but made an unscheduled inspection of his radio station. This appeared to be the final

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39. Daniel Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199.

40. Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 195

41. John Drysdale, “Foreign Military Intervention in Somalia: The Root Cause of the Shift from UN Peacekeeping to Peacemaking and Its Consequences,” in *Learning From Somalia: The Lessons Of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, ed. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 118-120.

42. In reality, Radio Aidid was his main propaganda tool for anti-UN messages.

43. That is, the equation went from “HURT > COST + BENEFIT” under UNITAF to “HURT < COST + BENEFIT” under UNOSOM II.



straw that influenced his decision to resist openly. His men attacked and killed 24 Pakistanis. UNOSOM had overestimated the menace its forces would pose to Aidid and the extent to which the lack of menace would affect his decision-making. It also miscalculated the extent to which Aidid would view UNOSOM's demands and actions as a direct threat to his power. The US also made a bad evaluation of cost, allowing its 4,000 troops to be trapped in a position where they did not strike fear in an adversary that had his back against a wall.

**After Resolution 837.** UNSC Resolution 837, with its mandate to arrest those responsible for the attack on the Pakistanis, effectively ended coercive diplomacy with Aidid. As Thomas Schelling's theory of coercion states, a critical element of coercion is giving the Target a choice.<sup>44</sup> When the US and UN demanded the Aidid's arrest or destruction, they gave him no choice. In Schelling's words, they had now "given notice of *unconditional* intent to shoot."<sup>45</sup> The US and UN had removed a critical element of coercion: the "...or else" as in "do this or else." In doing so, UNOSOM forced Aidid to oppose it with a stiffer resolve. As Byman stated about coercive diplomacy, "Some adversaries cannot concede,"<sup>46</sup> the UN and US placed Aidid within that category. In addition to the resolution, a US policymaker said, "You can never really get a political deal as long as Aidid is roaming free."<sup>47</sup> This further validated Aidid's concern that his very survival was at stake. One cannot coerce a Target when he, as Coercer, demands regime change and gives no options from which to choose.

When the US attempted to return to coercive diplomacy, it could not present a sufficiently menacing posture. In late September 1993, the US wanted Aidid to return to the negotiating table (after his exclusion over the past four months) or to accept asylum in a neighboring country. However, by this point the ultimatum of "...or else" was not menacing. Aidid had been resisting "...or else" for the past four months. The only addition to the expectation of hurt was a 440-member SOF team that he had successfully evaded since the end of August. In simple terms, Aidid, already suspicious of the UN

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44. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 74.

45. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 74.

46. Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999), xv.

47. R. W. Apple Jr, "Clinton Sending Reinforcements After Heavy Losses in Somalia," *New York Times*, 5 October 1993, A8.



and cognizant that some in the US wanted him removed, was winning and did not fear the threat since his decision calculus perceived little on the “expectation-of-hurt” side of the equation.

### **Credibility**

The low credibility of US commitment was decisive in Aidid’s decision’s to resist. America’s low credibility manifested in three factors: an *asymmetry of motivation*, issues with *democratic coercion*, and *alliance concerns*.

#### **Asymmetry of Motivation**

A large asymmetry of motivation favored Aidid, and he knew it. Simply put, Aidid and the other warlords cared more about the outcome in Somalia than did the outsiders. They knew their commitment to see the struggle through to victory was more credible than that of the US. This trait is nothing new to coercive diplomacy; it is one reason why coercive diplomacy, and compellence in general, is more difficult than deterrence.<sup>48</sup> However, several factors aggravated the situation. First, Aidid’s motivation stemmed from hard-fought gains. Next, the US backed away from a demand for which it could demonstrate credible motivation, to one that was transparently unimportant (relatively speaking) to Americans. Finally, American emphasis on limitation and lack of national interest diminished its credibility.

Aidid saw himself as a legitimate authority figure because of gains he had recently earned. Following a truce signed by many Somali factions, the United Somali Congress (USC) became the authority on policy, security, defense, and civil service matters over much of central Somalia.<sup>49</sup> In July 1991, Aidid was elected as the USC chairman, granting him legitimate authority and influence over at least a part of Somalia. Additionally, Aidid and his men had twice repulsed the dictator Barre from Mogadishu during the civil war. He, and many other Somalis, viewed Aidid as the figure most responsible for the “liberation” of Somalia from the military dictatorship. These

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48. See Chapter 2 for the full discussion on asymmetry of motivation and the difference between deterrence and compellence.

49. The USC’s authority stemmed from its clan affiliation, which is why it did not preside over all of Somalia. Its traditional membership area was not in dispute and encompassed Mogadishu.

sacrifices and strides contributed to increasing Aidid's relative level of motivation and commitment.

On the other hand, the US did not create a strategy that would ensure a similar level of motivation. The emphasis on limitation and the lack of national interest in Somalia communicated a lack of US motivation. From the beginning of coercion, the US displayed low motivation through its emphasis on the limited nature of the effort. The force buildup to the Somali situation was slow and indecisive. During the humanitarian crisis' beginning stage, UNOSOM I's failings, and the impotence of UN troops being unable to leave Mogadishu airport, the US did not originally act. The situation was nearly opposite of its swift and clear reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait some two years prior. In contrast, the US rapidly gathered more than 600,000 troops in case confrontation with Hussein became necessary. A Somali comparing the two scenarios would have seen a definitive difference in US resolve.

Additionally, President Bush's announcement of direct military involvement in Somalia could not have stressed its limited nature more sharply. When listing the steps the US would take in Somalia, the president listed "withdrawal" as his second action after delivering food from ships to those facing starvation. Shortly thereafter he stated unequivocally, "Our mission has a limited objective."<sup>50</sup> Likewise, his administration wanted the US mission to terminate by the end of Bush's term, in January 1993, less than two months from his announcement.<sup>51</sup> The Commander of US Central Command also advertised that some of the US troops would depart Somalia by that same date.<sup>52</sup> Though not able to accomplish this, the administration was able to manifest a symbol of this limited nature by withdrawing 1,500 troops from Somalia prior to President Clinton's inauguration. Meanwhile, the same month as the initial US announcement of intervention, President Bush's special envoy to Somalia, Ambassador Robert Oakley, said it was realistic to talk of a two to three month mission duration.<sup>53</sup> The UN continued this theme. Before the president's announcement, the US had expressed its desire for quick, limited involvement to the UN. The Secretary-General, with few options,

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50. Bush, "Address to the Nation," 7:40.

51. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 21.

52. Perlez, "Somalia we are Here," A3.

53. Perlez, "Somalia we are Here," A3.

accepted this prior to UNITAF's creation. He stressed that the operation would be "precisely defined and limited in time" with a planned handoff back to a UN mission.<sup>54</sup> These statements from the highest levels of diplomacy conveyed limited commitment to the Somali factions. They also implied that the level of US motivation was lower than it had been in previous conflicts, and lower relative to that of the Somali warlords.

America's motivation only decreased as coercion transitioned from one phase to the next. The urgent need to save lives provided what seemed to be the only reason for US military involvement. By the time UNOSOM II took responsibility, the US had achieved the initial goal of saving lives. This removed any national motivation for military involvement. Recalling the Cuban Missile Crisis example from Chapter 2, it was as if President Kennedy switched his demand from removal of the missiles to removal of Castro. The US no longer sought an interest for which it could demonstrate credible motivation. A cable from US Ambassador Robert Gosende on 6 September 1993 exposed this truth. He wrote that due to casualties on both sides, the administration was unwilling to commit the required manpower and political capital.<sup>55</sup> The cost was simply too high and dwarfed the minor interest at stake. Therefore, when gauging the level of US motivation and its commitment to see the operation through to victory, Aidid found US credibility wanting.

### **Democratic Coercion**

The limitations communicated by the US give rise to a question regarding the purpose behind those communications. One wonders why the US continually stressed the limited nature of their role in Somalia, given what it would communicate to the Target. As stated in Chapter 2, democratic coercion can harm a Coercer's credibility. The nature of the US and the politicians' intended audience provides at least part of the answer. When Washington made statements, the Target heard them—but was the Target the intended audience or was it the American people? Since a democracy holds leadership accountable for its actions, the policymakers intended their statements to avoid the misperception of US protracted involvement in a civil war on foreign soil. For this

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54. Butrous Butrous-Gali, *S/24868: Letter from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council* (30 November 1992): 6.

55. Keith B. Richburg, "U.S. Envoy to Somalia Urged Policy Shift before 18 GIs Died," *The Washington Post*, 11 November 1993, A39.

reason, the administration repeatedly stressed the limited nature of the involvement to the American people. Yet, one cannot prevent the Target from hearing those same messages; messages that affect the success of coercive diplomacy.

Similar statements further displayed low motivation because they highlighted a lack of US interest. American Ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, wrote a warning to the Bush Administration prior to the decision to intervene in Somalia. The warning became public the week of the president's announcement.<sup>56</sup> He wrote, "Aside from the humanitarian issue...I fail to see where any vital US interest is involved."<sup>57</sup> The day of President Bush's announcement, US Congressman John Murtha said sending troops to Somalia was not "in our national interest."<sup>58</sup> The minor interests at play in Somalia made policymakers unwilling to accept high costs—and they let the world know.<sup>59</sup>

Problems with US credibility continued under UNOSOM II, especially with respect to Congress. After Resolution 837 and the shift in emphasis to capture Aidid, the US demonstrated increased commitment in two ways. First, the US sent 440 Rangers and SOF to Somalia in August 1993. Second, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin gave a speech on 27 August 1993 explaining the decision to send the additional troops. In the speech, Aspin provided an extensive explanation of US strategy in Somalia and, more importantly, mentioned no timetable for US withdrawal, instead saying the US would remain until it accomplished the mission.<sup>60</sup> However, Congress undercut this apparent increase in commitment one month later. In September 1993, the House of Representatives "overwhelmingly passed a resolution...demanding that the Administration put limits on its mission or face the probability of a cutoff of funds."<sup>61</sup> The resolution also called on the president to seek Congressional authorization by 15 November to continue to deploy troops in Somalia. Additionally, the ranking Republican

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56. Mr. Hempstone's warning also contains prescient forecasts about the manner in which Somalis will fight, how the warlords will wait out the US, and how the burden will go back to the UN.

57. Michael R. Gordon, "Mission to Somalia; Envoy Asserts Intervention in Somalia is Risky and Not in Interests of U.S," *New York Times*, 6 December 1992, A14.

58. Anthony Lewis, "Abroad at Home; Changing the Rules," *New York Times*, 4 December 1992, A31.

59. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy After the Cold War: A Challenge for Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 38.

60. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Forces to Stay in Somalia to End Warlord Violence," *New York Times*, 28 August 1993, 1.

61. Clifford Krauss, "House Vote Urges Clinton to Limit American Role in Somali Conflict," *New York Times*, 29 September 1993, A1.

on the Foreign Affairs Committee stated, "It's time to bring our forces home."<sup>62</sup> The lawmakers' weariness illustrated Kenneth Schultz's thoughts. He wrote that domestic opposition to or constraints on coercive diplomacy, as witnessed in September 1993, are one of the largest detractors from credibility.

The context of the previous Congressional resolution reveals America's true level of commitment. Just days before the vote in the House, Somalis had killed three US soldiers. One lawmaker after another expressed outrage over the event in their speeches on the floor.<sup>63</sup> However, their outrage did not imply that the Somalis had "awoken the sleeping giant" nor that the US must use its might to win decisively and bring those responsible to justice. Rather, their outrage carried the tone of "enough is enough" and the resolution to limit the US involvement and perhaps bring it to an end passed 406 to 26. The vote sent a powerful message to the adversary with regards to its credibility; the American people do not want any more deaths.

The US reinforced that message through diplomatic relations with the UN. Just before the vote in the House, Secretary of State Christopher sent a letter that became public on 30 September 1993. The letter stated the US desire to withdraw some of its troops as quickly as possible.<sup>64</sup> All these events were occurring in the same month that the US appealed for Aidid's return to the bargaining table. However, these numerous reports made it plain to Aidid that the US lacked commitment; he was winning while the US was shedding credibility. The previous public events clearly encouraged Aidid to continue his resistance. In fact, the events must have forced Aidid to consider how many more Americans he would have to kill before the foreigners would finally leave.

### **Coalition Concerns**

Coalition concerns further afflicted US credibility. The September 1993 discussions regarding possible US withdrawal from Somalia had sizable effects on troop-contributing nations. Why should these nations, who were only in Somalia because of US pressure, remain to nation-build after the US departed?<sup>65</sup> This dilemma highlights the natural limitations to international collective action that by nature receives limited

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62. Krauss, "House Vote Urges Clinton," A1.

63. Krauss, "House Vote Urges Clinton," A1.

64. Sciolino, "U.N. Chief Warning U.S.," A1.

65. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 62.

support domestically.<sup>66</sup> These international discussions further encouraged Aidid that his commitment, and not the coalition's, would hold out longer.

The previous discussion on US credibility has an implication that tempers the apparent success of UNITAF. The asymmetry of motivation and commitment was a key piece in the warlords' decision calculus to acquiesce to UNITAF. The Somali factions knew they could postpone their resistance when presented with the menacing, but limited, UNITAF. They believed the US lacked credibility to act once the humanitarian crisis had ended. Therefore, the Somali factions had both the luxury and foreknowledge to wait until the menace decreased and the costs increased (as occurred during UNOSOM II). The US communicated, by word and deed, that after America's stated mission was over, it would not likely return to enforce the follow-on objectives associated with nation-building. This diminished the initial perceived success of US coercion during UNITAF. Instead of being a success, it now appeared to be an example of delayed conflict rather than coercion to stop a behavior. The demand heard by the warlords was less of "stop X behavior" and more of "stop X behavior for Y period of time"—Aidid simply waited out UNITAF.

Furthermore, he waited out UNOSOM after Blackhawk Down. When President Clinton announced a US withdrawal date of March 1994, Aidid ceased fighting. He had withstood the tests of coercion and, encouraged by Washington's lack of credibility, simply waited out the US—for the second time.

### Consistency

While one cannot point to consistency as a root cause for Aidid's resistance, it was a contributing factor. Two problems with consistency existed in this case: the changing nature of the demand and the different demands that the US and UN simultaneously made. First, the nature of the demand made by the US to the Somali factions constantly changed.<sup>67</sup> The demand, as outlined in "The Nature of the Threats" changed from "permit US delivery of aid" to "disarm and cease fire" to "you will be arrested" to "return to the bargaining table." As mentioned in Chapter 2, coercive

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66. Woods, "US Decisionmaking in Somalia," 170.

67. Poole, *Effort to Save Somalia*, 70.



diplomacy is particularly difficult. Adding a constantly changing demand only adds to its likelihood of failure. In fact, one of Jakobsen's four policy requirements which serve as a starting point for coercive diplomacy, is a credible assurance to the adversary against future threats.<sup>68</sup> Shifting the demand encourages the Target to resist because the Coercer's word has already proved to be questionable; how does it know more demands will not follow?

Second, the US and UN decreased the consistency of the coercive threat throughout the Somali Operation by simultaneously communicating demands to the warlords. This phenomenon began during the US-led UNITAF mission. The US and military commanders at all levels demanded that the factions permit free travel, unobstructed aid delivery, and store their heavy weaponry. However, the UN made statements through the press that disarmament would be a requisite activity undertaken in Somalia. During September 1993, the US and UN again failed to communicate a coherent message. Resolution 837 created a "UN vs Aidid" atmosphere as the UN committed to his capture. Meanwhile, US press reports and a leaked letter by Secretary of State Christopher indicated a US desire to include Aidid in the political negotiations or to allow him to enjoy political asylum outside Somalia.<sup>69</sup>

The ability to demonstrate any measure of assurance to Aidid, and other warlords, became impossible. The doublespeak exhibited in the Somali case would eliminate the assurance felt by any generic Target in coercive diplomacy. For Aidid, it was even worse. He had witnessed the US demand increase from UNITAF to UNOSOM II and, due to the diplomatic events involved with UNOSOM I, radically mistrusted the UN. The implication to this inconsistency is that, although it was not the sole reason for Aidid's resistance, it influenced his decision-making.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Jakobsen, *Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy*, 130.

69. Elaine Sciolino, "Pentagon Changes its Somalia Goals as Effort Falts," *New York Times*, 28 September 1993, A1.

70. In this case, although UNITAF presented an expectation of cost high enough for Aidid to acquiesce, he still probed the US forces through limited armed conflict. Perhaps Aidid did so because he knew of the UN's statements on eventual disarmament. The need to prepare his resistance to this possibility of forced disarmament compelled Aidid to probe UNITAF as a preparatory action to future resistance. Without the inconsistent background info communicated by the UN that differed from the US demands, Aidid may have felt no need for even this minor resistance to UNITAF's coercion.



## The Cumulative Factor

All phases of the Somali experience damaged America's coercive reputation, hampering future attempts at coercion. The negative lessons condition future Target states to question: the menacing nature of US conventional might and its ability to strike fear; America's ability to provide assurances to Targets; and America's credibility due to suspect motivation and commitment.

### Conventional Might

Outsiders learned to re-evaluate the true worth of various aspects of US conventional power; each aspect pushing a future target closer to resistance than concession. US conventional might did not bring enough pain to bear in Somalia to force acquiescence. The main cause was the troop level. Targets do not fear the sum of existing American conventional might; they fear the capabilities expected to be brought (or those actually brought) to the operation.<sup>71</sup> There was no reason to fear the Philistines because they had Goliath on their side, but there was reason to fear the Philistines when Goliath was on the battlefield. After Somalia, others will question the level of might the US may use in the future, especially with deficient political will or marginal interests at stake. This doubt, in the mind of a Target, only increases the possibility of being able to withstand the threat of conventional might and will push it closer to resistance as they question whether the Americans might bring Goliath to the battle.

A lesson with a very similar effect on future Targets was learned from the *CNN effect*. The CNN effect also influences others into thinking they may be capable of standing up to American conventional might. As Warren Strobel presented, there is a push-pull curve in the CNN effect. In America's open and democratic society, a news story that turns public opinion can quickly cause a change in policy. Coverage of certain international events may *push* a nation into military action, while news coverage of casualties or collateral damage *pull* that nation out of an intervention.<sup>72</sup> The immediate

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71. This echoes Posen's thoughts: these "precise capabilities [the Coercer] will actually muster may turn out to be rather different than what it owns. Barry R. Posen, "Military Responses to Refugee Disasters," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 434.

72. Warren P. Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 206-207. Strobel concedes that the CNN effect may be more myth than reality. "In the end, leaders must choose" and "Images accelerated and

domestic reaction to Somalis desecrating the bodies of US Rangers in Mogadishu's streets gave rise to that *pull* effect. The event immediately broke the nation's resolve, resulting in a timeline for withdrawal and limitations on employment of US forces. After Somalia, others asked themselves how many Americans they may have to kill to force a withdrawal. Again, the question inclines the Target even more toward resisting. Just as the Israelites would not have feared the Philistines without Goliath, they would have feared less if they knew Goliath might retreat after a flesh wound.

### **Consistency and Assurances**

A subset of the CNN effect also added a cumulative factor to doubt American consistency. The *impediment* or *body bag effect* is the policymakers' fear that casualties will diminish public support for an intervention below supportable levels.<sup>73</sup> The body-bag effect becomes an impediment to intervention since the policymakers consider it before deciding to intervene. This effect was a major factor in the calculus concerning Rwanda just one year after the involvement in Somalia. In the end, the US did not intervene in a massive humanitarian crisis in Rwanda despite intervening in Somalia. The consecutive actions (or non-actions) by the US created another trace of inconsistency in its reputation. How can intervention in one case be in accordance with national interests and values but not in the other? Perhaps similar regimes and factions that do not respect human life find encouragement to proceed with their freedom-assaulting plans.

Somalia negatively impacted Washington's ability to give assurances to Target states because of the cumulative appearance of US consistency. As proven earlier, America's demands changed three times during its involvement in UNITAF and UNOSOM.<sup>74</sup> A future Target simply must remember that sequence of vacillation to wonder if acquiescing to one American demand will bring more demands. Moreover, during the critical month of September 1993, the US sent hypocritical messages to Aidid. News broke of America's attempts to change its focus from capturing Aidid to including him in peace talks. That occurred just three days prior to the largest US raid to date; a

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catalyzed a policy evolution that was already under way." However, the Somalia case lends credence to the CNN effect's existence, especially on the pull curve.

73. Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 39.

74. While it is more accurate that the UN demand differed from the original US demand during UNITAF, US forces were the main offensive force for UNOSOM and therefore, the US is rightly associated with the UN's demands.

raid designed to capture Aidid and his lieutenants. The US never gave an explanation for obviously speaking out of both sides of its mouth. Other states develop skepticism for the trustworthiness of American messages during coercion because of this inconsistency. In other words, if you were a clan leader or warlord, could you trust the US after witnessing this in Somalia?

### **Damaged Credibility through Low Motivation and Commitment**

Finally, the Somali intervention encourages other states to question the US level of motivation absent a vital national interest. The Somalia case demonstrated to outsiders a clear lack of American commitment. President Clinton's speech on 7 October 1993 provided the best tutorial to future target states. The speech was Clinton's response to Blackhawk Down. He outlined the dangers that immediate withdrawal from Somalia would bring. Referencing those dangers, Clinton said, "That is why I am *committed* to getting this job done in Somalia...effectively (emphasis added)." Clinton then gave his steps to get that job done with commitment: intensifying efforts to deploy troops from *other* nations to Somalia, replacing US military logistics personnel with *civilian contractors*, and, since the problem is not fundamentally military but political, vigorously encouraging Ethiopia and Eritrea *to take the lead* in the political efforts. Finally, Clinton emphasized to the American people that "all American troops will be out of Somalia no later than March the 31st [1994]."<sup>75</sup> However, each step just cited emphasized the antithesis. In attempting to communicate the need for commitment, Clinton emphasized the lack of American commitment—bringing in other nations so it can leave, replacing troops with civilians, passing political responsibilities to others, and setting a timetable for US withdrawal.

President Clinton said he could not withdraw from Somalia before getting the job done. If the US did that, "our own credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged, our leadership in world affairs would be undermined...aggressors, thugs, and terrorists would conclude the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people."<sup>76</sup> Yet Washington's steps to display commitment did just the opposite; the US left Somalia according to its timetable, the UN left a year after that, and Somalia has had

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75. Clinton, "Address to the Nation," 9:00.

76. Clinton, "Address to the Nation," 7:00.

a legacy of anarchy as a failed state ever since. In outlining the dangers of mission failure in Somalia, Clinton ironically taught others the very things he was hoping to avoid. America's low commitment level translated into damaged credibility and increased motivation to do Americans harm.<sup>77</sup> The damaged credibility leads others to remember that the US will threaten, but may not be willing to commit the resources required for victory. Therefore, Targets feel encouragement to stand up to the US, perhaps kill a few Americans, and exploit their own higher motivation and commitment.

### **Summary**

In retrospect, US coercion was unsuccessful because it did not present an expectation of hurt high enough to compensate for the high cost it forced the warlords to absorb; that is, the US was not menacing enough. Lack of credibility was fundamental to the explanation for why the US could not be menacing enough. A clear lack of credibility on the part of the US to commit what was necessary to achieve victory translated into not being able to present a high expectation of hurt. US relative menace and credibility were causal to coercion's failure, inconsistency contributed to its failure, and the cumulative factor conditioned others negatively. The initial "successful" coercion achieved by UNITAF is explained through relative menace. The US did not ask the warlords to suffer high costs and presented a relatively high expectation of hurt. These factors worked in exact opposite directions during coercion under UNOSOM II. The US, through the UN, asked the warlords to suffer much higher costs while presenting much lower expectation of hurt. Fewer, less capable troops and low credibility explained this lower expectation of hurt.

Specifically, America's asymmetry of motivation compared to the warlords negatively affected its credibility. The US was able to overcome this asymmetry under UNITAF by displaying credible motivation for its limited interest (to end starvation) because achieving that interest required less sacrifice and time. However, the US displayed almost no motivation for the more difficult mission of nation-building. Aidid therefore saw no scenario in which he should expect a high level of hurt from UNOSOM.

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77. Remember that the US rallied and pressured nations to serve in UNOSOM. However, it rapidly exited the coalition, causing others to wonder why they were still taking part in the operation. This is just one example of the US's damaged credibility.

The US, perhaps unintentionally, communicated this lack of credibility to Aidid by continually stressing the limited nature of the operation, in terms of both time and resources. US leaders openly questioned what, if any, interest they had in Somalia. In the end, those leaders placed their own credibility on life support when, after suffering casualties, lawmakers responded with a desire to withdraw from Somalia instead of an aspiration to provide the required commitment for victory. These factors assured Aidid's initial and continued resistance.

US inconsistency also encouraged Aidid's resistance. The changing nature of the demand and the different demands simultaneously made by the US and UN removed any ability to demonstrate assurance to Aidid and other warlords.

Analyzing the cumulative factor demonstrates how a negative US reputation formed. First, the analysis highlighted that a Target need not fear America's total strength, but only that which it is likely to use. And this expectation stems from its credibility. Additionally, the aversion to casualties demonstrated by the US encourages a Target not to fear US might, but resist it. Next, Somalia taught others to doubt US consistency. Not only did it change its demand multiple times, but it was not consistent with its use of intervention over Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The former affects Schelling's idea that coercion proves trustworthy only through a long past record of abiding by one's own verbal assurances.<sup>78</sup> The latter makes others question America's word regarding its values and interests. How much does it truly care about human rights and international law, and when will it intervene? Finally, since "what one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow," America's damaged credibility conditions others that the US will threaten, but may not be willing to commit the resources required for victory.<sup>79</sup>

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78. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 75.

79. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 93.

## Chapter 4

### Case Study: Libya 2011

*In short, I consider it far more useful for the preservation of our empire to put up with injustice voluntarily, than to put to death, however justly, those whom it is in our interest to keep alive.*

Diodotus of Athens

*The strongest and most effective force in guaranteeing the long-term maintenance of power is not violence in all the forms deployed by the dominant to control the dominated, but consent in all the forms in which the dominated acquiesce in their own domination.*

Robert Frost

This chapter analyzes US and NATO coercion against Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011. Despite achieved coercive success in Libya in 2003, Washington's coercive reputation was set back by gambling on hopes that went unfulfilled. While its decision to use coercion in 2011 was a questionable and inconsistent foreign policy decision, America's menace and credibility were just as problematic. Washington's failure to state clear consequences for resistance and low US participation in the operation resulted in a lack of menace. US credibility was undermined by an asymmetry of motivation, war-weariness, and lack of domestic support. Qaddafi hoped he could withstand the initial US attack and watch as the coalition's cohesion disintegrated. Although the military operation in Libya was a success, the US would have better served its long-term interests and coercive reputation by continuing relations with Qaddafi.

### Background

Qaddafi rose to power in Libya during a 1969 coup that ousted the Senussi monarchy. He died in a NATO-assisted uprising in 2011. His Libyan Arab *Jamahiriya*, or state of the masses, promised to introduce popular rule to the former Italian colony. It was an Arab-nationalist and anti-Western uprising in the mold of Abdel Nasser of Egypt. The Green Book, written by Qaddafi in 1975, extolled the virtues of direct democracy, populist economic principles, and a stateless society. However in reality, the people's



committees that held power consisted of regime loyalists and Qaddafi harshly repressed dissent.<sup>1</sup>

After the Second World War, North Africa fell under France's sphere of influence. It has a longer history of involvement and more important national interests in Libya than the United States. France continued to remain an important, if not the primary, non-African actor in Libyan affairs up to the events of 2011. While this chapter does not ignore French involvement, it focuses on US attempts to influence events.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the late 1970s, Qaddafi planted himself as an open enemy of the West. He sponsored such terrorist acts as a 1986 attack on a Berlin nightclub popular with US troops. In response, President Reagan authorized air strikes in Libya during Operation El Dorado Canyon. This one-day operation was only mildly successful in its coercive results because Qaddafi ceased openly supporting terrorism but continued support by covert means. The 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, killing 270 civilians, was one result of his clandestine support of terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Qaddafi attempted to attain weapons of mass destruction (WMD). By the late 1990s, Libya had a chemical weapons program and was aspiring to attain nuclear arms and ballistic missiles.<sup>4</sup> But that all changed in 2003.

In a successful case of coercive diplomacy, Qaddafi gave up both his WMD programs and his support of terrorism. In exchange, the West promised that it would not attack Libya and normalized diplomatic relations. How did this dramatically successful turnabout occur? Scholars offer two explanations—one military, one economic—and reality lies in a combination of the two.

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1. Caitlin Alyce Buckley, "Learning from Libya, Acting in Syria," *Journal of Strategic Security* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 83.

2. It is difficult to separate US responses from its desire to provide solidarity with the French position, given France's status as a most-invested actor. The French investment in the region, and in Libya specifically, explains many of the positions taken by the French government, as explained later in the chapter. However, in many of the events that led up to the coercion of Qaddafi in 2011 are best viewed from the US point of view. For example, US support for and underwriting of a UN Resolution was the most causal factor that led to both a coercive threat and military action. For more context of French interests and investment in Libya, see Geraud Laborie, *Third Party Coercion in the Third World: France, the United States, and the Chadian-Libyan Conflict* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University, 2009).

3. In 2003, Qaddafi accepted responsibility for the bombing and paid compensation to the families of the victims.

4. Christopher Andrew, "British Official Perceptions of Muammar Gaddafi, 1969-2011," in *Scripting Middle East Leaders: The Impact of Leadership Perceptions on US and UK Foreign Policy*, ed. Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey H. Michaels (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 205.



In response to Qaddafi's support of terrorism, the UN Security Council and the US imposed separate sanctions on Libya that included a ban on the purchase of oil equipment. Qaddafi's regime, and most of Libya, survived off of their oil reserves. Libya has an extraordinarily large reserve of light sweet crude oil. This type is both easily convertible to gasoline and diesel, and easily extractable from shallow wells.<sup>5</sup> However, without the ability to import oil technology, Libya could not expand production of their only viable economic asset. These sanctions, along with Libya's disastrous economic policies, left the economy in shambles. By the late 1990s, Qaddafi faced increasing domestic unrest and became ever more concerned about his hold on power.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, he had strong economic motivation to acquiesce to Western demands: cease support of terrorism and give up WMD programs. Furthermore, Qaddafi attempted to open back-channels with the Clinton Administration in 1999. That year, five meetings took place between Libyan and US administration officials, but without results.<sup>7</sup>

As Qaddafi watched the US invasion of Iraq, he feared his own WMD program would provoke a US/UK-led invasion.<sup>8</sup> In a phone conversation between Qaddafi and the Italian Prime Minister, Qaddafi reportedly said, "I will do whatever the Americans want because I saw what happened in Iraq and I was afraid."<sup>9</sup> Additionally, President George W. Bush gave implicit assurances of Qaddafi's regime survival that may have provided the final measure of persuasion.<sup>10</sup> Most likely, the Iraq War made Qaddafi fear survival. This concern combined with the already dire economic and domestic situation to bring about his acquiescence.

The combination of economic and military factors permitted successful US coercion of Qaddafi. On 19 December 2003, the Libyan Foreign Ministry officially

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5. Terry Macalister, "Why Libya's Sweet Crude Oil is not Enough to Tempt BP or Shell," *The Guardian*, 25 August 2012.

6. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, "The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 285.

7. Apparently, they reached no agreement because Libya was more focused on giving up its WMD while the US focused more on Libya's responsibility for Pan Am 103. Art and Cronin, "The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy," 285.

8. Andrew, "British Perceptions of Gaddafi," 206.

9. Quoted in Robin Gedye, "UN Should Fight for Rights, says Berlusconi," *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 2003.

10. Art and Cronin, "The U.S. and Coercive Diplomacy," 285.

renounced its WMD program and agreed to international inspections.<sup>11</sup> Libya became a source of valuable intelligence on al Qaeda in North Africa. Inside its border, the former rogue state pursued operations to disrupt foreign extremist fighters returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and blunted the ideological appeal of radical Islam. The US State Department referred to Libya as a “strong partner in the war against terrorism.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the UN elected Qaddafi’s country onto the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member in 2007 and onto the UN Human Rights Council in 2010. Qaddafi himself served as Chairman of the African Union from 2009 to 2010.

However, any international goodwill Qaddafi had gained withered away with the events that unfolded after 15 February 2011. The Libyan uprising was part of the larger *Arab Spring* taking place in Tunisia, Egypt, and parts of the Middle East. Discontent with authoritarianism, corruption, inequality, poor employment prospects, and lack of housing combined with the internet coverage of protests beyond Libyan borders.<sup>13</sup> The arrest of a lawyer sparked the first protest within the country. That night, police used water cannons to disperse the crowd in Benghazi but each subsequent day the police fought back with greater force. On 17 February 2011, security forces in Benghazi are believed to have fired upon protesters with machine guns, causing a full-scale revolt that drove Qaddafi forces from the city within a few days.

Qaddafi’s repression encouraged imitation and the revolt spread across the country.<sup>14</sup> On 22 and 23 February, the UN Security Council and President Barack Obama spoke out against the situation, supporting the “universal human rights” of free speech, assembly, and the ability to determine one’s own destiny.<sup>15</sup> However, most nations did not advocate intervention at this time; instead their focus was on evacuating their citizens from Libya. In fact, Defense Secretary Robert Gates called for strategic

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11. Qaddafi even gave his nuclear enrichment equipment, including P-1 centrifuges, to the US. Those centrifuges ended up in the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. Jason Healey, *A Fierce Domain: Conflict in Cyberspace, 1986 to 2012* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2013), 226.

12. Quoted in Andrew, “British Perceptions of Gaddafi,” 208.

13. Christopher S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25.

14. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 26.

15. The White House, “President Obama Speaks on the Turmoil in Libya: ‘This Violence Must Stop,’” 23 February 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/02/23/president-opbama-speaks-turmoil-libya-violence-must-stop> (accessed 27 December 2014).

restraint on 24 February.<sup>16</sup> Two days later, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1970, imposing an arms embargo, freezing the regime's assets, and referring Qaddafi to the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>17</sup> The European Union (EU), US, UK, and France all imposed some type of sanctions against Libya. At the close of February 2011, Qaddafi displayed no visible sign of deviating from his course due to international sanctions. Instead, he continued his efforts to end the revolt while denying that his forces were killing civilians. He claimed the rebels were al Qaeda operatives seeking to turn Libya into another Somalia.<sup>18</sup>

Heading into March, the UK and France were firmly in one camp favoring intervention, while the US and Germany were in the opposite camp. In early March, French president Nicolas Sarkozy recognized the anti-Qaddafi National Transition Council (NTC) as the true and legitimate government of Libya and called for targeted strikes against Qaddafi. At the same time, British Prime Minister David Cameron, working with France, lobbied for a UN Security Council Resolution that would implement a no-fly zone. Cameron and Sarkozy then sent a letter to the EU that urged it to push Qaddafi out of power and called on a NATO no-fly zone and limited air campaign against Libyan military targets.<sup>19</sup>

On 3 March 2011, President Obama officially called for Qaddafi to step down, but remained confident in the ability of sanctions and diplomacy to bring him to the negotiating table.<sup>20</sup> During an 8 March call with Cameron, President Obama agreed that the priorities should be an immediate end to the brutality, the departure of Qaddafi from power, and a political transition.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the president remained opposed to military action. Going into the meeting of NATO Defense Ministers on 10 March, this put the US in the same camp with Germany, who was the most reticent and outspoken member of the alliance against military intervention.<sup>22</sup> The NATO nations departed that conference

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16. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 44.

17. UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 1970* (26 February 2011), 2-4.

18. Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Qaddafi's Forces Hit Back at Rebels," *New York Times*, 1 March 2011, A1.

19. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 35.

20. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 38.

21. The White House, "Readout of the President's Call with Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom," 8 March 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/node/27072> (accessed 27 December 2014).

22. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 41, 63.

with an agreement that set a fairly high bar for future action: a sound legal basis, strong regional support, and a demonstrable need. “In practice, these three conditions implied a UN Resolution, support from the Arab League or Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and a worsened situation on the ground.”<sup>23</sup> To Germany’s dismay, an unpredictable series of events would rapidly fulfill these requirements and sway much of the alliance, most importantly the US, towards intervention.

Over the course of three days (11 to 14 March) four critical events paved the way for a UN Resolution. First, Qaddafi’s forces began routing the rebels militarily, winning victory after victory until nothing stood between Qaddafi and the rebel stronghold of Benghazi. Second, the Arab League called for an international no-fly zone over Libya, shortly followed by similar vote by the GCC. Third, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) declared they were ready to intervene militarily in any anti-Qaddafi operation. The latter two events provided unprecedented regional support for an intervention against a member of their own community and lent international credibility to any NATO effort. Finally, many in the international community perceived an imminent threat to Benghazi as statesmen viewed imagery of pro-Qaddafi tanks approaching the city.

UN Resolution 1973 was the result of the rapidly changing environment. It authorized: all necessary means to protect civilians; enforcement of a no-fly zone; enforcement of an arms embargo; a flight ban on all Libyan foreign flights; and an assets freeze.<sup>24</sup> The Resolution passed with ten votes and five abstentions—Germany, Brazil, Russia, India, and China—and paved the way for the operations that eventually ended with the Qaddafi regime’s downfall and the dictator’s death.<sup>25</sup> The US-led Operation Odyssey Dawn took place between 19 and 31 March but gave way to the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector which continued until 11 days after Qaddafi’s demise in October 2011.

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23. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 41.

24. UN Security Council, *UN Security Council Resolution 1973* (17 March 2011), 3-5

25. Dan Bilefsky and Mark Landler, “Military Action Against Qaddafi Is Backed by U.N.,” *New York Times*, 18 March 2011, A1

## The Nature of the Threat

As in the case of Somalia, coercion was complicated by the fact that the US, France, NATO, and the UN were all Coercers. However, unlike in the Somalia case, the separate entities did not contradict each other and kept a relatively constant *demand*. Unfortunately, they did harm their own coercive efforts by communicating a vague *threat*.

The *demand* to Qaddafi originated from Resolution 1973 and President Obama reiterated it in his speech to the world on 18 March 2011. Qaddafi had to meet the following clear conditions: immediately implement a cease-fire; stop his troops from advancing on Benghazi; pull them back from Ajdabiya, Misrata, and Zawiyah; establish basic utilities to all areas; and permit humanitarian assistance to reach Libyans. President Obama firmly added that these condition were *non negotiable*.<sup>26</sup>

What were the consequences of failure to acquiesce? In the words of President Obama, “The international community will impose consequences and the [UN] Resolution will be enforced through military action.”<sup>27</sup> The reason this was vague is due to the wording of the Resolution. The clear portions of the military threat were the establishment of a no-fly zone and arms embargo. The Resolution was ambiguous with regards to the protection of civilians due to the imprecise language “all necessary means.”<sup>28</sup> This wording and Washington’s threat failed to provide the clear communication that facilitates successful coercion.

The reactions of international actors displayed the ambiguity of the Resolution’s wording and the threat. Some had preconceived notions that Qaddafi’s resistance would trigger no air strikes. Others expected no air strikes except those required to establish a no-fly zone. Still others believed the coalition would only strike against those directly threatening a massacre outside Benghazi. Incredibly few expected the bombing to continue beyond those measures. If that confusion existed on the international stage, how

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26. Barack H. Obama, “Statement on Libya” (speech, Washington DC, 18 March 2011): 4:40 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3wgifLcG3s> (accessed 10 February 2015).

27. Obama, “Statement on Libya,” 5:30.

28. This paper recognizes the utility of the language. It avoided unnecessarily restricting a military operation and provided flexibility. However, it was counter-productive to coercion when the Coercer did not clarify the threat to Qaddafi. It failed to provide the clear communication that facilitates successful coercion.

was Qaddafi to make an accurate assessment of the consequences of his resistance—that is, an accurate assessment of the *threat*?

The different expectations and reactions of some international actors provides insights into the inability to evaluate the nature of the threat. First and perhaps most importantly, there was confusion within the highest levels of the US over what military action would look like in Libya. Two days prior to the start of Operation Odyssey Dawn and one day before President Obama’s speech, a Pentagon official told reporters that “decisions were still being made about what kind of military action, if any, the United States might take.”<sup>29</sup> In a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on 31 March 2011 (only 12 days into the conflict, perhaps still in that “exemplary use of force” stage of coercion) two large misconceptions had to be set straight. Senator Bob Corker was under the impression that the US began operations with a no-fly zone that changed after 48 hours to a “no-drive zone.” This demonstrated his surprise that the air strikes shifted towards targeting Qaddafi ground forces. The response from a State Department official was that the air strikes never shifted at all; from the Administration’s perspective, there was never just a no-fly zone that then converted into a no-drive zone, the consequences for Qaddafi’s resistance had always been a no-drive zone.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Senator Corker believed the purpose behind the no-fly zone was to “make it a fair fight.”<sup>31</sup> While he had to be corrected again, this demonstrates the confusion over what exactly the US was threatening. Was it simply a no-fly zone, averting mass killings in Benghazi, or rolling back the entire Qaddafi regime?

The second misconception highlights the ambiguity over the UN Resolution’s language. In one instance, the committee questioned the permissibility of arming the rebels. This led to a discussion over the actual meaning behind “all necessary means.”<sup>32</sup> It is likely that if the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had trouble understanding what the US administration could and could not do under the Resolution and what the president had threatened to do, then Qaddafi also did not understand.

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29. Bilefsky and Landler, “Military Action Against Qaddafi,” A7.

30. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, First Session, March 31, 2011* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 20.

31. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 20.

32. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 28.



Confusion existed amongst the allies, as well. As of 25 March, six days into military action and six days prior to NATO assuming command, “there were differences [of opinion] in the scope of what NATO would do.”<sup>33</sup> Strategic divisions also prevented the alliance from agreeing on an acceptable end-state. Specifically, they could not reach consensus on whether they could cease the operation with Qaddafi still in power.<sup>34</sup> George, Byman and Waxman’s coercion theories predict that six days into an exemplary use of force, the Coercer still hopes to force Target acquiescence. In this case, the Coercer was not only still unclear of the *threat* and consequences, but what *demand* it would be willing to accept.

The Arab League’s response to the initial military intervention was perhaps the most telling. The group’s Secretary-General, Amr Moussa declared that member states were immediately “taken aback by what they have seen and wanted to modify their approval [for the operation].”<sup>35</sup> Just two days after the intervention began, Moussa said he deplored the broad scope of the bombing campaign, removing the Arab League’s endorsement of the “intense bombing” and “missile attacks.”<sup>36</sup> “What is happening in Libya differs from the aim of imposing a no-fly zone,” said Moussa. “And what we want is the protection of civilians and not the shelling of more civilians.”<sup>37</sup> Remember that the West considered an Arab League endorsement a requirement for the use of force. In that sense, if the people approving and calling for action were shocked at the intensity of air strikes, how could Qaddafi have accurately estimated the threat and consequences?

The impression that the coalition immediately went beyond its mandate was widespread.<sup>38</sup> China, Russia, and India also seemed genuinely surprised by the apparent consequences for Qaddafi’s resistance. Those three members of the Security Council condemned the coalition’s use of force and commented that, had they to do over, they would have vetoed Resolution 1979.<sup>39</sup> Since so many international actors did not expect

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33. An Obama Administration official quoted in Steven Lee Myers and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Allies Are Split Over Final Goal of Libya Mission,” *New York Times*, 25 March 2011, A9.

34. Myers and Kirkpatrick, “Allies are Split,” A9.

35. Edward Cody, “Arab Group Decries West’s Broad Air Campaign in Libya,” *The Washington Post*, 21 March 2011, A13.

36. Cody, “Arab Group Decries Campaign,” A13.

37. Cody, “Arab Group Decries Campaign,” A13.

38. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 90.

39. Buckley, “Learning from Libya,” 86. Andrew Jacobs, “China Urges Quick End To Airstrikes In Libya,” *New York Times*, 23 March 2011, A12. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 61.



the consequences to materialize as they did, one cannot expect that Qaddafi had a clear understanding of what the US was threatening.

The alliance created unnecessary doubts by making two irreconcilable threats. On one hand, the military operation would be extremely precise and limited; a no-fly zone with air strikes against air defense targets or Qaddafi forces directly threatening Benghazi. On the other hand, the US, UK, and France advertised not just a desire for, but an active effort towards regime change. Although Washington initially intended to change the regime through diplomatic and economic means, this distinction matters little to a Target. If Qaddafi saw the end goal as regime change, he could not help but consider it as part of the consequences.

The US finally made the consequences clear on 16 July 2011. On that date, US Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman and former Ambassador Gene Cretz met with senior members of the Qaddafi government in Tunis.<sup>40</sup> The Americans stressed that the bombing would continue until Qaddafi left power.<sup>41</sup> This demonstrated how far the threat shifted from original perceptions. The coalition essentially became the air component for the rebellion, supporting one side in the civil war. However, the original mandate had been simply to stop a civilian massacre. Given the UN Resolution, the coalition should have been neutral in the conflict between Qaddafi and the rebels. Twelve days after the operation began, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee discussed identifying the correct end state. Ranking member Richard Lugar asked, “Has humanitarianism evolved into supporting one side in a lengthy civil war? ... [The president] has not stated whether the United States would accept a stalemate in the civil war. If we do not accept a long-term stalemate, what is our strategy for ending Qaddafi’s rule?”<sup>42</sup> This discussion highlights the immediate and clear ideas that the coalition might go beyond simple neutrality. Not long after, the operation morphed into actively tipping the scales in favor of the rebels. In the last month of the operation, rebel forces closed around Qaddafi in Sirte. While fleeing the rebels, NATO airstrikes attacked and disabled his convoy. The rebels subsequently shelled, captured, and killed Qaddafi. This sequence of events, if not indicating a level of cooperation between NATO

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40. This appears to be the first direct diplomacy between the US and the government of Libya.

41. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 152.

42. Statement by Senator Richard G. Lugar in Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 3-4.

and the rebels, certainly went beyond neutrality. The US clearly did not threaten this level of action as part of the threat from the outset.

The final noteworthy facet of the nature of the threat was the ultimatum's timeline. President Obama, speaking for the coalition, gave Qaddafi only a few hours to comply.<sup>43</sup> In that time Qaddafi agreed to a cease fire, but not the withdrawal of his troops. This raised the question whether Qaddafi could have realistically met the demand with no negotiation in such a short time frame.<sup>44</sup>

### **Relative Menace**

Analysis shows a clear lack of relative menace in the coercion against Qaddafi. Three deficiencies existed: (1) a low expectation of hurt based on the ambiguity of the threat; (2) a low expectation of hurt based on the forces making up the threat; (3) a high expectation of cost due to an international emphasis on regime change. Either of these in isolation was enough to shift the weight in the relative menace formula towards the side that favored resistance.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the Coercer offered no carrots.<sup>46</sup>

### **Expectation of Hurt**

Qaddafi, along with the US Senate, the Arab League, NATO, Russia, and China, had no way of knowing the type and intensity of the air campaign he would face due to the vague threat. Therefore, it is likely that the actual hurt brought about by the coalition

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43. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 67.

44. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 67.

45. In other words, these combinations of factors created an imbalance that strongly favored resistance, where  $HURT < COST + BENEFIT$ .

46. Some may argue that applying rationality in any analysis of Qaddafi is folly. They would point to his seeming insanity and irrationality. President Ronald Reagan fostered this mindset, referring to Qaddafi as the "mad dog of the Middle East" beginning in 1981. While it is true that direct negotiation with Qaddafi himself was frustrating, others dispute this label and believe that Qaddafi arrived at calculated decisions no differently than other statesmen (Andrew, "British Perceptions of Gaddafi," 209). The US Ambassador to Libya, Gene Cretz wrote the State Department that, "While it is tempting to dismiss his many eccentricities as signs of instability, Gaddafi is a complicated individual who has managed to stay in power for 40 years through a skillful balancing of interests and realpolitik methods" (Quoted in Andrew, "British Perceptions of Gaddafi," 209). Princeton University Professor and former Obama State Department staff member Anne-Marie Slaughter added, "Although Colonel Qaddafi cultivates a mad-dictator image, he has been a canny survivor and political manipulator for 40 years" (Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Fiddling While Libya Burns," *New York Times*, 14 March 2011, A25). Furthermore, American political analyst Ronald St John believed Qaddafi had "a rational foreign policy pursued with tactical flexibility" (Ronald B. St John, *Qaddafi's World Design: Libyan Foreign Policy, 1969-1987* [London: Saqi Books, 1987], 143). Hence, sufficient proof exists to support analyzing the coercive diplomacy of 2011 using a theoretical lens and a rational model.

surprised Qaddafi, as it surprised other international actors. When given the ultimatum by President Obama on 18 March, Qaddafi had little reason to believe that he would face anything more than a no-fly zone and strikes against some of his forces around Benghazi. This translated into a lower expectation of hurt. Had it been made clear that NATO would bomb Tripoli to reduce support for and increase pressure on Qaddafi's regime until he acquiesced, his decision calculus might have been different. The expectation of cost would have been much higher and the weight of the menace equation may have tipped to favor acquiescence. The coercion theory I outline explains that a Coercer should clearly communicate the threat and what a Target should expect to.<sup>47</sup>

The level of US involvement did not foster successful coercion. President Obama pledged "that the American military role would be limited...that we would focus our unique capabilities on the front end of the operation and then transfer responsibility to our allies and partners."<sup>48</sup> The president explained the purpose of US involvement as "shaping the conditions for the international community to act together."<sup>49</sup> Since these statements were made during the demand and threat to Qaddafi and not weeks later, they clearly affected the expectation of hurt. The dominant paradigm of the last six decades had been a US-led coalition, "US plus others." Instead, an unfamiliar paradigm of "Europe plus" presented itself to Qaddafi. If only Qaddafi could weather the initial, short-term US involvement, he would face a less proven and less threatening adversary. The implication is that the way the US communicated its involvement lowered Qaddafi's expectation of hurt and encouraged resistance.

**Escalation Dominance.** Escalation dominance was not nearly the limiting factor in Libya as it was in Somalia. Qaddafi possessed a plethora of valuable assets that were valid military targets. Additionally, any air-heavy campaign can leverage its principle of mass to escalate or deescalate the strikes on a daily, if not hourly, basis. However, one element of President Obama's stated strategy did lower the Coercer's ability to escalate.

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47. Some may argue that as the campaign progressed, air strikes became less limited and therefore it would have been wrong to include this full range of hurt in the initial threat. This paper disagrees because the "exemplary use of force" stage of coercion will, by definition, be a limited taste of what is to come. Therefore, a wise Coercer will never only threaten what to expect in the exemplary stage, but what the Target should expect over the course of the coercion, including coercion in war. This simply was not communicated, implied, nor even hinted at in this case.

48. Quoted by Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg in Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 7.

49. Obama, "Statement on Libya," 5:40.

The president promised that he would not introduce ground troops. Taking that possibility off the table lowered the expectation of hurt that would accompany the specter of a Western ground offensive or occupation. With the West's aversion to collateral damage and pension for precision, Qaddafi believed he might simply live among the people and withstand a limited air campaign designed only to protect the Libyan population. If the air campaign could only produce a stalemate, or worse, could not turn the tide of momentum away from Qaddafi's forces, no added threat—no escalation—was possible. The lack of escalatory response by the West further lowered Qaddafi's expectation of hurt.

### **Costs**

Qaddafi's expectation of cost, although also opaque due to the unclear threat, grew too high to produce enough relative menace. The US and the majority of the European Community wanted Qaddafi to leave power. They continually and openly admitted as much prior to the start of hostilities. On 15 March, President Obama reiterated, for at least the third time, that it was time for Qaddafi to leave and he was investigating "a wide range of options that continue to tighten the noose around Mr. Qaddafi and apply additional pressure."<sup>50</sup> The day before the president's ultimatum, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton upped the rhetoric. She characterized Qaddafi as a menacing creature lacking a moral compass. "If you don't get him out and if you don't support the opposition and he stays in power there's no telling what he will do... [doing terrible things] is just in his nature," Clinton said.<sup>51</sup>

The US administration repeatedly clarified the difference between their diplomatic goals and military ones.<sup>52</sup> The US did not want Qaddafi to consider the broader diplomatic goal as part of his decision to resist or acquiesce; it was not asking for regime change as part of the military coercion, so Qaddafi should not consider it a very high cost.<sup>53</sup> To Washington, the ultimatum seemed to have been, "Cease fire and withdraw your forces or we will do military action against you." Whereas in Qaddafi's

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50. Steven Lee Myers, "Clinton Meets With Libyan Rebel Leader as U.S. Grapples With Role in Crisis," *New York Times*, 15 March 2011, A19.

51. Bilefsky and Landler, "Military Action Against Qaddafi," A7.

52. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 8.

53. The other explanation is that the Coercer did not expect nor care if Qaddafi acquiesced. However, this would not be coercion, but rather a military intervention in the form a victory campaign—akin to Iraq in 2003.

mind it was, “Do what we ask, and we will do what we can to end your regime.” In other words, it made no difference whether regime change was a cost suffered from military action or a cost suffered from diplomatic and economic action facilitated by acquiescence to a military threat—the death of his regime was part of Qaddafi’s expectation of cost. This weighted the menace equation far too heavily in favor of resistance: coercion is not possible when the Target feels that his survival is threatened.

Additionally, UN Resolution 1970 ironically closed the only road to Qaddafi’s survival. For the adversary, there is not an enormous difference between (1) the end of his regime and life and (2) the end of his regime and life in exile; both are a high cost to acquiescence. However, the latter is certainly less of a cost than the former, with the ability to offer exile being a carrot of sorts. Unfortunately, Resolution 1970, passed on 26 February, removed any possibility of this carrot and drove the expected cost higher. Since the resolution referred Qaddafi to the ICC for his role in the protest crackdowns, any asylum would have to come from one of the few countries without an extradition agreement with the ICC or he would have to be willing to stand trial—both supremely dubious propositions.

### **Credibility**

America’s asymmetry of motivation, NATO alliance issues, and domestic democratic concerns all reduced the credibility to pursue the campaign until victory and encouraged Qaddafi to resist.<sup>54</sup>

### **Asymmetry of Motivation**

A conspicuous disparity between Qaddafi’s and America’s interests created an asymmetry of motivation that favored the dictator. President Obama inferred that the events in Libya did not directly threaten America’s safety, but did jeopardize its interests and values.<sup>55</sup> However, the importance of those interests and values was debatable. Secretary Gates said that the situation in Libya was not a vital interest.<sup>56</sup> The first week

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54. Remember that pursuing the campaign to victory here means continuing all necessary military actions past the “exemplary use of force” stage of coercion and forcing a bludgeoning victory—thereby imposing your will on the adversary.

55. Barack H. Obama, “NDU Speech” (speech, Washington DC, 28 March 2011): 20:16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUXEiwJiKj4> (accessed 2 February 2015).

56. Quoted by Senator Lugar in Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 5.

in March, Gates outlined six reasons against military action in Libya, one of which compared the significant US interest in Afghanistan with the meager one in Libya.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, retired General Wesley Clark, commander of NATO's intervention in Kosovo, said US interests in Libya were simply too weak to warrant another war. Libya was not Egypt with its access to the Suez, Saudi Arabia with its major share of the world's petroleum, or Iran with its aspirations to nuclear weapons.<sup>58</sup>

Instead of vital US interests related to security, the US found only liberal or institutional interests in Libya. President Obama, while making his March ultimatum, warned that inaction would render the words of the international community hollow, cripple the UN's ability to uphold world peace, and overrun democratic values.<sup>59</sup> The previous month, while attempting to garner public support, he trumpeted Qaddafi's violation of international norms and the universal human rights of the Libyan people—rights of peaceful assembly, free speech, and self-determination.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, America supported the sentiment of the Arab Spring; it believed furthering the “democratic movements” was an important role. First, America thought its actions in Libya would send a signal to the rest of the Muslim world as to how much support there will be for “democratization, freedom, and liberation from despots.”<sup>61</sup> Second, the Libyan events were driving many refugees into Tunisia and Egypt, putting a strain on the “peaceful yet fragile transitions” in those countries.<sup>62</sup> These interests translated into the desire to protect civilians and hold Qaddafi responsible for his violations of liberal ideals.

The true motivation for such non-vital interests was encapsulated in a phrase the Obama administration came to lament: “leading from behind.”<sup>63</sup> The essence of the phrase radiated lack of credibility and will. Charles Krauthammer wrote, “Leading from

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57. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 47.

58. Quoted in Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 6.

59. Obama, “Statement on Libya,” 3:30 and Obama, “NDU Speech,” 15:00.

60. The White House, “President Obama Speaks on Libya.”

61. Statement of Senator Johnny Isakson, Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 35.

62. Obama, “NDU Speech,” 15:00.

63. I am not criticizing the idea of “leading from behind” as a military strategy. It may be appropriate, sufficient, and economically-wise. However, when advertised during coercion it lowers the Coercer's credibility and the Target's expectation of hurt. Therefore, although it may not reduce the chances of a successful military operation it does reduce the chances of successful coercion.



behind is not leading. It is abdicating.”<sup>64</sup> Retired Army LTG Jim Dubik commented on the US credibility of commitment: leadership is “not exercised from the rear by those who seek to risk as little as possible.”<sup>65</sup> Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral James Winnefeld listed six national interests that guide his counsel to the executive branch for the use of military force. The sixth interest in priority is “universal values.”<sup>66</sup> It was plain that the interests and motivation of the Coercer paled in comparison to those of Qaddafi: maintaining the very survival of his regime, and possibly his life.

Moreover, a UN factor complicated Qaddafi’s ability to estimate the Coercer’s relative motivation and credibility. In Libya, the UN enacted its Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine for the first time. R2P holds that sovereignty entails the responsibility to protect the citizens of a state—and when this responsibility is not upheld, foreign intervention is justified.<sup>67</sup> Qaddafi found difficulty judging his opponents’ motivation for R2P since his was the “test case.”

### **Alliance Coercion**

Coercion is less credible when the Coercer’s ability to establish and maintain a coercive coalition is dubious.<sup>68</sup> Differences among coalition partners and divergent member objective reduced the coalition’s credibility while permitting the Target opportunities for effective resistance.<sup>69</sup> Qaddafi was aware of such differences and fissures within NATO prior to his decision to resist coercion. First, President Sarkozy infuriated some European allies, most notably Germany, when he unilaterally recognized the NTC’s legitimacy over Qaddafi’s and broke solidarity with the alliance.<sup>70</sup> Next, in the opening weeks of March, France and Britain shared their irritation over America’s

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64. Charles Krauthammer, “The Obama Doctrine: Leading from Behind,” *Washington Post*, 28 April 2011.

65. James M. Dubik, “Finish the Job,” *New York Times*, 26 April 2011.

66. Admiral James Winnefeld, Vice-Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, (lecture, SAASS, Maxwell AFB, AL, 2 October 2015).

67. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 63.

68. Lawrence Freedman, *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.

69. Daniel L. Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999), xv.

70. Steven Erlanger and Judy Dempsey, “In Tending Its Interests, Germany Steps Away From European Unity,” *New York Times*, 24 March 2011, A14.



non-interventionist stance.<sup>71</sup> Then, Germany's abstention from the Security Council Resolution vote on 17 Mar sent shock waves throughout the alliance. Germany found themselves in unfamiliar company, aligning with China and Russia. The German decision deeply strained relationships within NATO, prompting the former head of the German military, Klaus Naumann, to say Germany turned the idea of a unified European foreign policy into a farce.<sup>72</sup> It looked like Germany refused European and Western solidarity.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, NATO member Turkey openly opposed the no-fly zone days prior to the ultimatum.<sup>74</sup> Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the use of force in Libya would be "extremely unbeneficial."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, allied cohesiveness was extremely dubious at the time of Obama's ultimatum, which lowered its credibility and encouraged Qaddafi to resist.

Only days into the campaign, the alliance continued to quarrel. Specifically, the allies disputed the permissible military actions and goals of the campaign. It was a textbook case of "divergent member objectives" and "divisions over the means to attain the goal" requiring consensus and compromise that *diminished the perceived commitment*.<sup>76</sup> When the US transitioned responsibility to NATO on 31 March, it demonstrated that the alliance held fundamentally different goals—the American exit strategy was not the alliance's exit strategy.<sup>77</sup> Qaddafi was further encouraged to resist as he questioned whether he could weather the initial US-led onslaught until the fractured alliance took responsibility. Since the world had seen similar differences nearly destroy the alliance during the Kosovo conflict, Qaddafi must have doubted the alliance's ability to sustain the campaign.<sup>78</sup> Although the alliance proved Qaddafi wrong, its well known fractures decreased its credibility so dramatically that one cannot fault Qaddafi for resisting.

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71. Nigel Morris and David Usborne. "Cameron Frustrated with Obama's Refusal to Act over No-Fly Zone," *The Independent*, 17 March 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/cameron-frustrated-with-obamas-refusal-to-act-over-nofly-zone-2244161.html> (Accessed 10 March 2015).

72. Erlanger and Dempsey, "Germany Steps Away," A14.

73. Erlanger and Dempsey, "Germany Steps Away," A14.

74. Jacobs, "China Urges Quick End," A12.

75. Myers, "Clinton Meets With Rebel," A19.

76. Byman, Waxman, and Larson, *Air Power*, xv. Robert J. Art, "Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?" in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 367.

77. Myers and Kirkpatrick, "Allies are Split," A9.

78. This doubt was only increased by the "Afghanistan fatigue" NATO was suffering from.

## **Democratic Coercion**

America's open society does not attempt to conceal information that may be harmful to its coercive attempts. During the critical month of March, two categories of information undermined US credibility: bi-partisan support and domestic backing. Domestic support among the two political parties did not exist. President Obama's opponents pressed him to seek authorization from Congress while some in the media referred to the Libyan mission as an illegal or unconstitutional war.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, a 21 March Gallop Poll indicated that popular support for military action against Libya was at 47%; the lowest level since 1986. To put that number in perspective, 90% approved of military action in Afghanistan in 2001, 76% approved of Iraq in 2003, and 65% approved of the relatively unpopular Somalia intervention of Chapter 3.<sup>80</sup> An educated forecaster might have predicted that if the campaign extended, the US would be compelled to negotiate as political and popular capital waned. While this information might not have been the cause for Qaddafi's resistance, it may have persuaded Qaddafi to continue resisting.

Similarly, no single one of the individual elements—asymmetry of motivation, alliance coercion, and democratic coercion—explain Qaddafi's resistance. Yet when one considers them together and couples them with the high cost of regime change, vague threat, and low expectation of hurt, the rationale for Qaddafi's decision to resist becomes clearer.

## **Consistency**

Consistency was not as causal to Qaddafi's resistance as relative menace or credibility. Yet, once again US coercion was less consistent than originally believed, creating doubts for the Target. America's rapid change in position, variation in acting in similar scenarios, and contradiction with previous assurances caused the inconsistency in this case study.

Beginning in February and throughout the first two weeks of March, the UK and France were advocating for military action while the US and Germany were advocating

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79. Bruce Ackerman, "Obama's Unconstitutional War," *Foreignpolicy.com*, 24 March 2011.

80. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Approve of Military Action Against Libya, 47% to 37%," *Gallup*, 22 March 2011.

for diplomatic and economic action only. In a matter of almost 24 hours, the US changed course and put forth the idea of standing up an aggressive military intervention.<sup>81</sup> Yet, Germany had not changed its stance and even abstained from the Security Council vote. One ought to wonder, given everything the US had said until very recently, how serious it could be; after all, Germany had not changed its position. At a minimum, such a rapid turnabout allowed little time for the leaders of the Qaddafi regime to process their opponent's political strategy and make accurate and informed decisions.

The lack of US diplomacy with Libya aggravated this inconsistency. It does not appear that the administration held talks with Libya.<sup>82</sup> Direct discussions and clear communication would have increased coercion's chances of success.<sup>83</sup> The ultimatum in this case—a non-negotiable demand with which Qaddafi only had hours to comply—was simply too inconsistent to be of value.

Prior to Libya, the history of US intervention varied. The US took no action in Rwanda in 1994. It required more than a year to intervene in Bosnia in 1995, and despite ruling out the use of force in Kosovo in 1998, finally began military operations in that country one year later.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the West's recent involvement with intra-state conflicts involving suspected atrocities demonstrated a distinct period of build-up of forces prior to the use of force. Libya was inconsistent with that trend. This inconsistency and an accelerated sequence of events may have been enough to muddle the Libyan government's decision-making. Since coercion is about influencing the adversary, the Coercer must guide his decision-making, not confuse it.

Furthermore, Qaddafi's decision-making definitely included a concern with assurances—that is, how many demands the West would make. Recall that the ability of a Coercer to assure the Target that it would make no further demands is a critical requisite to coercion. Qaddafi had already acquiesced once in 2003. Since Qaddafi had

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81. Not only did the US advocate for the use of force, but they did so in a way that was more aggressive than all the previous British and French proposals to that date. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 59.

82. By all accounts, no diplomatic talks with Libya occurred from the evacuation of the American embassy in February 2011 until 16 July 2011—four months into the military action.

83. In this way, France's methods contrast with America's. It is more common for France, and other European nations, to continue diplomacy while carrying out coercion in war. See Laborie, *Third Party Coercion*, v.

84. Dag Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble: Combining Diplomacy and Airpower in the Kosovo Crisis 1998-1999* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 125.

given the West everything it wanted, these new demands could only appear to be part of a series that might not end. The first talks between the US and the Qaddafi regime in July 2011 highlight this inconsistency. The Libyans were surprised that the US, who was so recently less hostile to Libya due to the agreements beginning in 2003, was now bombing them.<sup>85</sup> The Libyan diplomats who expressed their “surprise” may have exaggerated their rhetoric but the underlying principle remained: Libya did what the US asked, and now the US was asking for more.

### **The Cumulative Factor**

The US damaged its reputation for coercion by (1) deciding to use coercion in the first place (2) how it executed its coercion and (3) how it responded to Qaddafi’s resistance. America’s decision to threaten Qaddafi with force appeared inconsistent and undermined the previous gains it had made in Libya in 2003. In carrying out the coercion, the US damaged its ability to strike fear in a future opponent. Finally, the West undermined its legitimacy by its response to Qaddafi’s resistance.

### **The Decision to Threaten Force**

In 2003, Qaddafi’s change in behavior was a huge success for coercive diplomacy. He had conceded to all Western demands and became “a strong partner in the war against terrorism.”<sup>86</sup> Yet, the US squandered those gains by deciding to use coercion in 2011. The world watched as Washington reneged on its unwritten agreement with Libya. This causes questions to emerge for future Targets of American coercion. Outsiders ask, “Why would I give up X when the US will just demand more?” and are encouraged to resist from the outset. Simply put, if you were a dictator, would you trust the US after this incident?

**Damaged Reputation for Coercion.** The broader implication is that the US has dealt a blow to its own foreign policy goals by losing some of its ability to influence authoritarian regimes. Some of the regimes the US seeks to coerce are currently developing nuclear weapons—a potential existential security threat. Therefore, a policy

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85. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 152.

86. Andrew, “British Perceptions of Gaddafi,” 208.

priority should have been developing a reputation that leaders like Qaddafi could trust.<sup>87</sup> Instead, the US traded that reputation for lesser national interests and false hopes. A situation could arise that would require the US to appear inconsistent by renegeing on its agreements, if the issue at stake were sufficiently important to national interests to offset the damaged reputation; Libya, in 2011, was not. What explains the national decision-making then?

The Arab Spring helps to partially explain the decision to coerce Qaddafi. President Obama hoped the intervention in Libya would have a positive impact on democratic movements across the Middle East. Senator Lugar responded by saying the president's strategy was nothing more than a guess.<sup>88</sup> History illustrates that the president guessed wrong. For example, the situation in Egypt proved to be something quite distinct from how President Obama originally categorized it—a “peaceful transition”. Soon after the Spring ousted Hosni Mubarak, Mohamed Morsi, the democratically elected president from a radical Islamic party granted himself unlimited powers and violence erupted. A military coup and Mubarak's acquittal followed. This “democratic movement” proved to be both un-democratic and an unsettling source of instability.

Additionally, Libya is far from a bastion of stability and democracy as of early 2015. Post-Qaddafi Libya is “now a failed state. Jihadists have taken over... it [is] an incubator for terrorism.”<sup>89</sup> In 2012, radical Islamists attacked the US consulate, killing four Americans including the US Ambassador to Libya. In 2015, Libya has rival parliaments and governments. The three largest cities, Tripoli, Benghazi, and Misrata, are in the hands of militias while the internationally recognized government has taken refuge in Eastern Libya.<sup>90</sup> In December 2014, one of the larger militias, Fajr Libya, fought to control oil export terminals. During this battle, Fajr Libya even employed a

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87. Do not mistake this for saying that the US should develop a friendly attitude or reputation to these authoritarian regimes. The US should be menacing and firm, but trustworthy that when it makes an agreement, it will keep it.

88. Statement of Senator Lugar, Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 5.

89. Dennis Kucinich, *Kucinich offers insight on uncovered Pentagon Qaddafi tapes*, Fox Video, 6 min., 2015, <http://video.foxnews.com/v/4022710757001/kucinich-offers-insight-on-uncovered-pentagon-qaddafi-tapes/?#sp=show-clips> (accessed 15 March 2015).

90. AFP, “First Air Strikes Hit Libya's Militia-held Misrata,” *Dailymail.com*, 28 December 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2889102/First-air-strikes-hit-Libyas-militia-held-Misrata.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).

MiG-23 fighter-bomber from the nearby air base it controlled. The recognized government of Libya fought back with air strikes of their own. In response the UN said, “Failure to take steps towards de-escalation will lead to all-out war in Libya”<sup>91</sup>

The situations in Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere in the region demonstrate that America’s hope placed in the Arab Spring went unfulfilled. Relying on the Arab Spring for a foreign policy windfall was a shortsighted and risky gamble, especially compared to the long-term gains that had been won through the successful coercion of 2003. Were Qaddafi still in power today, Libya would be more stable, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria would not have a foothold in the southern Mediterranean, and Qaddafi’s situation would encourage future adversaries to acquiesce.<sup>92</sup> This Arab Spring gamble should not have been a major factor in deciding national policy or become a large national interest—in fact, the overall movement has harmed national interests across the region.<sup>93</sup>

**Damaged Consistency.** The decision to threaten Qaddafi also damaged America’s reputation for consistency. US willingness to sacrifice its previous coercive gains rested on the president’s notion that failing to prevent human rights violations would damage the US reputation worldwide.<sup>94</sup> However, the US conspicuously and unevenly applied its protection for “universal rights” and international norms across the region. The West did not intervene in Syria. The more numerous body count stemming from Syria as compared to Libya seems to highlight Western hypocrisy. If doing nothing

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91. Quoted in AFP, “First Air Strikes, Misrata.”

92. Since Qaddafi’s acquiescence in 2003 made him more vulnerable to future coercion, and since that future coercion did indeed take place, outsiders wonder why they should acquiesce to a US demand when there is historical example that more may be demanded of them in the future. This is a common sense proposal of which there is no empirical evidence. Therefore, further study is required at a date where sufficient cases of US coercion exist to test whether this perceived US inconsistency has had a negative effect on successful coercion.

93. The administration may also have thought that US prestige was on the line in Libya. Perhaps America’s reputation as a leader would diminish through inaction. Gilpin presented the notion that prestige is more important than power on the international stage. Therefore, any concern about a prestige decline resulting from inaction, is a valid one. However, America’s prestige was clearly not increased by its coercion in Libya; I contend that it actually decreased through Washington’s actions. The results in the region just discussed allude to this decline. Furthermore, prestige granted through leadership does not always mean one must demonstrate strength through threats and tough words. Washington’s focus should have been on leveraging its leadership to create the desired behavior in Qaddafi. True prestige means engaging in such a way that force is unnecessary. Instead, the prestige gamble in Libya may not have caused a change in the international hierarchy of power, but it did contribute to a relative change in the hierarchy of prestige, specifically as seen through American impotence with respect to Syria.

94. Quoted in David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker, *Confront and Conceal* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2012), 345.



in Libya would have “stained the conscious of the world” as President Obama said, what did that say about Syria? Similarly, the US did nothing to support the February and March 2011 protests in Iran. By all accounts the Iranian regime brutally suppressed the protesters, but the West did not champion Iranian universal human rights. The US also overlooked the brutality in Yemen and Bahrain. In fact, Saudi Arabia and the UAE deployed troops to help secure the Bahraini capital against protests.<sup>95</sup> All three countries seemed to disregard the American *request* to avoid the use of force against public demonstration.<sup>96</sup> American support for democratic ideals across the Middle East apparently did not actually extend beyond Libya or Egypt. President Obama, in his speech at the National Defense University regarding the initial success of the Libyan intervention, said, “Wherever people long to be free, they will find a friend in the United States.”<sup>97</sup> Outsiders who observed the events in Syria, Bahrain, Iran, and Yemen doubt the consistency of both that statement and America’s policies.

This hypocrisy damaged America’s international legitimacy, which ironically was one of the motivations for intervention in Libya. The US appeared spring-loaded to take a hardline stance against Qaddafi and take advantage of this opportunity to remove him from power. The lack of direct negotiation and talks with Qaddafi’s regime between February and July 2011 casts doubt on whether the use of force was truly Washington’s last resort, as it should have been in accordance with the international norms it often cites. One report highlights the idea that some in the administration made up their minds about Qaddafi and used the internal strife as an opportunity to force him out. Recently declassified recordings show that the day prior to Resolution 1973, Secretary Clinton ordered the Pentagon to refuse to take a phone call from and cease all communication with the Qaddafi regime. A Pentagon official said shutting Qaddafi out of the conversation allowed Secretary Clinton to pursue a solitary point of view—the hardline stance against Qaddafi.<sup>98</sup> No discussions, deliberations, or strategy considered solving how to keep Qaddafi in power or how to convince him to stop the crackdowns. The only US response was demands, threats, and condemnation. The earliest responses only

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95. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 54.

96. Here, I stress request as a contrast to demand. Myers, “Clinton Meets With Rebel,” A19.

97. Obama, “NDU Speech,” 24:46.

98. Jeffrey S. Shapiro and Kelly Riddell, “Secret Tapes Undermine Hillary Clinton on Libyan War,” *Washington Times*, 28 January 2015.



stressed the importance of holding Qaddafi accountable. These reactions were near opposites of the US response to similar situations in Bahrain and Yemen—why the double standard?<sup>99</sup>

It appears that some key players in Washington reverted to their preconceived notions about Qaddafi and his rogue past. Within weeks, the US was framing Qaddafi as the international pariah and villain of old despite the fact he had rehabilitated himself on the world stage. Remember that Secretary Clinton referred to Qaddafi as a “menacing creature.”<sup>100</sup> Many officials myopically focused on Qaddafi’s past behavior and missed the bigger picture. For instance, Senator Marco Rubio of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, cited Qaddafi’s past attempts at acquiring nuclear weapons as the reason to ensure he does not survive.<sup>101</sup> This rationale was completely backwards. The fact that Qaddafi *had* a WMD program and gave it up because of US demands should have provided *more* incentive to honor the pact that caused him to acquiesce in the first place, most likely by finding a way to keep him in power.

This does not imply that the US should turn a blind eye to the mass killing of civilians. Washington feared such an event as Qaddafi’s forces approached Benghazi. The impending “crime against humanity” supposedly forced intervention to be a question of hours and not days—there was no time to lose.<sup>102</sup> The president often quoted Qaddafi’s attitude toward Benghazi, saying he would show no mercy to his own people.<sup>103</sup> But in one account of the impending assault on Benghazi, even though Qaddafi said “We will come house by house”, he offered amnesty to those who laid down their arms. Only to those who continued to resist did Qaddafi say, “We will have no

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99. The point is that outsiders view America’s different responses as inconsistent. At first glance Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya all had strongmen who did not treat their people particularly well. However, the geopolitical realities are clearly different. The United States held different images of those states and filtered its interpretation of events through those images. To the US, Libya was run by a “bad guy” and France advocated for military intervention. On the other hand, Yemen may have had complicated reasons for their actions (a reasonable explanation for their seemingly harsh actions) and Saudi Arabia asked for time and patience in dealing with the unrest without American intervention. This plausible explanation for the different responses does not alleviate the appearance of hypocrisy.

100. Bilefsky and Landler, “Military Action Against Qaddafi,” A7.

101. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 29-30.

102. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 7.

103. Obama, “NDU Speech,” 6:16.

mercy.”<sup>104</sup> This puts a different spin on the impending situation; was it a humanitarian crisis or an iron-fisted sovereign maintaining order in his country?

### **The Execution of Coercion**

**Offer a Way Out.** Regardless of whether Benghazi was an impending international crime or the legitimate use of domestic force, the US should have engaged with and exerted influence over Qaddafi before the situation had devolved so dramatically. Washington needed to offer Qaddafi a way to stay in power as long as he stopped the crackdown. The US could have (silently) backed Qaddafi’s right to fight the armed uprising as long as he distinguished between the rebels and civilians. By only condemning and warning, the US tacitly permitted the situation to spiral out of control. Then, when time came to coerce with military force, it should have made its demand “negotiable.” The extreme black-and-white of a “non-negotiable” ultimatum makes a great sound bite, but is a shortsighted move that limits a Coercer’s options in a dynamic and fluid situation. If a nation desires to avoid war and expects coercion to work, a non-negotiable, less than 24-hour ultimatum appears hypocritical. By constructing the threat in such a way, the US disregarded Sun Tzu’s advice and did not offer Qaddafi a way out. I see only two plausible explanations: the US wanted to use force against Qaddafi or it was incompetent at coercion.

The day of the ultimatum, Qaddafi agreed to the cease fire but not a withdrawal of his troops.<sup>105</sup> That concession, even if less than sincere, warranted a further exploration of options through diplomacy. Does Qaddafi, a sovereign leader, not have the right to put down an armed rebellion within his borders? Must he cede control of his country’s second largest city? US policy would have benefited in the long-term had negotiation commenced at Qaddafi’s apparent agreement not to enter Benghazi. This would have decreased the appearance of hypocrisy and inconsistency and encouraged an international reputation for coercion. In other words, the US should have treated Libya more like Bahrain and Yemen. But instead it foolishly focused on Qaddafi’s past, and the shortsighted gambles associated with an Arab Spring that proliferated radicalism. The

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104. Bileski and Landler, “Military Action”, A7.

105. Obviously, this could have been a diplomatic delay tactic by Qaddafi, but either way, it provided an opening for continuing without the use of force—had the US worded the demand differently. Bileski and Landler, “Military Action”, A7. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 67.

US built its response only within the narrow context of Libya in March of 2011 instead of a longer-term and cumulative view of strategy and policy creation. It would appear the US was all too ready to remove Qaddafi from power and did not consider the possible benefits, especially to long-term coercion, by working out a way for him to remain in power.

**Damaged Credibility and Menace.** The US also suffered long-term damage to its credibility because of its execution of coercive diplomacy. Prior to his decision to use coercion against Qaddafi, President Obama believed inaction would harm US credibility because it would signal that the Iraq and Afghanistan experience paralyzed the US.<sup>106</sup> However, the US did not send the signal that it desired. During Qaddafi's crackdown, Secretary Gates warned that "any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined."<sup>107</sup> In his ultimatum, Obama stressed that he would not send ground troops to Libya.<sup>108</sup> Outsiders clearly saw a nation that was weary from ten years of war. The coercion in Libya proved to the world that the US was not paralyzed from *all* military actions, just some of them. The perception has immense ramifications for coercion. Others will question Washington's commitment to future military action, especially in scenarios that do not directly threaten America's safety. The loss of will for "boots on the ground" immediately lowers the adversary's expectation of hurt, decreases escalation dominance, works against relative menace, and encourages resistance.

**Undercutting its own Menace.** Washington also set an ill-advised precedent of informing the adversary of its gameplan—what it will and will not do. In his ultimatum to Qaddafi, the president said, "I also want to be clear about what we will not be doing."<sup>109</sup> Although vague threats are usually detrimental, vagueness with respect to forces and methods will increase menace. The US should want the adversary to fear that divisions of soldiers, fleets of sailors, and squadrons of airmen will be unleashed upon him if he resists; or at least that those forces may be used in subsequent escalation, if

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106. Sanger and Shanker, *Confront and Conceal*, 345.

107. Robert Gates, "West Point Speech" (speech, West Point, NY, 25 February 2011): <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539> (accessed 1 March 2015).

108. Obama, "Statement on Libya," 6:35.

109. Obama, "Statement on Libya," 6:33.

necessary. An adversary who must *question* if Goliath will be present at the battle is more likely to acquiesce than one who *knows* that Goliath will be absent.

The administration also advertised another piece of its gameplan. Policymakers saw the emerging crisis in Libya through the lens of late-1990s Kosovo. There, the successful military action stopped the immediate crisis but did not remove Slobodan Milosevic. Those who used the Kosovo analogy pointed to the successful diplomatic and economic pressures that tightened the noose around Milosevic and forced him from power.<sup>110</sup> President Obama admitted to applying this strategy to Qaddafi.<sup>111</sup> As argued here, outsiders learn from our past behaviors. For instance, future opponents discovered that a favored US gameplan is to force some concession, and then tighten the noose with other instruments of power until the regime perishes. In these cases, coercion theory reminds that “when giving way means the Target’s future capacity to resist is significantly diminished, its incentives to stand firm go up dramatically”—it will resist while it is still strong.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, advertising this prior to and during coercion is not favorable to its future success.

### **After Resistance**

The US also damaged its international legitimacy by exceeding the UN and Arab League mandate. Although the Arab League’s request for support was a requirement for a Western intervention, it immediately viewed the air campaign as excessive. The UN Resolution called for all necessary means to protect civilians. Even President Obama said, “We are not going to use force to go beyond a well-defined goal, specifically the protection of civilians in Libya.”<sup>113</sup> Yet one year later in testimony before Congress, Ambassador James Dobbins, the Director of International Security and Defense Policy for RAND, said the US and its partners intervened *in support of* the rebel side.<sup>114</sup> The mission morphed from protecting civilians to swinging the balance of power in favor of the rebellion. This damaged American legitimacy because the US claims it only used

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110. Senate, *Assessing the Situation in Libya*, 16.

111. Obama, “NDU Speech,” 16:00.

112. Art, “Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?” 367.

113. Obama, “Statement on Libya,” 6:40.

114. Statement of Ambassador James Dobbins in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session, August 1, 2012* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 12.

force to defend international norms and the credibility of the UN—but then it exceeded those very norms and UN mandates.<sup>115</sup>

This perceived hypocrisy has already damaged future attempts at coercion. The coalition's actions have made it more difficult to attain a legal basis for military intervention through the UN Security Council, as I discuss in the next chapter.

### Summary

This chapter has examined the West's failure to coerce Qaddafi in 2011. Coercion failed due to insufficient relative menace and low credibility. Coercion began with a rushed and vague threat that inferred a much lower expectation of hurt than what the coalition actually had in mind. Qaddafi's expectation of hurt was also lowered since the US planned only to set conditions and then let other nations lead the combat effort. Additionally, the weeks-long discussion of regime change caused the cost of acquiescence to be too high to offset the low expectation of hurt. These factors combined to produce insufficient relative menace.

Various factors affected the Coercer's credibility to commit to victory through war. America's stated interests and motivation for intervention were not vital to the nation. This produced an asymmetry of motivation that favored Qaddafi. Additionally, the well-known differences between alliance members created doubt that, given sufficient time, the alliance may fracture enough to end the military action. One of the issues vexing the alliance was scant domestic appetite for another war. This was no different for the US; the Libyan conflict had the lowest level of domestic support among all the conflicts of the last three decades. Therefore, the lack of support caused democratic coercion to have less credibility in Qaddafi's mind.

*Coercion may have been successful if Qaddafi had no reason to fear regime change or the West had been clear on exactly the type of bombing it would use.*

Demonstrating more commitment and avoiding a rushed, non-negotiable demand would have also promoted successful coercion. However, the policy recommendation is that *the US should have never allowed the situation to devolve to the necessity to use coercion.*

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115. Motives given by Obama, "NDU Speech," 15:00.

Focusing on a long-term view towards a coercion policy would condition others to acquiesce and avoid generating a bad reputation for the US.

Going forward, Libya was detrimental to Washington's ability to coerce. The Libyan experience was a gamble undertaken because of a perception that the world leader "must do something." Instead, it produced a reputation of unreliability since Qaddafi's concessions in 2003 proved to be insufficient for the US when it demanded more only eight years later. The apparent lack of US willingness to negotiate and work with Qaddafi only highlighted this unfortunate reputation; it rapidly pushed for Qaddafi's exit from power with a condemning, non-negotiable tone. The US also appeared inconsistent through its selective application of military force. The same interests that caused the US to intervene in Libya did not elicit the same response in Syria or Bahrain. Furthermore, the US damaged its future credibility and menace by displaying a war weariness that sapped all appetite for the use of ground forces.

Once again, the US coerced with the short-term versus long-term in mind. By looking only at the specific context of 2011, ousting Qaddafi may have been the right thing to do. However, all of the motivations for US involvement went either unfulfilled or undermined. For the whole of the twenty-first century, the decision to use coercive diplomacy in Libya was detrimental to US interests and undercut its future coercive diplomacy.

## Chapter 5

### Case Study: Syria 2011-2014

*I hope that you will none of you think that we shall be going to war for a trifle if we refuse to revoke the Megara decree...the revocation of which is to save us from war, or let any feeling of self-reproach linger in your minds, as if you went to war for slight cause. Why, this trifle contains the whole seal and trial of your resolution. If you give way, you will instantly have to meet some greater demand, as having been frightened into obedience in the first instance...*

Pericles of Athens

This chapter addresses the strategic coercion between the US and Bashar al-Assad's regime that began in 2011 and, to a minor extent, continues to this thesis' completion date. The coercion was a strategic failure; the US was unable to prevent the regime from killing more than 100,000 people or repeatedly using chemical weapons and air power against its own people. Both acts crossed "red lines" created by the Americans. By not acting, the US lost credibility and gained an international reputation of not meaning what it says. In short, US policy failed; deterrence failed. Coercive diplomacy for a limited end was successful, but insufficient to achieve strategic goals. In the end, the US lost.

### Background

If one accepts that stability in the Middle East is a vital US interest, Syria's geostrategic location cannot be denied. Syria's stability affects some of America's closest allies—it shares a border with Israel, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. America's understandably emotional tie to the sunk costs it suffered in Iraq make it deeply interested in any situation that might destabilize that country. Syria, when viewed in that respect, can either aid or erode Iraq's stability. Furthermore, the US has interests in Syria because it is an ally of and proxy between Iran and Hezbollah. The US sees opportunity in Syria to change the status quo and diminish both Iran's influence and Hezbollah's effectiveness. Finally, Syria's geography has become a jihadist arena. Syria garners more attention today than ever before, which raises the stakes of its final outcome.



Like Libya, Syria experienced a military coup in 1963. A Ba’thi regime seized power and has existed in varying forms ever since. The military commanders set out to establish a less exploitative and nominally socialist form of government.<sup>1</sup> Hafez al-Assad rose to power within the Arab Socialist Ba’th Party in 1970 and remained ruler of Syria until his death in 2000. Assad had originally selected his eldest son, Bassel, as successor. However, when Bassel died in a car accident in 1994, he recalled his second son, Bashar, from London, where he had been working as an eye doctor. Despite having no prior military experience, Hafez immediately promoted Bashar to Colonel in the Republican Guard and gave him an operational command in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> With only six years of political experience, Bashar became Syria’s ruler upon his father’s death.

As Assad took office, relations between Syria and the US were strained. Western sanctions pressured Syria’s economy, aiming to bring democratic reforms. US-Syrian relations were on the verge of collapse when Assad quickly condemned the September 2001 attacks and cooperated with US intelligence agencies searching for extremists in Syria. The relationship was steadily improving until Syria diplomatically opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This opposition combined with Syrian-Israeli antagonism, Syrian intervention in Lebanon, and suspected Syrian undermining of Iraq’s stabilization process widened the rift between the US and Syria.

Thus, a hostile relationship existed between the two countries when the Arab Spring swept through the Middle East. In 2011, Syria was especially susceptible to the revolutionary effects of the Arab Spring because, as Emile Hokayem wrote, Syria rested upon the intersection of critical fault lines running through the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> The first fault line was the breakdown of the social contract between the Assad regime and Syrian society. The second was the regional struggle for dominance between the powerful Arab states and Iran—the regime’s closest ally is Iran, but ethnically, Syria is an Arab nation. Third, Syria sat squarely on the explosive Sunni-Shia divide that already had brought violence to countries such as Iraq and Lebanon. The final threat to stability pertained to Syria’s many ethnic identities, whereby minorities and majorities increasingly engaged in

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1. Fred Haley Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, Global Security Watch (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 7.

2. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 29.

3. Emile Hokayem, *Syria’s Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 1.

existential battles.<sup>4</sup> The Syrian uprising that began in March 2011 merged these fault lines into a powder keg and lit the fuse.

The peaceful protests calling for the release of wrongly imprisoned Syrians and general democratic reforms met with violent repression from the Assad regime. The regime first opened fire on protesters on 18 March 2011 in Daraa. As in Libya, the crackdown failed to dispel the unrest and the anti-Assad protests spread to other cities and regions.<sup>5</sup> The government employed security forces, snipers, and pro-regime “thugs.” On 3 June 2011, security forces shot into a protest and killed 200 civilians.<sup>6</sup> Eight months after the first protest, Syria was in a state of civil war.<sup>7</sup>

The Syrian regime was able to maintain support by employing more than mass violence; it also played on raw sectarian fears. The rebels could not conceal the fact that most of them belonged to the Sunni community and extremist Sunnis rapidly became vocal proponents of the opposition cause. As Hokayem wrote, this glued many secular and non-Muslim Syrians to the regime.<sup>8</sup> These sectarian divisions are one factor differentiating the Syrian crisis from the Libyan uprising. Unlike in Libya, the Syrian opposition failed to gain sufficient international credibility because of internal squabbling and international distrust of radicals.

As the civil war continued, the crisis reached new international heights. In 2013, the UN announced that the situation in Syria caused the world’s worst refugee crisis in 20 years—1.2 million people had fled the country, another 600,000 were internally displaced, and 6.8 million needed urgent help.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Assad regime killed a staggering 5,000 Syrians each month. As of July 2013, experts believed more than 100,000 Syrians, mostly civilians, had been killed.<sup>10</sup> As of April 2015, more than 220,000 Syrians have died from the crisis.<sup>11</sup>

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4. Reinoud Leenders, “Syria’s Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant,” *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March 2014), 478.

5. Caitlin Alyce Buckley, “Learning from Libya, Acting in Syria,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 87.

6. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 85.

7. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 2.

8. Leenders, “Syria’s Uprising,” 478.

9. Quoted in P. W. F. Van Notten, “After the Arab Spring: An Opportunity for Scenarios,” *European Journal of Futures Research* 2, no. 1 (November 2013), 3.

10. Statement of Mona Yacoubian in House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic – Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options: Committee on Armed Services*,

The situation, grave as it was, only worsened by Assad's introduction of chemical weapons (CW). In March 2013, Assad's forces used CW against areas held by the opposition. On 21 August 2013, Assad conducted a large-scale CW attack. Within days, President Obama claimed over 1,000 people had died and current figures place the resulting death toll at 1,400.<sup>12</sup> In response, a joint Russian-American-Syrian deal, known as the Kerry-Lavrov agreement, after US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, outlined the manner in which Assad would relinquish his CW stockpile. On 19 Aug 2014, President Obama stated that the US had disposed of Assad's most lethal declared chemical weapons. In the same statement, the president admitted that "serious questions remain with respect to the omissions and discrepancies in Syria's declaration to the [Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] and about continues allegations of use."<sup>13</sup>

The Syrian situation also worsened because of the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS further destabilized the countries and its neighbors by taking large swaths of territory. ISIS's rise in importance also shifted most of the West's focus away from Assad; in other words, as of 2014 and 2015, Assad is perceived as the lesser of the two evils and a less urgent national security matter. A report published by the RAND Corporation in the spring of 2014 commented that the need to stop ISIS bodes well for Assad's longevity. The report closed by predicting that regime victory appears to be the most likely scenario in the near to mid-term.<sup>14</sup>

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*House of Representatives, , One Hundred Thirteenth Congress, First Session, July 17, 2013* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2013), 67.

11. Staffan de Mistura, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," *United Nations*, 15 January 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/db150115> (accessed 27 March 2015).

12. Eric Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence: Syria's Assad, Chemical Weapons, and the Threat of U.S. Military Action," *Comparative Strategy* 33, no. 5 (October 2014), 410.

13. "Statement by President Obama on Completion by M/V Cape Ray of Destruction of Syria's Declared Chemical Weapons," *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, 19 August 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.aufic.idm.oclc.org/pqrl/docview/1553964593/3585DADE298E4D0BPQ/13?accountid=4332> (accessed 23 February 2015).

14. Andrew Liepman, Brian Nichiporuk, and Jason Killmeyer, *Alternative Futures for Syria* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 9.

## **The Nature of the Threats**

Assad has faced three types of coercion from the US since the outbreak of violence in 2011. First, the US sought to force democratic reform and political transition through diplomatic and economic coercion.<sup>15</sup> Then, the US attempted to deter Assad from carrying out mass killings or using CW. When that failed, the US used coercive diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, to compel a limited concession from Assad. When coercive diplomacy ended, the US returned to its first strategy of diplomatic and political isolation. The insufficiency of coercive diplomacy to end the crisis raises questions as to the overall set of US ideas and practices regarding coercion.

### **Non-military Coercion**

Washington began using sanctions and diplomatic pressure on Assad immediately after the regime crackdown on protests began. The US demands focused on the observation of universal human rights and the reformation of the Syrian political system. Although Assad assured his people that he heard their protests and would bring reforms, repression increased and his promises proved hollow. In August 2011, President Obama said “for the sake of the Syrian people” Assad must give up power.<sup>16</sup> The US and its allies sought to isolate Assad by increasing their diplomatic and economic pressure. It hoped that by forcing extreme isolation, Assad would have no choice but to cede power.

### **Deterrence**

One year later, in August 2012, Assad’s internal situation had worsened. The rebels won gains and some feared the regime would respond to this threat by committing crimes against humanity. Statesmen specifically began to worry about Assad’s stockpiles of CW. Concerns of its use grew as intelligence services began to report movements of

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15. Since I focus on coercion that includes the threat of military force, this aspect of the case is not examined in detail. However, it does seem important to highlight the inadequacy of this approach in the Syrian context. Attempting diplomatic and economic isolation to force regime capitulation is only worthwhile if the Coercer can achieve actual isolation. In Syria, this was impossible. As of early 2015, Syria maintains stalwart support from Russia, China, and Iran. The US government often admitted that Russia would be the “game changer” with respect to Syria. That is, if the US were able to divide Russia and Assad, actual isolation could apply adequate pressure. This never occurred and Senator Kerry admitted that every veto or obstruction by Russia was a lifeline for Assad. Furthermore, a known US interest in removing Assad was the blow it would strike against Iranian regional power. For this reason, Iran would likely never withdraw its support for Assad. In summary, it appears somewhat naïve to base a strategy solely on diplomatic and economic isolation that one has little likelihood of achieving.

16. Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Leads Allies in Call for Chief of Syria to Quit,” *New York Times*, 19 August 2011, A1.

WMD. In the US, discussion over responses to this grave situation garnered more attention. The idea of a “red line” became prominent. The context used by lawmakers was the same as a trip wire in deterrence.<sup>17</sup> That is, the US seemed to believe the solution to the worsening situation was to deter Assad with the threat of force. Statesmen would set a red line, or trip wire, that if crossed, would result in action against the perpetrator.

By August 2012, it was evident that the US government had already decided upon setting red lines for deterrence. Then-Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations said, “I cannot go into details here [because this is an unclassified hearing], but I can tell you there is a red line and people know what it is. The people who need to know know what it is without going into any further discussion of it.”<sup>18</sup> As the hearing progressed, the discussion orbited around the use of red lines, or “triggers,” for direct US intervention in Syria. Most lawmakers at the hearing, including Kerry, agreed that two such red lines existed: “mass atrocities of some type, including massive refugee flows across borders, and...use of chemical weapons.”<sup>19</sup> Ambassador Martin Indyk summarized, “there is also a deterrent factor...we need to be signaling... that this kind of mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing, the deployment of chemical weapons for that purpose is a *red line* for the whole international community. And we need to try to *deter* that from happening rather than wait for it to happen before we intervene” (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

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17. My use of the term deterrence in this sense is based on the writing of Thomas Schelling. As Schelling wrote, deterrence is a threat intended to keep the adversary from starting something. “Deterrence involves setting the stage—by announcing, by rigging the trip-wire...and waiting.” (Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 70-71). President Obama made his red line comments and warned that if Assad used CWs, “That would change my calculus. That would change my equation” and “there will be consequences and you will be held accountable.” This is obvious deterrence because the demand does not require the Target to take an action or change its behavior—“you currently are not using chemical weapons, do not change anything.” Some may argue that a deterrent threat must have a military response as a consequence. This was clearly the case in this scenario. Prior to the red line comments, the Obama administration had already made it widely known that it was taking diplomatic and economic measures to isolate and remove Assad. What change in equation or calculus could the president have been speaking of besides the use of force? Similarly, his later, stronger warning of “consequences” and being “held accountable” seem clearly aimed at a military response.

18. Statement of Senator John Kerry in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session, August 1, 2012* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 24.

19. Statements of Andrew Tabler and Kerry in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 33, 38-39.

20. Statement of Ambassador Martin Indyk, Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 39.

Twenty days later, on 21 August 2012, President Obama formalized his nation's deterrence with regards to CW and implied the same message as Senator Kerry—namely, those who need to know, have known about our red line. “We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.”<sup>21</sup> Later in 2012, President Obama reiterated to Assad, “If you make the tragic mistake of using these weapons, there will be consequences and you will be held accountable.”<sup>22</sup>

Was the demand and threat clear enough? Deterrence requires less clarity than coercive diplomacy. In the latter, the Coercer increases its chance of success by stating a clear demand and a clear consequence for failing to meet the demand. In deterrence, clarity is not always desired. Leaving a threat unstated may have a greater deterrent value because the Target can only imagine the consequence it faces, and might over-imagine them. Schelling referred to this as “the threat that leaves something to chance.”<sup>23</sup>

Bruno Tertrais believed red lines must include clarity on either the demand or the consequences, but not both.<sup>24</sup> Did President Obama's deterrent statements fulfill this requirement? No one in the US clearly verbalized the consequence for stepping over the red line. The Senate came closest in their August hearing by clearly linking CW use and US military intervention. Additionally, the first half of President Obama's first statement was vague. How much WMD must be moved? To where and by whom? However, he seemed to remove the “movement” part from his red line in his subsequent threat and was consistently clear that the *use* of CW, a binary observation, was a trip wire. Since the luxury of hindsight demonstrates that Assad did use WMD and since that part of the deterrent threat was unmistakably clear, deterrence *was* properly communicated and understood. Therefore when President Obama told CNN that “we have been very clear

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21. Quoted in Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 1.

22. Quoted in Bruno Tertrais, “Drawing Red Lines Right,” *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (July 2014), 11.

23. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 187, 203.

24. Tertrais, “Drawing Red Lines Right,” 18.



about what we expect. And that is, ‘Do not use chemical weapons’” he was on firm coercive ground.<sup>25</sup>

### **Coercive Diplomacy**

The US responded to Assad’s crossing of the red line—the failed deterrence—by initiating coercive diplomacy. As the Obama administration maneuvered to justify military action against Assad while collecting undeniable evidence of the WMD’s origins, Secretary Kerry opened a door that the Russians seized. When asked if there was any way for Assad to avert US military action, Kerry responded, “Sure, he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week—turn it all over, all of it, without delay and allow the full and total accounting. But he isn’t about to do it and it can’t be done.”<sup>26</sup> Some analysts believe Kerry’s statement was a slip of the tongue while others believe it was a calculated diplomatic move to avoid an unpopular military intervention. Either way, the Russian willingness to back such a deal paved the way for coercive diplomacy.

On 10 September 2013, President Obama issued the American *demand* and *threat* in a televised statement. Assad must adhere to whatever arrangement the Russians and Americans might create. Furthermore, “any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments.”<sup>27</sup> The resulting Kerry-Lavrov agreement demanded that Syria turn over its CWs, permit full access to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention, preventing the possession of such arms.<sup>28</sup> President Obama also stated the threat associated with resistance. He said the military will remain in a posture to respond with force if diplomacy fails. Specifically, the US military would carry out “a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime’s ability to use them, and to make clear to the world that we will not

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25. Barack H. Obama, “CNN Interview” (interview, Washington DC, 9 September 2013): 5:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0WBkaFCjGI> (accessed 3 February 2015).

26. Arshad Mohammed and Andrew Osborn, “Kerry: Syrian Surrender of Chemical Arms Could Stop U.S. Attack,” *Reuters*, 9 September 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/09/us-syria-crisis-kerry-idUSBRE9880BV20130909> (accessed 27 February 2015).

27. Barack H. Obama, “Presidential Address” (speech, Washington DC, 10 September 2013): 11:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbIrm42zYTU> (accessed 3 February 2015).

28. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 414.



tolerate their use.”<sup>29</sup> However, the threat was not as simple as “do this or we will use force” because the president plainly said that he would not authorize force. Instead, if Assad did not comply with the Russo-American solution, Obama would “take this debate to Congress” and act only with their support.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the threat was less clear since resistance would not bring definite military force, but only a definite Congressional vote on whether to use military force—which may or may not bring military force.

### **Deterrence**

Deterrence against Assad failed because the US had little credibility to follow through on its threat. Assad’s benefits from crossing the red line and using CWs appeared to outweigh the consequences he would suffer, especially because the lack of US credibility shrunk the likelihood of suffering significant costs.<sup>31</sup>

### **Credibility**

Since low credibility was the root cause of the failure of US deterrence, it is appropriate to begin with a detailed discussion on that credibility. Credibility had a compounding effect by driving the expectation of hurt lower, thereby affecting America’s relative menace, as well. The analysis of this low credibility includes five factors: asymmetry of motivation, alliance concerns, third-party interference, democratic concerns, and specific actions during deterrence that undermined credibility. Additionally, this section highlights manners in which the cumulative effect from previous coercion affected some of these credibility factors.

**Asymmetry of Motivation.** The US faced a less severe asymmetry of motivation in Syria than in the previous two cases. The US confronted larger national interests and security concerns which gave it higher motivation. Regional stability and protection of key allies such as Israel, Turkey, and Jordan provided the US with high motivation. Similarly, Assad’s importance to US adversaries Iran and Hezbollah gave further interests in pursuing his downfall.

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29. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 5:30.

30. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 6:00.

31. Author David Lesch provided reason to believe analyzing Assad’s decisions in a rational way is appropriate. He wrote that Assad is not a bloodthirsty killer as presented by the media and opposition, but rather a rational actor with a plan. Assad’s rational desires are the product of an authoritarian system aimed not towards meeting people’s demands, but maintaining the status quo and regime survival. David W. Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 211.

However, one factor held back the US from being able to credibly demonstrate high motivation—the Syrian opposition. The opposition was unable to put aside sectarian differences and form a unified presence. Hokayem believed the opposition never gained sufficient credibility because of constant squabbling.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Ambassador Indyk told Congress that the opposition needs to “get its act together” and “act in unison to put forward a coherent political platform.”<sup>33</sup> The opposition’s failure to do so is significant because their strife implied that sectarian divisions would define any post-Assad governance. This reality produced American caution and held the US back from doing more to cause Assad’s departure—lowering its motivation.

The other aspect that lowered American motivation to support the opposition was well known and perpetuated by Assad himself—the extremist elements within the rebellion. Assad’s narrative painted the opposition as thugs, gangs, and terrorists.<sup>34</sup> Assad told Charlie Rose that any strike against him amounts to direct support of Al Qaeda.<sup>35</sup> The US believed that, at some level, Assad was correct. The formation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in 2011 gave the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization with a violent jihadi past, the highest representation.<sup>36</sup> By 2013, Islamists consisted of over 35 percent of the SNC, with half of that proportion being the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>37</sup> The open introduction of Al Qaeda into the fight against Assad in February 2012 only worsened the situation. Al Qaeda’s head of operations, Ayman al-Zawahiri released a video taking credit for various anti-Assad attacks and extolled the bravery of the fighters engaged in armed struggle against the Ba’th Party.<sup>38</sup> The US reaction was predictable. In 2012, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee demonstrated paralysis because of the fear that any support may feed Al Qaeda.<sup>39</sup> Two years later, testimony before the same committee portrayed even a minor involvement, such as arming the opposition, as being

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32. Leenders, “Syria’s Uprising,” 478.

33. Statement of Indyk in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 8.

34. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 1.

35. Bashar al-Assad, “Charlie Rose Interview” (interview, Damascus, 9 September 2013): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBe0cShOf-4> (accessed 10 February 2015).

36. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 72.

37. Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 189.

38. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 73.

39. Senate, *Syria: The Crisis and its Implications: Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session, March 1, 2012* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), 33.

fraught with risk.<sup>40</sup> These statements demonstrate how the nature of the Syrian opposition conspicuously undermined US motivation to act credibly.

**Alliance Concerns.** A clear lack of allied cohesion existed during the deterrence against Assad between 2011 and 2013. As explained previously, such disagreements damage the credibility of coercion and will not reiterate the argument. However, the alliance concerns in this case also demonstrate the cumulative effect on lowering credibility. In Libya, the US stressed its need to have regional support as a prerequisite for military intervention. This influenced future Targets, such as Assad, to consider the prospects of such regional support. Without a realistic probability of Arab League or Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) support, Assad knew the credibility of US intervention would be undermined.

The US perpetuated this during deterrence against Assad. In March 2012, the US State Department advertised America's credibility limitations to the world: "For more aggressive action, we would need to have a larger international consensus than currently exists."<sup>41</sup> Ambassador James Dobbins testified in 2012 that "most Arab League governments would need to endorse such a call [for intervention] as they did with respect to Libya."<sup>42</sup> While considering possible responses to a future WMD use by Assad, Dobbins said, "you would want an Arab League endorsement or at least a vast majority of the Arab League, the GCC, most of NATO" in order to decide on using military action.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the cumulative factor and statements by government officials influenced Assad to believe that Arab endorsement of military action would be a necessary prerequisite. Assad wondered what the US would do if that endorsement never came—would it follow through on its deterrent threat? Lack of Arab and European support could only lower the probability of following through—resulting in lower US credibility.

Unfortunately, Arab and allied support of intervention was near non-existent. Arab support predictably never materialized in the deterrence phase. Scholar Shibley Telhami hinted that the cumulative effect from Libya affected Arab perception of

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40. House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in Syria*, 8.

41. Statement of Jeffrey Feltman in Senate, *Syria: The Crisis and its Implications*, 22.

42. Statement of James Dobbins in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 13.

43. Statement of Dobbins in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 40.

intervention in Syria. He said polls showed that even though the Arab League asked for intervention in Libya, most Arabs in 2012 believed the way in which the coalition carried out the intervention was wrong. Additionally, the vast majority of Arabs viewed any US action as motivated by its own interest.<sup>44</sup> More practically, Arab desire for regional stability caused some nations to perceive Assad as the lesser evil and to accept his sovereignty. This meant there was little chance of overwhelming support from the Arab world for Western intervention. Not only did the Arab League fail to support intervention, but at times it actively supported Assad. For instance, in January 2012, the Arab League published a report supporting Assad's claims that he had exercised restraint in dealing with the uprising.<sup>45</sup> Arab League support for intervention between 2011 and 2013 was unrealistic and lowered US credibility to act.

The Assad regime also witnessed a clear lack of support for military intervention from America's more traditional allies. In late 2011, NATO Secretary-General Anders Rasmussen said, "NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. I can completely rule that out."<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the US ambassador to NATO indicated that "there has been no planning, no thought, and no discussion about any intervention in Syria."<sup>47</sup> Despite the US warnings over red lines, France—the chief proponent of intervention in Libya—communicated its opposition to military action in Syria throughout 2012. Consequently, as the US was giving threats on the one hand, it could not generate the regional or international support to meet its stated prerequisite on the other.

**Third-Party Interference—Russia and the Legal Basis.** Libya taught the world that America's gameplan relied partly on a legal basis created by the UN Security Council. During the Syrian uprising, the US government repeatedly stated that it preferred a UN Resolution for intervention in Syria, but would act without one if necessary. The problem was that the US still advertised its need for a sound legal basis; something much more difficult to prove to the international community without a UN

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44. David D. Kirkpatrick and Mark Landler, "Arab League Stance Muddies U.S. Case," *The New York Times*, 27 August 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/28/world/middleeast/arab-league-rejects-attack-against-syria.html> (accessed 23 February 2015).

45. Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 168.

46. Quoted in Buckley, "Learning from Libya," 88.

47. Quoted in Buckley, "Learning from Libya," 93.

Resolution or regional support. Therefore, all efforts to block progress in the UN also undermined the credibility of US military action.

Russia and China learned to do just that. They abstained from the vote on Resolution 1973 regarding Libya but immediately spoke out against the West exceeding its mandate in Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector. Though it is difficult to tell whether China and Russia voiced rhetoric or reality, both nations felt “tricked” by the West and have vowed not to allow another Western intervention aimed at regime change. With their ability to veto any future UN Resolution with similarly vague language, it appears unlikely that such a resolution will pass anytime in the near future.

As the Syrian crisis worsened, the world knew there was no chance of a UN Resolution authorizing any type of foreign intervention based on this “Libyan lesson learned” by China and Russia.<sup>48</sup> As a result, NATO’s chosen means of implementing its mandate had paradoxically delegitimized the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) concept and diminished its prospects for future invocations.<sup>49</sup> Russia and China vetoed two proposed resolutions to put economic and diplomatic pressure on Assad, one in October 2011 and another in February 2012. Additionally, President Putin and a delegation from China issued a statement affirming that “Russia and China are decisively against attempts to regulate the Syrian crisis with outside military intervention as well as imposing a policy of regime change.”<sup>50</sup> It became clear to the world that there was no possibility of using the UN to exert pressure on Assad. The US would face a heavy burden in convincing the world of any legal basis for intervention, decreasing its credibility in Assad’s mind.

**Democratic and Domestic Issues.** The open nature of a democracy can lower a Coercer’s credibility, because of the easy access to information that a government might otherwise guard. The US could not conceal its war-weariness. Its intervention in Libya demonstrated the lack of will to become involved in any significant manner. The US stressed the limited nature of its involvement and withdrew most of its resources from

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48. Patrick Goodenough, “Russia, Angry About Libya, Won’t Support Resolution on Syria,” *csnnews.com*, 19 May 2011, <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/russia-angry-about-libya-won-t-support-resolution-syria> (accessed 10 March 2015).

49. Justin Morris, “Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 5 (September 2013), 1265.

50. Quoted in Lawson, *Global Security Watch: Syria*, 169

Libya within two weeks. Washington's continued highlighting of its desire for limited involvement influenced Assad's decision-making. While testifying about Syria, Ambassador Indyk told the Senate that the American people seemed to be particularly weary of wars in the Middle East and are not ready for another intervention in that region.<sup>51</sup> In a Senate hearing that took place one month before Assad's use of WMD that killed 1,400, there was universal consensus that the US would "not under any circumstances want American boots on the ground in Syria."<sup>52</sup> Mona Yacoubian, a senior advisor for the Stimson Center summed up the feeling in the Senate: "Americans have no appetite for US engagement in a third Middle Eastern war."<sup>53</sup>

The lack of appetite was not only apparent through Congressional hearings, but also from national polling. Polls taken three months before Assad's CW use reported that only nine percent of Americans thought President Obama should intervene in Syria. When the question changed to poll support for intervention "if Assad should use WMD in the future," only 24 percent supported military action with 68 percent still opposed. Only 11 percent of Americans agreed with arming the rebels during this deterrence phase, while 89 percent did not.<sup>54</sup> Such opposition existed within the government as well. Gallop reported that Democrats were divided on whether to intervene and a strong majority of Republicans opposed the use of force in Syria.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Assad saw American domestic reasons to question the credibility of the US to respond militarily if he crossed the red line.

The open US society permitted access to military information, which also sent mixed signals to the world. The massive cuts to the defense budget brought on by sequestration damaged America's credibility to act. Multiple military leaders warned about the harm done to US readiness and capabilities. Specifically, the Air Force grounded one third of its combat fleet between April and July 2013. Leading up to Assad

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51. Statement of Indyk in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 28-29.

52. Statement of Ambassador Frederick Hof in House of Representatives, *Security Situation in Syria*, 6.

53. Statement of Yacoubian in House of Representatives, *Security Situation in Syria*, 73.

54. Lesley Wroughton, "As Syria War Escalates, Americans Cool to U.S. Intervention: Reuters/Ipsos Poll," *Reuters*, 25 August 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/25/us-syria-crisis-usa-poll-idUSBRE97O00E20130825> (accessed 23 February 2015).

55. Andrew Dugan, "US Support for Action in Syria Is Low vs Past Conflicts," *Gallup*, 6 September 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164282/support-syria-action-lower-past-conflicts.aspx> (accessed 22 February 2015).



crossing the red line in August 2013, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised that any air strikes in Syria would require at least 700 air sorties to suppress Syrian air defenses.<sup>56</sup> Yet this advice appeared irreconcilable with the desire for a very limited role in any military action and the grounding of one third of the air fleet. One cannot fault Assad for calculating that both the military's ability and the nation's will to carry out the US military's advice was highly dubious.

**Credibility-Hurting Actions.** From the early stages of the Syrian uprising, the US government appeared disconnected and disinterested in the crisis. While it undoubtedly worked diplomatically to isolate Assad, the US failure to persuade Russia and China rendered it relatively impotent and unwilling to attempt more forceful measures. For example, the same week as the president's initial call for Assad to go, Secretary Hillary Clinton hedged, "No outside power can or should impose this transition."<sup>57</sup> Hokayem believed that despite rhetoric suggesting that it would be glad to see the regime fall, the US essentially stood by and did nothing, even when France and the UK signaled their willingness to arm the rebels.<sup>58</sup> Until the end of deterrence in 2013, the official position of the US was that it would not arm the opposition. Additionally, the administration repeatedly assured the world that putting boots on the ground was not an option. Tertrais warned that during deterrence, a Coercer should "never give the impression that you would give up the military option. Appearing to retreat from a commitment to use force can seriously weaken the deterrent effect."<sup>59</sup> Little to no evidence existed to persuade Assad to think the US would become physically involved when it had such reluctance to pursue as small a gesture as arming the rebels.

America's communication, in both words and deeds, during the Syrian crisis, but especially during the one year of attempted deterrence, caused some to believe that it "had looked for every opportunity to avoid taking the kind of action needed to impose any costs" on Assad.<sup>60</sup> Salman Shaikh, director of the Brookings Doha Center,

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56. Quoted in House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in Syria*, 11.

57. Myers, "U.S. Leads Allies," A6.

58. Leenders, "Syria's Uprising," 479.

59. Tertrais, "Drawing Red Lines Right," 20.

60. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 415.



commented on the perceived credibility of the US to act on its deterrent threat when he said, “Many Arab leaders think that Obama’s word cannot be trusted.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Relative Menace**

The US did not present enough relative menace during its attempted deterrence. Although Assad did not expect a high level of hurt for crossing the red line, he did expect to receive high benefits from doing so.

**Expectation of Hurt.** Low credibility was the main reason for the insufficient expectation of hurt. Even if the US had threatened massive retaliation for crossing its red line, each factor that diminished its credibility (above) would still have lowered the probability of carrying out such an action, and therefore, the overall expectation of hurt. Yet while the US did not specifically identify what punitive action Assad would suffer, one could easily infer that the action itself would not carry a high level of hurt. Senate hearings in 2013 focused on a response that would not alter the balance in Syria, as it had in Libya, but rather would destroy or seriously degrade the regime’s ability to conduct mass terror campaigns.<sup>62</sup> A RAND report published in 2013 hinted that the US had few effective options in Syria. Air power would most likely cause little real hurt to the regime or would require a high level of commitment that, at this point, had been ruled out by all levels of government.<sup>63</sup> Terry Terriff effectively summarized part of America’s deterrent menace in 2013 when he wrote, “The options to the US and the international community to respond to any [CW] use are limited.”<sup>64</sup>

The already low expectation of hurt decreased further after Assad’s first use of WMD in March 2013. After waiting three months to acknowledge that this CW attack had originated from the regime, Washington’s response to Assad’s first step over the red line was the arming of some rebel groups. Save for complete inaction, one could hardly imagine a response bringing a lower level of hurt. Since the administration would not

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61. David D. Kirkpatrick, “Arab League Endorses International Action,” *The New York Times*, 1 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-syria-military-action.html> (accessed 23 February 2015).

62. Statement of Hof in House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in Syria*, 15.

63. Karl P. Mueller, Jeffrey Martini, and Thomas Hamilton, *Airpower Options for Syria* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 1.

64. Terry Terriff, “A Year of Decision in Syria?” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 14, no. 3 & 4 (January 2013), 2.

arm the rebels sufficiently to pose a threat to the regime, “this so-called response to Assad’s [March] use of chemical weapons had little deterrent value.”<sup>65</sup> As August approached, the month of his massive WMD attack, Assad’s expectation of hurt for violating America’s red line had reached a new low.

**Costs and Benefits.** Assad knew the US envisioned an end-state for Syria without him in power. President Obama first called for Assad’s departure five months into the crisis. That same day, 18 August 2011, the heads of the UK, France, and Germany released a joint statement urging Assad to step down.<sup>66</sup> During President Obama’s articulation of his deterrent threat on 21 August 2012, he reiterated that Assad had lost the legitimacy to lead.<sup>67</sup> That same month, Congress used terms such as “Assad’s rule is unsustainable,” and “it is not in US interests to see the Assad regime survive.”<sup>68</sup> Coercion becomes very difficult when Coercers mention regime change because it increases the Target’s costs. Ambassador Indyk communicated this point to Congress and hit on a cumulative effect influencing Assad: “On your point about declaring the objective as being Assad must go or Mubarak must go or Qaddafi must go, I actually think it is a mistake for the United States to be deciding those things in that way or making it look like we can decide when they can stay and when they can go. I think it is a lesson from the Arab Awakening that the Obama administration should take on board...we should not be dictating it.”<sup>69</sup>

However, the largest cost to Assad were those that were internal to Syria. His regime was in a fight for its survival. Terriff believed Assad felt cornered by Syrian Free Army gains throughout 2012.<sup>70</sup> Assad owned WMD because of the deterrent benefits—an adversary is less likely to attack because of the concern that a response would include CW. However, during the phase of US deterrence, the momentum appeared to be with Assad’s adversary. For that reason, the use of CW might pay big benefits to the regime. Many observers around the world, including the US Senate, characterized Assad’s tactics

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65. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 409.

66. Myers, “U.S. Leads Allies,” A6.

67. Barack H. Obama, “Red Line Statement” (speech, Washington DC, 21 August 2012): 0:45, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxxwfaIAI\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxxwfaIAI_Q) (accessed 24 February 2015).

68. Senate, *Syria: The Crisis and its Implications*, 9, 31.

69. Statement of Indyk in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 28.

70. Terriff, “A Year of Decision,” 2.

as a terror campaign.<sup>71</sup> In this way, Assad was employing a punishment strategy. He sought to demonstrate that an alliance with the rebels would bring harsh and indiscriminate punishment. If successful, such a strategy would cease popular support for the rebels and lower its ability to recruit. A CW attack could increase this strategy's chance of success. Therefore, when framed this way, Assad's choice to use WMD becomes more understandable. The decision fits into Tertrais' explanation for when deterrence fails—"The adversary may calculate that the price [of crossing the red line] is worth paying anyway."<sup>72</sup>

The regime was in a fight for its survival, knew the US had low credibility to act, and suspected any action would be extremely limited in nature. Therefore, if Assad could translate using CWs into operational gains inside Syria, the price would be worth it.

### **Consistency**

Before Assad crossed America's red line, the US had displayed inconsistency in applying its own justification for intervention. Moreover, after the regime used CWs, the US inconsistently responded to the failed deterrent, emboldening Assad to continue his chemical attacks and leading to the massive 21 August 2013 attack.

Remember from Chapter 4 that the US justified its intervention in Libya by the need to protect the lives of the Libyans, international democratic values, and the credibility of the international community, specifically the UN. These interests were present in Syria, also. In January 2012, the UN Secretary-General warned of the need to "prepare ourselves for the next test of our common humanity...the test is here—in Syria."<sup>73</sup> Statements like this placed the word of the international community and the UN's ability to uphold world peace in as much jeopardy in Syria as in Libya. Yet, after taking only one month to intervene in Libya, two years and five months passed in Syria with little mention of a US or UN intervention.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the administration quickly

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71. House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in Syria*, 5.

72. Tertrais, "Drawing Red Lines Right," 11.

73. Quoted in Morris, "Libya and Syria: R2P," 1265.

74. Two years and five months refers to the time Assad had to calculate his decision. From the beginning of the uprising until his massive chemical attack, 25 times the length of time it took the US to act in Libya had passed. Intervention seemed unlikely.

called for the removal of Mubarak in Egypt and Qaddafi in 2011, but waited approximately five times as long to do so with Assad.<sup>75</sup>

Inconsistency was also evident when one considers the Syrian death toll. The US based its success in Libya on saving civilian lives and giving Libyans a chance to choose their own future; the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project estimates that 1,319 civilians died in Libya prior to US intervention.<sup>76</sup> The post-Qaddafi National Transition Council estimates that 4,700 rebel supporters died in that same time period.<sup>77</sup> In a hearing, one senator struck this chord by asking how many Syrians will have to lose their lives before a similar tipping point is reached.<sup>78</sup> Assad must have wondered the same thing. However, one month prior to his major crossing of the red line, more than 100,000 Syrians had been killed, primarily civilians.<sup>79</sup> If Libya warranted intervention for less than 5,000 deaths, how could Syria's 100,000 casualties merit no action? To Assad, the US was plainly inconsistent and its word was unreliable. These facts affected Assad's decision-making as he questioned which statements the US might adhere to.

The initial US response to Assad's CW use only increased his doubts concerning US consistency. Assad first used CWs in March 2013. Within a month, the UK, France, and Israel reported they had credible evidence linking the regime to the attack. By the end of May, Turkey joined the chorus in accusing Assad of using WMD.<sup>80</sup> Yet, the US withheld accusations, leading some to believe the administration sought to blur the issue to avoid having to act.<sup>81</sup> While the US conceded that Assad had most likely used CWs, the administration publicly downplayed the issue and raised concerns about the chain of evidence and the need for more proof. The US appeared to discount its allies' intelligence reports.<sup>82</sup> When the US finally conceded the guilt of Assad in June 2013, its *only* response was arming some rebel groups. Assad—and the world—saw the

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75. Myers, "U.S. Leads Allies," A6.

76. Ian Black, "Libyan Revolution Casualties Lower than Expected, Says New Government," *The Guardian*, 8 January 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/08/libyan-revolution-casualties-lower-expected-government> (accessed 26 February 2015).

77. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "ACLED Version 5 (1997 – 2014)," <http://www.acleddata.com/data/version-5-data-1997-2014/> (accessed 26 February 2015).

78. Statement of Senator Benjamin Cardin in Senate, *Syria: The Crisis and its Implications*, 21.

79. Statement of Yacoubian in House of Representatives, *The Security Situation in Syria*, 67.

80. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 409.

81. Yoel Guzansky, "Thin Red Lines: The Syrian and Iranian Contexts," *Strategic Assessment* 16, no. 2 (July 2013), 26.

82. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 409.

inconsistency. First, the US downplayed the importance of responding to clear defiance on the part of Assad. Then, when it finally acted, the administration's muted response must have appeared to Assad as though the US had no desire to act meaningfully to his violation of the president's August and December 2012 red lines.<sup>83</sup> Deterrence pivots on the notion that the Coercer will act meaningfully and consistently to Target defiance. US inconsistency seemed to encourage Assad to cross the red line again.<sup>84</sup>

### **Coercive Diplomacy**

Coercive diplomacy appears to have succeeded in the limited objective of removing CWs from Syria. Although evidence of Assad's continued resistance during and after the coercion exists, he turned over much of his known WMD. Explaining this success is not easy. The analysis suggests Assad had good reason to continue his resistance. Therefore, Assad's acquiescence is best explained through a combination of coercive factors and strategic context that was exogenous to the threat of military force.

#### **Credibility**

As US strategic coercion transitioned from deterrence to coercive diplomacy in September 2013, America's credibility remained low. The same credibility problems experienced during deterrence existed during coercive diplomacy. This section will only reiterate some of the more important factors that did not change and highlight those that worsened.

The Afghanistan fatigue gripping the nation remained prevalent in many coercive statements made by the US administration. Even as President Obama gave his coercive ultimatum to Assad, he warned that the US cannot solve others' problems, particularly after Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>85</sup> This conflicting statement somehow linked the Syrians' problems with the decade-long wars. One can interpret it to mean that the heavy toll from the previous wars has decreased America's commitment to become involved to help solve "others' problems." In a similar statement ten days prior to the ultimatum, Secretary Kerry said that the "American people are tired of war" and therefore the US

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83. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 410.

84. Yoel Guzanski asks, "Did the lack of an immediate American response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria empower the regime to continue and maybe even extend their use?" Guzanski, "Thin Red Lines," 26.

85. Obama, "Presidential Address," 0:45.

will use “no boots on the ground.” Therefore, it was plain to Assad that US credibility to commit the resources necessary to impose a high cost, even after failed deterrence, was staggeringly low.

The domestic support for carrying out President Obama’s threat of force also damaged that credibility. After the administration announced that Assad had used CWs, only 36 percent of Americans favored carrying through with Obama’s threat.<sup>86</sup>

While war-weariness and low domestic support continued to hurt credibility in coercion as it had in deterrence, several factors worsened. The first was the lack of support from the Arab League. Many Western statesmen who favored intervention had hoped that a regime use of WMD would bring swift condemnation and a call to arms from the Arab League. However the absence of such an action—a prerequisite—damaged the potential for action. Arab support would have provided the most critical backing to the American threat of force, but it never materialized.<sup>87</sup> The Arab League called for the international community to hold Assad accountable, but declined to back a military strike.<sup>88</sup> In the entire region, only Turkey pledged to support a military intervention.<sup>89</sup> Disagreements within the Arab League restrained requesting military intervention as it had in Libya. Although Saudi Arabia supported the use of force, countries such as Egypt would not permit the motion. Egypt believed a political approach held the best chance of successfully resolving the Syrian crisis.

Many members of the British Parliament agreed with Egypt. Days prior to Obama’s ultimatum, Parliament shot down any possibility of military intervention in Syria without a UN Resolution. Those that voted for the bi-partisan rejection cited two reasons. First, Prime Minister David Cameron did not make a compelling enough case for intervention against Assad.<sup>90</sup> Second, the MPs placed their faith in the political process. The opposition to Cameron believed the parties in Syria would eventually agree

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86. Dugan, “US Support for Action.”

87. Throdore Karasik, “How Strong Is Arab League Support for Striking Syria?” *Al Arabiya News*, 11 September 2013, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/world/2013/09/11/How-strong-is-Arab-League-support-for-striking-Syria-.html> (accessed 22 February 2015).

88. Kirkpatrick, “Arab League Endorses Action.”

89. Kirkpatrick and Landler, “Arab League Stance.”

90. One cannot discount politics in this vote. It took place only nine days after the chemical weapon attack and before proper evidence could be gathered. The UN had not even released its findings yet. PM Cameron was not asking for a vote to authorize strikes, but rather a vote that would allow another vote once the UN and intelligence services had published all the information.



to a political transition; and any military action, no matter how limited, would undermine that political process and delay an end to the crisis. Therefore, the US lost the support of its most trusted ally, and with it, credibility that it would act on its threat.

The phrasing of the president's threat also decreased its credibility. If Assad would not agree to the Kerry-Lavrov agreement, or did not adhere to it, Obama would not authorize targeted military strikes. Instead, he would ask Congress for permission to proceed with military action.<sup>91</sup> In reality, Congress would not have granted permission. *Roll Call*, a newspaper specializing in Congress, reported the day after the president's ultimatum that upward of 50 percent of Congress opposed military strikes, 10 percent favored, and the rest were undecided.<sup>92</sup> The next day, *Politico* stated that the administration did not have enough votes to pass an authorization to use force.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Assad witnessed a war-weary nation standing without its closest allies, without the Arab League, and with little domestic support to carry out its threat.

Yet, one change did increase America's credibility. It did not improve its credibility to carry out military action, but rather its credibility to achieve a diplomatic pact. Russia's support prevented the US from politically or economically isolating Assad. Even after the use of WMD, Secretary Kerry knew that with Putin's "guaranteed Russian obstructionism...the UN cannot galvanize the world to act as it should."<sup>94</sup> However, the Russians did not approve of Assad's WMD use. Prior to August 2013, Minister Lavrov warned that any use of CWs was beyond the pale, saying it would be political suicide for the regime.<sup>95</sup> The Russians had the credibility to pressure Assad into acquiescing. After the WMD use, Ambassador Indyk stated, "on this issue, we will have the Russians with us."<sup>96</sup> Therefore, with the assistance of the Russians and for the

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91. Obama, "Presidential Address," 6:00.

92. David Hawkings, "After Bowing to Congress on Syria, Then Pulling Back, Will Obama Ever Return?" *Roll Call*, 11 September 2013, <http://blogs.rollcall.com/hawkings/after-bowing-to-congress-on-syria-then-pulling-back-will-obama-ever-return/> (accessed 27 February 2014).

93. Manu Raji, "Lawmakers: White House Syria Briefings a Flop," *Politico*, 12 September 2013, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/white-house-congress-syria-96677.html> (accessed 27 February 2015).

94. John Kerry, "Statement on Syria" (speech, Washington DC, 30 Aug 2013): 16:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDN4L00Ls9E> (accessed 10 February 2015).

95. Quoted in Terriff, "A Year of Decision," 2.

96. Statement of Indyk in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 39.

limited aim of achieving a diplomatic solution, the US gained some diplomatic credibility.

### **Relative Menace**

The low expectation of hurt witnessed in the deterrence phase carried over to coercive diplomacy. The US pronounced time and again that it would not put American boots on the ground. In his ultimatum, the president added, “I will not pursue an open-ended action...[or] a prolonged air campaign...This would be a targeted strike to achieve a clear objective deterring the use of chemical weapons.”<sup>97</sup> Assad had little reason to believe his resistance would trigger more than a flesh wound to his regime.

On the other hand, acquiescing provided a carrot of sorts to Assad. In his ultimatum, President Obama stressed the need for a political settlement. The very action the US asked Assad to do—sign and comply with an international agreement—gave him international legitimacy. The West had spent the previous two years attempting to convince the world that Assad no longer had legitimacy to lead. Yet by making and keeping a new international pact, Assad took on the role of “partner” and shifted the international focus away from his regime’s illegitimacy.<sup>98</sup> In reality, the US needed Assad to *stay in power* to comply with the Kerry-Lavrov deal and provided him a carrot and benefit to acquiescing.<sup>99</sup>

On the other side of the relative menace equation, costs to acquiescence decreased. Since the US had advertised its desire for regime change, Assad must have been wary about any concession that would leave him weaker. Although a Coercer cannot remove that consideration after it suggests regime change, the US appears to have *attempted* to do so. Despite carrying out the most vicious act yet, official statements and interviews between August and September 2013 lacked all mention of Assad’s lost legitimacy or need to cede power. Was the US attempting to lower Assad’s costs of acquiescence by indicating it would only link the military response to CWs?

The costs of acquiescence also went down because the strategic landscape in Syria had changed. His CW use in 2013 allowed the regime to make gains against the rebels. In the immediate aftermath of the 21 August 2013 attack, Assad escalated his

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97. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 8:00.

98. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 417.

99. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 417.

conventional military campaign.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the rebels had backed Assad into a corner in 2012, by the end of 2013 RAND reported that regime victory was the most likely outcome. Few RAND contributors could foresee a future in which the opposition could gain sufficient traction to make gains against the regime.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the CW use sadly facilitated the result for which Assad had hoped. The cost of giving CWs up in September 2013 was significantly lower than it would have been months earlier. Perhaps the low expectation of hurt balanced with the introduction of a carrot, lowered costs to acquiescing, and so created sufficient relative menace.

### **Consistency**

The US continued displaying actions that were inconsistent with its statements during coercive diplomacy. During the president's ultimatum he said that because of Assad's use of WMD, and in order to deter him, the US would degrade Syria's WMD stockpile, and send a message to the world, "it is in the national security interests of the US to respond through targeted military strikes."<sup>102</sup> Within ten minutes, the president then stated he would put the authorization to act in Congress' hand; but he would not do that, unless diplomacy failed. Was it in the national security interests of the US to act or not? How can a state deter Assad against future CW use and signal to the world a message of deterrence against chemical weapons if no action is taken? The inconsistency between US messages and actions were readily apparent.

As coercive diplomacy progressed, US responses to Syrian lapses into resistance became inconsistent as well. For example, Assad missed an April 2014 deadline to turn over CW without a corresponding US response.<sup>103</sup> After the US destroyed Syria's most lethal WMD, President Obama admitted that "serious questions" remained regarding omissions and discrepancies with its stockpiles and continued allegations of use.<sup>104</sup> Specifically, the French Foreign Minister alleged that Assad had used CWs against

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100. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 414.

101. Liepman, Nichiporuk, and Killmeyer, *Alternative Futures for Syria*, 8.

102. Obama, "Presidential Address," 5:20.

103. Diane Barnes, "U.S. House Demands Data on Any Hidden Syrian Chemical Arms," *Global Security Newswire*, 2 June 2014, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/us-house-presses-details-concealed-syrian-warfare-chemicals/> (accessed 27 February 2015).

104. "Statement on Completion by M/V Cape Ray."

civilians 14 times since the “successful” coercive diplomacy.<sup>105</sup> None of these omissions, discrepancies, or allegations drew any repercussions and highlighted Assad’s ability to resist coercion.

### **Explaining the “Success”**

As the previous evidence suggests, coercive diplomacy to force Assad to give up his CWs may be less successful than originally thought. Yet there is no doubt that he openly acquiesced on the international stage (even if perhaps he is covertly resisting in a limited manner). If the US had low credibility, relative menace, and consistency, what explains this success? Three different factors provide the likely explanation. First, the US provided a benefit to the regime by re-establishing some level of international legitimacy. It made Assad a “partner” in a recognized pact among heads of state. Second, the strategic environment had changed and Assad no longer required his CWs to the same extent he had months earlier. Thus, the US asked him to give up something that no longer held high value. Finally, Russia pressured Assad to acquiesce. Russia’s support was the one thing Assad could not afford to lose. No city or weapon meant as much to Assad as did Russia’s backing. Therefore, the combined effect of exogenous variables to US coercive diplomacy performed a large role in causing Assad’s acquiescence.

### **The Cumulative Effect**

It was little wonder that deterrence failed but quite surprising that coercive diplomacy succeeded. However, both phases damaged America’s coercive reputation and resulted in an overall failure of strategic coercion. Every consequence that affected America’s reputation did so in a negative manner. Nothing occurred during the US-Syrian dealings between 2011 and 2014 that encourages future Targets to favor acquiescing. Instead, the US conditioned others to question its commitment, its deterrence reputation, and its credibility. Both the insufficiency of successful coercive

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105. Quoted in Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 416. Possibly due to international focus on ISIS, these lapses remain unverified. Yet, even the shifting focus away from these possible violations shows inconsistency, specifically that the US does not care enough about failed deterrence to fully investigate.

diplomacy and the cumulative lessons should cause the US to rethink its set of ideas regarding coercion.

### **Commitment**

Once again, the US accentuated its desire to remain free of military involvement around the world. Both the president and secretary of state repeatedly reminded future Targets that America was “sick and tired of war.”<sup>106</sup> During an interview with CNN, President Obama displayed how the toll of Afghanistan consistently weighed on the administration’s decision calculus. After the US had determined Assad used CWs that killed more than 1,000 people, the president was asked if he had seen enough and would intervene in Syria. Obama responded, “We’ve still got a war in Afghanistan. We’re still spending tens of billions of dollars in Afghanistan.”<sup>107</sup> The message to future Targets was clear. No matter the *need* for intervention or the need to follow through on its word, the costs of war had paralyzed the US.<sup>108</sup> Even when attempting to convince the nation that some type of involvement may be necessary, each speech immediately translated this objective into a policy avoiding boots on the ground, open-ended action, or prolonged air campaigns. The admonition of Senator Rand Paul seems applicable to this type of conditioning of future Targets: “we should not announce to our enemies what we might do in every conceivable scenario.”<sup>109</sup> The obvious lack of commitment translated into limited involvement, at best. This conditions future Targets to doubt not only whether the US will carry out its threat, but also how painful the limited air strikes will be.

### **Deterrence**

US words and deeds between August 2012 and the spring of 2014 also damaged the US reputation for being able to deter an opponent. In fact, outsiders must have wondered if the administration even had a basic understanding of how to perform deterrence. Before deterring a Target by influencing its behavior through a threat or

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106. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 7:39.

107. Quoted in Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 411.

108. It appears the failure to produce the promised stability and democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced justifiable caution to wade into new conflicts. Policymakers should use this same caution when deciding upon coercion—coercion that can either lead America into conflict or reputation-destroying inaction. In this case, Washington’s caution (paralysis, if you will) should have prevented it from drawing a red line in the first place, instead of preventing it from acting after the red line was crossed. See Chapter 6 for further discussion on this point.

109. Quoted in Tertrais, “Drawing Red Lines Right,” 16.

implied threat, the Coercer must evaluate the costs of carrying the threat out and be willing to either do so or lose credibility. The Coercer should also have an idea about the type of military action that will embody the consequence for failed deterrence. It appears the US had not carefully considered what response, if any, to use if Assad crossed its red line. After Assad did so, President Obama said, “The question is now what are we prepared to do about it.”<sup>110</sup> Simply put, that is not how deterrence works—a Coercer does not ask that question after deterrence has failed. Evidence suggests much of the US government was asking the same question as President Obama. After the US had decided to use red lines against Assad, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, which received classified briefs, demonstrated that no one had decided upon the response. One senator asked questions about how it will be decided that the US will become involved—should it be with NATO, does the US require a UN Resolution, does it require encouragement from the Arab League?<sup>111</sup> The point is that one should not make a deterrent threat if these questions have not been internally resolved. If the US would not act without Arab League support, for instance, it should not have commenced deterrence against Assad. The US must either be willing to act unilaterally or have such allied assurances before it makes a deterrent threat.

Secretary Kerry unintentionally provided a summation of the administration’s inadequate understanding of deterrence. The month after Assad’s WMD use, he testified, “We know that Assad will read our silence, our unwillingness to act, as a signal that he can use his weapons with impunity.”<sup>112</sup> Kerry said this with every intention that the US would act. However, America’s deeds at that time actually made Kerry’s warning a reality. Assad used CWs on multiple occasions and, despite crossing the red line, he was not deterred from using them again. The reason lies in the US response to failed deterrence. After the regime crossed the line, the US responded with a threat. A threat is not a response. After Assad’s defiant CW use, President Obama stated that his primary goal in threatening the regime was to deter it from future use of WMD.<sup>113</sup> A Coercer does not deter the Target after deterrence fails—Obama had been “detering” Assad since

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110. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 4:00.

111. Statement of Senator Jim Webb in Senate, *Next Steps in Syria*, 43.

112. Quoted in Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 410.

113. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 5:20.



his “red line statement” and therefore, further deterrence is not the appropriate response. Unfortunately, the US did not display this comprehension and sent the message to outsiders that they need not adhere to US deterrence, because America will give you another chance to comply.

In other words, Assad proved the US red lines to be meaningless. The US largely ignored his first WMD use in March 2013. Assad continued to use chemical attacks well into 2014 and still has not fully complied with the US demands. Yet, somehow President Obama believed that the US “sent a clear message that the use of these abhorrent weapons has consequences and will not be tolerated by the international community.”<sup>114</sup>

### **Credibility**

US coercion in Syria damaged America’s general credibility even worse than its deterrence reputation. The US reputation of meaning what it says diminished as a result of Syria. President Obama issued a red line to Assad. After the regime crossed the line, Obama said, “It is in the national security interests of the US to respond to the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike” and warned his Republican opponents of the “failure to act when a cause is so plainly just.”<sup>115</sup> On a different occasion, the president stated, “I have decided the United States should take military action against Syrian regime targets” and “if we won’t enforce accountability in the face of this heinous act, what does it say about our resolve to stand up to others who flout fundamental international rules... We cannot raise our children in a world where we will not follow through on the things we say... We cannot, and must not, turn a blind eye to what happened in Damascus.”<sup>116</sup> However, Assad crossed the red line in March 2013 with no action. His “heinous” crossing in August 2013 resulted only in a US demand to relinquish the CWs. After that threat, Assad possibly used CWs on 14 more occasions, including the use of Chlorine gas in April 2014.<sup>117</sup> All these occurred with no US military action; the US did not “follow through on the things we say.”

Secretary Kerry provided the implication in his speech leading to the US ultimatum. He said, “What are we going to do about it? ... It matters deeply to the

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114. “Statement on Completion by M/V Cape Ray.”

115. Obama, “Presidential Address,” 13:20.

116. Barack H. Obama, “Statement of Chemical Weapons” (speech, Washington DC, 30 August 2013): 8:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrQJ2LZSJ4A> (accessed 27 February 2015).

117. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 416.

credibility and the future interests of the United States of America... [others] are watching. They want to see if the United States and our friends mean what we say. It is directly related to our credibility and whether countries still believe the United States when it says something.”<sup>118</sup> Yet, as the months passed, the “others” Kerry spoke about doubted US credibility and called into question the administration’s will to make good on its threats.<sup>119</sup> Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta believed the US sent the wrong message to the world. He perceived that the US damaged its credibility to stand by its word by not backing up its “red line statement.”<sup>120</sup>

As a result, both enemies and allies might view America’s credibility in the future with greater skepticism.<sup>121</sup> International partners may seek their own security needs rather than relying on the US to keep the peace, bringing potential destabilization to the international environment. Adversaries may have already begun to act with this cumulative effect in mind. President Obama’s reputation as someone who would hesitate to use military force could be a causal factor in recent Iranian actions. It is not inconceivable that after seeing the US blink in response to its close ally Syria, Iran was emboldened to call America’s bluff on two deadlines regarding nuclear enrichment. Iran may have learned that US words and deadlines mean little.

### **Summary**

This chapter has examined the failed strategic coercion against the Assad regime between 2011 and 2014. Deterrence failed because the US lacked credibility to act with military force in Syria. Even if the US would respond with force, it was plain to the world that the Obama administration would only consider using limited force. This lowered Assad’s expectation of hurt and caused the US to lack relative menace. Additionally, the US demonstrated inconsistency in responding to initial defiance of its deterrent line, which encouraged continued CW use. On the other hand, coercive diplomacy succeeded when two factors—credibility and consistency—suggested failure as the most likely outcome. Although the US lacked credibility and consistency, it

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118. Kerry, “Statement on Syria,” 11:00.

119. Sterner, “Dictators and Deterrence,” 413.

120. Leon Panetta, “Katie Couric Interview” (interview, Washington DC, 21 October 2014): 0:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0j40PwmojQ> (accessed 27 February 2015).

121. Guzansky, “Thin Red Lines,” 27.

improved its relative menace by striving to downplay its desire for regime change and offering Assad the carrot of legitimacy. More likely, Assad's acquiescence is best understood as a combination of the improved relative menace, Russian pressure, and the operational victories and momentum that changed the strategic landscape inside of Syria.

The scenario was an overall failure because the US could not stop Assad's actions from causing over 220,000 deaths—and he is still carrying out his campaign of terror. Likewise, the US did not stop Assad from using CWs. Both WMD use and a massive humanitarian catastrophe are events the US said would trigger action. By not acting, the US lost all credibility that it means what it says. As previous chapters highlight, the world may not have feared US military force enough when compared with the costs of giving in to coercion, but few doubted whether the US would follow through on its word to use it. After Syria, future adversaries doubt both the menace of US military action and the credibility that its threats and words can be trusted.

The US certainly squandered prestige through its use of coercion in Syria. Not only did the US lose a prestige gamble, but other international powers gained in the process. The administration's choices granted Russia a larger role in determining the outcome of the Syrian crisis. Its role in brokering the CW deal with the US and Syria raised Russia's profile in the Middle East.<sup>122</sup> From the beginning, the US attempted to convince Russia and China to support a political transition in Syria that would not include Assad. Yet for the time being, the US has accepted a political solution that does include Assad—granting success to Russia and China.

Assad killed hundreds of thousands of people and used chemical weapons multiple times. Political and economic isolation failed. Deterrence failed. The limited success attained by coercive diplomacy was not sufficient. In the end, the US failed.

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122. Sterner, "Dictators and Deterrence," 416.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

*Good policy against an adversary is superior to the blind attacks of brute force.*

Diodotus of Athens

My analysis has uncovered several necessary conditions for successful coercive diplomacy, if the United States chooses that option. First, the US must focus on presenting a menacing, credible, and consistent set of demands and threats to the Target. Second, it must learn to think in terms of long-term strategies defined by what I refer to as the cumulative factor. Finally, the assumptions that lie behind the US military's inherently coercive nature need to be rethought. Quite simply, the US threatens to use force too often. This overuse has led to missteps that damage the reputation and prestige of the United States. In order to bolster the likelihood of success, the US should threaten to use force only when national interests warrant engaging in actual conflict.

#### **Reorient to Menace, Credibility, and Consistency**

Given an isolated scenario of coercive diplomacy, the US is neither as menacing, credible, or consistent as it should be nor as it thinks. To mediate this dilemma, the US must reorient its policies and strategy to focus on contextually improving its menace, credibility, and consistency. The first section of this conclusion focuses on a strategy to provide this reorientation.

Table 1 presents the results of the case study analysis. Relative menace and credibility are the most explanatory elements in an individual case's success or failure. However, policymakers and strategists cannot eschew consistency since it has the most direct translation into the cumulative factor. Consistency, then, leads into the second major recommendation: transitioning away from isolated and in-the-moment reactions towards a long-term view of coercion and strategy. Consistency, when viewed this way, is vitally important to coercive diplomacy, but not a causal explanation for individual cases.

**Table 1: Case Study Analysis**

	Relative Menace	Credibility	Consistency	Success/Failure
<b>Somalia-UNITAF</b>	+	+	--	Success
<b>Somalia-UNISOM</b>	--	--	--	Failure
<b>Libya</b>	--	--	-	Failure
<b>Syria (Deterrence)</b>	--	--	--	Failure
<b>Syria (Coercive D)</b>	+	--	-	Success

+ Abundant; - Somewhat Deficient; -- Very Deficient

*Source: Author's Original Work.* The quantification given in Table 1 is subjective, not formulaic. My analysis and evidence in the case studies suggest whether the factor should be classified as abundant, deficient, or very deficient, informed by my judgment.

Recommendations aimed at increasing relative menace and credibility will aid in creating successful strategies for individual scenarios. Within relative menace, the two most concrete areas to examine and correct are the expectation of hurt and expected costs. When leaders decide to implement coercive diplomacy, they must concentrate on presenting a higher expectation of hurt than the US has recently exhibited. Policymakers must realize that a Target does not base its expectation of hurt from the overall might of the US military instrument, but rather on the actual forces employed. Too often, presidents and secretaries do not craft their threats and communication to the Target in a way that conveys the possibility of high amounts of pain. Instead, they rely on the Target being intimidated by America's total strength as the sole superpower.

An implication of this realization is that presidents must stop saying what it will *not* do. Administrations must stop: advertising the removal of certain military options—such as ground forces—from its decision-making; advising that the military role will be limited; maintaining that the US will only set conditions and then withdraw; and warning that it will not support any protracted conflict. These statements immediately decrease expectation of hurt to minimal levels and remove any ability for the Coercer to escalate. Therefore, a key factor to relative menace—escalation dominance—is conspicuously ceded to the Target. The fundamental importance of creating fear in the Target

demonstrates how overly candid statements decrease the chances of successful coercive diplomacy.

Any ability to increase, or at least not lessen, the expectation of hurt is critical given the nature of conventional forces. Conventional forces cannot generate as high an expectation of hurt and are not as menacing as most leaders believe.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that potential Targets do not fear US forces. Targets simply do not fear them enough to willingly suffer high costs of acquiescence.<sup>2</sup> America's character, along with that of all liberal democracies, limits the amount of menace it can project to the Target. Other states know America's character is different from that of a Hitler or a Stalin. The US will not devastate a country or disproportionately kill civilians. In a sense, US conventional options to inflict hurt on the Target start off limited. This is an area that merits further study. Must powerful nations fundamentally rethink the coercive nature of even strong militaries? Do Targets inherently prefer weathering a limited twenty-first century use of force over paying the costs of acquiescence?

Additionally, the increasingly popular "Air Power-only" option greatly reduces the conventional ability to cause hurt. Removing ground troops from the equation tremendously lowers the adversary's fear of the US. Moreover, the precision character of US air power does not convey menace to a Target; historical evidence, including the analysis from two of the case studies in this thesis, suggests as much.<sup>3</sup> Targets no longer fear the prospect of carpet bombing and massive destruction. US abundant use of remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs) lowers the expectation of hurt further. As militarily effective as RPAs and precision are, they do not strike as much fear in sovereign states.

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1. Conventional forces do not strike the same fear as nuclear arms. That whole new level of hurt and menace gave all adversaries increased caution and pause during the Cold War that does not exist among most adversaries today.

2. This is also not to say that conventional troops cannot force the Target to concede through military action. If the troops must be used to such an extent, coercion has failed.

3. One will usually point to Kosovo as a counter to this statement. I propose that NATO air power in Operation ALLIED FORCE in 1999 was not sufficient to cause Milosevic's acquiescence precisely because it did not cause a high enough expectation of hurt. First, under my conceptual framework, coercion failed against Milosevic because the NATO operation clearly exceeded the "exemplary use of force" phase and became coercion during war. Second, some analysts—including the operation's commander, General Wesley Clark—claim that the threat of introducing ground troops ultimately cause Milosevic's withdrawal from Kosovo. When viewed through this lens, that claim has validity. Even though the ground forces were months from operational readiness when Milosevic conceded, the very preparation to introduce them raised his expectation of hurt and made the allies relatively more menacing. Finally, the exogenous fact that Russia withdrew its support for Milosevic, much like Russia's pressure in the Syria case, contributed to Milosevic's decision.



Adversaries believe they can withstand a campaign of precision bombing and drone strikes. Air power cannot take and hold terrain, nor does it have a sterling track record of decapitating a state by itself. In essence, the air power-only option does not threaten survival the way ground forces do. It seems reasonable that Qaddafi would have feared a threat of land invasion and occupation more than a threat of limited air strikes. Without the possibility of a ground threat, an air-only coercive threat carries such a low expectation of hurt that acquiescence prior to or during the “exemplary use of force” stage is improbable.

The US can offset its limited ability to strike fear by actively managing the Target’s costs to acquiescence. Demanding regime change is counterproductive in coercive diplomacy. If the Target associates its survival with resistance and its demise with acquiescence, it will choose resistance and coercion will fail. The US must learn that mentioning regime change as a policy interest shapes the Target’s expectation of costs, even if the demand associated with *military* coercion is less than regime change. In other words, it does not matter if the military demand is “X” when the stated US economic or diplomatic goal is “regime change.” This is not to say that the US should never seek regime change as a goal, but rather such a goal will make successful coercion unlikely and the use of force very likely. If vital national security interests are involved and can only be served by regime change, the US should commence coercion and prepare itself for conflict.

Within a given scenario, the US can improve its credibility by taking stock of its asymmetry of motivation and democratic issues before deciding to use coercion backed by force.<sup>4</sup> The US often has a widely inferior asymmetry of motivation in relation to the Target. This lack of motivation stems from the same faulty assumptions as does the lack of menace. Successful coercion is heuristically associated with military dominance. This idea suggests that surely a tiny band in Somalia will bend over backward to appease the most powerful nation on earth. By having an over-inflated view of its own reputation, the US discounts the importance of avoiding an asymmetry of motivation. Instead, it

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4. I have previously shown that coercion involving alliances face credibility concerns. However, given the current international order, this appears to be more of a given constant than a controllable factor. Certainly, The US must take all measures to achieve unity within the alliance. However, it would be unrealistic to suggest that one could remove differentiating interests, perspectives, and goals.

must be able to demonstrate credibly that it is motivated to achieve its objectives in the Target's country. The US can only achieve this type of credibility by associating the coercion with important security and national interests. If the Target's behavior only disturbs marginal US interests, America is not likely to expend much effort in its use of force. This does not mean that the US will *not* use force or is destined to fail militarily. It does mean that, given a constant cost, Targets will be more likely to resist when marginal US interests are involved. On one hand, this gives further credence to the notion of lowering the Target's cost if one wants coercion to succeed—a low enough cost may translate to the Target not wishing to test America's motivation for even minor interests. On the other hand, a possible way to overcome the poor escalation ability and low expectation of hurt associated with conventional forces is by displaying high motivation over a *vital* national interest. However, giving an ultimatum based on a *marginal* interest and low national motivation is a certain path to stiffening resistance.

I have outlined various democratic issues affecting credibility during coercion. Many of these issues are constants and not susceptible to manipulation. Yet, in the analysis a theme emerged regarding the executive branch's open communication. When an administration informs a Target that it will not put boots on the ground, it does not do so for the benefit of the Target. Instead, it is part of the communication that is a fundamental characteristic of democracies, but unfortunately, has a down-side for coercion. Presidents and secretaries commonly make statements that are harmful to coercion by giving assurances directed at calming the public. A fine line exists in determining which statements are truly "necessary," and which are overly damaging to coercion's cause. I suggest that current attempts at political maneuvering or informing the domestic audience have become far more prevalent than attempts to intimidate and convince a Target. Our leaders must not preemptively give away our game plan, limitations, and restrictions.

Therefore, when still attempting to influence the Target, whether through coercive diplomacy or deterrence, presidents and secretaries should make no mention of limitations or restrictions. The executive branch should only discuss its options and game plan with the public *after* the Target resists and military options have begun. In this way, policymakers can remove some factors that diminish menace and credibility, while still

providing the necessary assurances to their public *when appropriate*. Recently, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg provided an example of this course correction when he attempted to influence Russia's behavior. Unlike President Obama's coercion against Syria, where he told Assad everything he would *not* do in the same speech as his demands and threats, NATO attempted to appear menacing. The Secretary-General told Russia that cyber attacks could potentially trigger an Article 5 response, meaning the possible use of conventional forces. When specifically challenged on whether NATO might bomb the perpetrators, Stoltenberg responded, "We will do what's necessary to do to protect all allies. But I'm not going to tell you exactly how I'm going to do that."<sup>5</sup>

This is another valuable area of further study. Perhaps, an investigation could demonstrate the public's acceptance or lack thereof to not knowing the exact response during coercion. Would the public be satisfied to simply be informed about the national interests involved and that force will be used if the Target resists? Would Americans understand the need to appear menacing during coercion? Does public sentiment even dictate an overly candid level of information after coercion has failed and conflict has begun?

### **Fundamental Recommendations**

(1) The US must make every effort to raise the Target's expectation of hurt. A liberal democracy's conventional forces—using precision, respecting the value of human life, and limiting collateral damaging—are not as menacing as the US believes. (2) For coercion to succeed, the US must offset this lower expectation of hurt by attempts to lower the costs. (3) Absent a high level of hurt or low cost to the regime, the US must expect coercion to fail and be willing to fight until outright victory. This may be the case when the actions of a Target are so damaging to US interests that the latter should be willing to forcibly change the regime. I do not recommend against using coercion in these cases, but advise that the US should expect coercion to fail.

(4) The US must only use coercion when it is worth using force—that is, when there is a high enough interest at stake. This final recommendation concerns the paradox of contemporary coercion. Like menace, being able and willing to show high motivation

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5. Quoted in Michael Hardy, "Cyber attack could draw military response from NATO," *C4ISR & Networks*, 25 March 2015, <http://www.c4isrnet.com/story/military-tech/cyber/2015/03/25/nato-cyber-article-5/70455026> (accessed 27 March 2015).

is critical to coercive diplomacy's success. The US can only have high motivation to fight until victory for important enough national interests—which are the very issues for which it can display credibility and increase the chances of Target acquiescence. The paradox is that those interests that are low enough that the US is not likely to fight until total victory are the same that a Target will most likely resist in coercion—forcing a fight. In other words, the US is most likely to be forced to fight when it most hopes to avoid a fight. The implication is that, if the US is not willing to fight until total victory for a certain cause, it should never make the threat of force to begin with because the opponent will force America to commit to war. The US should only coerce when the interest is important enough to commit the force required to attain victory. In reality, Washington has been using threats in cases where vital interests are not at stake, but this paradoxically compels the US to use force.<sup>6</sup> Falling into situations where one must reluctantly use force for marginal interests displays a narrow and shortsighted approach.

### **Changing the Mindset from Short-Term to Long-Term**

In fact, my analysis highlights that very type of short-term, reactionary nature in recent strategies. US administrations' coercive responses appear to respond “in the moment,” attempting to grasp the best solution while only considering the isolated context of, for example, Somalia in December 1992, Libya in March 2011, or Syria in August 2012. How else could one explain two separate occasions (Somalia and Libya) where the US had different end states and exit strategies than its coalition partners—partners that relied on US leadership?

In Somalia, the US purposefully avoided taking part in stability operations and passed that mission to the UN. Yet, the US left some 4,000 troops bound to the more difficult and protracted UN mission—the same mission it had repeatedly communicated it had little motivation to complete. Such a decision demonstrated the US planned little more than a few months in advance and did not consider how its communication would affect its ability to coerce the Somali warlords in the future and endanger its own troops. America's lack of strategic planning was a result of shortsighted overconfidence in its strength and ability to coerce. The US must stop thinking, “We are so powerful” and

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6. Or not follow through on its word, damaging its credibility.

instead ask, “What resources am I willing to commit to this endeavor? And how powerful is that deployed force?”

In Libya, Washington stressed its limited role and impending withdrawal from combat operations *during* its ultimatum to Qaddafi. Even if this was a correct domestic decision for that isolated slice in time, one questions the foresight to communicate this statement as strongly as the US did. Such shortsightedness had various second-order effects that weakened the coercive message to Qaddafi. Similarly, Washington had successfully achieved behavioral change in Libya in 2003 and increased America’s coercive reputation. However, the US rapidly decided to destroy that reputation for the long-term uncertainty and instability of regime change in 2011.<sup>7</sup> This not only created a less stable situation in Libya, which jeopardizes US security, but it damaged America’s reputation for consistency, specifically, and coercion, in general.

In Syria, all evidence points to a reactionary decision to deter Assad from using chemical weapons through the threat of force. The decision seemed like a good idea in August 2012 because the US had successfully deterred the powerful Soviet Union throughout the Cold War; deterring a minor state like Syria would be as easy as commanding, “Don’t!” Yet, the strategy had not been fully fleshed out for its long-term ramifications. Was the US truly willing to act militarily if Assad used chemical weapons? Perhaps, but what if the American people are still war-weary; if the Arab League does not support action; if its European allies withdraw support; if Russia continues to block the UN Security Council? Had the US considered what would occur if Assad crosses the red line and it does not act? These questions were not contemplated before deciding on a policy for Syria. Asking what one should do *after* deterrence has failed smacks of shortsightedness.

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7. This is not to say that simply because Qaddafi did what we said in 2003 that we should never again threaten, admonish, or even punish him for future violations of international law. Three factors are important. First, the speed at which the US reached that decision demonstrates a “locked and loaded” desire to oust Qaddafi and a lack of considering the perceived inconsistency to others. Second, the US did not attempt direct communication with Qaddafi and should have influenced him to stop the brutal crackdowns as it had in Yemen and Bahrain. There is no certainty that this counter-factual would have succeeded, but the attempt to do so would have alleviated much of the damage to the consistency of America’s policy. Third, the manner in which the coalition carried out the operation exceeded its mandate. I do not believe the US should always be restricted by the will of the international community. However, in the Libyan scenario, the stated motives for intervention were to uphold the rule of law and credibility of international institutions. To then disregard those very institutions by changing the mission is hypocritical.

The above are exemplary of the numerous occasions in which the US reacted in isolation from the larger strategic context. In doing so, the US damaged both its ability to coerce in the given scenario and, through affecting its reputation, its ability to coerce in the future. No government enjoys being cornered, or boxed-in; strategy is about leaving as many options and doors open as possible. Yet, brazenly demanding that a leader “must go,” stating that terms are “non-negotiable,” and setting “red lines,” are unquestionably shortsighted and do indeed box in the Coercer.<sup>8</sup>

I have demonstrated that reacting only to the short-term and eschewing long-term effects is detrimental to US policy and America’s prestige among the international community. This is especially applicable to coercion since long-term effects damage the US reputation and condition others to resist future coercion. The US is failing so often at coercive diplomacy that soon the superpower will be in a position where coercive threats mean little. Stephen Walt wrote, “Washington must first recognize how it appears to others and then develop a sustained campaign to shape these perceptions.”<sup>9</sup> The suggestion, then, is to change Washington’s mindset. When tempted to coerce another state, policymakers must think in terms of long-term strategies. The US must proactively create a unified strategy for consistent coercion.

Policymakers can create such a global strategy by setting the cumulative factor as its foundation and defining feature. As the US strives to exude menace, credibility, and consistency during coercion, policymakers must scrutinize their words and deeds before publicizing them. They will avoid actions or announcements that condition others to doubt America’s menace, credibility, or consistency, that encourage future Targets to resist, or that damage America’s reputation. This recommendation is not to say that the US will become a slave to the cumulative factor. If an action has a negative conditioning effect on others, it may still be a valid action to take. However, in this case, policymakers must consider other options that would be consistent with the cumulative factor. If none exist or are implausible, then the offending action’s benefit to national

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8. The US insisted that Aidid, Qaddafi, and Assad all “must go.” It gave a “non-negotiable” and immediate ultimatum to Qaddafi. Finally, Washington drew a ill-conceived “red line” against Assad.

9. Stephen M. Walt, “Taming American Power,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 357.



security and prosperity must exceed its detriment to the global and long-term strategy of coercion.

This shift to consistently thinking of the long-term would highlight: what is or is not an acceptable agenda and objective in Somalia; intervening early with the national instruments of power to influence Qaddafi away from his iron-fisted tactics before he gets out of hand; and not making a red line statement before the costs have been counted so as to avoid an empty threat. In the end, this is a balance of short-term gains against long-term detriments. To implement this recommendation, policymakers must accept short-term inconveniences and political difficulties in exchange for long-term benefits, security, and successful, powerful coercion.

### **Use Coercive Diplomacy Less**

If political difficulties arise by maintaining a consistent strategy that focuses on cumulative effects, national leaders face pressure to do what feels right “in the moment.” Herein lies an implication that leads to the third main conclusion: coercion is used too often, perhaps because it is the “easy” response. Yet, if one is convinced that by threatening force, the US risks damaging its reputation and prestige, the US should consider making threats less often. E. H. Carr wrote that prestige is important because “if your strength is recognized, you can generally achieve your aims without having to use it.”<sup>10</sup> Gilpin believes that when this is the case, there is a clear hierarchy of prestige and diplomacy will involve relatively little use of overt force.<sup>11</sup> If the US gambles prestige by using coercion too often, the clear hierarchy disappears in the eyes of the international community. With a less clear hierarchy, others will resist the US more and overt force will become more necessary. This creates a circular logic in which the frequent threat or use of force creates a situation in which the US will have to use force more often because Targets will resist.<sup>12</sup>

There will always be demands for the threat of force. Coercion’s difficulty and frustrating track record—even under ideal conditions—should temper those demands.

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10. Quoted in Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 31.

11. Gilpin, *War and Change*, 31.

12. The other option is to not follow through on its word and damage credibility, but avoid military action.

Military leaders and civilian advisors must educate policymakers not to rely on the threat and use of force with such frequency. Instead, the US must be cautious with coercive endeavors. This change will not be easy to generate. Alexander George warned, “Leaders of militarily powerful countries may be tempted sometimes to believe that they can, with little risk, intimidate weaker opponents to give up their gains and their objectives.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately for the US, my analysis demonstrates that it cannot intimidate others into acquiescence with little risk to itself.

Yet, threatening or using military force has become something of a default reaction for many policymakers. Unmatched advances in US military technology and proficiency raise both the public’s and leaders’ expectations of possible accomplishments to unrealistic levels.<sup>14</sup> Calling on the military is responsive and convenient. After all, nothing demonstrates to the American people that its leaders are “doing something” like threatening or using military force—even though other, less visible tools would be more appropriate. Despite this, in March 2011, diplomacy and economics, perhaps behind the scenes, were more appropriate to the Libyan scenario than force. However, the American people do not feel the same security or satisfaction when their government uses slow economic sanctions or diplomatic discussions as they do when it threatens or uses force. Thus, policymakers feel pressure to act in a way that resonates with the public. Unfortunately, Washington currently overestimates the effectiveness of force and underestimates how its overuse damages a coherent and convincing foreign policy.

To this point, Robert Pape wrote, “Both publics and policy makers should stop thinking of coercion as a silver bullet to solve intractable foreign policy dilemmas. Coercion is no easier...than imposing demands by military victory.”<sup>15</sup> In this quote, Pape highlighted both the tendency to default to threatening force and the lack of calculating its true cost to the nation. Anytime the US threatens force, including for humanitarian

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13. Alexander L George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, 7th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 74.

14. Ever since Operation Desert Storm, America has witnessed the ability to precisely deliver a weapon through a desired window. This generates a mindset that believes, “If the US can do that, it can achieve whatever objectives it desires.” Such precision appears clean and easy. It influences the public and appointed leaders to say, “I remember that, let’s order some of that for this scenario.”

15. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 331.

purposes, it must consider the likely possibility that its ultimatum will end in conflict. Even when simply trying to aid threatened populations overseas, the US must be ready for more than rhetoric—it must prepare for possible protracted conflict. If it calculated that the national interests at stake do not warrant such a commitment, the US should not decide to coerce with the threat of force in the first place.

President Obama has said the menace of ISIS is an unintended consequence of using force—specifically within the context of Iraq’s invasion in 2003. He warns that “we should generally aim before we shoot.”<sup>16</sup> The president is correct. However, it would appear Washington must listen to its own words and apply them not only to the use of force, but to *threatening force*, because it often leads to either conflict or credibility-damaging inaction. America would have been better served by “aiming” before it shot in Somalia and Libya and by “aiming” more carefully before drawing its gun on Syria—only to have to reluctantly holster its weapon.

This realization, along with my other conclusions can help to educate US policymakers on the true costs of threatening force. Coercion is not easy and requires the Coercer to present menace, credibility, and consistency. The US should keep the Target’s expectation of hurt high and its costs of acquiescence low. If unable to do so, the US should expect coercion to fail. Furthermore, the US should only coerce if the national interests are high enough to warrant engaging in actual conflict. Reacting to short-term inputs and in-the-moment political demands damages America’s reputation, prestige, and ability to coerce in the future. Reorienting the focus to a coherent, long-term coercion strategy will require accepting short-term criticism but will provide greater prestige and national security overall. The US places too much faith in its conventional might’s coercive nature. By doing so, the world’s sole superpower too often defaults to threatening to use that conventional force—with detrimental consequences.

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16. Barack H. Obama, “Vice Interview” (interview, Washington DC, 16 March 2015): 0:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOnKM2a7Nok> (accessed 29 March 2015).

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