

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

POLITICS AND POLICY IN THE CRUCIBLE
OF INTERSTATE COERCION

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

16 February 2011

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Biography

Colonel Carl N. Brenner most recently served as a Deputy Commander, Data Analysis Group, National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC), Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. He previously led as Commander, Geospatial Intelligence/Measurement and Signature Intelligence Analysis Squadron at NASIC. A Joint Qualified Officer, Col Brenner served with US Central Command, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and in several squadron-level intelligence positions. Colonel Brenner was assistant professor of political science at U.S. Air Force Academy where he won the Outstanding Educator Award. His deployments include service in Qatar and in Afghanistan. Colonel Brenner earned a BS as a distinguished graduate of the US Air Force Academy, an MA in Political Science from The Ohio State University, and a PhD in Government from Georgetown University.

Introduction

Coercion remains a significant element of US foreign policy despite a mixed record of success and persistent questions about how the US can apply it to solve contemporary problems. Policymakers are drawn to coercion, the threat or actual use of force to influence an adversary's behavior, primarily because it offers hope of achieving aims at lower costs than imposing solutions unilaterally by brute force.¹ Coercion's endurance in war and close link to politics is prominent in Clausewitz's dual dictums that "war is thus an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will" and that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."² Despite the close association of war, coercion and politics, however, the study of coercion has traditionally treated states as unitary actors, largely disregarding domestic political considerations.³ This legacy undermines both policy making and analysis of coercion today. To gain greater insight into leaders' decisions, it is critical to understand how leaders respond to domestic and international pressures as they choose strategies in coercion. Interstate coercion can be better explained by integrating leaders' efforts to manage both political risks associated with the desire to retain political authority and policy risks associated with the successful implementation of the coercive strategy to achieve international goals.

Coercion is a crucible of politics and policy that tests leaders' skill and reveals a great deal about their choices. The study begins to examine interactions in the crucible by setting out the logic of selectorate theory and detailing concerns about existing efforts to apply it to war and coercive decision making. The subsequent section grafts prevailing approaches to coercion onto selectorate theory to model how both democratic and autocratic leaders respond to domestic and international pressures. It offers specific predictions of how leaders select aims and means in coercive interaction with other states. Drawing upon this logic, the study predicts conditions that

are likely to promote escalation dominance as well as conflict termination, both critical concepts in the study of coercion and war. The model generates theoretically unique insights and predictions about coercion, recasts a widely accepted claim about war termination, and reshapes key concepts.

Developing the Theoretical Approach to Coercion

Selectorate theory has proved a powerful starting point for studying political behavior and can be extended to model coercive interaction. As set out by Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues, selectorate theory assumes political leaders place a premium on holding office as a requirement to accomplishing any goal. Leaders may have other goals, but all leaders, it is assumed, desire to retain political authority.⁴ Leaders head states that are comprised of four parts: the broad population of all residents, a selectorate that possesses characteristics institutionally required to participate in determining the government's leaders, a winning coalition within the selectorate of sufficient representation to empower political leaders with authority over the population and, finally, leaders who exercise political authority. The size and composition of each state's selectorate and winning coalition are features of each state's political institutions. In democracies voting rights make nearly all members of the population part of the selectorate. The winning coalition is large, generally a majority of the selectorate. In autocratic states, selectorate size can vary but the winning coalition remains small.⁵

Selectorate theory postulates that to endure in office, leaders must advance policies that provide public or private goods sufficient to sustain the support of the winning coalition. Public goods are nonexcludable, nonrival benefits all can enjoy, such as defense against external threats, rule of law, and export of a broadly held ideology. Private goods are excludable and rival,

including trade policies favorable to a group, subsidies, or exclusive opportunities to contract to the government.⁶

From the perspective of selectorate theory, leaders approach policy decisions, including decisions related to coercion, with a choice of how to distribute public and private goods to maintain the support of the winning coalition. Success in coercion may require significant investment to apply means necessary to persuade the opponent to make concessions. However, the more leaders dedicate resources to the coercive effort, the less they have available to distribute as goods within the winning coalition or retain for themselves. At the helm of small winning coalitions, autocratic leaders can retain office by directing private goods to their winning coalitions rather than investing resources in the public good of prevailing in coercion. When the winning coalition is large, as in democracies, a similar amount of private goods would be spread too thinly to hold the loyalty of coalition members who could join rival leadership candidates' large alternative winning coalitions. By this logic, leaders of large winning coalitions gain better marginal return by allocating increased resources to the public good of increased war effort. Bueno de Mesquita concludes that “democratic leaders try harder in war than autocrats” and points to other empirical and theoretical findings on democratic war fighting effectiveness as corroboration.⁷

Despite the logic of this approach, Bueno de Mesquita acknowledges and history demonstrates that there is considerable variability in both democratic and autocratic effort and effectiveness in conflict. Bueno de Mesquita admits an exception that all regimes, both democratic and autocratic, commit fully to wars that threaten regime survival. On the other hand, he contends that all regimes may lightly pursue wars of colonial and imperial expansion that pose no threat to regime survival.⁸ Even with these caveats, the theory struggles to explain

historical variations. Challenged by Nazi Germany, democratic Czechoslovakia invested little in defense and conceded swiftly while comparatively autocratic Poland invested significantly and put up a fight. Italy's military investment lagged all major combatants well after it became clear that the Allies threatened both the regime's hold on power and the nation's sovereignty.⁹ The UK committed deeply to success in the distant Falklands. Inconsistencies are even more prominent in economic coercion. The US has undertaken a huge range of economic sanctions and frequently accepted outcomes that fell well short of stated policy goals rather than "try harder."¹⁰

The ready availability of both acknowledged exceptions and empirical outliers suggests a need to refine the approach. The next section extends the logic of selectorate theory to forge a model that provides a superior ability to make predictions about leaders' choices in coercive contests.

Modeling Choice of Coercive Strategy

Leaders' most important decisions related to coercive disputes address the aims to pursue and the means to apply. The application of means to achieve aims rests at the center of many influential definitions of strategy.¹¹ Coercion is an effort to apply means, including the threat and use of force or other method of inflicting costs, to convince an adversary to grant the coercer's aims. It is appropriate, therefore, that aims and means serve as the constituent parts that define the model's dependent variable of coercive strategy.

In contrast with many models, including Bueno de Mesquita's, this investigation treats the aims of coercion not as a fixed goal locked down prior to conflict, but as part of leaders' ongoing efforts to manage coercive interaction.¹² Leaders frequently change aims during coercive

contests. The US, for example, altered its coercive aims during both the Korean and the Vietnam Wars.¹³ Iran and Iraq both modified war aims during their eight year conflict.¹⁴ Leaders change aims in coercive conflict strategically. The cost-benefit logic that prevails in the coercion literature explains that by changing aims, leaders affect their international foes' calculations on whether to resist or yield by raising or lowering the costs of concession, which is then compared with the cost of continued resistance.¹⁵

Less well acknowledged in the coercion literature is the fact that leaders' decisions to shift aims also influence domestic audiences. From the perspective of selectorate theory, statements of aims in coercive interaction suggest rewards domestic audiences may gain by sustaining the costs of coercion. When leaders increase coercive aims, they indicate potential to enhance the payoff to their winning coalitions as a result of coercive success, justifying the call for investment. A reduction in aims suggests a lower payoff, potentially undermining leaders' abilities to maintain winning coalitions. Domestic audiences judge whether the results of a coercive conflict justify the means invested. How this assessment plays out varies considerably by regime type. Autocratic leaders may be able to direct most costs to citizens outside the winning coalition while guiding gains to their supporters. Reliant on a large winning coalition, democratic leaders are less likely to succeed in pushing the costs of coercion onto political foes, leading to accountability for the means invested in coercive campaigns.

This model addresses leaders' simultaneous concerns about domestic and international success by adopting leaders' assessments of political risk and policy risk as independent variables guiding their choices of aims and means in coercion. The model explains changes in strategy by assuming that leaders scan the domestic and international environments to monitor their political standing with the winning coalition and their progress in compelling their

international adversary to alter its behavior. As they update their understanding of domestic and international circumstances, they make judgments, whether accurately or inaccurately, about political and policy risks.¹⁶ Borrowing from Lamborn, political risk is the perceived likelihood that a policy option will undermine the winning coalition's willingness to continue supporting the political leader. In terms of selectorate theory, a high political risk situation arises when leaders believe their ability to deliver goods sufficient to maintain the support of the winning coalition is in question. This concern prompts leaders to find ways to adjust their coercive strategy to enable them to provide these goods. Low political risk exists when leaders are confident that the winning coalition's support is being maintained through adequate provision of goods. Policy risk is leaders' assessment that the coercive effort will fail to achieve its stated aims. Leaders perceive high policy risk when they conclude that their on-going coercive efforts are unlikely to succeed in influencing the opponent's behavior.¹⁷ High policy risk may lead to high political risk over time if leaders believe pending coercive policy failure wrecks their ability to provide goods to their winning coalitions.¹⁸

Attempting to manage both political and policy risks, leaders face incentives that shape choices of coercive strategy. These incentives, derived from selectorate theory, are strong pushes that urge leaders to choose particular strategies. They are not, however, deterministic. Leaders sometimes fail to respond to incentives either due to incorrect assessment of the political and policy setting or limits of small group or personal decision.¹⁹ When leaders do not appropriately react to incentives, they can be expected to pay a political or policy price.

The expected pattern of choices for leaders of autocratic and democratic states under different conditions of political and policy risk are set out in tables 1 and 2. When political and policy risks are low, both autocratic and democratic leaders choose a strategy of Stay the Course

that maintains both aims and means.²⁰ Both types of leaders expect to achieve their coercive policy aims while maintaining or even enhancing support of their winning coalitions, so there is no reason to change course.

Autocratic Choice of Coercive Strategy

		Political Risk	
		Low	High
Policy Risk	Low	1. Steady Course Maintain Aims Maintain Means	2. Greedy Victor Increase Aims Maintain Means
	High	3. Reduced Ambition Decrease Aims Decrease Means	4. Gamble Increase or Sustain Aims Increase Means

Table 1. Autocratic Choice of Coercive Strategy

When leaders identify political or policy risk, however, the helmsmen of democratic and autocratic regimes are likely to select divergent coercive strategies due to differences in requirements for maintaining a winning coalition. Autocratic leaders who perceive a combination of high political risk and low policy risk face incentives to act as Greedy Victors. They approach the coercive strategy reevaluation believing they will achieve their coercive policy goals but doubt their ability to maintain the support of their winning coalition. Averse to losing the support of their winning coalitions, autocratic leaders will try to leverage their pending

coercive policy success by increasing their aims. They will especially be likely to extend their anticipated gains if they can attain an objective that readily provides private goods for the winning coalition. Not wanting to divert goods from the winning coalition, they may not increase means applied to coercion proportionate to the increase in aims.

The Iran-Iraq war presents an excellent example of Greedy Victors. After Iran repelled Iraq in 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini turned down Iraq's peace offer and approved a counter-offensive to "continue until Saddam Hussein is overthrown, so that we can pray at [the holy Shi'ite town of] Karbala and Jerusalem." This increase in aims delivered significant goods to conservative clerics and the Republican Guard as hardliners consolidated power. As predicted, Iran did not apply sufficient means to achieve these objectives, though substantially due to limits of resources imposed by international isolation rather than just the costs of payoffs to the winning coalition.²¹

When autocratic political leaders perceive the opposite condition of low political risk and high policy risk, they are likely to pursue a course of Reduced Ambition by reducing both aims and means. This strategy aligns with Bueno de Mesquita's expectation that autocratic leaders tend to make threats but ultimately fail to apply means sufficient to deliver coercive success.²² Confident in their abilities to tap alternative ways to deliver goods to their small winning coalition, leaders do not fear punishment for failure in the coercive adventure. They see little reason to divert goods away from the winning coalition and their own accounts to rescue failing coercive efforts. This alignment played out frequently in both modern and ancient wars. Despite Hannibal's sensational success in the early stages of the Second Punic War, autocratic Carthage declined to raise funds from the city's merchant elites to support the expedition, ultimately leading to defeat at Zama.²³

Acting out of desperation, autocratic leaders who perceive both high political risk and high policy risk will be tempted to pursue a strategy of Gamble, hoping to resurrect their political standing by taking risks in coercion that might yield large payoffs to their winning coalition.²⁴ They intend to retain the winning coalition's support by increasing their coercive aims and aggressively diverting available means to the coercive effort.²⁵ This is especially likely if the coercive contest is high-profile, such as a militarized dispute. Even when the situation appears hopeless, autocratic leaders may attempt to buy time to find other ways to provide goods to the winning coalition. This prediction contradicts Bueno de Mesquita's expectation for autocratic leaders to back away from fights as coercive policies falter but complements Goemans' expectations that authoritarian leaders who fear political risks will gamble for resurrection. The closing chapters of World War II provide excellent examples of Gamble in Japan's strategy of inflicting high costs on invading US forces and Germany's counter-offensive in the Ardennes as both Axis powers tried to improve their negotiating positions.²⁶

Democratic Choice of Coercive Strategy

		Political Risk	
		Low	High
Policy Risk	Low	1. Steady Course Maintain Aims Maintain Means	2. Expanded Conflict Increase Aims Increase Means
	High	3. Limited Success Maintain or Decrease Aims Increase Means	4. Reduced Ambition Decrease Aims Decrease Means

Table 2. Coercive Strategy Choice for Democratic Regimes

Responding to contrasting incentives for political survival, democratic leaders conduct themselves differently than autocrats in cells 2, 3, and 4. When democratic leaders perceive high political risk but low policy risk, they tend to increase aims to leverage the foreign policy opportunity for political gains much like autocratic leaders. In this Expanded Conflict strategy, however, they are more likely than autocrats to commit additional means to ensure they harvest the foreign policy success. This difference occurs because democrats cannot hold the coalition by delivering private goods like leaders of smaller winning coalitions if their coercive effort fails. When democratic leaders increase aims, they hope a well-resourced foreign policy success can provide a substantial public good that will enable them to enhance the support of their large winning coalition. During the Peloponnesian War, ambitious Alcibiades persuaded Athens to expand war goals to include the conquest of Sicily. His promise of vast riches and security

attracted Athenians to his coalition at the expense of his rival, Nicias. Athens funded a massive, though ultimately doomed effort.²⁷

Democratic leaders who perceive low political risk but high policy risk will adopt a Limited Success strategy that scales back their foreign policy objectives. Although secure for the moment, these leaders remain averse to foreign policy failure due to the need to provide goods to large winning coalitions and the constant efforts of political rivals to encourage defections of coalition members. With the coercive effort flagging, they must wring out any possible gains and attempt to preempt rivals' abilities to label the coercive effort a failure. This motivates them to commit additional means necessary to achieve the revised, more limited coercive aims. These democratic leaders do try harder while seeking limited aims, as with President George W. Bush's surge in Iraq in 2007 and President Barack Obama's review of Afghanistan policy in 2009.

Contrasting with Bueno de Mesquita's expectations, democratic leaders who simultaneously face coercive policy failure and political collapse are more likely to back out of the coercive confrontation by reducing aims and means. The costlier the foreign policy failure and the greater the impact on the winning coalition, the more likely democrats will choose Reduced Ambition. For democratic leaders, sustaining a failed coercive strategy only further saps their ability to provide public goods to their large winning coalitions. Their political rivals will criticize them harshly for wasting blood and treasure in a failing effort, calling the leader's ability to continue to provide goods to the winning coalition into doubt. These rivals will promise alternative strategies to sway support of coalition members. Struggling democratic leaders are likely to withdraw and attempt to rebuild their winning coalitions through other policies. If harsh judgment cannot be averted, democratic leaders, unlike their autocratic

brethren, can leave office peacefully, perhaps to restore their reputations, stage comebacks, allow their own partisans to seek to leadership or pursue profitable opportunities.²⁸ President Johnson’s withdrawal from the 1968 presidential race, the subsequent reduction of US troops, and the three-year hiatus in significant bombing of North Vietnam exemplify Reduced Ambition.

Coercive Interaction Shapes Conflict Escalation and Termination

As dyadic rivals make choices in coercive interaction, possibilities emerge for conflict escalation and de-escalation, potentially leading to total war or conflict termination. Whether circumstances promote escalation or de-escalation is determined by the combination of the opposing sides’ coercive strategies set out in the previous section. Table 3 depicts the interactions of an autocratic state’s and a democratic state’s decisions in a coercive duel.²⁹

		Democratic Coercive Choice			
		1. Stay the Course	2. Expanded Conflict	3. Limited Success	4. Reduced Ambition
Autocratic Coercive Choice	1. Stay the Course	Status Quo	Escalation	Limited Term Opportunity	Termination Opportunity
	2. Greedy Victor	Rhetorical Escalation	High Escalation	Limited Term Opportunity	Limited Term Opportunity
	3. Reduced Ambition	Termination Opportunity	Limited Term Opportunity	Termination Opportunity	High Term Opportunity
	4. Gamble	Escalation	High Escalation	Limited Term Opportunity	Limited Term Opportunity

Table 3. Coercive Choice, Escalation and Conflict Termination

Having entered a coercive contest, leaders may choose to maintain their existing aims and means rather than escalate or de-escalate. Mutual selection of Stay the Course strategies suggests both sides are politically secure and reasonably satisfied with prospects for coercive success. Simultaneous satisfaction may be especially likely following a coercive policy choice but before a clash reveals new information on the likelihood that the strategy will influence the enemy's behavior or retain winning coalition support. It may occur when at least one side's leaders fail to update their estimates on the likelihood of success due to cognitive biases. Advisors can fail to keep leaders informed, especially when the news is bad. Finally, simultaneous satisfaction can emerge when the coercive campaign produces goods that members of both sides' winning coalition value more than the goal of coercion itself. For example, some have suggested that the US ban on importing Cuban sugar benefits both American sugar producers and the failing Cuban government that needs a foe to rally support while still selling sugar on the global market.³⁰ The ban may achieve little in terms of coercive effect but provide goods to important members of winning coalitions in both countries.

At least one side's leaders choose an escalatory strategy to initiate a coercive engagement. As coercive interaction reveals information, leaders' assessments of political and policy environments may press them to select coercive strategy combinations that further escalate the conflict. Most especially prone to escalation are the autocratic Greedy Victor/democratic Expanded Conflict and Gamble/Expanded Conflict combinations in which both foes' simultaneously increase aims and means. Escalation is also likely when one side increases its aims and applies greater means while the other presses on with its strategy, as in the Stay the Course/Expanded Conflict and Gamble/Stay the Course combinations.³¹

A pair of factors set the theoretical limits for escalation. First, states may fully commit all resources to the coercive effort. From the perspective of selectorate theory, complete commitment of resources to coercion is extremely rare, perhaps limited to polities in which the winning coalition strongly is focused on a single foreign policy goal, such as survival against an imminent threat. Usually, members of the winning coalition will demand side payments or leaders will seek to pocket benefits for themselves. Second and more commonly, coercive escalation can end when leaders who are willing to commit greater resources shift efforts from coercion toward control to impose a desired outcome rather than attempt to persuade an opponent to provide it.

The matrix also presents a range of possibilities for de-escalation or conflict termination. The strongest opportunities for conflict termination arise when dyadic leaders' assessments of both political risk and policy risk simultaneously urge them to limit aims and means in Reduced Ambition. The simultaneous reduction of aims creates bargaining space that provides an opportunity for agreement. The concomitant reduction in means offers the clearest signals that both sides are eager to back away from the quarrel. Termination opportunities also arise when there is a net increase in bargaining space created as one side reduces aims while the other side holds steady. These opportunities, however, may be difficult for leaders to recognize, especially as the concessionary side attempts to determine its more ambitious foe's intentions.

Highly indeterminate are the Limited Termination Opportunities characterized by either an increase in aims by one side but a decrease in aims by the other or by a combined net reduction in aims accompanied by a net increase in means that likely fails to telegraph a willingness to de-escalate. Leaders in these Limited Termination Opportunities are uncertain about the existence of bargaining space making it likely that the coercive contest will continue.

Conceptual Implications for Escalation Dominance

The ability to offer systematic predictions about the incentives related to coercive combatants' choices of strategy also illuminates the concept of escalation dominance, a topic substantially ignored since the end of the Cold War. Air Force doctrine defines escalation dominance as the "the ability to increase the enemy's costs of defiance while denying them the opportunity to neutralize those costs or counter-escalate."³² Cold War perspectives on escalation dominance emphasized "ability" to mean both the technical ability to inflict costs on the enemy as well as the willingness to risk losing control by stepping up what Hermann Kahn labeled "the ladder of escalation."³³ Experience in coercion, however, suggests states that possess superior material capabilities sometimes lose the battle for escalation dominance to less wealthy foes that may employ asymmetric means. As explained by Byman and Waxman, this occurs because, "Coercive strategy making requires an understanding of the internal political logic behind the coercer's and the adversary's responses to escalatory threats as much as it require an understanding of the military strengths and weaknesses."³⁴

The coercive decision making model responds to Byman and Waxman's observation by identifying political and policy conditions that affect which side enjoys incentives most likely to support a drive toward escalation dominance. The literature on escalation dominance overlooks the insight that leaders' willingness to bear costs necessary both to punish the opponent and suffer continued counter-coercive blows hinges significantly on how these costs impact their ability to maintain winning coalitions. These costs translate into risk differently for leaders of democratic and autocratic states. Democratic leaders are most likely to achieve escalation dominance when mixed political and policy incentives press them to pursue Limited Success and Expanded Conflict strategies while politically secure autocratic opponents choose Reduced

Ambition. Politically secure autocrats have little incentive to risk their positions by attempting to rescue a failing coercive policy against democrats that are willing to apply additional means, perhaps especially the superpower US. Democratic leaders will struggle most to gain escalation dominance when both they and their autocratic foes perceive high political and policy risks, as in the Expanded Conflict/Greedy Victor and Expanded Conflict/Gamble cells. Desperate autocrats may risk everything in a game of “chicken.”³⁵

This escalatory logic suggests the American pursuit of regime change as a coercive goal is riskier than policymakers may assume. American calls for regime change backed by the credible threat of significant force is likely to guide autocratic leaders to perceive high political risk, urging them to apply greater means in Gamble or Greedy Victor strategies. Policymakers may be forced to make tough choices as autocrats hold out against coercion. If American leaders are politically secure, they may reduce aims and dedicate means sufficient to shift from coercion toward control as they pursue a Limited Success strategy. These adjustments may achieve a pyrrhic victory at greater cost than initially anticipated and with a lower payoff for success. The history of coercion against Iraq from the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 to the present exemplifies this strategic course. If politically weak, however, American leaders’ demands for regime change at the onset of coercion may prove to be a costly trap. Facing simultaneous policy and political risks, American policymakers may be unable to rally greater resources or maintain aims in the face of opposition intransigence. Although not strictly an example of regime change, Johnson administration demands for North Vietnam to halt the insurgency in the South struck so deeply at the Communist Party’s core that it would have required northern officials to risk their political positions and perhaps their lives to concede.³⁶ Hanoi and the southern insurgency proved capable of escalation both by absorbing blows and by applying asymmetric force.

Conceptual Implications for War Termination

This approach's regard for the pressures created by political and policy risk also offers unique insights into conflict termination. The analysis provides a theoretically distinctive explanation of when bargaining space may open that can enable conflict termination, a critical factor other explanations treat as exogenous. It relies on the conflict to reveal information to enable reassessment by leaders, but contrary to the Blainey's widely-adopted approach, it does not support the idea that "Wars usually end when the fighting nations agree on their relative strength."³⁷ Rather, wars or coercive conflicts end when leaders on both sides simultaneously determine that peace offers the best opportunity to manage political and policy risks within their political systems.

The coercive interaction model also offers a distinctive prediction that democracies and autocracies move toward conflict resolution under different circumstances. Adding considerable nuance to two-level game approaches to war termination, this argument suggests variation by regime type, but also by circumstances within regime type.³⁸ Democrats are more likely to shift toward termination when they envision that continued fighting would leave them cornered by a combination of political and policy risks. They may seek to cut deals when policies falter yet political security remains. They will not be inclined to seek peace solely due to political dangers. Autocrats are more open to opportunities for peaceful disengagement and compromise when they face policy failure but enjoy political security. This suggests coercion through denial strategies may be more effective than punishment against autocracies.

Conclusion: Principles for Interstate Coercion and Paths for Research

This effort to analyze interstate coercion by integrating leaders' efforts to manage both political and policy risks offers significant and, in many cases, unique, principles:

- Democracies are persistent coercive competitors that will invest greater resources when faced with either political or policy risk. They back down when both politics and policy have failed.
- Campaigns that defeat autocrats' coercive strategies are more likely to win concessions than attempts to threaten autocrats' hold on power.
- Regime change will continue to prove costly. This is due to the nature of incentives confronting autocratic leaders rather than the shortfalls of any particular coercive strategy.
- When cornered by political and policy risks, autocratic regimes can be extremely dangerous. Ill-conceived coercion against autocratic nuclear powers could prove especially hazardous.
- Democracies and autocracies seek peace under different conditions. Autocratic leaders likely require assurances about their political future before agreeing to peace.
- The ability to achieve coercive dominance depends as much on political conditions as on military capabilities and strategies. Weaker states can prevail by eroding these conditions.
- Coercive contests end when leaders on both sides see termination as the best way to manage political and policy risks.

This study also suggests additional investigations in the selectorate theory research program. Most immediately, this model should be tested against specific cases to confirm its

utility and identify causal paths. Future studies should probe how the diverse means leaders employ to maintain support of their winning coalitions, including coercion and inducement, affect coercive decision making. Analyses should investigate how the characteristics of goods provided to winning coalitions, such as whether the good is excludable, rival, tangible or revocable, affect coalition loyalty and coercion. Research should also extend selectorate theory approaches to relook at the coercion of non-state actors, such as terror groups, insurgencies, and drug traffickers, by investigating how their leaders maintain their positions.

Coercion tests policy makers' abilities to shape strategies as they respond to incentives. By thinking carefully about how these incentives pressure their enemies and themselves, leaders can improve their chances of surviving the crucible.

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End Notes

¹ The other major international policy purpose for employing coercion is to win concessions on an issue that cannot be imposed, such as a statement of belief or principle. For discussions that define the concept of coercion, see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2-6; Lawrence Freedman, "Strategic Coercion," in *Strategic Coercion: Cases and Concepts*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15; Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1.

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 85; 87.

³ See Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 13-14; Zeev Maoz and Randolph M. Siverson, "Bargaining, Domestic Politics, and International Context in the Management of War: A Review Essay," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25 (2008): 171-189.

⁴ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph Siverson and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-76. This essay subsumes Bueno de Mesquita's separate treatment of monarchies and juntas as a regime type with very small selectorate and even smaller winning coalition within the autocratic regime category. It leaves open for future consideration whether the small selectorate in monarchies and juntas guides leaders to behave differently than autocrats who are supported by small winning coalitions drawn from a large selectorate that creates incentive for loyalty among members of the winning coalition who can be readily replaced.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-31. For the seminal work on public and private goods more generally, see Paul A. Samuelson, "The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36, no. 4 (1954): 387-389.

⁷ Bueno de Mesquita et al, *The Logic of Political Survival*, 235. Other advocates for the democratic military effectiveness claim include, Kenneth A. Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review*, 86, no. 1 (March 1992), 24-37; Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, III, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁸ Bueno de Mesquita et al, *Logic of Political Survival*, 260.

⁹ Mark Harrison, "The Economics of World War II: An Overview" in *The Economics of World War II: Six Great Powers in International Comparison*, ed. Mark Harrison (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34.

¹⁰ See Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, Kimberly Ann Elliott and Barbara Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd Ed. (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008).

¹¹ "Strategy is the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy" B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 335; "Strategy is the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy." Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 17. "A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives." Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 2006).

¹² For discussion on fixed vs. shifting war aims, see Joseph Leggold and Brent L. Sterling, "When Do States Fight Limited Wars?: Political Risk, Policy Risk, and Policy Choice," *Security Studies* 9, no. 4 (summer 2000): 127-166.

¹³ Elizabeth A. Stanley, *Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 134-147.

¹⁴ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988* (Oxford: Osprey Press, 2002), 22-27; 36.

¹⁵ Alexander L. George, "Theory and Practice" in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2d ed. ed. Alexander L. George and William E. Simons (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 15.

¹⁶ For analyses of how leaders update their understanding of circumstances during international crises, see Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Leggold and Sterling, "When Do States Fight Limited Wars?";

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- ¹⁷ Alan Lamborn, *The Price of Power: Risk and Foreign Policy in Britain, France and Germany* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), 58-61.
- ¹⁸ Bueno de Mesquita et al, *Logic of Political Survival*, 226.
- ¹⁹ The classic treatment on the limits of leaders' abilities to understand their environment and make sound decisions is Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976).
- ²⁰ Many of the names for the combinations of strategy are taken from Leggold and Sterling, "When Do States Fight Limited Wars?"
- ²¹ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 36-37.
- ²² Bueno de Mesquita et al, *Logic of Political Survival*, 252-264.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 260.
- ²⁴ The "Gamble" strategy is drawn from Agency theory's insights into "gambling for resurrection." See George Downs and David Rocke, "Conflict Agency and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War" *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (May, 1994): 362-80.
- ²⁵ H. E. Goemans, *War and Punishment: The Causes of War Termination and the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 39-40. Goemans' explanation that highly exclusionary, highly repressive regimes will not gamble for resurrection presupposes that leaders do not risk loss of office, unlikely moderately exclusive, moderately repressive regimes. This paper's analysis considers that even the most autocratic leaders perceive threats to their ability to maintain their hold on office.
- ²⁶ Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 83-86. Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1968), 9-12. It is interesting to note that Slobodan Milosevic's decision to withdraw from Kosovo in 1999 may be the exception that proves the rule. If Milosevic faced high political risks and high policy risks, then he should have picked Gamble as a means to challenge NATO unity, force NATO to contemplate the full costs of a ground invasion and buy time with his winning coalition. Instead, he selected Reduced Ambition and paid the political and policy consequences anyway.
- ²⁷ See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book V.
- ²⁸ Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 47-48.
- ²⁹ Naturally, it is also possible to create matrices for both an autocratic vs. autocratic struggle and a democratic vs. democratic struggle, but the autocratic vs democratic struggle is most relevant for U.S. foreign policy.
- ³⁰ See, for example, Daniel Griswold "Four Decades of Failure: The US Embargo Against Cuba," *Cato Institute Online*, Oct 12, 2005; Arthur A. Eccevaria, "Cuba and the International Sugar Market," *Cuba in Transition: Proceedings of the Annual Meetings of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)*, 1995. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/asce/cuba5/FILE30.PDF>.
- ³¹ The Greedy Victor/Stay the Course pairing is unique because it is, at least initially, likely to promote an increase in rhetoric from the autocratic side but without an immediate corresponding increase in means.
- ³² Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.2, *Strategic Attack*, 30 September 2003, 33.
- ³³ Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (Washington, DC: Prager, 1965), 25-39.
- ³⁴ Byman and Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion*, 44.
- ³⁵ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 115.
- ³⁶ Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 262-283. As Thies discusses, there might have been greater hope for coercive success prior to the 1959 Vietnamese Politburo commitment to victory in the South.
- ³⁷ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 122.
- ³⁸ Examples of two-level game approaches to war termination include Goemans, *War and Punishment* and Stanley, *Paths to Peace*.