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### The United States and Coercive Diplomacy: Past, Present, and Future

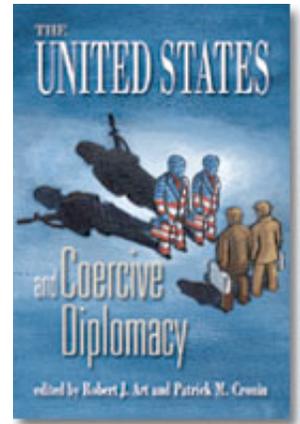
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With increasing frequency, U.S. leaders try to achieve their foreign policy goals by marrying diplomacy to military muscle. Since the end of the Cold War, "coercive diplomacy" has been used in no fewer than eight cases. But what, exactly, has the concept of coercive diplomacy meant in recent practice? How does coercive diplomacy operate and how well does it work?

On June 17, the Institute hosted a [Current Issues Briefing](#) to explore lessons learned over the past 12 years from coercive diplomacy applications aimed at countries ranging from Serbia and North Korea to Afghanistan and Iraq as examined in the new Institute book [The United States and Coercive Diplomacy](#).

Moderated by [Paul Stares](#), director of the Institute's Research and Studies Program, the briefing featured book co-editor Robert Art, a professor at Brandeis University and research associate with Harvard University's Olin Institute for Strategic Studies; former undersecretary of state Arnold Kanter, currently a resident senior fellow at the Forum for International Policy; and Robert Gallucci, dean of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service and a former ambassador at large with the U.S. Department of State.



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#### Understanding Coercive Diplomacy

Although coercive diplomacy has increasingly become a popular tool for U.S. policymakers since the 1950s, the effectiveness of the limited use or threat of military force by the United States is open to debate.

In fact, according to Robert Art, his research on applications of coercive diplomacy by U.S. policymakers over the past 12 years shown that, "coercive diplomacy fails more often than it succeeds." Discussing the cases in his study, which range from U.S. interventions in Somalia and Kosovo to the Clinton administration's 1994 negotiations with North Korea, Art stated that applications of coercive diplomacy by the United States only succeeded in meeting its policy objective 20 percent of the time.

While Art noted that political objectives often will change during coercive diplomatic actions and that it was also difficult to define clear policy success, he stressed that the study's finding was consistent with the findings of other research in the field. What makes coercive diplomacy such a difficult tool for U.S. policymakers to wield effectively Art asked.

Examining some of the lessons learned from his study, Art outlined three main challenges that

policymakers have encountered in the use of coercive diplomatic tactics:

1. *Compellence in general is much more difficult than deterrence.* Unlike a policy of deterrence which sets up very clear "red lines," trying to compel an adversary to take certain actions requires policymakers to set up a system of rewards and punishments to impose a risk for the continuance of undesirable behavior. "The problem with coercive diplomacy," Art cautioned, "is that you're [only] using force either to threaten or use in a very limited [way]."
2. *Coercive diplomacy is extremely difficult to sustain over long periods of time—particularly when part of a multinational effort or campaign.* Discussing the political challenges that coercive diplomacy can place on policymakers, both at home and abroad, Art stressed that it is often difficult to maintain political support for coercive diplomacy over long periods of time. Additionally, as it is so difficult to judge success and to decide what level of force should be used during different junctions of the effort, Art noted that coercive diplomacy was even more challenging to manage when employed by international organizations such as NATO or the United Nations.
3. *Completion of military objectives might not achieve the desired diplomatic or political objectives.* Art stressed that the achievement of the military objectives in a coercive diplomatic exercise, such as the destruction of several military bases in a cruise missile attack, might not translate into an adversary taking the desired political actions. In addition, according to Art, the amount of military force that might have to be applied to achieve a diplomatic objective may be difficult to justify politically at home.

Therefore, Art stressed in conclusion, the costs of coercive diplomacy often in the long run can prove to be much greater than its policy benefits—making it a high-risk tool for U.S. policymakers, with potentially unreliable results. "[You] shouldn't resort to coercive diplomacy," Art warned, "unless you're prepared to go to war if it fails."

### **Managing the Winds of War**

Building upon Art's previous remarks, Arnold Kanter stated that from a policy standpoint coercive diplomacy was a "very slippery concept" where the policy was centered on the use of military force and yet designed as an alternative to all-out war. This, Kanter noted from his tenure as U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, can set up a very alluring, yet paradoxical situation for U.S. policymakers. "The most important feature from a policy standpoint is that [coercive diplomacy] can be very seductive," Kanter cautioned. "It offers the allure of gaining our military objectives on the cheap." Unfortunately however, as Kanter noted, there are very few clear examples of an opponent changing its behavior in response to coercive diplomacy.

In an effort to balance the risks, political and otherwise, with the potential benefits of using coercive diplomacy, Kanter suggested that U.S. policymakers use four primary guidelines in evaluating whether coercive diplomacy is the appropriate policy tool to use in managing a foreign policy dilemma as well as in its later implementation:

1. Determine if the policy is vital to U.S. interests (national security, economic, political, etc.) and is worth the losses of lives as well as military, political and economic resources.
2. Consider if domestic political support can be sustained and determine how actions can be effectively communicated to both domestic and international audiences to bolster support for coercive diplomatic actions.
3. Develop clear criteria and internal decision-making systems for evaluating when coercive diplomacy is a feasible alternative to full-scale combat to ensure that its use is both selective and justifiable in its application to foreign policy crises.
4. Examine if the use of coercive diplomatic measures will limit the ability to employ political tracks at a later date or may open new opportunities for negotiation, dialogue, and discussion.

In closing, Kanter noted that before employing coercive diplomatic measures policymakers should consider what threshold of force would separate coercive diplomacy from limited war or full-scale combat. He also stressed that coercive diplomacy was intelligence intensive and required very accurate information not only on an opponent's vulnerabilities, but economic and political analyses of their likely reactions to the application of various levels and types of military force. Nevertheless, Kanter stressed that policymakers should not be afraid to consider coercive diplomacy, if necessary, to deal with daunting foreign policy challenges, including serious international humanitarian crises or human rights abuses such as the charges of ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses in the mid '90s in Kosovo. "The dichotomy between [national] interest and [U.S.] values is at best false and in any event not a helpful guide to policymakers," Kanter emphasized.

### **Success or Failure: Coercive Diplomacy and North Korea**

In examining one of Art's case studies, Robert Gallucci discussed his experiences working as part of the State Department team during the [Clinton administration's negotiations with North Korea](#) leading to the 1994 Agreed Framework. In contrast to the arguments made by Art and his co-authors, Gallucci argued that the 1994 North Korea negotiations were not a failure of coercive diplomacy, but instead a success meant as a means and not ends for managing North Korea's nuclear ambitions. To illustrate this, Gallucci offered rebuttals to three of the major assertions in the North Korea case study:

1. *Coercive diplomacy was a failure in the 1994 negotiations with North Korea because the Clinton administration used inducements more than force.*

On this charge Gallucci stated that the use of the threat of force was clearly used by the Clinton administration and that in his experience it both brought added leverage to working with North Korea and unquestionably improved the U.S. negotiating position. Further, Gallucci stressed that threats, inducements, and consequences were so intermingled in the negotiations with the North Koreans that it was difficult to clearly discern causation. Irrespective, he still felt strongly from his experience working on the negotiations that the use of threats of military force by the United States did produce some concessions on the part of North Korea, which in turn opened up more political operating room for U.S. policymakers.

2. *Coercive diplomacy was a failure in the 1994 negotiations with North Korea because a third party (former U.S. president Jimmy Carter) was the most influential player in developing the Agreed Framework.*

Discussing the role that former president Jimmy Carter played in the negotiations with North Korea, Gallucci stated that it was clear that Carter had played an invaluable role in the negotiation process and that it was uncertain what the end result would have been without his intervention. However, Gallucci emphasized that it was a popular misconception that Carter's assistance occurred over the objections of the Clinton administration. "It is not correct to say that Jimmy Carter's trip was not authorized, it was explicitly authorized [by Clinton]. [However,] what he did when he got there was unauthorized," Gallucci noted. Nevertheless, Gallucci stated that Carter's assistance was deeply appreciated by the Clinton administration as it helped open political space for the administration to craft an agreement that met the administration's goals.

3. *Coercive diplomacy was a failure in the 1994 negotiations with North Korea because North Korea has cheated on the Agreed Framework.*

The last major assertion about the 1994 negotiations that Gallucci addressed was that the Agreed Framework, and the negotiations that led up to them, was a failure due to the recent revelations that the North Korean secret weapons program. To the contrary, Gallucci argued, many U.S. policymakers had always assumed that there would be some cheating by North Korea. The Clinton administration's goal in the negotiations was to stop the public nuclear program. In fact, Gallucci pointed out, the North Koreans, to the best of our intelligence, have not to date produced any

enriched plutonium. Indeed, he noted, the Agreed Framework may actually have delayed this development by up to 15 years.

In summary, Galluci stressed that the negotiations leading to the Agreed Framework had not been perfect and that the resulting agreement, like all international agreements, was imperfect. Further, Galluci argued that it was a realistic outcome for a process that was only designed to manage the immediate crisis over North Korea's drive to enrich plutonium and was never envisioned as a permanent fix-all for North Korea's desire to become a nuclear power. "It's good, if you're a bureaucrat, to have low standards of success," Galluci noted in closing.

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This USIPeace Briefing reflects the presentations and comments from "[The United States and Coercive Diplomacy: Past, Present, and Future](#)"—a Current Issues Briefing held at the U.S. Institute of Peace June 17, 2003. The views summarized above reflect the discussion at the meeting; they do not represent formal positions taken by the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

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