

Nuclear Compellence: The Political Use of the Bomb

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Abstract Concepts of deterrence and, more recently, nuclear warfighting have dominated postwar strategic thinking. But a third use of nuclear weapons, compellence, in which the Bomb is employed or its use threatened to achieve some political gain, has received surprisingly little attention. In fact, threats of using the Bomb or deploying destructive new weapons systems have been used dozens of times—in earlier years of American superiority, in regional conflicts in the Third World, and in current negotiations over the Eurostrategic balance—to coerce, intimidate, or wring concessions from an opponent. This paper surveys more than a dozen cases of this intermediate use of nuclear weapons, lying midway between deterrence and warfighting. It explores the objectives for which compellence has been used, assesses the specific techniques employed, and assesses the effectiveness of such nuclear threats both in the short and long run.

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Introduction

With the fate of mankind hanging in the balance, theories of deterrence and proposals for stabilizing the nuclear arms race have dominated postwar strategic thinking. Deterrence has been described as a way of "thinking about the unthinkable," of rationalizing—in the fullest sense of the word—a reality otherwise too terrible to contemplate. Despite the resurrection of doctrines of nuclear warfighting,² we still find some solace in the principle of mutual assured destruction,³ which is said to have governed the relations of the superpowers and to have preserved the peace for more than 20 years.

But if deterrence remains the "main game in town," it is not the only one. There have been many historical episodes, in earlier years of American nuclear superiority and in regional conflicts in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, in which the possibility of actually using the Bomb was raised or, at least, credibly used as a threat by one nation against another.

This paper attempts an empirical study of an all-important issue, too often ignored or dealt with only theoretically and generally—nuclear compellence. In a recently published and rather controversial book,⁴ Seymour M. Hersh says that in 1969, as part of an effort to force an end to the Vietnam War, President Nixon planned to threaten Hanoi with severe military consequences unless it negotiated seriously. Among the contingencies discussed by Mr. Kissinger's staff was, according to Hersh, the idea of detonating a nuclear device in order to block roads from China to North Vietnam. Furthermore, the Strategic Air Command was put on alert for 29 days. Though Hersh's story generated intense interest, revelations of this sort are by no means unique or even rare. Even more are likely to surface in years to come as additional documents are declassified and new memoirs published on the Cold War.

In this paper, we raise a number of issues related to nuclear deterrence: Under what circumstances are nuclear threats made? How effective are they in forcing behavioral change on the target state? Do such threats strengthen the target state's resolve to acquire a nuclear capability or, where this is impos-

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sible, increase its conventional forces? Are we likely to see more such threats made in today's—and tomorrow's—international politics? These questions are of great importance in view of the rapid progression of both vertical and horizontal nuclear proliferation. An empirical study of actual cases is useful: the discussion of deterrence has too often been nonempirical and ahistorical. The present paper makes a beginning toward closing this gap.

Theoretical Discussion

The material for studying nuclear compellence is richer than is usually realized. That is, there appear to have been many situations in which the use of the Bomb for political reasons was seriously considered, a dozen or so instances in which its use was more or less implicitly threatened, and some cases in which weapons reportedly were being prepared for actual use. Generally, these cases involved American threats against the Soviet Union and its allies during the period of American strategic monopoly and superiority, but there are a number of other cases that are probably more typical of what could be expected in the future. Since most of these cases are reasonably well documented (even though sometimes in obscure publications), we will concentrate here on developing a theoretical typology on the use of the Bomb for political ends.

Nuclear weapons can be used for three more or less distinct purposes:

1. *Warfighting*, in which the Bomb is actually detonated to inflict damage on an opponent. One can distinguish here between an attack initiated by the country employing the weapon (first strike) and a retaliatory blow delivered in response to the previous attack of an opponent (second strike). Various targeting strategies are involved in carrying out an initiated or responsive strike.
2. *Deterrence*, in which the Bomb is used primarily to restrain an opponent from launching an attack on the nuclear nation or on its allies (extended deterrence). The actual use of the

Bomb would normally be considered to signify the failure of deterrence, although some analysts have suggested that, even after the beginning of hostilities, intra-war deterrence might limit a nuclear exchange to less than an all-out spasm of mutual destruction (limited nuclear war).

3. *Compellence*, in which the Bomb is employed or its use threatened in order to secure some political gain. Here a state's nuclear capability is used not to convince an adversary to *refrain* from taking a certain action (normally an armed attack on a defined territory), but rather to *compel* it to do something that the nation wielding the Bomb desires. Compellence is thus a more active form of influence.

These are not rigidly defined categories. They slide off into one another depending on the intent and the motivation of the compelling state, the specific tactics it decides to use, and the targets or audiences whose behavior it is attempting to control. Thus, an event like the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki can be interpreted as an act of compellence (designed to force a Japanese surrender), an act of compellence *and* deterrence (intended as a warning to the Soviet Union), and an act of warfighting (justified as an extension of the strategic bombing campaign already underway).⁵ This appears to be a classic case of the indirect use of compellence, convincing one state to behave in a certain way by making an example of the cost of noncompliance. Another example of the ambiguity of these categories might be the Kennedy Administration's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁶ Although the Administration's goal was to compel the Soviets to remove their missiles, it went about achieving this by imposing a blockade on the island that shifted the burden of the first move to Khrushchev, making this almost a deterrence situation. The Soviet leader had to decide whether or not to run the blockade, crossing the line drawn by Kennedy. Despite important ambiguities of this sort, these three categories are analytically useful. Our focus in this paper is on the last of them—compellence, or the use of nuclear weapons to coerce, blackmail, and force an opponent into compliance with one's demands.

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categories. They slide off into intent and the motivation of the means it decides to use, and the behavior it is attempting to control. The bombing of Hiroshima and the act of compellence (designed as an act of compellence *and* deterrence Soviet Union), and an act of coercion of the strategic bombing as appears to be a classic case of compellence, convincing one state to beg for an example of the cost of the ambiguity of these categories. The administration's handling of the Vietnam Administration's goal was to show their missiles, it went about the trade on the island that shifted the balance, making this almost a case where a leader had to decide whether or not to cross the line drawn by Kennedy. In this sort, these three categories in this paper is on the last of the use of nuclear weapons to coerce, or to bring into compliance with one's

compellence, on both the nuclear

and conventional level, is contained in a short section of Thomas C. Schelling's classic *Arms and Influence*. Schelling uses the term to describe a type of coercive diplomacy in which "pressure [is] exercised over an extended period of time, allowed to accumulate its own momentum . . . and administered until the other [side] acts."⁷ He distinguishes compellence from deterrence on the basis of its initiative, timing, and greater requirements for skillful communication of the desired action that will bring about removal of the threat. This distinction is useful for our paper. Compellence is for Schelling an "active kind of threat" designed to coerce an opponent into behaving in a certain way. The initiative is with the compelling state to carefully orchestrate a series of moves, often on several different levels, that will maintain, or, better, escalate the pressures on the target to modify its actions or change the situation so that the threats may cease. In contrast to the indefinite commitment of deterrence, compellence always involves an actual or implicit deadline. The time horizon is crucial: it must be long enough to permit the target to make politically difficult changes, but not so long as to allow it to lose its sense of urgency about the situation.

Problems of signalling are compounded in a compellence scenario. Schelling observes that it is often unclear to both sides what actions the target will have to take to satisfy the demands of the compelling state. The leadership of the compelling state may also be unclear in its own mind just exactly what it intends to do. When the Nixon Administration tilted toward Pakistan during the 1971 war, the Indian leadership found it so hard to discern what use Kissinger intended to make of Task Force 74 that it decided to simply ignore the American fleet and redouble its efforts to achieve a quick military victory in East Pakistan.⁸ The leadership of the target state may also find the demands made on it incompatible with its core values and fear that any show of weakness may cause a loss of domestic control or only serve to increase the demands of the compelling state. Ways of making compliance less humiliating to the target, Schelling finds, became crucial: back channel and third party communications are often used to avoid giving public ultimatums, and demands are often couched in terms of general results rather than specific actions to allow the target to save face. This poses a dilemma, of

course, since the more vague the threat the more likely it is to be misunderstood.

Schelling uses this degree of connectedness between threat and desired action as the basis of a rough classification of compellence scenarios. These range from situations in which the target is presented with "a last clear chance" to avert disaster, to those that provide an "escape hatch" to both parties, to those in which compellence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for terminating the coercion, to those that the initiator can end unilaterally whether or not compliance has been forthcoming. Schelling concludes by suggesting that compellence may be much more prevalent than we tend to realize in an age of nuclear deterrence. Indeed, he remarks in passing that the idea of "measured punitive forays" to break an enemy's will and sow confusion in his rear "may be the oldest form of warfare."⁹ Schelling's discussion of compellence is useful in a number of ways: (1) the emphasis on *concrete pressure* designed to produce a *concrete response*; (2) the attention to the *means* of compellence—the specification of a deadline, the orchestration of moves, the use of a variety of communication channels, and so on; and (3) the classification of situations in which compellence is involved. Nevertheless, Schelling's analysis requires significant development, especially empirical elaboration, as is attempted in this paper.

Expanding on Schelling's concept of compellence, Alexander George and his co-authors of *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* identify four ways in which violence can be used as a tool of influence: (1) a "quick, decisive military strategy" designed to so massively pre-empt an opponent as "to induce compliance or passivity"; (2) a more limited employment of coercion "in an exemplary, demonstrative manner, in discrete and controlled increments to induce an opponent to revise his calculations and agree to a mutually acceptable termination of the conflict"; (3) a "strategy of attrition" to wear down an adversary's psychological or physical resistance; and (4) a "test of capabilities within very restrictive ground rules" to stalemate an opponent in an arena of his own choosing in order to force him either to back down or escalate the conflict.¹⁰ George's second type of strategy, coercive diplomacy, is essentially what we mean by compel-

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lence. Compellence can be used defensively to force an adver-
 sary to forego an attainable goal or to give up something he has
 already achieved (harder to do), or offensively to "blackmail"
 him into "paying a price" to avoid implementation of the threat.
 Compellence is not just pure coercion, according to George, but
 may include "the possibility of bargains, negotiations, and com-
 promises as well as . . . threats." The goals for which it is
 exercised and the motivation of both sides are crucial in deter-
 mining its success or failure. The threat may be applied incre-
 mentally or in the form of a tacit or explicit ultimatum. George
 finds that several conditions are necessary for the latter, more
 effective form of coercive diplomacy to work. These involve
 strength of relative motivation, viability of military options, op-
 ponent's fear of escalation, sense of urgency regarding the ob-
 jective, degree of domestic political support, as well as clarity of
 objectives and terms of settlement. George observes that opera-
 tionalizing compellence is replete with difficulties of timing,
 credibility, stability, and control that even skillful diplomats are
 often not able to overcome. He concludes that, for these rea-
 sons, it seldom constitutes "a feasible and useful strategy."¹¹

Although we agree with most of George's analysis, particu-
 larly with his emphasis on the need for historical as well as game
 theoretical approaches and on the dangers of coercive diplo-
 macy, we believe that compellence has been employed success-
 fully much more frequently than he and other authors would
 suggest. Blechman and Kaplan identify at least 19 incidents in
 which American strategic forces were used to send a nuclear
 signal during the post-War period.¹² In the sections that follow,
 we will examine some of the unique features of nuclear compel-
 lence and the factors that can contribute to its success. We will
 specifically examine (theoretically and empirically) three dimen-
 sions of nuclear compellence: (1) the objectives of the compel-
 ler, (2) the means used to achieve these objectives, and (3) the
 effectiveness of those means.

Objectives of Compellence

Nuclear threats can be designed to achieve a great number of
 goals, some general and others specific in nature. The following

is an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of such political goals, accompanied by a few examples. The list does not include cases of *actual use* of the Bomb or purely *deterrence situations*, despite the fact that these, as indicated earlier, may also be compellence scenarios. For example, a regional power threatening the use of nuclear weapons may be able not only to freeze the territorial *status quo* ("unit veto"), but also to exert a positive, compellent-like influence through the "law of anticipated reactions" over the range of actions taken by its opponents or proposals advanced by them at the bargaining table. This is assuming that its opponents are interested in settling the dispute and not simply in conflict for conflict's, or principle's, sake. In other words, achievement of a nuclear capability may be viewed as a declaration that the game has now moved to such a high level of potential destructiveness that a military solution is no longer possible and the opponent should seriously consider a negotiated settlement (e.g., Israel in the Middle East and India and Pakistan on the Subcontinent).¹³ We identify seven main objectives of nuclear compellence:

1. Compelling an adversary to *end a war* or to stop a *conventional attack*. Two historical cases and one possible scenario should be mentioned under this heading: the Eisenhower Administration's use of nuclear threats to end the Korean War, the possible introduction of Soviet nuclear missiles to Egypt during the Yom Kippur War, and evident American contingency plans for a nuclear warning shot if the Soviets should launch a conventional attack on Western Europe.

The United States had already been fighting in Korea for over 2 years when Eisenhower was elected (November 1952). In a preview of the doctrine that later became known as Massive Retaliation, the new President-elect warned, on returning from an inspection tour of Korea, that unless the war was brought to a speedy conclusion, the United States might retaliate "under circumstances of our own choosing."¹⁴ As if to give substance to this threat, a new atomic cannon was prominently displayed in his inaugural parade, and in March the US Atomic Energy Commission conducted the first test of a tactical nuclear weapon.¹⁵ Eisenhower also announced that the Seventh Fleet would no

ist of such political goals, a list does not include cases of *deterrence situations*, despite the fact that, in a *deterrence* situation, the threat of nuclear power threatening the use of force may only to freeze the territorial status quo. To exert a positive, compellent effect on anticipated reactions over the course of negotiations or proposals advanced by the United States is assuming that its opposite is a dispute and not simply in the balance of power. In other words, the use of nuclear power may be viewed as a declaration of such a high level of potential that a negotiated settlement is no longer possible. The United States considers a negotiated settlement with India and Pakistan on the basis of even main objectives of nu-

and a war or to stop a conventional war and one possible scenario leading: the Eisenhower Administration's decision to end the Korean War, the decision to send nuclear missiles to Egypt during the Suez Crisis, and American contingency plans for the eventuality that the Soviets should launch a conven-

tion fighting in Korea for over a year (November 1952). In a letter to the Chinese, it became known as Massive Retaliation. It warned, on returning from the front, unless the war was brought to a halt, the United States might retaliate "under circumstances." ¹⁴ As if to give substance to the threat, it was prominently displayed in the US Atomic Energy Commission's report on a tactical nuclear weapon. ¹⁵ The Seventh Fleet would no

longer shield the People's Republic of China (the removal of American ships probably resulted in several Nationalist bombing raids). ¹⁶ The week after this announcement, word was "discreetly passed" by the Administration, according to one of Eisenhower's biographers, that if truce negotiations continued to drag on "a few atomic weapons might, to use the jargon of the military, be 'wasted.'" ¹⁷ Either because of such threats or the death of Stalin in March, the logjam suddenly broke when an agreement was signed to exchange sick and wounded prisoners. When talks stalemated a few weeks later over the prisoners of war issue, the Administration again resorted to atomic diplomacy. It communicated its determination to end the war by the mid-May bombing of such previously off-limits targets as the Yalu hydroelectric and North Korean irrigation dams. A week later, Secretary of State Dulles passed word to the Chinese through the Indian Prime Minister that if the fighting did not end soon, the US planned to introduce nuclear weapons into Korea. ¹⁸ The use of the Indian channel was doubly significant, since Beijing had used an Indian diplomat 3 years before to warn that it would intervene in the war if the U.N. forces continued their advance on the Yalu River. The Eisenhower Administration's tactics apparently worked, as within weeks an armistice was signed.

Many sources mention a scenario in which Israel contemplated the use of her presumed nuclear capability against the Arab states in order to halt their initially successful offensive during the 1973 war. According to this view, the Israeli leadership came to believe that Israel might face a crushing defeat at the hands of the advancing Egyptian and Syrian armies. At this point, instructions were given to the Air Force to prepare a nuclear attack, though it is still unclear of what nature. When the tide of battle unexpectedly turned and the Israelis defeated the Arabs by conventional means, the use of the Bomb became unnecessary. Yet, we can easily conceive of a scenario in which the Bomb might have been used politically as a demonstration shot in this situation.

2. Compelling an adversary to *withdraw from a controversial territory*. The US apparently hinted that it might use its military

power, including its nuclear forces, to induce a Soviet withdrawal from northern Iran in early 1946. Though Truman recounted on numerous occasions how "he played poker with Stalin over Iran," historians remain doubtful that he ever issued a direct ultimatum.¹⁹ Whatever the facts of the matter, the anecdote was revived when the US articulated the Carter Doctrine in January 1980. *Time* reported Senator Henry Jackson as saying that:

he had heard from Harry Truman [that] the President summoned Soviet Ambassador Andrey Gromyko to the White House . . . [and] told Gromyko that Soviet troops should evacuate Iran within 48 hours—or the US would use the new superbomb that it alone possessed. "We're going to drop it on you," Jackson quoted Truman as saying. They moved in 24 hours.²⁰

The Cuban missile crisis was another example of the use of compellence to force a withdrawal. Both threats seem to have worked because they were based on overwhelming US strategic superiority.

3. Compelling an adversary to *behave "responsibly" and in accordance with the compeller's interests*. In 1969 the USSR apparently warned the People's Republic of China to adopt responsible behavior or face the consequences. In August 1969, General Tolubko, a missile specialist, was appointed to command the Soviet Far East Military District. This appointment was meant as a warning to the Chinese.²¹ On August 28, 1969, a *Pravda* editorial warned that China's territorial claims courted nuclear war in which "no continent would be unaffected" (a warning to China and the West). Kissinger, in his memoirs, reports that the Soviets asked the US what its reaction would be to "a Soviet attack on Chinese nuclear facilities." A stand-down of the Soviet Air Force in the Far East meant, for Kissinger, "at a minimum . . . a brutal warning in an intensified war of nerves" and maybe "a sign of a possible attack."²² Other hints were also given by the Soviets.²³ Though Kaplan doubts that the Soviets had any intention of actually carrying out the threat,²⁴ he concludes that "this carefully orchestrated mixture of threat, military action and diplomatic initiative did have its intended effect

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to behave "responsibly" and in their own interests. In 1969 the USSR threatened the Republic of China to adopt reciprocal nuclear consequences. In August 1969, Alexander Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister, was appointed to command the Soviet District. This appointment was a threat.²¹ On August 28, 1969, a Soviet official said "China's territorial claims courted no change and would be unaffected" (a Kissinger, in his memoirs, remarks that its reaction would be to "close down its facilities." A stand-down of the Soviet meant, for Kissinger, "at a time of an intensified war of nerves" in the Sino-Soviet "rivalry."²² Other hints were also given. Kissinger's plan doubts that the Soviets were backing out the threat,²⁴ he concluded that a mixture of threat, military force, did have its intended effect

on the Chinese," who agreed to Kosygin's meeting of Chou En-lai in Peking on September 11.²⁵ Kaplan also argues that the Chinese continued to take the Soviet threat seriously for years.²⁶ The bolder Chinese actions in Southeast Asia, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, indicate that as China becomes a more powerful nuclear power, the Soviet threat becomes less effective.

The US also employed nuclear threats against China in 1958. Although this case fell close to a deterrence situation that was designed to prevent a Chinese attack on Taiwan and the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, the threat was designed to produce nonaggressive behavior in general. The Eisenhower Administration deployed and tested nuclear-capable Matador tactical surface-to-surface missiles, emplaced 8-inch atomic howitzers on Quemoy, and moved US aircraft carriers of the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits.²⁷

Another example of this use of compellence is Israel's decision to develop nuclear weapons. At least one analyst has suggested²⁸ that Israel's decision to develop these weapons was designed to warn the Soviet Union to disengage from its growing involvement in the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition. If this is indeed the case, it is one of the few examples we have been able to find of an inferior military power compelling a superior one.

4. *Compelling an adversary to take note of the serious interest of the compeller in an issue.* By using the "nuclear card" a nation can demonstrate its commitment to a particular cause. Thus, during the 1956 Suez campaign the USSR threatened to use the Bomb against Egypt's opponents. Though the threat was not highly believable, it served a political goal: to demonstrate the Soviet commitment to Nasser and his regime. The Chinese, despite clear-cut inferiority, also have expressed their determination to "return with interest" all the nuclear bombs that are dropped on China.²⁹

5. *Demonstration of strength.* South Africa's nuclear ambitions fall into this category. They demonstrate to Black Africa the steadfastness of the South African regime. This is a case of general deterrence. South Africa was forced to cancel plans to test a nuclear weapon in the Kalahari Desert in August 1977

when preparations were discovered by the Soviet spy satellite Cosmos 922. Moscow passed word of the impending test to Washington, and Pretoria came under intense pressure to call off the shot. A mysterious episode occurred 2 years later, early on the morning of September 22, 1979, when an American Vela satellite detected the characteristic double flash of a nuclear explosion. Although the White House Office of Science Policy attempted to downplay the incident, South African naval vessels were known to be in the area and collateral reports were received of ionospheric disturbances characteristic of a nuclear blast. The episode caused a flurry of speculation about South African nuclear capabilities and clandestine cooperation in the nuclear field with Israel and West Germany.³⁰ Having been forced to cancel their demonstration shot, the South Africans evidently decided to resort to secret tests in order to avoid another humiliation at the hands of the superpowers. The premier example of the use of nuclear compellence as a demonstration of strength is, as we have already mentioned, the use of the Bomb against Japan to send a message to the Soviet Union.³¹

6. Nuclear weapons can also be used as a *background, support factor for conventional moves*. They make the target state perceive the situation as more serious. Nuclear weapons do make a difference. Bleckman and Kaplan found that the effectiveness of compellence was not directly related to the level of force used or threatened, "except when strategic nuclear force units were used together with one or more major conventional force components."³² They identify 15 incidents in which nuclear and conventional forces were brought to bear by US attempts at influence, 10 of which involved compellence scenarios.³³ The addition of nuclear-capable forces obviously demonstrates seriousness of intent and poses the danger of escalation to the nuclear level if the target state chooses to fight.

7. A final use of nuclear weapons appears to be as a "*bargaining chip*." A nuclear power may use the threat of deploying a particularly destructive or destabilizing weapons system as a way of achieving a bargaining advantage in arms control or other negotiations. The Reagan Administration's dual track strategy of proceeding with the deployment of Pershing II and cruise mis-

red by the Soviet spy satellite word of the impending test to under intense pressure to call off occurred 2 years later, early on 1979, when an American Vela double flash of a nuclear explosion. Office of Science Policy, South African naval vessels and collateral reports were received characteristic of a nuclear war of speculation about South African clandestine cooperation in the West Germany.³⁰ Having been a nation shot, the South Africans conducted secret tests in order to avoid the wrath of the superpowers. The pressure of compellence as a demonstration—already mentioned, the use of the message to the Soviet Union.³¹

be used as a *background*, *superpowers*. They make the target state very serious. Nuclear weapons do not. Kaplan found that the effect is directly related to the level of threat when strategic nuclear force is one or more major conventional weapons. 15 incidents in which nuclear force was brought to bear by US attempts at compellence scenarios.³³ The evidence obviously demonstrates a real danger of escalation to the nuclear powers to fight.

It appears to be as a “*bargaining*” use the threat of deploying a nuclear weapons system as a advantage in arms control or other negotiation’s dual track strategy of the Pershing II and cruise mis-

siles in Western Europe while pursuing its “zero option” in the INF talks is only the most recent example of this type of compellence. The Chinese test in the fall of 1982 of a SLBM (Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile)—whose deployment would give China an invulnerable deterrent for the first time—in the midst of talks with the Soviet Union to normalize relations, is another, more subtle example of compellence of this sort.

A less familiar use of nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip is a regional power’s manipulation of its nuclear program to extract a continuing security guarantee or supply of conventional arms from a big power ally. Such use of compellence may involve a fairly direct *quid pro quo* (South Korea’s abandonment of its fledgling nuclear program under US pressure in the 1970s), a more tacit understanding to go slow in the development of a nuclear capability (Pakistan’s response to the Reagan Administration’s military aid package?), or a continuous background threat by the regional power to go public with an existing nuclear capability if its aid flow is interrupted (Israel).

Means of Compellence

The existence of nuclear capability, in and of itself, even without public acknowledgment or explicit threats, gives its possessor a measure of political power over others. Yet, in some specific situations, a nuclear power may want to take action, using its nuclear forces, in order to impress on an opponent its actual willingness to commit its superior power for political goals. Among nuclear means of compellence, the following are particularly important:

1. The *actual detonation* of the Bomb as a means of compelling not only the victim, but also other parties (the compellence of the victim is beyond the scope of this paper). Hiroshima and Nagasaki were apparently “warning shots” to the Soviets, though it is unclear exactly in what way and to what extent they affected Soviet behavior. Even detonation for testing purposes can have obvious political overtones. Thus, the detonation of a “peaceful” nuclear device by India in 1974 was a clear political

signal to a dismembered and embittered Pakistan, and possibly to China as well. The aborted South African test in the Kalahari Desert in 1977 may have been conceived as a warning shot to Black Africa.

2. *Introduction of nuclear weapons* to the "battlefield" is the second strongest political use of such weapons. During the Indo-Pakistani War (1971), the USS *Enterprise* force, armed with nuclear weapons, appeared in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, this latter-day "gunboat diplomacy" was perceived by the Indians as an empty gesture: they simply did not believe that the US would become militarily involved in the conflict. In a similar fashion, the US introduced nuclear weapons during the Offshore Island Crisis (1958), and the USSR did the same during the Yom Kippur War (1973). On October 22, 1973, a Soviet freighter passed through the Dardanelles en route to Alexandria, carrying nuclear materials, possibly nuclear warheads for the Soviet-supplied SCUD missiles. Says Kaplan: "It is probably safe to say that a Soviet motive in sending the nuclear shipment to Alexandria was to warn that continued Israeli advance on the west bank of the canal might precipitate a nuclearization of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This might have been expected to put more pressure on Washington to dissuade the Israelis from further action."³⁴ There is some intriguing evidence that the US was not entirely unhappy with the Soviet move, and that it saw some blessing in the wide circulation of the rumors about it. Only after Egypt and Israel signed an agreement on November 11, 1973, did the Administration deny that the USSR had installed atomic arms in Egypt.³⁵ Be that as it may, this episode gives an example of the many uses or potential uses of nuclear capability.

The 1973 Soviet threat was not the only case in which more than one country was involved in a complex nuclear threat. In April 1953, India, encouraged by Dulles, cautioned China that if peace did not come soon to Korea the US would resort to nuclear warfare—a threat that proved to be effective.³⁶ On two other occasions there were US nuclear threats against China.³⁷

3. *Nuclear alert*, on one level or the other, is one means of attempting compellence. It was apparently used by the US on a number of occasions (including Berlin in 1948, Cuba in 1962, and

attered Pakistan, and possibly
h African test in the Kalahari
nceived as a warning shot to

ons to the "battlefield" is the
ch weapons. During the Indo-
erprise force, armed with nu-
ian Ocean. Nevertheless, this
is perceived by the Indians as
not believe that the US would
conflict. In a similar fashion,
ns during the Offshore Island
ie same during the Yom Kip-
973, a Soviet freighter passed
Alexandria, carrying nuclear
eads for the Soviet-supplied
is probably safe to say that a
ur shipment to Alexandria was
ance on the west bank of the
ation of the Arab-Israeli con-
ted to put more pressure on
s from further action."³⁴ There
the US was not entirely un-
at it saw some blessing in the
out it. Only after Egypt and
vember 11, 1973, did the Ad-
had installed atomic arms in
isode gives an example of the
lear capability.

the only case in which more
a complex nuclear threat. In
Dulles, cautioned China that if
a the US would resort to nu-
ed to be effective.³⁶ On two
lear threats against China.³⁷
or the other, is one means of
parently used by the US on a
rlin in 1948, Cuba in 1962, and

the Yom Kippur War of 1973). According to Kaplan, "the normal levels of alert of Soviet strategic forces are much lower than those of US strategic forces, and in crises Soviet leaders may have been very anxious to restrict the risk of accident or unauthorized action."³⁸ Putting nuclear forces on alert is indeed a dangerous proposition since accidental or unauthorized launching is more likely in a force at high readiness.³⁹ At the same time, a nuclear alert could, potentially, send a powerful message to an opponent.

4. A verbal nuclear threat is another means designed to influence the behavior of an opponent. While most verbal threats are delivered secretly, others are made publicly. Thus, on November 30, 1950, President Truman, in response to a question about the possibility of dropping the atomic bomb in Korea, said, "There has always been active consideration of its use," though he quickly added that he "doesn't want to see it used."⁴⁰ In 1947 President Truman is also reported to have warned the USSR that a failure to withdraw its forces from Iran would result in an American military move.⁴¹

In 1969 the Soviets gave the Chinese a verbal warning regarding clashes along their disputed border. On August 28 *Pravda* warned that "no continent would be left out if a war flares up under the present conditions."⁴² At least at the time the threat was made, the Soviets had achieved a respectable nuclear capability vis-à-vis the United States. Khrushchev did not scruple to make inflated nuclear bluffs during the Suez and Berlin crises of 1958 and 1961 when the Soviets were clearly inferior strategically to the United States.

Effectiveness of Compellence

One of the most important dimensions of nuclear compellence is its effectiveness. Does it work? If so, under what conditions and circumstances? Answering these questions presents a number of thorny problems of causation and measurement. One can never be certain, for example, what element in a well-orchestrated campaign of compellence finally convinces the target state to comply with the demands of the compeller. As in the analysis of

power in general, there is always the question of whether the target state acted on its own volition or in response to the external pressure. In this section, we intend to concentrate on the policy dimensions of nuclear compellence rather than on these more theoretical issues. It is particularly useful to focus on a few elements of nuclear compellence related to its effectiveness: the balance of forces between the compeller and the compellee, the degree of big power involvement in the situation, the credibility of the nuclear threat, the goals of the compeller, and the domestic political situations of the compeller, the compellee, and any other parties involved.

We believe the effectiveness of nuclear compellence is closely related to the balance of forces between the actors involved. When the compeller enjoys a monopoly over nuclear weapons he can virtually dictate conditions to the compellee, if the issue is perceived as important enough for the compeller and the threat is regarded as credible. In a situation of overwhelming superiority the leverage of the compeller is also considerable. In a case of rough equality (parity), direct compellence is of limited usefulness unless employed as a "bargaining chip." Indeed, such uses have increased as nuclear parity between the superpowers emerged. This phenomenon is not merely a frequently used technique to bring about arms control agreements, but also appears to have some relevance for the debate on whether arms races are a prelude to or a substitute for war.⁴³ It is interesting to note that in some situations inferior nuclear powers have used compellence tactics. During the Suez campaign the USSR, despite its obvious strategic inferiority, threatened US allies (Britain, France, and Israel) with nuclear weapons. This type of threat is extremely dangerous, since it could provoke the superior nuclear power to pre-empt, and it could (and most likely would) prove ineffective, thereby producing a diplomatic disaster. The Cuban Missile Crisis proved such a disaster for the USSR and for Premier Khrushchev personally.

Among those cases in which nuclear compellence worked, we include not only the Cuban Missile Crisis—when the US publicly committed all its power and prestige—but also other cases in which compellence was used in situations of clear and per-

he question of whether the or in response to the external tend to concentrate on the ellence rather than on these arly useful to focus on a few ated to its effectiveness: the eller and the compellee, the he situation, the credibility : compeller, and the domes- ler, the compellee, and any

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ceived superiority, such as the US threat to use nuclear weapons to end the Korean War and the Soviet threat against China in 1969. We are unaware of cases in which a clearly superior nuclear power failed to achieve its stated goals in a nuclear compellence scenario. However, this success could be the result of the manner in which nuclear compellence has been used to date. Invariably, it has been used by an overwhelmingly superior nuclear power, over an important issue, and even then in a cautious manner—in the sense of allowing the compellee an escape route. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the compeller was successful in achieving its goals, at least in the short run.

Everything stated in the theoretical literature about the importance of credibility in power relationships applies to compellence scenarios, especially nuclear ones. The stakes are too high to make empty threats. The compeller must be determined, and able to convince the compellee of its determination to carry out its threats if need be. To a large extent, credibility is a function of the perceived importance of the issue to the parties involved. Thus, the balance of interests, not only the balance of forces, enters in a major way into the calculus of compellence.

Though we have dwelt on the usefulness of nuclear coercive techniques, we are not unaware of their dangers. Whenever intimidated into political submission, a country will seek nuclear capabilities or seek to redress its inferiority in strategic forces as rapidly as possible and regardless of costs (e.g., the USSR versus the United States, India versus China, Pakistan versus India). Nuclear intimidation seems, in and of itself, to be the strongest impetus toward nuclear proliferation. By and large, the short-term success of a nuclear compeller is likely to erode over time. Thus, while the Russians were successful in intimidating the Chinese in 1969, it is doubtful that they have permanently arrested China's emergence as a great world power. The dilemma for a nuclear power is always this: whether it is worthwhile to use nuclear compellence to obtain positive, yet temporary, outcomes. We believe that the answer is *yes* only when the essential interests of the compeller are at issue, not in more peripheral matters. When such essential interests are involved,

others are likely to take notice and change their behavior. In the long run, the nuclear "hints" of the US during the Berlin Crisis led to stable conditions in Central Europe once the Soviets understood the depth of American resolve. In sum, other things being equal, nuclear compellence is effective to the extent it is credible.

As more nations develop nuclear weapons, regional power disparities will make nuclear compellence more attractive to Third World powers that have the Bomb. The dangers will be enormous. The combination of nuclear compellence *and* lack of second strike capability—together with general political instability—could very well lead to unprecedented violence.

The lines between deterrence and compellence—even between the superpowers—are often blurred, and there have been many more cases of compellence than have usually been acknowledged. Nevertheless, nuclear compellence is generally considered an illegitimate strategy (which is not the case with deterrence) and is often used as a background support for other influence strategies. It is most frequently implemented through the orchestration of overt military moves with back-channel communications so as not to cause an overreaction by the target at which it is directed.

Nuclear compellence can be effective in the short run, but the cost is often high. It not only poisons relations with the state against which it is directed, but also increases the danger of war by miscalculation, accident, or irrational response. Unfortunately, despite these risks, compellence is not just a phenomenon of historical or game-theoretical interest, but a strategy often resorted to by nuclear superpowers, and one which is likely to see even more use in the future.

Notes

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2. Colin Gray and Keith Payne, "Victory Is Possible," *Foreign Policy*, no. 39 (Summer 1980), pp. 14–27; Edward Luttwak, "How to Think about Nuclear War," *Commentary*, 74 (August 1982), pp. 21–28.

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25. *Ibid.*
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32. Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, p. 107.
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