

What About Iran? Examining Coercive Approaches to Foreign Policy with Persia

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ABSTRACT

Has recent U.S. foreign policy regarding Iran really been an effective approach? What can the Jentleson and Whytock (2006) model really tell us about dealing successfully with foreign states pursuing nuclear and biological capability? The disposition of Iran is thought by some to be a key factor in a stable Middle East. The higher the diplomatic stakes, the more essential the need for predicting and implementing successful policies which produce dependable outcomes.

This paper seeks to test the utility of the Jentleson and Whytock model, which stems from their study of U.S. foreign policy with Libya. Their study established a model of foreign policy coercion, which they maintain, helps explain why Libyan foreign policy changed so radically during the presidency of George W. Bush. The model is applied to American policy, implemented from the Carter administration to George W. Bush, towards Iran. The coercive strategies used by each administration are compared against the prescription and projection purported by the model in order to determine if it accurately predicts the success or failure of past policy and thus, offers predictable utility for projecting future outcomes for foreign policy. The findings indicate that the model has some utility and largely explains success or failure in past American coercion towards Iran. It neglects, however, particular mitigating external factors which were evident in past coercion successes and may either enhance or inhibit the effectiveness of coercive strategies in achieving future diplomatic goals.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the war which removed Saddam Hussein from Iraq and now sees America gradually handing control over to its fragile democracy, there are still many potential threats to be addressed by U.S. foreign policy. One major question which looms for the future is how to handle foreign policy with Iran. A capacity for chemical weapons revealed in the Iran-Iraq War, a continued pursuit of nuclear capabilities and a declared hostility for Israel have caused much concern among those in the west.

Sun Tzu, in *“The Art of War”* (translation by Sawyer 1993), claimed that the pinnacle of warfare is to achieve victory without engaging your enemy in battle. Had he lived in the modern era of political diplomacy and global conflict, he might have modified this statement to claim that the pinnacle of coercive diplomacy is to convince your enemy to change his policies without bombing or invading his country. Similarly, assuming Clausewitz’s dictum that war is a continuation of policy by other means is true, then coercive diplomacy could be rightly said to be “a continuation of policy by limited means.”

There have been media reports of discussions in the Bush administration about the possibility of an invasion of Iran or air strikes to eliminate suspected nuclear sites. Page and Bouton (2006:100) note that “since the terrorist attacks in September, 2001, there has been a substantial willingness to use force” against real or perceived enemies, “but most Americans prefer diplomatic methods with force as a last resort.” Would military approaches to coercion actually accomplish America’s policy goals in Iran or would it affect them more adversely? What are the coercive strategies most likely to meet with success? These are the central questions in which this study will attempt to answer.

This article builds upon the research presented by Jentleson and Whytock (2006) that analyzed and compared the coercive strategies employed by the United States from the Reagan administration to that of George W. Bush towards Libya. It was the finding of these authors that the Libya case would be significant to policy debates concerning coercive diplomacy in relation to other states, such as Iran, and that their model helped provide insight on how successful coercive diplomacy strategies may be employed. To assess this model, a study of a variety of cases is necessary to determine which strategies will be successful in relation to the specific circumstances of different target states. Thus, the purpose of this study is to facilitate a continuation of the concepts proposed by Jentleson and Whytock in order to evaluate the utility of their model as well as the prospects for similar coercive strategies to be effective in Iran. In accordance with their research, this article will employ the same two sets of variables; coercer state strategy, and the target state’s domestic politics and economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To paraphrase George (1971, 1991), the aim of coercive strategies is to convince the opponent (target country) that the costs of noncompliance will be so unbearable, he will lose his motivation to continue his course of action. Jentleson and Whytock (2006) are more revealing in contending that successful coercion is about striking a balance between the benefits and costs offered by the coercer,

Critique

whereas the target must have more to benefit from compliance and to lose from noncompliance. One might liken the ideal message of the coercer to the philosophy of the “Borg” from the “Star Trek” series; “you must assimilate and resistance is futile.” Coercion is used to persuade a target to stop, undo or reverse a course of action. It is not to be confused with deterrence which is employed to prevent an action or aggression before it has begun (George 1971, 1991). That said, coercive strategies can take several forms including sanctions, threats, limited aggressive action or a combination of these forms.

A number of authors have researched coercion, from viewpoints of its theoretical concepts to studies of specific cases or specific coercive strategies which may or may not have been successful. Drezner (1998) for example, used a game-theoretical model to show how expectations of future conflict have a paradoxical effect on coercion events. His study shows that target states are less likely to make concessions when the chances for frequent conflict with the coercer are high. Similarly, coercer states are less likely to threaten sanctions when there is a low probability of future conflicts unless they incur minimal costs and cause the target to suffer significantly.

Much of the research centers around the economic effects of coercion on a target state, most commonly manifest in the use of economic sanctions. McGillivray and Stam (2004) revealed a strong correlation between the duration of economic sanctions and leadership change in both nondemocratic coercer and target states. Lektzian and Souva (2001) have shown that jointly democratic dyads return to their pre-sanction levels of trade faster than non-jointly democratic dyads. Others such as Horowitz and Reiter (2001) have conducted empirical tests of multiple coercion strategies to evaluate their level of effectiveness. Their findings have revealed that successful coercion is much more likely when the coercer state does not demand regime change.

George has written extensively on the subject of coercive diplomacy. Included in his works are a number of case studies which address the uses of coercion by the United States in crisis situations such as Laos, Vietnam and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1971, 1991) and the Persian Gulf, Pearl Harbor, Nicaragua and Libya (1991). Much of his work has offered insights into the effects of different coercion strategies from these case studies which are useful in projecting what effects similar strategies may produce when employed against other states in the future. Like George, other authors such as Greffenius and Gill (1992) have written about the value of reciprocity in the success of coercion, sometimes referred to as the “carrot and stick” approach. It was their finding that pure coercion is more likely to induce a target to fight, whereas demonstrating resolve while offering a “carrot” for compliance can effectively begin to diffuse hostility and encourage further compliance.

George maintains that the construction of a coercive strategy requires policymakers to make choices among four critical variables with regard to a specific situation. They must decide (1) what should be demanded of the target state; (2) if and how to create a sense of urgency for the target to comply with the demand(s); (3) if and what kind of punishment should be threatened for noncompliance; and (4) whether to rely solely on threats or to offer incentives for compliance (George 1991). These variables can be implemented alone or in combination depending on the objectives of the coercer and the characteristics of the target involved in a given situation.

Additionally, George (1971, 1991) offers four ways in which these choices can be manifest. First, there is the ultimatum which makes a demand of the target, sets a time table for compliance and offers a credible threat of punishment. George provides an example of this in the secret negotiation between Khrushchev and Kennedy over the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy offered incentives for Russian compliance (missiles in Turkey) while setting a strict timetable for compliance. At the same time, preparations were completed for an invasion of Cuba which was verified by Soviet and Cuban intelligence (a credible threat). The ultimatum can be a risky endeavor. Had it not been for the concessions offered by Kennedy (which allowed Russia to “save face”), the strategy might have failed, leading possibly to war.

The second manner of employing coercion, a variant of the first, is the tacit ultimatum where the coercer *indirectly* conveys the urgency of the target’s compliance. In this case, the coercer may imply the gist of urgency by maneuvering military forces in a manner which signals a credible threat to the target state in conjunction with a stern warning that noncompliance will have consequences. A third variant is the “gradual turning of the screw” approach. The coercer employs an action with a threat that additional measures will follow. Subsequent measures are added incrementally to gradually increase pressure on the target state. The final variant is aptly referred to as the “try and see” approach. As the name suggests, the coercer implements one action at a time in steps. Subsequent action is postponed until the impact of this action is clear but does not involve impressing upon the target a sense of urgency or timetable for compliance (George 1971, 1991).

Economic sanctions are the form of coercive strategy used most frequently by the U.S., at least initially in confrontations, and have been generally viewed by U.S. administrations as a low cost alternative to foreign military intervention (Franssen and Morton (2002). Sanctions represent something akin to a “diplomatic slap on the wrist” (Davis and Engerman 2003:187). Sanctions can take on different characteristics of influence depending on how broadly they are applied. The United States, for instance, can impose economic sanctions (unilateral) which restrict the purchase from or sale of goods to a target country. The target country, however, may be able to absorb the loss of trade if it is able to find a suitable substitute trading partner. The effectiveness of sanctions can be improved if countries allied or institutionalized (as in the U.N., for example) with the coercer participate in the sanctions jointly (multilateral). However employed, are used as a means to create internal economic and ultimately social pressure on national leaders for policy change if not regime change (Jentleson and Whytock 2006). Some have argued, however, that (comprehensive international) sanctions can be even more destructive to the citizens of a country than military strikes. Mueller (2004) postulates that the sanctions implemented against Iraq did more damage to the Iraqi people than both of the Bush wars combined. His sentiment is not new to debates over the consequences of sanctions. In 1926, David Miller argued that under the state system, the effect of a sanction (of any type) is to inflict punishment on the innocent of the target country. Marinov (2005:564) similarly argues that while economic sanctions do destabilize the leaders of a target country, “such measures have a certain and large negative impact on the welfare of the targeted populations.” Indeed, it would be difficult to externally create social pressure on a regime if the citizens of a target country were not suffering the consequences of a sanction which can be attributed to the policies or behavior of their government.

Critique

In spite of these arguments, sanctions were arguably effective in changing the behavior of Libya. Over time, the security of Muammar Qaddafi's regime was threatened internally and oil production (the heart of the national economy) was seriously threatened by the inability to acquire needed parts of U.S. manufacture to sustain their equipment (Jentleson and Whytock 2006). The history of the effectiveness of economic sanctions is mixed, however. It takes time for their impact to be felt which requires patience from the coercer, and if employed in too harsh of a manner they can have an opposite effect than what was intended. George (1991) provides a classic example of this in his case study of U.S.-Japanese relations which led to the attack on Pearl Harbor. When threats to cut off oil supplies to Japan (which accounted for 80 percent of its supply) failed as a deterrent strategy, the U.S. implemented an embargo as a coercive strategy to force Japan cease its aggression in Southeast Asia. The "sharpness" of the coercion combined with the high stakes for Japan in its conquests and no "carrots" offered for compliance, backed the Japanese into a proverbial corner and left war as their only option.

Military or "offensive" forms of coercion, to take a phrase from George (1971), offer the *potential* for direct, limited strikes against a target government without visiting harm on the population of a country. Unfortunately, the reality is not as successful as it is in theory. Regardless of how smart "smart-bombs" and advanced targeting systems have become, they still often incur civilian casualties. Even when they do not kill civilians, such attacks are often viewed as "outsider meddling" which can actually increase the popular support for the target government. An example of this is offered by Jentleson and Whytock (2006). The U.S. bombing of targets in Libya in 1986 by the Reagan Administration, which was intended to precipitate a military coup, actually increased Qaddafi's domestic support, if only temporarily. Even in the U.S., the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (which was arguably a coercive strategy intended to convince the U.S. to withdraw from the Middle East) had the short-term effect of uniting the American people, despite political differences, against the perpetrators.

While limited with respect to coercion, military options may be necessary and effective under certain circumstances, but can also be particularly self-defeating if they are excessively punishing. Similar to overly "sharp" economic sanctions, George (1971) notes that if military action is too damaging, it may have the adverse effect of causing the target to escalate the conflict in order to compensate for the political or military injuries to the regime. An example of this was the bombing of the Osirak reactor in Iraq by the Israelis in 1981. According to Khadir Hamza, a former Iraqi nuclear official, the bombing of the reactor had destroyed that facility, but accelerated the nuclear program by driving it underground (Cirincione 2005). Despite the important research which has already been conducted by many authors on coercion, much more is still needed to better understand the impact of coercive strategies on target nations and foreign policy outcomes. At this time, no one has built upon the model of Jentleson and Whytock (2006), which presents a solid framework for analyzing coercion case studies. Additionally, coercive strategies applied to Iran have yet to be examined by any similar model. By applying their model to the past, currently active, and possible future coercion used against Iran, this case offers an important opportunity to increase our understanding of coercion and to lay the groundwork for future studies using this model.

METHODS

Iran presents a good case for a study of coercive diplomacy in light of its potential importance for stability in the Middle East and due to the confrontational relationship it has had with the United States since the ousting of the Shah in 1979. Because conflict with Iran is a current issue of concern for U.S. foreign policy, there are significant resources available for this study to draw upon. Additionally, the Iranian pursuit of nuclear capacity (including possible weapon-grade material) and both historical and ongoing coercion employed by the U.S. makes such a study a potentially useful resource for predicting which coercive strategies are most likely to meet with success in Iran and a significant contribution to research on coercion as a whole.

Jentleson and Whytock (2006) created a model for analyzing coercive strategies in their case study of U.S. coercion in Libya. Their model focuses on two variables which they believe are key to the success or failure of coercion: a) coercer state strategy and; b) the target state's domestic politics and economy. Following this model, I analyze coercer state strategy according to three critical attributes: proportionality, reciprocity and coercive credibility.

Proportionality refers to the instrument employed by the coercer relative to the scope and nature of the objective (the ends and means). Reciprocity is the proverbial carrot and the stick. The carrot (something the target wants) is offered to entice the target to move forward (something the coercer wants). This works, of course, as long as the target does not think it can gain the carrot without moving. In the reverse, the target must believe the coercer will reciprocate the carrot if it does comply with demands placed upon it. Finally, credibility is the extent to which the coercer is able to convince the target of the consequences (costs) of noncompliance. A target state must perceive the credibility of the threats posed against it, militarily or economic, in order to become convinced of the costs to be incurred by its defiance. Military superiority is not sufficient to do this by itself. Studies of U.S. coercion where a clear military superiority existed revealed failure more often than success (Jentleson and Whytock 2006).

The second variable relates to the vulnerability of the target to coercion. The domestic political and economic conditions will determine the target state's ability to compensate for the power imbalances with the coercer and will influence its assessment of costs and benefits relative to compliance or noncompliance. I will thus apply this model to past and present U.S. coercive strategies towards Iran and evaluate the possible effects of future coercion. I thus offer the hypothesis that the Jentleson and Whytock model will accurately predict the coercive strategies best suited to the Iranian situation

ANALYSIS

The persisting break in U.S.-Iranian relations occurred with the revolution in 1979 which ousted the authoritarian Shah, who was politically allied with the United States. Beeman (2003:683) reveals that, at the time the revolution occurred, Iran had "a demoralized population, an economy sprawling and out of control, and a repressive, autocratic government that allowed its citizens no influence....in policies that affected them directly; not even the right to complain." He goes on to add that the cause of anti-American sentiment which ultimately led to the taking of American hostages in November of that year, was the symbolic role played by the United States in the oppressive rule of the Shah. From out of this conflict emerged

Critique

the unsavory term for the U.S., the “Great Satan” which has since become popularized throughout the Middle East (Pollack and Takeyh 2005, Beerman 2003).

Despite being a member of the “Axis of Evil” as declared by George W. Bush (State of the Union address 2002), determining the extent of Iranian “rogue” behavior, such as sponsoring or aiding terrorism, is complex and muddled. As Sick (2004:231) notes, “Iran may often be falsely accused. Many of these (acts of terrorism) were never solved and the degree of Iranian official responsibility may be overstated.” Still, indictments in some cases have been brought against Iran, such as the 1996 bombing of the U.S. military barracks at Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia (Pollack and Takeyh 2005, Sick 2004), and the incendiary rhetoric of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the clerical elites reported in the media seem convincing enough to warrant the rogue label. Iran’s displayed capacity for chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War and discoveries by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of activities by Iran to make fissile material for nuclear weapons (Pollack and Takeyh 2005), when combined with hostile rhetoric towards Israel, present a tangible threat which most would likely agree must be addressed in the Middle East.

Ironically enough, Iran has never denied and openly claims that it is pursuing a wide range of research on nuclear technology. They contend that Iran has a “national right” for access to nuclear energy and the U.S. agrees (Cordesman and Al-Rodhan 2006). Much of the problem has been a lack of transparency and, as Pollack and Takeyh (2005) note, the very mixed messages Iran conveys to the U.S. Iran has backed a number of groups considered terrorist organizations such as Hizballah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Hizballah is believed to have been responsible for the bombings of the U.S. marine barracks and embassy in Lebanon in 1983 and an Argentinian court concluded in 2003 that Hizballah received support from the Iranian embassy for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center (Sick 2004). These actions (financing and material support) were made possible because of Iran’s large oil and natural gas revenues.

Part of what makes the intentions and behavior of Iranian government difficult to ascertain is a dual personality exhibited by the state. The first part of that personality belongs to a president and ministries which are held accountable through public review and frequent elections. The second part consists of a supreme leader, oversight committees such as the Guardian Council and Expediency Council, and the security services. In the case of the latter, they are dominated by the conservative clergy who are officially beyond reproach (Sick 2004).

This division is most clearly evident in the presidencies of Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami. Rafsanjani made concerted efforts to rebuild political and economic ties with the west which were subsequently sabotaged by “shadowy” forces within the government who were neither identified nor made to be publicly accountable, most likely because they were a protected group or individuals near the top of the conservative Iranian power structure. Khatami, who repeatedly condemned (terrorism and) the killing of men, women and children who are not involved in confrontations, illustrates another example. When several Iranian intellectuals were murdered in 1998, he launched an investigation which resulted in the arrest of a group of ultraconservative officials. At the head of this group was the deputy director in the Ministry of Intelligence, Saeed Emami. Before the trial, Emami apparently committed suicide which led to broad speculation he had been killed to prevent him from implicating figures at the highest levels of the

clerical leadership. This case ultimately confirmed suspicions that extremists inside and outside of the leadership structure had been operating without approval of the elected government of Iran (Sick 2004).

US-IRANIAN COERCIVE HISTORY: The Carter Administration

The US initiated unilateral sanctions as a coercive strategy immediately following the take-over of the US embassy by Iranian students in Tehran in November 1979. The first measure employed by Carter was Proclamation 4702 which banned US imports of Iranian oil. Ten days later, Executive Order 12170 froze all assets owned by the Central Bank and Government of Iran within US jurisdiction. Executive Orders 12205 and 12211 soon followed which placed an embargo on all US exports to, imports from and financial transactions with Iran (Franssen and Morton 2002).

The economic effects of these sanctions took a while to seriously impact Iran, but they ultimately did have an impact. Despite a Soviet veto for multilateral sanctions in the UN Security Council, many states gradually joined the US effort and reduced trade with Iran. Thus, as the sanctions dragged on, Iran was deprived of critical supplies and spare parts which it desperately needed. This forced them to make expensive deals with unreliable sources to meet their needs. The invasion by Iraq in September, 1980 exacerbated the problems caused by sanctions and Iran found both the supplies for fighting a ground war and international support hard to come by. The difficulties of obtaining supplies, near complete collapse of oil revenues and failed efforts to recover frozen assets were the cumulative result of US sanctions and arguably an effective means proportional to the desired US objective ends (Carswell 1981).

Even though the rescue attempt of the hostages in April 1980 failed, a credible threat was still presented which heightened the Iranian sense of vulnerability. The US maintained a carrier task force in the Indian Ocean which could have been used for a strike against Iran. The broad support for the US in the United Nations and no sign of a softer stance by incoming president Reagan left Iran facing a difficult economic and security future. Thus, Iran was willing by 1981 to release the hostages if the US would reciprocate by negotiating the release of some of its frozen assets (Carswell 1981).

Until the end of the crisis, the coercion strategy of the US lacked either sufficient reciprocity or the effects of coercion had failed to impact the target nation sufficiently (in the short term) to accept any possible reciprocal offers being made secretly. Once the return of Iranian assets had been worked out between the parties, Iran released the hostages. The exact level of internal political pressure on the post-Shah regime is difficult to assess, but the economic consequences were severe and likely inhibited the ability of elites to insulate the Iranian leadership. Given the malleable financial demands made by Iran in return for compliance, it appears likely that Iranian elites put pressure on the regime to resolve the issue when continued support would have been disastrous economically and might have undermined regime support. This successful coercion strategy thus reflects the findings of effective coercion in the Jentleson and Whytock (2006) model. Using sanctions and a credible threat, the US coercion was successful by 1981, once the costs of noncompliance became too high and the beneficial “carrot” of compliance was offered as a sufficient reciprocal factor.

The Reagan and Bush Sr. Administrations

Critique

The terrorist bombing of the US embassy and marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 initiated a new round of coercive diplomacy focused on sanctions on Iran. In January 1984, President Ronald Reagan declared that Iran was sponsoring international terrorism which made them ineligible for US foreign aid or loans from financial institutions controlled by the US. The US Arms Export Control Act in 1986 prohibited the sale of weapons and parts to Iran, functioning as an arms embargo. The following year, a full embargo on Iranian imports was implemented by Executive Order in response to active, state-sponsored support of international terrorism. After George W. Bush succeeded Reagan as president, a CIA report raised concerns that Iran had invested 2 billion in pursuing weapons of mass destruction. In response, Bush included Iran in the arms non-proliferation act targeted at Iraq in 1992 (Franssen and Morton 2002).

The coercion itself was a response to actions taken by Iran for which the US demanded change (support of terrorism, WMD research). While these actions were all coercive measures, they seem to lack most of the requirements for successful coercion as revealed by the Jentleson and Whytock model. Only an arms embargo, aid and loan restrictions and sanctions against entities which trade military use items were implemented to pressure Iran to change its activities in international terrorism and WMD research. There is no indication that the sanctions were combined with a credible threat for non-compliance, nor is there any evidence of reciprocal benefits for compliance being offered, save the ease of sanctions. Unlike the sanctions initiated by the Carter Administration, there was not significant multilateral support. As long as Iran could find other states, such as China, to buy their oil and engage in trade, US sanctions had little hope to affect Iran politically or economically by itself. For example, despite the threat of trade sanctions under non-proliferation act of 1992, nine Chinese companies were barred from trade with the U.S. (between 2002 and 2003) for shipping restricted goods to Iran (US Department of State). Thus, the coercive strategies used by the Reagan and Bush Sr. Administrations were unsuccessful in altering Iranian state behavior. If the Jentleson and Whytock is correct, the failure of U.S. coercion efforts was due to a lack of reciprocity, a credible threat, and sufficient international support to raise the costs of non-compliance to the level necessary for achieving success. The Clinton Administration

The dissolution of the Soviet Union as a superpower brought an end to bipartisan US foreign policy. Clinton was willing to concede to sanctions desired by the republican congress in exchange for cooperation on domestic issues. He also saw sanctions as a low cost alternative to military intervention. With continued concern about Iran's support for international terrorism and continued efforts to develop WMD, Clinton authorized an expansion of existing sanctions which included a total trade and investment embargo on Iran. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 was directed at foreign companies (especially petroleum investors) doing business with Iran which made other countries more reluctant to agree to multilateral sanctions amid fears they would have to pay severely for what was perceived as US domestic political agenda. The alienation of European allies led to numerous defiances and challenges to the ILSA prohibitions in Iran which undermined any chance for sanctions to be effective. (Franssen and Morton 2002).

As was the case with the actions under Reagan and Bush Sr., sanctions alone and not supported internationally were ineffective as strategic coercion. Sanctions applied in this manner were not able to significantly harm Iran

Spring 2009

economically, which made the goal of creating internal pressure for halting support for terrorist groups and research on WMD by the regime improbable. According to the Jentleson and Whytock model, for coercion to be successful, the target state must perceive itself as vulnerable to the coercion directed at its economy and political leadership. A target nation, knowing that other nations will trade with them and that sanctions are not supported multilaterally either formally through UN resolutions or informally by choice, has little impetus to comply with coercer demands or fear any crippling effects of coercion. Indeed, there appears to be no indication that Iran was placed in a vulnerable position by U.S. coercion efforts.

The US effort since the Carter Administration to this point appears similar to what George (1971, 1991) refers to as a “try and see” approach which, in these cases, never seemed to evolve into a complete coercion strategy once it became clear that Iran was not compelled to comply with US demands. There was never evidence of any timetable for compliance, sincere reciprocal offers and negotiation by the US or any credible threat presented which conveyed a resolve for compliance with US demands if Iran balked. In sum, there were never sufficient costs presented to Iran which would convince them that compliance was in their interest or to their benefit. It is interesting that Rafsanjani did make attempts to ease relations between the U.S. and Iran during this time period. His efforts were sabotaged, however, by the clerical elite who are arguably the real political power in Iran. It is difficult to state conclusively, but it would appear that the efforts of Rafsanjani were either motivated by personal beliefs or a response to desires of the electorate. However, there is no indication U.S. coercive efforts created sufficient pressure for him to negotiate which could likely only come through the clerical leadership.

The George W. Bush Administration

Faced with a veto-proof majority in congress to extend ILSA sanctions, Bush signed an extension of the act into law in August of 2001 despite its having cost US industry billions of dollars in lost business and its failure to stop foreign investment in Iran (Franssen and Morton 2002). The events of September 11 arguably swung the political pendulum away from the “toothless” coercion strategies employed by the US since 1981. The Administration’s resultant national security strategy made clear that the US would not tolerate inaction (by its allies) and it would act preemptively if necessary (Lennon and Eiss 2004).

The attack of September 11 caused the reshaping of US coercion efforts aimed at Iran which, in some ways, resembled those employed by the Carter Administration. The US stepped up pressure on foreign banks to block them from dealing with Iranian financial institutions, froze Iranian assets, was able to pressure the international community to restrict business with Iran by threatening to cut off access to US markets and gained limited multilateral sanctions via UN Resolution 1737. There were not multilateral trade sanctions included as the US strategy was to financially squeeze the government of Iran while avoiding hardship on the Iranian people. In this manner, the US effort resembled the disinvestment campaign which was used against apartheid South Africa (Behner 2007).

The political and economic effects of these US coercion efforts have thus far been minimal. Despite a stagnating economy, Iran is faring better than its neighbors in the Middle East who are not the target of sanctions. More damaging to the Iranian economy than coercion efforts has been the decline in oil prices on

Critique

the global market (Beehner 2007). Whenever oil prices decline, income from oil decreases in states such as Iran. Because oil is Iran's primary export commodity, any decline in oil prices affects the stability of the national economy. Any decline can be damaging, but a large drop in market prices can seriously harm program funding and markets in such a country. The US has offered incentives for compliance with the demand to suspend uranium enrichment and has, according to George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, made increasingly lucrative incentives in an effort to get Iran to negotiate. Thus, reciprocity is present in U.S. strategy. All of these efforts have ultimately failed, however (Gwertzman 2008).

The failure of US coercive diplomacy targeting Iran since the Carter Administration seems evident by its failure to organize a focused, multifaceted program for achieving success. Efforts to gain multilateral sanctions through the UNSC have not been supported by Russia or China which has limited the capacity of U.S. sanctions alone. Sanctions have thus not materialized in such a way as to seriously harm the Iranian economy in a manner which could produce the internal pressure necessary for policy change by the regime. There have been strong statements and implied threats by U.S. politicians reported in the media, but the U.S. has not displayed a credible threat (visible forces lurking in the region which could be unleashed on Iran at any time) which conveys a resolve for compliance with their demands. Forces in Iraq do not serve this purpose as they are bogged down in security operations and could not be remobilized quickly for any effective attack against Iran. When "carrots" have been offered, the lack of sufficient pressure from other coercive strategies has undermined their value as an enticement tool.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of past US coercion strategies against Iran has produced a surprising finding that could be a significant factor in enhancing the effectiveness of future actions aimed at convincing Iran to abandon its pursuit of WMD; an unplanned, intervening variable which was the Iran-Iraq War. This situation greatly exacerbated the effects of multilateral sanctions on the economy and, combined with a credible threat and sufficient reciprocal offers, compelled Iran to agree to US demands to release the hostages. In all other situations where coercion was used, the strategies were piecemeal, not supported multilaterally, not balanced with threats and tangible benefits, and not significantly damaging to the economy to create political pressure against the regime for policy changes. In each case, failure or success was directly related to the proportionality of the means to the ends, the reciprocity, and credible threat requirements which Jentleson and Whytock (2006) found to be the critical factors in their study of US coercion in Libya.

The Jentleson and Whytock model appears to be supported, not only in the characteristics of U.S. coercion which failed, but in the success of the strategic coercion employed by the Carter Administration. The coercion used during the hostage crisis fits their model precisely with the exception of the intervening variable that was the Iran-Iraq War. While one could make the argument that this event (more than direct coercion) supplied the pressure needed to resolve the crisis and thus falls outside the model, I do not believe this is the case. The U.S. was on friendly terms with Iraq at that time and it is quite likely that they received some level of indirect, logistic support from the U.S., who surely knew the conflict would be to their advantage. A second consideration is that the real impact of the war was

Spring 2009

to shorten the time in which the effects of sanction would be felt. There is nothing to indicate that the outcome of coercion efforts would have been different except the time needed to reach the successful conclusion was greatly shortened by the added strain of war.

The serious impact of the Iran-Iraq War on the Iranian economy is especially interesting today because of another event currently taking place; the extreme drop of prices for crude oil on the international market. Because oil exports make up 85 percent of the Iranian economy (CIA World Factbook), strong multilateral financial and trade sanctions have the greatest chance for impacting Iran in a shorter time period than at any time since the Iran-Iraq War in 1981. This means that the time necessary to produce significant internal pressure is greatly reduced and could provide a window of opportunity for similar coercive strategies to be successful as long as market prices can be maintained at a low rate. This could be a significant consideration depending on how close Iran might actually be to developing weapon-grade nuclear material.

Predictions for a successful coercion strategy are always an educated gamble, but based on past coercion history and its relevance to the Jentleson and Whytock model, it still appears that there is at least moderate support for a successful, non-military approach to coercion aimed at Iran as outlined by the Jentleson and Whytock model, though it is clearly evident that intervening conditions can greatly enhance the timely effectiveness of that coercion which falls beyond the model's specifications. While economic and trade sanctions can hardship the population, the government is extremely dependent on oil for its pursuits and is therefore highly vulnerable to sanctions effects. With increased global support for Iranian compliance to abandon its WMD activities, the possibility for the multilateral sanctions needed to cripple the economy of Iran and create internal pressure on the regime and the elites who insulate it is very favorable.

A credible threat which demonstrates US resolve need not and should not present itself as an immanent threat. The carrier force in the Indian Ocean during the hostage crisis served this purpose sufficiently without alarming the population and, barring another intervening war which could possibly serve the same purpose, would still be a necessary component of any U.S. strategy. Subtlety is more effective because it presents the potential for use of force without making the US appear as a "bully." Too much show of force or any military strike in Iran could alienate the Iranian people as it did with Reagan's 1986 airstrike in Libya (Jentleson and Whytock 2006). Actions which undermine current pro-western support in Iran could be disastrous to US interests in the long run, which might ultimately require Iranian help in creating stability in the Middle East.

Reciprocity or the "carrot" has been shown to be an ineffective factor when coercive strategies do not sufficiently squeeze the Iranian economy and when a credible threat does not exist concurrently. Reciprocal offers can only entice a target when the effects of coercive diplomacy have a significant impact. Like the Jentleson and Whytock study of Libya, each of these three variables must work in conjunction sufficiently for the coercion to cause the modification of state behavior. Additionally, the demands of the coercer state must be amenable. The demands of the Carter Administration were smaller by comparison with those being made of Iran today. Any successful coercion must ensure that the demands placed upon Iran are not overly difficult to meet and that compliance will help to

Critique

normalize relations and reduce the potential for future conflict between the two countries.

In conclusion, this study sought to facilitate a continuation of the concepts proposed by Jentleson and Whytock in order to evaluate the utility of their model as well as the prospects for similar coercive strategies to be effective in Iran. Similarly, I asked two central questions: Would military approaches to coercion actually accomplish America's policy goals in Iran or would it affect them more adversely and; what are the coercive strategies most likely to meet with success?

It appears from the success of the Carter Administration that, despite pressure created by a third-party conflict, U.S. coercion did not require the direct use of military force. Because of the unusually pro-western attitude of the Iranian population, any military strike could cause more damage to U.S. interests than it could gain. Such support has been evident over recent years, notably the enthusiastic reception for U.S. wrestlers at the Takhti Cup wrestling tournament in Tehran in 1998 (Marks 1998) and in the candlelight vigils held across Iran for the victims of the September 11 terrorist attack (Sick 2004). Unless an imminent threat of a nuclear attack by Iran against a neighboring country presented itself, it seems likely that any military strikes would have the same negative effect on the Iranian population as the September 11 attacks had on the American population or the airstrikes of 1986 had in Libya. As Sariolghalam (2004:289) notes, "failure to address the deep sensitivity all Iranians attach to their national sovereignty is ill advised."

The second question directs us back to the Jentleson and Whytock model. Indeed, there is nothing to suggest a superior formula for strategic coercion is currently available, though the powerful influence of intervening situations and special external conditions can greatly effect the outcome of coercion efforts. This does suggest that the model should possibly be amended to include or account for the conditions under which coercion is applied. This concept is supported by George (1991) who relates that coercive strategies are more likely to be effective in a particular situation.

Overall, the model presented by Jentleson and Whytock performs well, but as mentioned above, could be improved. My hypothesis that their model will accurately predict the coercive strategies best suited to the Iranian situation is supported. A third-party war or other events (such as market price declines for a target's main exports) would be very difficult to predict, let alone mobilize for coercive advantage. Coercion could only be structured or timed to make use of other situations taking place at a given time. In any case, it is my finding that this model, in terms of straight coercion strategy, holds up under scrutiny with the available data. Future studies should look to expand on the concept of conditions under which coercion takes place as a new focus for evaluating or expanding the predictability value of the model.

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