

Introduction to International Relations

Lecture 8: Deterrence and Compellence

Professor Branislav L. Slantchev

Department of Political Science, University of California - San Diego

May 2, 2005

Overview. Having concluded that war could be something that rational actors engage in, we note that this means that threats to use force can be made credible. We turn to a more concrete analysis of deterrence and compellence, the two generic categories of strategic coercion, the use or threatened use of force for political purposes. We distinguish between several types of deterrence, and discuss various strategies that actors can pursue in order to succeed in gaining leverage. We conclude with the example of the First Persian Gulf War that demonstrates the evolution from general deterrence to compellence, and back.

OUTLINE OF LECTURE 8: DETERRENCE AND COMPELLENCE

1. The strategic use of force

- brute force
- strategic coercion (latent use of force)
- examples: Mongols, Romans

2. Deterrence

- persuade opponent not to initiate action
- passive, indefinite duration
- hard to know if success is due to deterrence
- make status quo good and issue a threat
- strategies: glass plate (trip-wire) to counter salami tactics

3. Compellence

- persuade opponent to stop/change action
- active, definite deadline
- easier to know if success is due to compellence
- make status quo bad and issue a promise
- coercive strategies: punishment, risk, denial, decapitation

4. Types of deterrence

- direct (target is defender) and extended (target is protégé)
- immediate (threat is actual) and general (threat is potential)
- entrapment by protégé (Serbia and Russia in 1914)
- strategic ambiguity (U.S. Taiwan policy)

5. Cost-benefit calculations

- evaluate status quo v. alternative
- how to improve status quo for opponent
 - increase benefits of SQ (trade, membership in valuable organization)
 - decrease costs (arms reduction)
 - decrease probability SQ will get worse (don't build arms)
- how to make alternative worse for opponent
 - increase probability of war (credibility, audience costs)
 - increase costs of fighting (more destructive weapons)
 - increase costs of losing (war-crimes trial, looting)
 - decrease benefits of victory (scorched earth)
 - decrease probability of winning (better military)
 - reduce value of unopposed gain (arms race)

1 Brute Force and Strategic Coercion

We have now arrived at a particularly important junction. As we have seen, war could be explained by rational causes. Again, this is not to say that all wars have been rational, or that even most of them have (one might well argue, with persuasiveness, that actual war-making involves quite a bit of psychological adjustment that is hard to characterized as rational). However, if there are reasons over which rational actors could engage in the ghastly and extremely expensive large-scale destruction, then it becomes possible to use the *threat of war* for political purposes. In other words, it is possible to engage in **strategic coercion**, a bargaining tactic that relies explicitly or implicitly on the threat of force.

Why is this the case? Because, as we have seen, success in bargaining turns on one's ability to influence the expectations of one's opponent, and this ability depends crucially on ability to establish credible commitments. We have distinguished between threats and promises, but for our more generic principles, they are the same: commitments to take future actions that are conditional on the behavior of the opponent. The key issue is credibility because a non-credible commitment would be ignored by any opponent who is not entirely idiotic. But, if war is so costly and risky, how can it be rational to threaten with it? The rationalist explanations provide at least three general mechanisms that demonstrate that under certain conditions, it can indeed be rational to do so.

This now means that it is possible to make credible threats to wage war in particular circumstances, which turns force into a tool of statecraft. We briefly mentioned a distinction between **brute force** and **strategic coercion** when we discussed bargaining, and now is the time to make the idea more precise.

What do we mean by "use of force"? One use is to take possession, or deny possession of an object forcibly. For example, a country can occupy land, exterminate population, or repel an invasion—all through direct use of force at its disposal. A high school bully can simply beat up a smaller kid and take his lunch money. This kind of use of force is direct, and we shall call it *brute force*. The other type is less direct and involves threatening the opponent with pain without actually hurting him, at least in the beginning. Force can be simply used to hurt and, if we manage to uncover the points where it would hurt most, a threat to do so can motivate our opponent to avoid it. We shall call this *coercive use of force*. It is strategic in the sense that it seeks to persuade an opponent to do our bidding without destroying him.

Notice how in the "brute" case force settles everything—there's no room for bargaining. In the second case, our determination to gain our objectives and the opponent's desire to avoid being hurt—opens up room for bargaining. The coercive power is thus aimed at influencing the other side's behavior, primarily through his expectations. For example, our bully does not have to beat up the smaller kid. If his reputation is good (or bad) enough, he can demand the kid's lunch money and get it by just threatening to beat him up. Important to note that while no actual force is used in this case, force is used nevertheless. It is

the *latent use of force* here that gets the result. Whereas the power to hurt is destructive, and seemingly aimless (because it does not immediately advance our objectives), it is useful because it can cause others to change behavior in accordance with our wishes.

Thus, *strategic coercion* is a type of bargaining where the opponent's expectations are influenced by the threat to hurt him. The threat must be understood and compliance rewarded. In other words, the opponent must be persuaded through the manipulation of threats. With force one may kill an enemy but with a threat to use force one may get an enemy to comply.

In order for coercion to work, the opponent must receive the threat of force—latent, not actual, use of force—whose success will depend on its credibility. We must then be able to relate it to a proposed course of action; and finally decide whether to proceed. This means that it is the expectation of more violence that will get us desired behavior (if at all), not actual use of force. This is the “coercion” in strategic coercion. “Strategic” refers to the process being a two-way street. Our actions engender reactions, we are influenced by our expectations of his expectations. This interdependent decision-making is called strategic interaction. Hence “strategic” in strategic coercion.

One might say that brute force is what happens when strategic coercion fails. If the threat to use force succeeds, then no (or very little) violence should follow. However, often it is necessary to use brute force to make the threat of further violence more credible. Consider the depredations of the horse peoples from the steppes who terrorized the Roman Empire (Atilla, the Hun), the Chinese and the Persians (the Mongol Genghis Khan), and almost the entire Middle East and India (Tamerlane). Let's take the greatest of them all, Genghis Khan, whose bloodthirstiness has become legendary. The Mongols were vicious by contemporary standards, no doubt about it. Yet, they were not wanton destructors. It is curious to see how often the great Khan used strategic coercion to compel the unconditional surrender of his opponents. He would lay waste to a city that resisted him but would spare one that would surrender. He would even try a diplomatic approach first before attacking (e.g. when he sent a caravan, which was sacked, and then an embassy, which was murdered, before resolving on the conquest of Khwarazm). Sometimes, the Mongols used tactical coercion: they marched captives from previous raids in front of their army to forestall further resistance.

When all is said and done, it was better for the Mongols if they could enjoy the booty and what we would call today “preferential trade treatment” without risking their skins. Yes, they glorified violence, but skin is skin, and a man has but one. So slaughter they did but they reaped the benefits of fear when remaining rulers voluntarily disgorged tribute to keep the hordes away. It is true that sometimes the Mongols massacred city populations following surrender, but generally they did not. In other words, by indulging in atrocities, they cowed their “audiences” into submission.

And intimidation they truly needed for the so-called hordes were not that nu-

merous. In fact, the Mongols regularly fought out-numbered, and their army probably did not have more than 20,000 warriors at its core, and rarely numbered more than 80,000. In China, they faced over half a million men of war, and emerged victorious. In Russia, they obliterated armies twice their size. Perhaps a less over-awed numerous enemy would have been able to make a successful stand, especially if they realized how to counter the tactics (as people eventually did learn). In the end, however, the Mongols built the largest empire the world has ever known (the reason it's not nearly as famous is that it collapsed very quickly), a lot of it by conquest, and quite a sizeable chunk by intimidation.¹

The Mongols used terror on a large scale much like the Romans did during their expansion. The Roman armies also regularly massacred entire populations of cities that dared resist them, sometimes going so far as to kill all the animals as well. The idea was much the same: by showing the consequences of defeat, they would discourage further resistance. And, given their nearly unbroken string of victories, the probability that any such resistance would end in defeat was too large for many polities. Whereas the conquest of a particular city or territory was an exercise in brute force, the manner in which it was done had a larger strategic purpose, making the threat of force a credible commitment for everyone watching. Terror, as we have come to re-learn painfully, is a strategy of coercion.

2 Deterrence and Compellence

Brute force takes two basic forms, offense and defense. Strategic coercion similarly takes two basic forms: deterrence and compellence, which are roughly related to offense and defense in terms of their goals (change or maintain the status quo), and timing (actively pursued or waiting for opponent to engage).

Deterrence aims to persuade the opponent not to initiate action. We make the demand, explain the consequences of acting, and then wait (success is measured by whether something happens); if the opponent “crosses the line” we’ve drawn we take punitive action. One role for jails (punishment) is to deter potential criminals. The success of prisons is thus measured by how empty they are. It is hard to judge whether an event fails to occur because of successful deterrence or for other reasons. Deterrence is conservative: it seeks to protect the status quo. It is also, like defense, essentially a waiting game: the opponent has to move before a reaction is triggered.

Compellence aims to persuade the opponent to change his behavior. We make a demand of action, then initiate our own, and continue doing it until the

¹Tamerlane, famous for piling towers of skulls, used a similar strategy, although it is arguable whether his particular taste for violence did not exceed the coercive needs (e.g. the massacre of 20,000 residents of Damascus, or 100,000 captured Indian soldiers after the battle of Panipat, among numerous others). Atilla, the Scourge of God, was actually an extremely skillful diplomat who used the fear his Huns inspired with regular success against the Romans.

opponent ceases. We can distinguish three categories of compellence. We persuade opponent (i) to stop short of goal; (ii) to undo the action (i.e. withdraw from land); or (iii) change his policy by changing government. Success of compellence is easy to see because it entails the reversal or halt of ongoing behavior. Again, this may happen for other reasons but it is hard to avoid the impression of doing it under duress. Compellence is active: it seeks to change the status quo. Also, like offense, it takes the initiative and engages the opponent until the latter relents.

Recall that a commitment is essentially a pledge to take some action in the future. It may be a threat if this action involves hurting the opponent, or it may be a promise if it involves rewarding him. Threats and promises are *conditional strategic moves* that can be used either for deterrence or compellence, depending on what they are supposed to achieve. A **threat** is a pledge to impose costs if the opponent acts contrary to one's wishes. A **promise** is a pledge to provide benefits to the opponent if he acts in accordance with one's wishes. Both threats and promises are intended to influence the expectations of the opponent and cause him to change his behavior. Both threats and promises are costly to the one making them although threats are costly if the player fails to influence the opponent, and promises are costly if the player succeeds.

In principle, both threats and promises can be used for either deterrence or compellence. Suppose we wish to compel the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear program: we could threaten a punishment (cut off economic aid, limited strikes on the power plants) if they fail to comply, or promise a reward (invest in the country, build other plants) if they dismantle the program. Similarly, if we wish to deter them from pursuing such a program, we could try either a punishment or a reward. Although both could be used, in practice deterrence is best achieved with a threat, and compellence with a promise.

The difference is in the timing, initiative, and monitoring. A deterrent threat can be passive and static. One sets up the **trip wire** and then leaves things up to the opponent without any time limit. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. constantly worried about the possibility of the USSR attacking Western Europe. The problem was that in conventional armaments, the Red Army was much, much stronger than what NATO could muster against it. A general war over Western Europe almost invariably meant that the U.S. would have to resort to nuclear weapons. The Americans could say "If you ever attack Western Europe, we shall fight back with all we've got, including nukes." Then they could sit back, wait, and watch. Only if the Soviets ever invaded would the Americans have to do anything.

The deterrent threat can be eroded by **salami tactics**, a strategy that takes steps that are small enough not to activate the threatened action, yet that bring the player closer to his goal. For example, the Soviets could send "military advisors" to Eastern Germany. Is this an invasion? Of course not, they are helping an allied communist nation organize its defenses against the imperialist Western aggressors. Before you know it, they bring several tank brigades to

Berlin. Is this an invasion? Of course not, they are using the equipment to train said defense forces. Then they instigate a couple of incidents along the perimeter with West Berlin. Is this an invasion? No, these are provocations by the imperialists which demonstrate the need for defenses, which is why we are sending a Red Army division there to make sure things stay calm. They cut off the corridor to West Berlin. Is this an invasion? No, they are exercising their right to sovereignty, which was threatened by the West in those border clashes. West Berlin suffocates and the East Germans offer to begin supplying it (while Soviet tanks are making sure nobody else can get through). Is this an invasion? Before you know it, the Soviets are in possession of Berlin, with a sizeable contingent of the Red Army ready to strike. By the time you think of an answer, you find yourself hoping they would spare Britain.

Thus, the deterrent threat had to be invulnerable to salami tactics, and it would have to ensure that the Americans would actually want to respond to an invasion by defending Europe. As we shall see, stationing American troops in Europe provided a trip-wire (or “glass plate”) that performed these functions. The presence even of a significant U.S. force there was not enough to win a land war against the Red Army. However, it did ensure that if the Soviets ever decided to attack, they would have to do so in strength that would be sufficient to overcome these forces. This meant that the Soviets would have to use such a large number of troops that there would remain no doubt about their intentions. An attack on the U.S. contingent in Europe would be nothing less than the opening salvo in a general war. It would shatter the glass plate, so to speak.

This should therefore tend to discourage the Russians from adventurous policies that would probe American resolve to defend Europe (it did). Whether it would work like that elsewhere in the world was an open question (it did not). Further, apart from making the Soviets reveal the scope of their aggressive intentions, stationing Americans in Europe would enhance the credibility of the threat to fight the Red Army if it did invade. As we shall see, many Europeans (and Americans) doubted whether the U.S. was prepared to go to general, possibly nuclear, war with the Soviet Union over Western Europe. If the Russians did invade, they would inevitably have to overcome the resistance of the American forces by destroying them. It is highly unlikely that the U.S. would calmly accept the deaths of tens of thousands of its citizens: the U.S. would be compelled to react and fight even if it cared little for Europe itself. As Schelling put it, the purpose of these troops there was to die gloriously.

Thus, stationing troops in Europe could serve as a glass plate by forcing the Soviets to come in strength, and as a trip-wire by forcing the Americans to respond in kind. Attack would be unequivocal, and defense nearly automatic.

Trying to achieve such deterrence with a promise is possible but harder. The U.S. could say something like “Every year that you do not attack Western Europe, we will provide you with economic aid.” This requires continuous action which could actually strengthen the enemy and perhaps encourage him to do the very thing that the promise is supposed to help avoid. However, this is not to say

that deterrence cannot be achieved through promises. A powerful argument can be made for improving the status quo for dissatisfied powers to such an extent that destroying it would not be in their interest. (You should carefully read John Mueller's chapter on this topic.)

Unlike deterrence, compellence must have a deadline. We cannot follow U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson who, when told by the Russians that they would inform the U.S. about the movement of nuclear weapons toward Cuba in "due course," responded by saying that he was prepared to wait until hell froze over. Quite a dramatic statement, but exceedingly bad strategy. Why? Because the Soviets could procrastinate, if not until hell froze over, then until they had their missiles in place and operational. Without a deadline (e.g. "tell us in 24 hours or we shall assume you are installing them and strike to remove them"), the compellent threat can be seriously undermined by delay.

A compellent promise can induce the other party to bring to your attention its good behavior. For example, we could tell the North Koreans that if they dismantle their nuclear program, we shall provide them with economic aid. This should encourage them to come to us with evidence of such dismantling because they will be eager to persuade us to fulfill our promise. (Of course, this does not guarantee that they would not cheat. As we see below, any evidence that they produce must be a costly signal or we would not believe them.)

Generally, if deterrence is the goal, you would do best by choosing a status quo such that if your opponent acts contrary to your wishes, what you do is punishment. This usually involves making the status quo sufficiently pleasant and threatening to make it much worse if he disrupts it. You can also promise to make it progressively better as long as he persists in compliance.

If compellence is the goal, you would do best by choosing a status quo such that what you do if the opponent complies with your demand becomes a reward. This usually requires that you make the status quo sufficiently unpleasant and promise to improve it if he complies. You can also threaten to make the status quo progressively worse if he persists in non-compliance.

The biggest problem with using threats and promises is that one may have no incentive to follow through on them because they are always costly to the player making them.² That is, they may not be credible. But as we have seen, if they are not credible, they will have no effect on the expectations of the opponent, who will ignore and refuse to believe them. If they fail to influence his expectations, he will not change his behavior, and we shall be stuck with having to deal with the consequences. Thus, the art of credible commitments constitutes an enormously important part of achieving the goals of national security.

²It is worth repeating that a threat is costly if it fails, and a promise is costly if it succeeds. If the threat fails, one must carry out the costly action that was threatened. If the threat succeeds, one need not do anything. If the promise succeeds, one would have to deliver the benefits, which is costly. If the promise fails, one need not do anything.

3 Typology of Deterrence

We begin by distinguishing between two types of deterrence with respect to the relationship between the defending actor and the challenger, and the perceived timing of the action. The idea is that the defender issues a deterrence threat that is supposed to prevent the potential challenger from attempting to overturn the status quo.

First, the question is the identity of the actor the threat is designed to protect. **Direct deterrence** refers to threats that are designed to prevent direct attacks on the defender itself. Examples include any posturing that attempts to persuade the potential challenger not to initiate an action against the state that issues the deterrent threat. During the Cold War, both the U.S. and the USSR engaged in direct deterrence with respect to each other, each seeking to prevent the other from trying to attack the two mainlands. By its very nature, direct deterrence is usually quite credible: after all, an army would defend its homeland almost always.

Less clearly credible is **extended deterrence**, which refers to those occasions on which the defender extends his protection to a third party, usually called a *protégé*, and warns that he would resist an attack upon the protégé by the challenger. For example, these days Taiwan is an American protégé, with the U.S. engaged in extended deterrence to prevent China from absorbing the island which it regards officially as a renegade province. Because, by its very nature, extended deterrence involves expanding the “national interest” on a larger sphere than protection of the homeland, it is inherently more amorphous and less well-defined.

A second way to differentiate among types of deterrence is with respect to their timing: is the deterrent commitment intended to prevent some vague potential threat posed by a would-be attacker, or is it intended to prevent an immediately pending action? **General deterrence** refers to situations where there is no clear and present danger of attack and yet an underlying antagonism persists. An example of such a commitment is the American treaty with Japan that secures the island nation against any potential aggressor even though no such threat is apparent at present. The treaty was designed at a time when the USSR could be counted on to press for concessions from the country recently battered into submission by the Americans (and the Red Army in Manchuria), and totally demilitarized. General deterrence is also an apt characterization of U.S. protection of Western Europe from the potential menace of the Red Army during the Cold War.

Immediate deterrence, on the other hand, refers to situations where the challenger can mount an attack at any moment. For example, in 1950 the Chinese attempted to deter the U.S. from pursuing a war of conquest into North Korea but their warnings were ignored, and the Chinese swarmed across the Yalu River to push back the American forces. A successful example would be the 1970 warning by Israel against potential invasion of Jordan by Syria. Every crisis that ends in the outbreak of war is a case of failed immediate deterrence.

Combining these dimensions of deterrence at hand, we can distinguish four generic categories in Table 1.

		<i>Threat Posed by Attacker</i>	
		<i>Actual</i>	<i>Potential</i>
<i>Target of Attack</i>	<i>Defender</i>	Direct-Immediate (Outbreak of Winter War, 1940)	Direct-General (Sino-Soviet border dispute since 1970)
	<i>Protégé</i>	Extended-Immediate (U.S.-Chinese crisis over North Korea, 1950)	Extended-General (U.S. forces in South Korea since 1953)

Table 1: A Typology of Deterrence. Source: Paul Huth, 1988. *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, p. 17.

The Arab-Israeli conflicts would usually fall into the direct deterrence categories: with Israel attempting general deterrence to ward off attack upon its territory, with the periodic failure of its policies and an eruption of yet another war. In the critical days preceding the Six Days War of 1967, for example, Israeli policy-makers were crucially concerned with the credibility of their deterrent posture against Egypt. Once they convinced themselves that immediate deterrence (which they tried to achieve by mobilization) would fail, the road to war lay open. Conversely, the stunning success of 1967, persuaded Israel that its posture would not fail to deter in the future, and this belief goes a long way in explaining their unpreparedness in 1973 when the Arab forces struck back exposing the weakness of the general deterrence policy.

The Great Powers are the states that can afford to indulge in extended deterrence, and many wars have occurred when the protégé drags its protector into conflict by its intransigence, which itself is a result of the promise of security. This was the case with both Serbia and Austria-Hungary in 1914. The Russians had guaranteed the security of Serbia and encouraged the government to resist the ultimatum delivered by the Austrians. The Austrians themselves were goaded by the Germans who issued the so-called “blank check” promising to come to the aid of the empire come what may. In the end, the two defenders found themselves at war with each other over a conflict between their protégés.

This problem of entrapment is what usually causes commitments of extended deterrence to be somewhat less than firm and absolute, which, of course, in turn contributes to them being less credible, and therefore open to more frequent challenges. Hence, such commitments are inherently riskier for the defenders. Take the example of American commitment to Taiwan. The problem is well-known: should the U.S. promise unconditional defense of the island, it may well choose to defy China and declare full independence, something that the Chinese have repeatedly insisted would be a *casus belli* (cause of war). Such a commitment may encourage Taiwan to pursue a reckless policy that would endanger the peace between U.S. and China. On the other hand, should the U.S. appear neglectful in its promise to defend the island, China may well find the

courage to attempt to take it over by force, an outcome that (for now) is not in American interests for it would alter the security balance in the region and throw into doubt American commitments in South Korea and Japan, perhaps triggering an arms race when these countries seek to defend themselves from possible future Chinese aggression. This is why the U.S. has pursued a rather vague policy of *strategic ambiguity*, which means it sometimes supports Taiwan and sometimes does not, and it is never clear exactly how committed the U.S. is and to what. All that both sides know is that the guarantee is not absolute, and yet it is perhaps strong enough to ensure defense against unprovoked Chinese attack.

4 Strategies of Coercion

When you think about strategic coercion, it should be apparent that there are two relevant calculations that actors must make: they must relate the costs and benefits of the status quo to the costs and benefits of an alternative that involves possible war. A potential challenger must weigh the risks of attempting to overturn the status quo against living in peace with a situation he does not like (if he did, he would not be dissatisfied, and hence would not be a potential challenger).

The first calculation is what he should expect to get from fighting, if things come to it. This involves figuring out the costs of war, which include direct costs in terms of new taxes, lives lost, resources squandered, and destruction that would have to be repaired, and indirect costs such as opportunities foregone. The next step would be to determine the potential benefits of victory: these tend to be amorphous and somewhat vague, but sometimes can take very precise measures. Finally, the challenger must come up with some estimate about how likely he is to prevail in the conflict.

Once all of these nebulous concepts are determined, the challenger must compare them to the costs and benefits from remaining at peace. What can he expect to get by not going to war? Is the situation going to get worse in the future? Is it going to improve, if so, how quickly and to what extent? Obviously, the challenger is dissatisfied with the status quo, so a relevant question would be how much of his grievances could be addressed short of war.

When the expected payoffs from remaining at peace are calculated, the challenger compares them to the expected payoffs from fighting, and, should the risks warrant it, throws down the gauntlet, perhaps by issuing a demand or just attacking. Which road he chooses depends on how likely the defender is to concede to demands, and how credible the defender's commitment is.

From the defender's perspective, each of these components can be manipulated to some degree to improve the prospects of success. Obviously, the defender would improve the credibility of his commitment if he could **reduce the value of conflict** to the challenger either by reducing the payoff from fighting and increasing the likelihood that a challenger would be met by the force of

arms. That is, the defender would seek to persuade the challenger that (a) he is unlikely to capitulate, and (b) in the resulting war the challenger cannot hope to gain much.

We have already discussed several strategies a defender can use to make his commitment credible by rendering retreat very unlikely. The defender can improve its threat by *imposing costs on itself* in case it backs down. This is the familiar approach of constraining one's choices. In this scenario, the defender makes the backing down option completely unattractive and so will have no choice but fight. This, of course, gives it credibility to resist in the first place. How can it constrain its choices? By staking its reputation on resistance, for instance. In the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, the U.S. publicly proclaimed its policy and staked its reputation on successful resistance to the Soviets.

Let's now look at some possible strategies that reduce the value of war to the challenger.

1. Decrease the opponent's benefits of winning. For example, by scorched earth policy: the Dutch threaten to blow up the dikes in case of invasion inundating the land and reducing its economic value to invader even if the invasion succeeds;
2. Increase the costs of losing by threatening to punish the loser. For example, by laying waste to the country once it has been defeated, as we have seen in the Mongol and Roman strategies, or perhaps branding losers as "war criminals" and then punishing them. The problem with laying waste to a country is that it reduces the defender's value of victory as well because it reduces the possibilities for economic exploitation and reparations. This makes it unattractive and hence less credible. However, if one does not care about the territory (as the nomads did), then the threat would work.
3. Increase the costs of fighting by punishing the opponent's population or building a strong army to destroy his bases. This is easier said than done, of course. Modern technology allows richer states to reduce their own costs of fighting while retaining the capability to impose prohibitive costs on their opponents. The so-called "smart" weapons are such an example: they could be guided with great precision without exposing soldiers to great risks.
4. Decrease the probability of winning by creating a formidable military with high morale that can defeat him. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to know in advance just how formidable one's army really is. History is replete with stunning surprises when an army widely considered inferior managed to inflict defeats on supposedly superior forces. In the First Gulf War, one of the problems of the coalition and one of the reasons it was not successful in compelling Saddam to leave Kuwait short of war was that nobody really knew how powerful the Americans were. Many analysts predicted heavy

casualties for the U.S.-led coalition, and there's some evidence that Saddam may have hoped to draw it out in a costly battle and thereby split it apart, thereby gaining some bargaining leverage.

Generally, one can pursue a mix of four types of pure coercive strategies. First, the strategy of **punishment** targets cities, key economies, and civilians. The goal is to make fighting extremely painful, perhaps triggering a popular revolt, or at least social disintegration that would make continuation of the war economically impossible. The Allies during World War II did just that to Germany with their strategic bombing. As the surveys after the war showed, massive area bombing did not have the desired impact on the civilians: despite heavy casualties, morale did not drop sufficiently to cause production to fall below critical levels. On the other hand, targeting key industries (e.g. rubber, transportation) had brought Germany to the brink of collapse.

Wholesale destruction involved in punishment strategies may undermine the opponent's capability to wage war but can also stiffen his resolve to fight it to the end. The problem is that by reducing things he values to rubble, one makes continued fighting a cheap alternative. Simply put, the opponent has little left to lose, so he may prolong the war in the hopes that his residual capacity to inflict pain would persuade the other party to offer better terms. The **risk** strategy involves gradually increasing civilian damage which avoids wholesale destruction in favor of demonstrating ability to impose costs. Presumably, the opponent would concede in order to preserve what he has left and avoid future costs. The U.S. may have attempted such a strategy in Vietnam by purposefully avoiding doing extensive damage to installations that may have guaranteed victory (e.g. bombing irrigation system and destroying rice cultivation fields).

A more straightforward strategy involves the **denial** of objectives to the opponent by attacking his military strategy. This involves weakening his military strength to the point where one could conquer territory. This can be done through direct engagement and attrition of field forces or, better yet, through interdiction of supply lines, destruction of arms manufacturing industries, or disruption of communication. This is the strategy that military planners spend most of their time thinking about and perfecting. It is also extremely difficult to operationalize with success.

Finally, the **decapitation** strategy involves the targeting and destruction of the leadership and the command structure of the opponent. If successful, this would render his remaining forces "headless" and hence incapable of resistance. New technology makes decapitation a bit less implausible than it used to be: after all very few leaders willingly expose themselves to direct risks. Of course, this strategy could involve engineering coups or assassinations.

These four strategies deal with reducing the value of conflict. Another strategy that a defender could use if his commitment to use of force is not credible, involves **reducing the value of unopposed gain** to the challenger. That is, even if the opponent succeeds in taking what it wants short of fighting, the new status quo would not be as beneficial as he would have hoped. For example, one could

threaten that following an action that overturns the existing status quo, the new situation would result in an expensive arms race that would be too costly and perhaps ruinous to the successful challenger. Obviously, such a tactic would rarely be seen as credible because it also imposes serious costs on the defender and because the challenger has presumably acquired something valuable that would help him endure the escalating costs.

Finally, a strategy the defender could use to dissuade the challenger from persisting in its contrary ways would be to **improve the value of the status quo**, which would make overturning it less attractive. This involves manipulating costs and benefits, as usual:

1. Increase the benefits of the status quo. For example, agree to some concessions, secure challenger's membership in some organization that might be beneficial to him, and redistribute benefits (access to markets) accordingly. This, of course, may backfire because by definition it improves the strength of the challenger, and demonstrates that the defender is not entirely committed, or is at least afraid of provoking a clash. This, at least, is the usual interpretation for the Second World War, when Britain and France, still remembering the carnage of the Great War, tried to appease the Germans, thereby encouraging them to demand even more.
2. Reduce the costs of the status quo. For example, agreements to eliminate certain expensive types of weapons, reduction of inventories. This makes living with the current conditions less painful to the challenger. However, since such measures are usually reciprocal, they also undermine the defender's capability to resist.
3. Reduce probability of worsening of the status quo. That is, alleviate the challenger's concern that things will get worse if it does not act now. One explanation about German behavior in 1914 argues that the German's perception of the rising Russian threat convinced the leadership that the country had a relatively brief **window of opportunity** to act before it was faced with the enormous power of the rapidly industrializing empire. Similar calculations played a great role in Israel's decision to strike preemptively in 1967 as well.

Consider the problem of an **arms race**, which increases the costs of the status quo because the actors have to pay the escalating costs of maintaining the appropriate levels of armaments. But this reduces the net value of the status quo for both and makes it less attractive. This causes a problem with stability because nobody likes the status quo sufficiently, and the dissatisfied challenger may be particularly prone to resolve his grievances with violence. War becomes likely because deterrence may fail and it may do so for reasons that are not immediately related to the probability of winning a war.

Thinking about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in these terms makes the apparently suicidal war more understandable. It is not mystery today how the

U.S. practically ensured that Japan would attack. President Roosevelt deliberately set out to reduce the value of the status quo to an extent that even a war with minuscule chances of success was preferable to living (and dying) with the status quo. The U.S. and Britain (helped by the Australians) had imposed an embargo on many strategic goods that the Japanese empire desperately needed to sustain its conquests in China, which it deemed necessary for its own continued survival.

Nobody in Japan really believed that the country could win against the U.S. in a long war. However, many believed that it could prevail temporarily and that peace could be had then at better terms. Japan's problem was twofold: first, the U.S. had made the status quo unbearable, and second, the Japanese doubted that the Americans would want to fight for things peripheral to their interests but vital to the Japanese. So, net value of status quo low and defender's credibility low. This means that the Japanese were practically undeterrable in 1941 after the U.S. refused to improve the status quo through negotiations. Seen in this light, Pearl Harbor is not a mystery at all.

5 The Iraq War, 1990-91

Despite our conceptual distinction between deterrence and compellence, in practice the two are quite difficult to tell apart, and sometimes this results in confusion about the appropriate tactics one should use. In particular, since both may involve some actual application of force, they may be hard to distinguish from brute force altogether. Consider, for example, the First Persian Gulf War.

It started out with general extended deterrence through American policies in the Middle East according to which a hostile country that attempted to gain control over the vast oil reserves in the region would be met with U.S. resistance. The policy was stated in terms of anti-communist doctrine by Presidents Eisenhower and Carter, but its general thrust was clear.

It is important to realize that When Saddam Hussein began inching toward invasion of Kuwait, Iraq had legitimate grievances there. First, the border with Kuwait that cut off Iraq from the sea was arbitrarily imposed by the British in 1899 when Kuwait became a British protectorate (the status lasted until 1961 when it was granted independence). The Kuwaitis were pumping large amounts of oil, some of it by illegally siphoning off underground deposits from Iraq, and were keeping prices low, cutting severely Iraq's income.

Second, Iraq badly needed income because the bloody eight-year war with Iran that had begun in 1980 had left it economically devastated, and Kuwait held a huge chunk of Iraq's resulting debt. Iraq asked both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to negotiate over the debts claiming that it had performed a service to the Arab world by stopping the expansion of revolutionary Iran.

Third, Saddam also had ample reason to believe the U.S. and its allies would not act. After all, they had given him \$40 billion worth of arms to fight Iran, nearly all of it on credit. At the time, Iran seemed the larger threat despite the well-known brutality of Saddam's regime. Finally, the U.S. government reassured

Iraq that Bush would veto any Congressional attempt to impose sanctions on Iraq over human rights abuses.

When in July 1990 Iraq's negotiations with Kuwait ground to a halt, Saddam Hussein began a massive military buildup on the border and summoned the American ambassador April Glaspie. He outlined Iraq's grievances and promised not to invade before another round of negotiations. Although the ambassador expressed concern over the buildup, her non-committal response that the U.S. had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait," was interpreted as giving Iraq tacit approval for the invasion.

Instead of switching to a policy of immediate extended deterrence, the U.S. seemed to have tacitly acquiesced to an invasion. On August 2, 1990, Iraqi troops crossed the border and occupied Kuwait. The first U.S. response was to secure Saudi Arabia from potential invasion by stationing troops there and issuing a clear immediate deterrent threat that warned Iraq not to attempt to expand its aggression. This is where the line between deterrence and compellence begins to blur for this threat could also be viewed as compelling Saddam to halt his invasion and not go any further (it is unclear whether he had any intention of doing so).

After brief vacillation, American response solidified around an attempt to compel Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait. President Bush managed to get the U.N. to brand the aggression as an illegal land-grab, and began mobilizing forces to eject Iraq from Kuwait. At first, the coalition applied vigorous sanctions but there was slight evidence that they would work: after all, Saddam was not the one paying the costs. The penultimate phase of compellence began in January 1991 when a month-long bombing campaign. However, when the last-minute peace initiatives by the USSR and Iran failed, the coalition went on the offensive, and in four days secured a cease-fire that guaranteed the complete withdrawal of Iraq. The policy then reverted to one of general deterrence warning Saddam not to attempt such an adventure again.

6 Next Time on PS12...

We have thus far seen how the fact that the use of force can be rational one could credible threaten to use it. We then explored two abstract forms of strategic coercion, deterrence and compellence. We carefully argued how limited force could be applied under certain conditions to extract desired results or concessions from an opponent. All this makes force a rational tool of foreign policy.

Until, that is, you consider the arrival of nuclear weapons. How could an instrument of such enormous destructive power ever be utilized for political purposes? We have now arrived at our next intriguing puzzle: the nuclear weapon, but its very nature, seems to defy rational use. Even the threat to use it seems incredible against an opponent similarly equipped. The nuclear weapons seem to have caused a revolution in military thinking, in particular in relating military means to political ends by undoing the credibility of the threat to employ it. This is the topic we shall explore next.