Briefing Memo

Compellence and Coercive Diplomacy: Concepts and Characteristics

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When using military power as physical force, it is possible to achieve an objective not only by directly exercising this force, but also with the threat of force. The strategies based on the threat of force include compellence and coercive diplomacy as well as deterrence, and they have some contrasting features. During the Cold War, deterrence was the main focus of policy and research, and even today, its importance has not waned. After the Cold War, however, there have been more cases of compellence and coercive diplomacy, while the number of studies on these topics is increasing, too. For example, since the 1990s, the United States has repeatedly used various forms of sanctions and the threat of military action to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear development. This can be considered an example of compellence and coercive diplomacy. However, while deterrence is widely known, understanding of compellence and coercive diplomacy has yet to spread. Therefore, in order to be a help in promoting the understanding of the strategies, this paper will take a closer look at the concepts and characteristics of compellence and coercive diplomacy.

Seminal works by Schelling and George

Thomas Schelling was the first to create the word "compellence" and elucidate its concept (Shelling 1966). Schelling categorizes methods for achieving an objective using military force largely into brute force and coercion. The former is a method for achieving an objective directly using force without relation to other party's will. For example, it include destroying objects or killing people that are unwanted or taking others' belongings by force. In contrast, coercion is a method of achieving an objective by affecting another party using threats to make them act in a certain way. For example, the aim is to convince the other party to abandon or give up a certain object, following the coercer's demands. If coercion is successful, the other party will choose on their own and follow the demands due to threat, even though they originally did not want to do so.

Schelling combines this categorization of brute force and coercion, along with whether the objective is to change or maintain the status quo, to categorize military force functions into four areas (see table). Attempts to change the status quo using brute force are categorized as offense. This refers to taking something owned by another party by force or destroying it, for example. Conversely, attempts to maintain the status quo using brute force are categorized as defense. In case of being invaded by another party, this means

	Brute force	Coercion
Change status quo	Offense	Compellence
Maintain status quo	Defense	Deterrence

(Prepared based on Schelling 1966 and the table on Schaub 1998, 44)

eliminating the invading party by force to block their actions. Deterrence is an attempt to realize the same objective of maintaining the status quo but using coercion. The aim is to prevent the other party from taking a certain action in the first place, by demanding the other party not to perform such an action and threatening to inflict punishment or block the action using brute force in case of defiance.
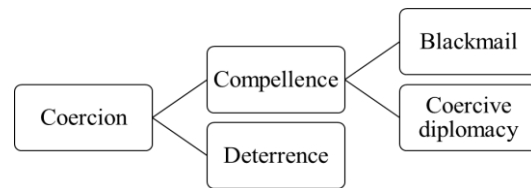
An attempt to change the status quo by coercion is compellence. In contrast to deterrence, in compellence demands are made for the other party to take a specific action. The compeller attempts to get the other party act in the manner demanded by threatening that they will face a damaging outcome or the purpose will be anyway achieved through brute force if they do not comply. Examples of specific demands include making the other party initiate a new action it has not done before, stop an action the counterparty is currently performing, or undo an action that the counterparty has already performed. In each of these cases, demands are made for the other party to act in a way to change the current situation. In this manner, compellence is a strategy of using threats to change the status quo. Even if it is a strategy that relies on the same threat, unlike deterrence, compellence has a more proactive nature. At the same time, even if the purpose is to change the status quo, compellence aims to have the other party take the action of their own accord. This is different from attacks to change the status quo using brute force.

Alexander George also contributed greatly to research on coercion strategy along with Schelling (George et al. 1971; George and Simons 1994). Compellence as presented by Schelling can be employed in a defensive form where the other party is made to change their behavior in response to their unwanted action, as well as in an aggressive form where the other party that has done nothing is made to take a specific action. George isolates the two, calling aggressive compellence "blackmail" and defensive compellence "coercive diplomacy," and he expands discussions of the latter. In addition to this categorization of aggressive and defensive, George cites the emphasis on diplomatic aspects, such as negotiations, and not only threats and pressure, as a reason for using the term coercive diplomacy. While Schelling analyzes the characteristics of compellence deductively using the knowledge of game theory, George and his co-authors study the success conditions of coercive diplomacy inductively through comparative case study research.

Compellence and coercive diplomacy are attractive strategies. Compared to achieving an objective using brute force, if the counterparty follows demands with threats alone, the objective can be achieved more efficiently. Also, depending on the nature of the objective, there are times where it is impossible to directly achieve the objective and it can only be realized by having the other party change their actions. For example, when wanting to stop another country from possessing weapons of mass destruction, it is possible to eliminate weapons it already has using brute force. However, in order to have them abandon their development program for weapons of mass destruction, there is a need to have the other party decide to give up on development on their own, and this cannot be achieved with brute force. In this manner, as a method of influencing the other party's will, compellence and coercive diplomacy are strategies widely used around the world on par with deterrence.

Confusion of Terms and Concepts

Summarizing the concepts expounded by Schelling and George indicates that coercion is a concept that includes both compellence and deterrence, while coercive diplomacy is a concept that aims for a certain type of compellence (see figure). However, as various scholars have researched this field thereafter, the same words have been used with different meanings or different words altogether have been used,

(Prepared based on the figure on Jakobsen 2011, 155)

resulting in confusion. For example, coercion is sometimes used to indicate a strategy in the location of compellence in the figure (Pape 1996). In addition, the word coercive diplomacy is also used in a form that includes both compellence and deterrence in place of coercion in the figure (Sperandei 2006), and others have created new words such as strategic coercion for the place (Freedman 1998). This indicates that discussions by various scholars are being deployed using various terms.

One of the points of debate for defining the concepts is the stance on the actual use of force. In case of deterrence, deciding to go ahead with military action after a threat represents a situation where the other party took a specific action against the demands, and therefore means the failure of deterrence. Deterrence is a passive and static strategy. The expectation is that after a line is drawn and threats made, the other party will not cross that line and as a result the deterrer, too, will not have to take action.

In contrast, compellence can include the actual use of military force, in addition to the threat of force. Since the status quo is not preferred in case of compellence, the side using compellence needs to take the initiative in convincing the other party. In other words, there is a need to continually apply pressure, until the other party accepts the demands and takes a specific action. The actual use of force in compellence is expected to exemplify pain and damage that will be further inflicted if the demands are not heeded. By influencing the cost-benefit calculation of the other party, it aims to drive the other party to decide to accept the demands of the compeller in order to avoid further damages.

However, there is a difference of opinion among scholars whether an act falls under the category of compellence or coercive diplomacy based on the extent of military action. Of course, if the objective has been directly achieved using military force, this is the use of brute force and means compellence failed. Meanwhile, even the cases of large-scale use of force can be considered within the scope of compellence, if the aim is to change the other party's action without achieving the objective using brute force. For example, there is research that views the strategic bombing campaigns during World War II and the Vietnam War as examples of compellence (while it is another thing if the compellent attempts were successful or not) (Pape 1996). In the case of George, he deems instances where the force used is limited as examples of coercive diplomacy, and discusses that full-scale use of force itself means a failure of coercive diplomacy. From the same standpoint, there are some scholars who segmentize concepts, including the introduction of new terms, such as demarcation of wartime compellence and coercive diplomacy (Art and Greenhill 2018). Finally, there are scholars who do not include any actual use of force as they view coercive diplomacy as the use of threats only (Haun 2015).

The differences in position regarding the use of force cause differences in the evaluation of whether a case was successful as compellence or coercive diplomacy (Bratton 2005). When using the threshold of limited use of force in defining concepts, the question of what constitutes "limited" becomes a major issue (Jakobsen 2011). On the other hand, when considering compellence as achieving the objective in short of brute force, almost all use of force for changing the status quo, including most of the wars in history, would be compellence. The exceptions are limited types of military action which directly achieve objectives regardless of the other party's will, such as the creation of a fait accompli, war of extermination, and hostage rescue using special forces. When taking this stance, the results should not be simply separated into success or failure, but the extent of the success should be evaluated based on the extent of force used until the other party accepts the demands. For example, in the instance of the other party accepting the demands after a few skirmishes, and the instance of the other party first accepting the demands only after being pushed to the brink of defeat following all-out war, the former will have a higher degree of success as compellence (Pape 1996).

In this manner, the terminology and definitions of concepts differ among scholars in the field of compellence and coercive diplomacy. As a result, when touching upon the individual discussions, attention must be heeded as to how the terms and concepts are defined in them.

Punishment and Denial

Similar to deterrence, the pressure used in compellence and coercive diplomacy can largely be separated into punishment and denial. Both attempt to affect the other party's cost-benefit calculation, but the part of the calculation affected differs. Punishment-type pressure is the threat of imposing punishment on the actions of the other party at a cost that exceeds the benefit that the other party should obtain from their current actions. Denial-type pressure is the threat of impeding the gain that should be obtained by the other party from its current actions (Johnson el al. 2002).

In the case of the pure form, punishment inflicts costs on the other party without damaging the other party's ability to continue its current actions (in some cases, these damages cannot be made). Therefore, no matter how much one continues to cause the other party to incur costs, the other party is able to continue the current actions, and the decision of whether to accept the compeller's demands to change the actions will remain in the other party's hands (Freedman 1998). A familiar example of punishment-type pressure is the threats of reducing allowance to make a child stop always playing video games. The punishment of reducing allowance does not directly hinder the child from playing the video games. However, from the overall cost-benefit calculation, the child is expected to select the action of stopping the video games.

In contrast, in the case of denial, the aim is to change the other party's actions by either reducing the other party's ability to continue their current actions or showing a stance of impeding the continuation of these actions using brute force. Therefore, if denial-type pressure is carried out continuously, the other party will lose their ability to continue the current behavior, which will lead toward objective achievement using brute force (Freedman 1998). In this sense, the difference between compellence and coercive diplomacy through denial and objective achievement using brute force can be understood as that of degree (Byman and Waxman 2002). An example of denial-type pressure is, in the case above, the threats of taking away the game instead of reducing allowance. In this case,

implementing the threat will make it impossible for the child to play the game itself. In existing research, discussions indicate denial is more effective than punishment (Pape 1996; Art and Cronin 2003), but further research is needed about what type of conditions make punishment more effective.

Success Conditions

Since the research of Schelling and George and co-authors, various scholars have explored the success conditions of compellence and coercive diplomacy. However, a consensus still remains to be achieved. Of the conditions examined thus far in the literature, multiple scholars have pointed out the importance of such conditions as (1) for matters causing confrontation, the compeller has greater interests and stronger motivation than the other party; (2) the threat is serious and credible; (3) use of positive inducements (using not only a stick but carrot, too); (4) presence of domestic support; (5) presence of strong leadership; and (6) lack of support from outside for the other party. In addition, although there is a difference of opinion regarding importance, there are researchers who point out the importance of conditions such as (1) the extent, clarity and publicness of the demands; (2) the degree of urgency accompanied with the demands; (3) use of exemplary military force; and (4) presence of international support (see research indicated elsewhere and Blechman and Wittes 1999, etc.).

One of the causes of a difference in opinion over success conditions is the difference in cases used in empirical studies. The concepts of compellence and coercive diplomacy can be applied to various contexts; thus, an important condition for success in one context may not be important in another, or there could be no expectations of satisfying such in the first place depending on the context. For example, when using compellence or coercive diplomacy in the context of humanitarian intervention or peace operations, since intervention is made as a third party in a dispute of other parties, it is fundamentally difficult to satisfy the condition of "the compeller having a greater interests and stronger motivation than the other party." The success of compellence or coercive diplomacy in such a situation could indicate that conditions are necessary that differ from those in the context deeply related to the interests of the compeller. Given this, pursuing studies with focus narrowed on specific contexts is considered beneficial to more specifically understanding success conditions. On the other hand, there is a new data set focused exclusively on compellence and coercive diplomacy, which is enabling quantitative research using data on large numbers of cases (Sechser 2011). Pursuing studies by combining multiple research methods is expected to further elucidate causal relationships.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the concepts and characteristics of compellence and coercive diplomacy. As discussed above, compellence and coercive diplomacy are attractive strategies that, if successful, can change the status quo without the cost of using force. However, if the other party does not acquiesce to threats, the compeller will need to put threats into practice and continue applying pressure until the other party accepts the demands. If the other party does not accept the demands even after ratcheting up pressure, the compeller will be forced to choose either achieve the objective using brute force or give up the objective achievement (George and Simons 1994). In addition, compellence and coercive diplomacy are not a one-way street, but mutual interaction between the

compeller and the other party, since the other party, too, can take counter measures to make the compeller change its actions (Freedman 1998; Byman and Waxman 2002). When using compellence or coercive diplomacy, these risks and difficulties must be considered. In addition to the frequent occurrence of interventions in civil wars, today it has been pointed out that there has been a return to competition between major powers. It is believed that countries will increasingly use compellence and coercive diplomacy in order to change the status quo into their preferred state. It can be said there is a need to continually elucidate the effectiveness and limitations of compellence and coercive diplomacy as a policy tool based on accumulated knowledge through research in the field.

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