

Why the United States' coercive diplomacy against North Korea failed

Abstract

Coercive diplomacy, applied as a strategy, is constituted by diplomatic negotiations combined with threats of, or the actual use of limited military force, as a way of backing the negotiations. The purpose of this paper is to (1) examine if the United States' attempts from January 2001 until October 2006, to persuade North Korea to disarm and reverse its nuclear weapon programmes, was a case of coercive diplomacy. But I also, and more importantly, set out to (2) find explanations to why the U.S. failed in its effort to get North Korea to comply with this demand, during the same period of time. I will carry out these aims through a case study guided by the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy. I argue that the United States' strategy to get North Korea into compliance indeed was a case of coercive diplomacy. And that the US failed due to the lack of fulfilment of the core conditions that favour a successful implementation of coercive diplomacy.

Key Words: Coercive diplomacy, U.S., North Korea, Nuclear weapons, Disarmament

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1 Introduction

In the course of the Six-day War, Israel was appropriately described by Middle East analyst Malcolm Kerr as merely "a football for the Arabs, kicked into the field by the discontented Syrians, then back again by Nasser". However, with regards to the eventual triumphant outcome for Israel, and to continue Kerr's analysis "it became a case of the football kicking the players" (Piggott 2006). Now, according to some, North Korea has throughout its history, seen its small part of the Korean peninsula as a shrimp among whales, and has thus been forced to use clever tricks rather than direct confrontation to survive. However, since the end of the 1980s North Korea has regularly been accused by the United States and the rest of the international community of pursuing a clandestine plutonium nuclear programme and confrontation has ever since, been imminent. The already precarious situation became further elevated in early October 2002 when North Korean officials surprised the U.S. and the rest of the international community by admitting to having a clandestine nuclear weapons programme based on highly enriched uranium (HEU)¹. Shortly after, Pyongyang withdrew the statement and thus denied its existence (Interview Hans Blix 2007-05-29).

Still the United States continues to be the most dominant external actor on the Korean peninsula. Although U. S. primacy is almost world wide accepted, the description in this case is particularly apt: history, geopolitics, and geo-economics combined, all fuel U. S. interest in North East Asia (NEA). Thus Korea's location at the strategic crossroads of the NEA-region makes it an intrinsically valuable place for the United States to focus its concern (Kim 2006:225-26). But despite all this interest and the hegemonic position in the world order that the United States presently holds, it could not forcibly convince Pyongyang to reverse its nuclear weapon programmes and terminate them indefinitely. This is what puzzles me.

¹ North Korea's HEU programme was a violation of the Agreed Framework, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the DPRK-IAEA Safeguards Agreement and the North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (Fact Sheet on DPRK Nuclear Safeguards, 2003).

1.1 The U.S. being both the problem *and* the solution

According to Samuel Kim (2006:225-226), the Bush administration –in the eyes of both Seoul and Pyongyang and albeit for different reasons –constitutes both a part of the Korean problem *and* the Korean solution. So what is the problem and what is the solution? Hopefully this thesis will help explaining this paradox.

The main focus of the thesis will be on the U.S. attempt during the period of January 2001 until October 2006 to solve the security problem that arose with the developments in North Korea's efforts to develop nuclear weapons. According to the International Crisis Group this effort presented North East Asia, the United States, and the whole international community with an extremely precarious security challenge (International Crisis Group). Although the United States might seem to be at great geographic distance, the Pacific Ocean has according to Kim (2006:226) "increasingly become something akin to an 'American lake' since the end of World War II". This would mean that the United States acts in Korea as if it were a *de facto* neighbour.

If a neighbouring nuclear North Korea was one of the main U.S. concerns and vice versa, what would then be the solution that the United States allegedly was a part of? Well, the answer could simply be 'convincing North Korea of becoming a non-nuclear weapon state'.

With the Bush administrations coming into office in January 2001, Washington opted for a more coercive approach towards North Korea. However, and this is where the puzzle of thesis the explicitly reveals itself: in October 2006 North Korea supposedly conducted its first plutonium based nuclear weapon test. Thus, North Korea overtly showed the U.S. its new capabilities and its unwillingness to cave in to the pressure that it had been exposed to and to the contrary confronted the world's only superpower heads on. So to pick up on the pictorial language which I initially embarked upon, just as the football kicked the players in the Six-Day War 1967 as Kerr suggests, the shrimp undeniably bit the largest of whales in October 2006.

This raises questions such as 'why was the United States left unable and unsuccessful to forcefully convince an apparently tiny state as North Korea?' To be able to provide an answer to such a comprehensive outset it is necessary to specify the questions and identify what strategy the Bush administration applied and why this strategy failed in its obvious aim of persuading Pyongyang to abandon its partly proclaimed nuclear weapon programmes.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

My hypothesis is that the U.S. made a combination of coercive and diplomatic attempts to persuade North Korea to comply with its demands and that these attempts failed during the period of January 2001 until October 2006. Hence I find it utterly suitable to use a framework that incorporates military force and diplomacy in the same theory.

I will argue that the U.S. applied a coercive strategy since the Bush administration used coercive measures in its ambition of forcefully persuading North Korea to comply with its demands. Such measures were amongst other, threats of sanctions, threats of the use of force, and the displaying of military capacity, as a way backing the latter. Thus, I find it intriguing to ask the following question:

How was U.S. strategy against North Korea characterized during the period of 2001-2006? And more importantly; why did U.S. fail in its efforts to persuade North Korea to comply with its demands?

The chief purpose of this paper is thus to examine, and give suggestions to why U.S. coercive, diplomatic efforts failed in its aim of persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapon programmes. To this end I will apply the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy. The theory seeks to establish a framework over which conditions that are favourable for a successful implementation of a diplomacy that entails coercive elements. My purpose of applying the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy is to single out key variables that may have been left unfulfilled in the U.S. strategy and thus caused the failure.

2 Method

2.1 Qualitative case study

I have opted for a qualitative case study on the basis that the North Korean case constitutes yet another unique example in context of applied coercive diplomacy. However, as pressure on the Iranian government increases with regards to its nuclear policy, similarities are occurring. Hence an assessment of U.S. attempts of coercive diplomacy may have, if yet limited, perhaps some value for cases like Iran.

The case study may also be valuable for the theory of coercive diplomacy in general. When Alexander George –he who first developed the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy –presented his findings in *Forceful Persuasion –Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* in 1991, he based his construction of the theoretical framework on seven cases² where coercive diplomacy was applied. The cases have had different outcomes in terms and success and failure. Adding yet another example may be beneficial for the development of the theory.

The study will take a theory testing character since I will use one theory (the theory of coercive diplomacy) which, in terms of a concrete hypothesis (that U.S. attempts of forceful persuasion existed and failed against North Korea between 2001-2006), will be tested on empirical material (The so called second U.S.-North Korean nuclear crisis of 2001-2006) (Esaiasson *et al* 2003:40).

To sum up, by analyzing a contemporary example of coercive diplomacy I will be able to test if the theory of coercive diplomacy –or more explicitly the conditions that allegedly favour a successful outcome –still is to be regarded as valid.

A major problem with pure case studies concerns the absence of comparable elements. Without such elements it is troublesome to decide whether or not the theory will find adequate support. The problem originates in the fact that it is difficult to draw conclusions concerning if the value on the variables ought to, respectively be considered high or low, successful or a failure (Esaiasson *et al*

² These are (1) the United States-Japan relations leading to Pearl Harbour; (2) The Laos Crisis of 1961-62; (3) the Cuban Missile Crisis; (4) Vietnam 1965: the failure of air power to coerce Hanoi; (5) the Reagan administration's use of coercive diplomacy against Nicaragua; (6) U.S. coercive diplomacy against Libyan-inspired terrorism, December 1985-April 1986, and; (7) the Persian Gulf Crisis 1991.

2003:119). However, in terms of my methodological ambitions I view my study as a contemporary amendment within an already cumulative field of research.

2.2 A note on the material

In the study of contemporary crises, the problem of lack of access to primary sources such as letters, memoranda, cabinet papers etc is ever present. In addition, much of the available literature on U.S. diplomacy towards North Korea mainly covers the period up until the eruption of the first nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula in the beginning of the 1990s, thus omitting many topical developments essential for this thesis. However, a small number of books do stretch their analyses beyond the millennium shift but usually halt in scope with the North Korean withdrawal from the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003. Hence I have been forced to rely partly on internet sources when I have collected my empirical material.

I have also conducted an interview with Hans Blix on May 29, 2007 and therefore would like to raise the concerns about the material related to this interview. There is always a risk of misinterpretation in such situations which in turns affects the reliability of the material.

Also, not to be omitted is the fact that despite the qualitative character of this study the conclusions are provisional and subject to improvement as new information becomes available. However, the empirical material on which the analysis is based relies on very good sources from the public domain. The same is true for the theoretical material since I have mainly referred to primary sources i.e. those scholars that have constructed the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy.

3 Theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy

3.1 Coercive diplomacy

According to Alexander George, the overall idea of coercive diplomacy is to “back one’s demand on an adversary with the threat of punishment for non-compliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with the demand” (George 1991:4). More explicitly formulated, coercive diplomacy is a strategy that “seeks to persuade an opponent to cease his aggression rather than bludgeon him into stopping” (George 1991:5). Hence, coercive diplomacy offers an alternative to reliance on military action since it is focused on persuasion rather than the use of blunt force to convince an opponent to cease his aggression.

Positive inducement may or may not be included in the strategy of coercive diplomacy, depending on the situation. When they are, these inducements can involve either a transfer of resources to the target, or the offer of other tangible benefits (Art & Cronin 2003:7). Important to remember is that any ‘carrot’ in such a strategy can be a variety of things the target of coercion values. Thus the magnitude and significance of the positive inducement can stretch from a seemingly trivial concession of a face-saving character to an extensive one that brings about a settlement to the crisis through a genuine, balanced *quid pro quo*. And just as threats of punishment must be credible to the opponent, so must the carrots and reassurance offered be (George 1991:10-11).

Having that said, the use of force is far from excluded from the concept. But when applied, force is only displayed in an exemplary manner i.e. in a limited way to persuade the opponent to back down. By “exemplary” George means “the use of just enough force of an appropriate kind to demonstrate resolution to protect one’s interests and to establish the credibility of one’s determination to use more force if necessary” (George 1991:5). The use of exemplary action is according to George, not an obligatory requirement in the strategy of coercive diplomacy. Thus, he emphasises that a crisis may be resolved without the resort to demonstrations of military force, or to the contrary, the strategy of coercive diplomacy may be abandoned in favour of full-scale military operations without any preliminary use of exemplary force (George 1991:6). Coercion is however a broad term and I find it necessary to discriminate between different types of coercive strategies.

In accordance with Art and Cronin, I distinguish between coercive diplomacy and coercive attempts. The main difference between the two concepts is the presence or absence of the employment of force. Despite the fact that exemplary force i.e. limited use of force, not necessarily is an obligatory requirement in the strategy of coercive diplomacy, its essential feature is nevertheless the *threat* of use of force. Coercive attempts exploit levers over a target, but these levers do not, according to Art and Cronin, involve the threat or use of force (Art & Cronin 2003:6f). Hence I do not consider cases that involve *only* the use of economic sanctions, *only* the withholding of benefits of a target, *only* the cessation of benefits that a target currently enjoys, or more generally, any coercive attempts that does not include some employment of military power, as cases of coercive diplomacy.

But even when the threat of use of force, or the actual use of force, is present there are still a few strategies that differentiate in their coercive character. Hence I find it necessary to make a further division in my aim to narrow down what constitutes coercive diplomacy.

3.2 Coercive diplomacy vs. deterrence, compellence and blackmail

An excellent starting point for the discussion is to distinguish the concept of coercive diplomacy from deterrence and compellence with the help of Lawrence Freedman's term 'strategic coercion'. This term constitutes an umbrella concept incorporating all threat based strategies (see fig. 1.1). Friedman defines 'strategic coercion' as "the deliberate and purposive use of overt threats to influence another's strategic choices" (Friedman 1998:15). Since it entails coercion, coercive diplomacy is a type of compellence.

For Thomas Schelling –he who first coined the term *compellence* –the distinction between compellence and deterrence is "the difference between an action intended to make an adversary do something" i.e. compellence, and an action "intended to keep him from starting something" i.e. deterrence (Art and Cronin 2003:7). Blackmail and coercive diplomacy are sub branches of compellence because they aim at persuading the target to do something (an offensive strategy) and stop doing something (a defensive strategy), respectively (Jakobsen 1998:12). This division into sub branches is important to stress since the more generic term 'compellence' does not (1) distinguish between defensive and offensive use of coercive threats. Nor does it (2) emphasise the more flexible diplomacy that can employ non-coercive persuasion and accommodation *as well as* coercive threats (George 1991:5). In essence, George's concept of coercive diplomacy stresses, in contrast to that of compellence, negotiation and incentives as important features of the coercive strategy.

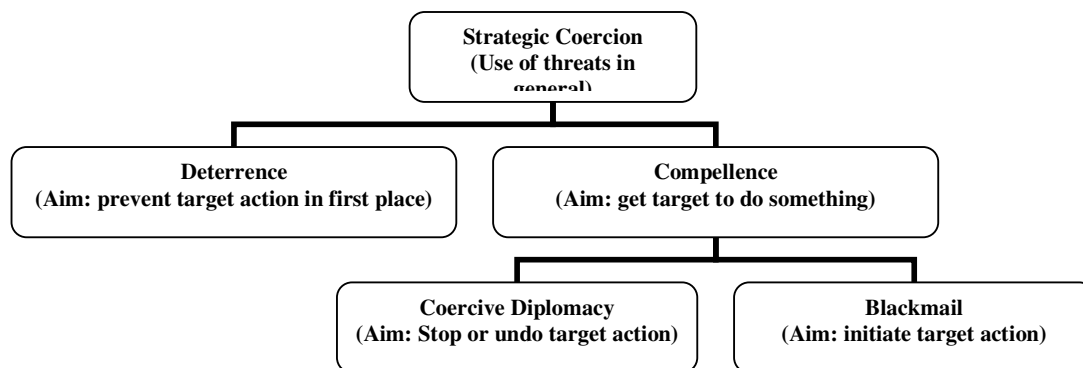


Figure 1.1 Overview over existing terms concerning the use of threats

There are basically two demands that can be made on the opponent and that is either to ask him to stop what he is doing, or ask him to undo what he has done i.e. to reverse an action embarked upon. George argues that the first type of demand –to stop something –generally requests less of the adversary and may be easier to accomplish than the second type –to undo something (George 1991:6). Regardless of which, to realize the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy it must be translated into a more constituent based strategy. Hence the following chapter will deal with how strategic approaches of coercive diplomacy may be constructed.

3.3 Strategies of coercive diplomacy

Alexander George argues that there are *variables*, or “empty boxes” that policy-makers must fill in when constructing a strategy of coercive diplomacy to apply in a specific situation. Accordingly, policy-makers must decide (George 1991:7-9); (1) what to demand of the opponent; (2) and how to create a sense of urgency for compliance with the demand; (3) and what kind of punishment to threaten for non-compliance, and; (4) whether to rely solely on the threat of punishment or also to offer conditional inducements of a positive character to secure acceptance of the demand. Basically, any strategy of coercive diplomacy is therefore characterized by three set *elements*³, (1) a demand; (2) a threat, and; (3) time pressure.

³ I chose to narrow down the basic elements of coercive strategy only to cover three elements. A fourth and fifth element could include the application of positive inducements and the use of exemplary force, respectively. But since these elements are optional I do not consider them a part of the basic characteristics of the concept.

First, there must be a specific *demand* formulated vis-à-vis the opponent. The aim with the demand is to stop or undo an action he has already embarked upon. It is important that there be no ambiguity about what is exactly required from the opponent. Naturally, and as Tom Sauer states, “[s]uccess or failure of coercive diplomacy depends on whether the demand will be fulfilled” (Sauer 2006:2).

Second, the demand has to be backed by a *threat*. As Alexander George states, the coercer must “create in the opponent the expectation of costs of sufficient magnitude to erode his motivation to continue what he is doing.” (George 1991:11). According to Sauer, most of the times, the threat has to be made explicit. The threat can then be backed by action of some kind. For instance, organizing military exercises close to the threatened state may verify the realness of the threat.

Third, apart from having a demand combined with a threat, a sense of urgency must be established. Coercive diplomacy thus requires some kind of *time pressure*. The time pressure could either take the shape of explicit deadlines or merely work in favour of creating a sense of urgency for compliance (George 1991:11-14).

Alexander George makes a distinction between four types of strategies that entail all, or some of the three basic elements. He calls these four, ‘variants of the strategy of coercive diplomacy’. These strategies are a result of how the above mentioned variables are filled. They should be regarded as (Sauer 2006:3, George 1991:4-9); (1) the explicit ultimatum; (2) the tacit ultimatum; (3) the try-and-see approach, and (4) the gradual turning of the screw. Each of these has their advantages and weaknesses and it is possible to move from one category to another during the conflict.

3.3.1 The ultimatums

First, there is the ‘explicit ultimatum’ that sets a deadline. This is the starkest kind of strategy and it entails three components; a specific demand; a time limit for compliance, and; a credible threat of punishment for non-compliance. Second, there is the ‘tacit ultimatum’ that emphasises a sense of urgency. With the tacit ultimatum the coercer chooses to omit either a specific time limit or threat of punishment and therefore relies upon the ambiguity to instil fear in its opponent. The tension of uncertainty will then hopefully trigger a positive response from the threatened actor. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that ultimatums are a precarious variant of coercion. If the timing of the ultimatum is poor, then the risk of political backlash or pre-emptive military action will increase (George 1991:7-8, 72-73; Sauer 2006:2-3).

3.3.2 The ‘Try-And-See Approach’ and the ‘Gradual Turning of the Screw’

In the ‘try-and-see approach’ all elements except for a clear demand have more or less been omitted. Hence, the coercer does not articulate a specific time limit or a strong sense of urgency for compliance. Rather, he takes on limited coercive threats or actions and then waits to see if the measures are sufficient and potent enough to persuade the opponent to comply before taking another step (George 1991:8).

The ‘gradual turning of the screw’ on the other hand, differs from the ‘try-and-see approach’ in that a threat to step up pressure gradually is conveyed from the start. Thus, the coercer hints that if its demands are not met, it will escalate its threats incrementally until they are. The gradual turning of the screw differs from the ultimatums in that it lacks the element of time urgency for compliance. Instead it relies on the threat of gradual, incremental increase in coercive pressure rather than executing threats based on the promise of escalation to firm, large military actions in the case of non-compliance (George 1991:8).

3.4 Two levels of communication

The four different strategies of coercive diplomacy; the explicit ultimatum; the tacit ultimatum; the try-and-see approach, and; the gradual turning of the screw, are useful to recognize but it would according to George, be misleading to assume that the form of strategy alone determines the outlooks for success. Hence it is important to stress and recognize the impact of how coercive diplomacy operates on two levels of communication (George 1991:9). Jönsson concludes that “there are always two levels of communication in bargaining: words and action (as well as silence and inaction)” (Jönsson 1990:12). George makes a similar assessment of the strategies of coercive diplomacy as he states that both words and actions are ways for the coercer to communicate with the opponent. And in addition to this he continues, “[...] significant nonverbal communication or signalling” should not be disregarded as alternative ways of communication. Military moves or political-diplomatic are thus activities which can prove to be effective strategies of nonverbal communication (George 1991:9).

So far we have learned that coercive diplomacy may take the shape of different strategies that in various degrees contain the elements of demands, threats, and time pressure. At this point we are also familiar with the importance to recognize that coercive diplomacy operates via both actions and words. The question is now how to maximize the chances for a successful implementation of the concept of coercive diplomacy. I answer the question by identifying certain conditions that according to the theoretical framework favour success.

3.5 Conditions that favour successful coercive diplomacy

Instead of outlining certain conditions as *necessities* for successful coercive diplomacy George (1991), Jakobsen (1998), and Sauer (2006) are cautious enough to make a more modest claim that there are only conditions that *favour* success. Furthermore, George concludes that it would be dangerous to oversimplify that coercive diplomacy always is successful if only one or another condition is satisfied. But yet he argues that despite the highly context-dependent nature of the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy there are certain generic conditions that favour a successful application of coercive diplomacy (George 1991:75-81). There must be: (1) a clarity in the demand; (2) a strength of motivation from the threatening actor; (3) an asymmetry of motivation between the threatening actor and the one being threatened; (4) a sense of urgency; (5) an adequate domestic and international support; (6) a fear from the opponent of unacceptable escalation; (7) a clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement of the crisis, and; (8) a strong leadership⁴. George identified these conditions when he examined seven different occasions where coercive diplomacy was used. However, George is not the only one who has elaborated around conditions that favor success. Tom Sauer (2006) argues that there are ten factors that determine the success rate of coercive diplomacy and that these can be clustered around five basic questions: (1) Is the demand legitimate?; (2) does the opponent believe that there will be more demands in the future?; (3) is the threat credible?; (4) is the time pressure credible?, and; (5) which actor is the most motivated to win the negotiation game? (Sauer 2006:3-6).

Since Sauer's work is very much inspired by George (1991), Schultz (2001), Jakobsen (1998), and Schelling (1963), who are all influenced by each other to some extent, Sauer's conditions do overlap earlier work, but in a modified sense.

However, I see no problem in taking advantage of his research especially not since he has made a contemporary and similar assessment to that of mine since he has examined EU coercive diplomacy against Iran. Hence, I will partly use his formulation of the factors that favour success as the basis for my analysis. To make the conditions more credible I will verify them by referring to other authors within the field as well.

⁴ I will not consider this condition when conducting my analysis. I argue that (1) evaluating the characteristics in Bush and Jong Ill leadership demands an elaborate assessment. It can not be done within the limits of this thesis. However, I argue that the strength of the leadership will to some extent be reflected when I analyze the condition of relative motivation. The leader of a country shows his or hers strength in proportion to the degree of fear that his or her country experiences. Hence relative motivation indicates how far a leader is willing to compromise.

3.5.1 Is the demand legitimate?

Firstly, a distinction has to be made between (1) the *underlying objective* and (2) the *specific demand*. As Sauer concludes, the objective of the coercer may be in accordance with international law. However, if other states fail to comply with the same law or just international law in general, critical voices may find it justifiable to stress the double standards used by coercing state(s). In this context, legitimacy is a broader and more sufficient concept than legality. Even more so, if the public opinion in the coercing state views the final goal as illegitimate, then the policy-makers will find it difficult to sustain their policy of coercive diplomacy for a longer period of time (Sauer 2006:4). According to Shultz, this is especially true for democracies since public competition makes it difficult for democratic government to “conceal factors that make the use of force politically or militarily unattractive”. Opposition parties have incentives to reveal such concealed factors and expose them to the public and thus often opposing the use of force. The foreign state(s) that are subject to the coercion and who is observing the signal, then have reason to doubt the credibility of the coercer (Schultz 2001:229). But the impact of public opinion will also matter in the state that is being coerced. When the threats have been initiated or fully carried out then, if public opinion in the coerced state does not regard the underlying objective as legitimate, it will support its own government. Hence, external pressure is likely to result in the coerced state growing more self-confident and harder to persuade (Sauer 2006:4).

Second, Sauer argues that even if the underlying objective seems legitimate, the specific demand has to be proportional to the objective. If it is not, then it will not be conceived as legitimate (Sauer 2006:4). According to Jentleson, the major problem with proportionality in current coercive diplomacy is the extraordinary stakes that arises with the call for regime change in the coerced state, as opposed to mere policy change. However, he concludes that there is not a strict linear relationship between a limited scope of objectives and success, and notes that demanded regime change or major changes in policy do constitute crucial proportionality thresholds (Jentleson 2006:3)

3.5.2 Does the opponent believe that there will be more demands in the future?

The coercing state should clarify from the beginning (3) *the terms of the final settlement* and solution as well as what the overall goals are. Because if the opponent believes that more demands will follow in the future, that he will be trapped in a ‘slippery slope’, he is unlikely to be motivated to cooperate in the first place (Sauer 2006:4). George concludes that it is necessary in some cases that the coercer formulates specific terms regarding the termination of the crisis the two sides have agreed upon. Accordingly, establishing procedures for carrying out such terms and verifying their implementation is of utter importance. Hence

George also considers a clarity concerning the precise terms of settlement of the crisis as a seventh favourable condition for success. In situation where conflict or differences of opinion exist in several issues, the coerced state may desire precise settlement terms to safeguard against the possibility that the coercer will resort to a broader, more sweeping interpretation of the formula for ending the crisis (George 1991:80).

3.5.3 Is the threat credible?

Whether or not a threat succeeds depends on a large on the credibility with which it is sent i.e. “the belief they generate in the target that the threatened actions will be carried out” (Shultz 2001:5). To instil such a belief in the opponent there are basically four factors that has to be fulfilled. First and discussed above, the threat should be (4) *proportional to the specific demand*, the underlying objective and the means available. Second, (5) *public opinion must be supportive of the threats* and its potential consequences in order for the threats to be credible. A coercive diplomacy strategy highly based on sanctions may for instance also damage the economy of the coercing state and thus lessen the incitements of the public opinion to support its government. Time is also of particular concern. The longer the crisis sustains, the weaker public support will be (George 1991:78-79). Third, if the coercing state has (6) *a reputation of making credible threats*, then the opponent will be easier to persuade (Sauer 2006:5). Finally, if the opponent fears (7) *an uncontrollable escalation of some kind*, then coercive diplomacy becomes easier (Sauer 2006:5). According to George such fear may arouse if the opponent believe that there will be an escalation to the level of warfare that he would be strongly motivated to avoid (George 1991:79-80)

3.5.4 Is the time pressure credible?

This question is closely knit to George’s fourth condition that favours success i.e. (8) *the creation of a sense of credible urgency*. If the coercing state itself experiences a sense of urgency to achieve its objective it will accordingly, be more prone to generate and instil a sense of urgency for compliance in the opponent. However, creating a sense of urgency may also backfire in the sense that it can encourage a desperate opponent to strike pre-emptively (George 1991:78). Generally speaking, if the time pressure is too tight, or to the contrary, too loose then the odds are that the opponent will not consider the threat credible enough and will thus not cave in to the external pressure (Sauer 2006:5).

3.5.5 Which actor is the most motivated to win the game?

First, motivation can be viewed in (9) *absolute terms*. Accordingly, motivation basically rests on the size of national interests involved. Second, even if there is a

high degree of absolute interest it is likely that one of the adversaries is more motivated than the other in (10) *relative terms* (Sauer 2006:5). George uses other terms when he addresses the same issues of motivation. Instead of absolute terms he speaks of *strength of motivation by the threatening state* as his second condition that favours success. Motivation in relative terms he calls *asymmetry of motivation*, which also constitutes his third condition that favour success. George argues that the absolute motivation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a successful strategy and that motivation is a two-side matter (George 1991:77). With this he means that relative motivation, in favour of the coercer, is more likely to bring about a successful strategy of coercive diplomacy.

Once again it boils down to the beliefs of the opponent and that he thinks that the coercing power is more highly motivated to achieve its crisis objective than the opponent is to prevent it.

4 Analysis I – Was U.S. attempts to persuade North Korea a case of coercive diplomacy?

At this point it is essential to pose the question: during the period January 2001 until October 2006, was the U.S. approach towards North Korea an example of coercive diplomacy? The answer to that question is according to the following analysis, yes.

4.1.1 The demand

We have learned that coercive diplomacy differs from blackmail in the sense that it is a response to an action from the target and therefore regarded as a defensive strategy. The U.S. demand for the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear programmes was accordingly a response to the latter's admittance in the 1990s of having a plutonium based nuclear weapon programme as well as a response to Pyongyang's acknowledgement in October 2002 of having a highly enriched uranium programme (HEU) running.

As explained above, coercive diplomacy aims at stopping or undoing an action already initiated by the target. In this case the U.S. made the demand that North Korea would have to terminate and reverse the programme before any further progress could be made in U.S.-North Korean relations. More explicitly framed, early in the negotiating process of the Six-party Talks the U.S. called for a formula called CVID; complete, verifiable, irreversible, disarmament (Chang 2006:42). In President Bush's words

“We will not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea. We will not give in to blackmail. We will not settle for anything less than the complete, verifiable, and irreversible elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program.” (CNN Transcripts 13 July, 2003)

More specified demands were made in addition to the more general CVID. A U.S. policy review of June 2001 that called for a “serious dialogue” with Pyongyang included the promise of further economic assistance. It put forth the acceleration of IAEA safeguard compliance under the Agreed Framework; an end to North Korea's mid- and long range missile programmes; a less threatening North Korean conventional posture; improved human rights performance; and tangible steps toward economic reform. According to the Council on Foreign Relations these terms were essentially presented as a take-it-or-leave-it package,

and North Korea balked at negotiations under them (Council on Foreign Relations 2003:22).

However, the demand should according to the theoretical framework be combined with a threat. The threat should to some extent entail a promise of the use of physical force and in some instances an actual implementation of exemplary military force. Hence, it will be necessary to identify if, and when such threat(s) were articulated, and in addition how it was fashioned.

4.1.2 The threat

The threat must to some extent be based on the use of force, which may or may not be backed by the exemplary use of military force. In this case, the U.S. made clear at several times that the use of force may be applied should North Korea not comply with the demand of dismantling their nuclear programmes. The demands started prior to the North's acknowledgement of its most recent programme in 2002, since U.S. intelligence were highly confident of the potential existence of a North Korean HEU-programme.

During the 2000 campaign season the Republican Congress was condemning the Clinton administration's North Korean policy as being a policy of appeasement. At the same time, in an article in *Foreign Affairs* Condoleezza Rice suggested that the U.S. policy was not aggressive enough when facing North Korea. Then the Quadrennial Defense Review of September 2001 came, which called for a "paradigm shift from threat to capability-based models". And on the last day of 2001, the Nuclear Posture Review lowered the threshold for the use of tactical nuclear weapons and listed North Korea as one of seven target states. Furthermore, the Nuclear Posture Review was in strict contradiction with the Agreed Framework's negative nuclear security provision which stipulated that the United States assured North Korea that it was not a target of U. S. nuclear weapons. To the opposite of such an assurance, the Review explicitly sanctioned the targeting of North Korea. Since the United States had nullified the Agreed Framework in August 2002 (Kim 2006:257-58) the threat of an attack ought to have been perceived by Pyongyang as more real than ever before.

In January 2002, President Bush articulated further threats that stressed the United States' willingness to resort to the use of military force. In his State of the Union address President Bush labelled North Korea as a part of the 'axis of evil'. According to the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States, that expression "drew enormous and worried attention on both sides of the 38th parallel.". In addition, the Council argues, North Korean concerns deepened in September 2002 with the launch of the National Security Strategy, which offered a comprehensive ground for pre-emptive action against "rogue states" that possessed WMD's and identified North Korea as a prominent example (Council on Foreign Relations 2003:22).

On 19 January, 2005, Condoleezza Rice, then President Bush's nominee as Secretary of State, identified North Korea as one of the six "outposts of tyranny" and argued that the U.S. must help bring about "freedom" in the country

(BBC(a)). Interpreted in the context of the by then, still ongoing Operation Iraqi *Freedom* such statement could by Pyongyang have been regarded as a genuine threat. Despite the fact that Condoleezza's statement did not explicitly entail references to North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the threat nevertheless was articulated in a context where U.S.–North Korean relations were deteriorating from incongruities over the latter's plutonium and uranium programmes.

With regards to the exemplary use of force the examples are few but indeed present during the course of the nuclear crisis. In February and March 2003 for instance, the United States proclaimed that it would deploy more forces to North East Asia (NEA) to deter North Korea from making any rash moves. And it realized its threat by moving twenty-four bombers to Guam and hence put them within striking distance of North Korea. Furthermore, at end of March the same year the United States executed a war game with South Korea –a week long military exercise across South Korea (Kim 2006:258-60) –and was in this way displaying its military capacity in the region. Once the exercise was over the U.S. announced on April 1 the same year, that stealth fighters used in the exercise were to stay in South Korea (BBC(a)). A second exercise followed on 23 February, 2006. The US–Japan combined war game included a simulation where the U.S. responded to a North Korean hypothetical readiness to fire ballistic missiles (Sieff 2006).

Having the threat of the use of force backed by limited military action is according to the concept of coercive diplomacy a way of signalling a high degree of resolution. However, in order for the demand and the threat to be taken seriously the two elements must be accompanied by a time pressure of some kind.

4.1.3 The time pressure

It is difficult to identify any tangible deadlines for compliance that have been articulated in combination with an explicit demand during the investigated period. But by no means was there an absence of a U.S. created sense of urgency for compliance.

The U.S. repeatedly called for an immediate and complete verifiable irreversible disarmament (CVID) of North Korea's nuclear weapon programmes. Before the CVID formula was realized, U.S. stated that no further progress could be made in U.S.–North Korean relations and was thus creating a sense of urgency for compliance. According to Blix, step-by-step demands and deadlines against North Korea were constantly being articulated by the U.S. in the bilateral as well as the multilateral negotiations. For instance, one of the several deadlines was set to May 1, 2006 with the demand of the closure of North Korea's plutonium reactors (Interview Hans Blix 2007-05-29).

By adopting a more comprehensive view over the investigated period, the conclusion on which variant of strategy of coercive diplomacy the U.S. actually applied, primarily point in one direction. The four variants of strategies of coercive diplomacy –the explicit and tacit ultimatums, the try-and-see approach, and the gradual turning of the screw –may all be present at sometime during the

course of a conflict. However, since I attempt to chart a more comprehensive view over the diplomatic discourse I aim at identifying which strategy should be regarded as the most illustrative for the entire period in question.

4.2 U.S. strategy applied

I argue that the general strategy the U.S. applied from January 2001 until October 2006 resembles the strategy labelled the *tacit ultimatum*. As mentioned before there are two kinds of ultimatums – the tacit and the explicit one. While the explicit ultimatum entails three elements i.e. a specific demand, a credible threat of punishment for non-compliance, and a time limit for compliance, the tacit ultimatum omits either a specific time limit or an explicit threat of punishment, or both but only to a certain degree.

In the investigated case and seen in a more comprehensive light, a specified threat was never explicitly articulated from the United States. But in contrast to the *try-and-see approach* and the *gradual turning of the screw* a strong sense of urgency was articulated from the very outset in January 2001. Furthermore, the threats never seem to have been incrementally stepped up as the strategy of the gradual turning of the screw suggests. Rather they seem to have been conducted on a more ad hoc basis not following an escalatory character. For instance, if we regard the exemplary use of action as a harsher type of threat than one simply articulated verbally, the first war game exercise with South Korea in 2003 and the followed deployment of military forces close to the North Korean borders, should have been pursued by an even more serious threat in the case of North Korean non-compliance. Instead, the US returned to verbal threats.

In accordance with the strategy of the tacit ultimatum the U.S. seemed to embark upon a journey lined with implicit but ambitious threats, such as calling for “punitive actions” as well as labelling North Korea as a “rouge state” and one of the three countries in the “axis of evil” (one of which were already under U.S. military attack). In addition, the U.S. also articulated threats by displaying physical military actions close to the North Korean borders, such as the war game exercises. The threats were supplemented with the creation a sense of real urgency since Washington stressed the fact that in the absence of compliance the relations between the two nations would not become normalized. Since the U.S. had been pushing the Security Council for imposing economic sanction since after 9/11 (Global Policy Forum) and in addition been halting shipments of food and heavy fuel provisions to North Korea (which it previously had been the largest provider of) after having learned that it had a covert HEU-programme (Dao 2003) any regression from a normalized relationship would hurt more to North Korea than it would to the United States.

As a last indication of the US initiative to create a sense of urgency before the supposed detonation of the plutonium nuclear charge on 9 October, 2006, the U.S. got the UN Security Council to finally agree to impose limited sanction against North Korea following a missile test in the Sea of Japan. The resolution barred all

UN member states from selling missile or WMD related technology or materials to North Korea (Lederer 2006).

To sum-up, the U.S. undeniably set out on a course where Washington resorted to the use of coercive diplomacy that involved a demand, a threat of the use of force, and time pressure characterized by the creation of a sense of urgency. The coercive diplomatic effort also operated on two levels of communication since it entailed verbal threats as well as the displaying of military force. Finally, the U.S. coercive diplomacy was characterized by the strategy of the tacit ultimatum.

Yet U.S. coercive diplomacy failed. The question is now to find out why it failed. In order to do so it will be necessary to try empirical materials on the conditions that according to the theoretical framework, maximize and favour success.

5 Analysis II – Were the conditions for effective coercive diplomacy fulfilled?

5.1 Was the demand legitimate?

5.1.1 A legitimate underlying objective

At first glance, prohibiting North Korea from becoming a nuclear weapon state seems to be a legitimate objective. One of the strongest arguments in favour of such prohibition originates from the rhetoric that loose nukes or nuclear weapons launched by mistake, will likely stem from poorly developed countries such as North Korea. Such events pose an unyielding challenge for international security. Despite the fact that every nuclear weapon state (NWS) so far has had a strong record of protecting against the accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, it is difficult to say what the future will bring. The possibilities of major nuclear accidents and of the domestic and/or terrorist use of nuclear weapons argue for limiting their spread.

Furthermore, to argue that nuclear deterrence has ever worked in any given situation, as a way of justifying the acquirement of nuclear weapons, is logically impossible since successful deterrence results in non-events, i.e. continued peace (Hagerty 1998:36-37). But as neo-liberalist Joseph Nye maintains:

“There can be no decisive answer in the debate over the effects of proliferation. Particular outcomes may differ. Some cases may start a disastrous chain of events; other [cases] may turn out to have benign effects.” (Nye 1981:33)

However, it has been possible for North Korea to counter arguments of proliferation prohibition and in the same time justify its resignation from the NPT in 2003, by referring to U.S. double standards. As outlined in the theoretical framework of coercive diplomacy, the objective of the coercer may be in accordance with international law. But if other states fail to comply with the same law or international law in general, critical voices may find it justifiable to stress the double standards used by coercing state and thus undermine the latter’s capability to conduct an effective strategy of coercive diplomacy. Accordingly, it is important to differ between legality and legitimacy. Take the NPT for instance. Since the NPT stipulates both non-proliferation as well as disarmament, a breach

by any signatory in any of the categories will not only be illegal but will jeopardize the legitimacy of the entire treaty as such, if punitive actions are not undertaken immediately.

This raises the question: are the NWS:s in compliance with the NPT and, in particular, with respect to Article VI that stipulates nuclear disarmament (Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, p. 4)? I argue that the answer is no.

According to Blix (Interview 2007-05-29), NWS signatories of the NPT are already in non-compliance with the demand for disarmament since there still exist some 20.000 odd numbers of nuclear weapons 37 years after the entry into force of the NPT. In addition, Blix states, the U.S. may also be in violation of the stipulated demand for non-proliferation since it is well known that the U.S. has helped India to develop its nuclear weapon capabilities. In return, these violations by the NWS:s of the NPT, undermine the entire treaty as such according to Blix. Therefore, one can criticize the legitimacy in pressuring non-NWS (as North Korea allegedly was during its period as a NPT signatory) to fulfil their obligations.

The fact that North Korea left the NPT in 2003 does indeed pose yet another challenge for it to maintain that U.S. calls punitive actions against the regime were unjustified. However, we must again differ between legality and legitimacy. It may be legal for the international community to sanction North Korea, but was it legitimate?

In its first two years, the Bush administration decided to trash several multilateral treaties and treaties in the making; the ABM treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Land Mine Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol, the treaty to establish the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Geneva Conventions, and a draft treaty on international small arms sales. In addition, in May 2002 the administration unsigned the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court⁵ (Kim 2006:227-28). In this context, the double standards stem from the fact that U.S. threat of punitive actions can be regarded as loosely founded. The threat of such actions relied on a basis which the U.S. itself hardly could live up to i.e. that it was legitimate to punish North Korea for trashing the NPT or not abiding the Agreed Framework⁶ when the US was doing the same with other treaties.

The UN Security Council reluctance to abide to US calls for punitive action against North Korea from January 2001-October 2006 can be seen as proof of that the international community, to a crucial extent, regarded the underlying objective of U.S. coercive diplomacy as illegitimate. Hence, it was difficult for the U.S. to realize its threats.

⁵ The Bush administration claimed that it had no legal obligation to abide to President Clinton's signature on December 31, 2000.

⁶ According to Blix the Agreed Framework of 1992 does indeed refer to the concept of denuclearization but since prohibition against plutonium enrichment not explicitly is stated in the actual framework, it is difficult to argue that North Korea necessarily has violated the treaty (Interview Blix 2007-05-29).

5.1.2 A legitimate demand

In order for coercive diplomacy to be successful, the specific demand has to be legitimate. As I interpret the theoretical framework, legitimacy is derived from the proportionality between the demand and its objective. However, I will wait to discuss proportionality until chapter 5.2.2.

As I identified earlier the demand was basically articulated as the CVID-formula. This formula opposed North Korea of having access to any kind of nuclear weapon capacity. But in addition to the call for CVID the U.S. extended its demand to cover the cessation of programmes for peaceful nuclear energy as well (Chufrin 2005). Not even the NPT prohibits from peaceful nuclear capacities. To the contrary, Article five of the NPT stipulates each signatory's right to peacefully use of nuclear technology (Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, p. 3). Thus the U.S. further undermined the legitimacy of its demand.

Using the same rhetoric that I opted for in the preceding chapter, one may once again refer to unwillingness from the NWS to abide to disarmament. If they will not, why should North Korea? But what is more important to take notice of is the implicit demand of regime change that came with the accusations of being an "outpost of tyranny" and a part of "the axis of evil". Jentleson concludes that demanded regime change or major changes in policy constitute crucial proportionality thresholds to efficiently executed coercive diplomacy (Jentleson 2006:3). Blix argues that North Korean has felt lonely for a long time. And that the U.S. and its so called "Hostile policy", together with decreased security guarantees from China and Russia has provided North Korea with incitements to develop nuclear weapons. The weapons would be an insurance against a forcefully required regime change (Blix: interview 2007-05-29).

Hence the North Korean government may have preferred a war instead of forcefully been required to resign. Under such circumstances coercive diplomacy is doomed to be ineffective.

5.2 More demands in the future?

5.2.1 A slippery slope

Without explicitly formulated and limited demands or precise terms of settlement, coercive diplomacy is likely to be unsuccessful. I would argue that this was the case.

Apart from the CVID-formula, demands were extended to entail disarmament of North Korea's mid- and long range missile programs, a less threatening North Korean conventional posture, improved human rights performance, and concrete

steps toward economic reform. This could be interpreted by Pyongyang as road to further concessions once the initial one (the CVID) was fulfilled.

In addition the Joint Statement of 2005 (stated by Japan and the U.S.) that contemplated the disarmament of North Korea can be argued to be imprecise. There was for instance no mentioning of the existence of North Korea's uranium weapon programme which according to Chang (2006:45) was the primary subjects of the talks. Furthermore, the statement did not stipulate precise terms of settlement when the parties had to perform their obligations regarding their promises –promises that in addition were rather sketchy (Boucher 2005)

I would therefore argue that there might have been a North Korean fear of getting caught in a slippery slope, where the fulfilment of one demand automatically would lead to further ones in other domains. I also draw the conclusion that what appears to be imprecise terms of settlement may have resulted in North Korean unwillingness to agree upon the demands from fear of what the future would actually bring.

5.3 Was the threat credible?

5.3.1 Proportionality

Military attacks as offensive strategies are generally regarded as disproportionate and therefore not credible. This should especially be true when the legitimacy of the underlying objective is questionable. Since 2003, the U.S. has had a disadvantage due to the fact that major parts of the international community regarded the war in Iraq as illegitimate. The UN for instance did not approve of the U.S. attack. Hence a U.S. attack on North Korea was likely to be regarded as disproportionate as well.

Furthermore, North Korea possessed mid- and long range missiles which could be launched against South Korea and thus elevating the hypothetical costs of a U.S. attack. Under these circumstances the U.S. threat of the use of military force could hardly be regarded as credible by Pyongyang since the latter probably was well aware of the enormous costs on the international security a U.S. attack would provide.

5.3.2 Support by public opinion and the international community

In a poll from 2002⁷ that was fielded by the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks a majority of U.S. citizens showed that they did not accept a U.S. military intervention in North Korea unless it was approved by the UN. Furthermore, a majority also opposed withholding food supplies to North Korea with the argument that food should not be a political weapon. (World Public Opinion 2003)

According to Kim, North Korean media has always been attentive to U.S. security policy debates and documents (Kim 2006:253). If Pyongyang accessed information like the one above it might have encouraged them not to regard U.S. coercive diplomacy as credible.

With regards to the international community, U.S. coercive diplomacy was further undermined due to lack of international support. Seoul which was Washington's closest ally did for instance not side with the U.S. regarding the CVID-formula. Nor was it willing to proclaim that North Korea had a uranium weapon programme (Chang 2006:112). Furthermore, in "Multi-National Citizens' Poll on Current States Surrounding Korean Peninsula" of October 2004, 72 percent of the South Koreans that participated, expressed their discontent with President W. Bush and 85 percent claimed that it was wrong to invade Iraq (Kim 2006:284). In addition, Beijing disputed sanctions and prevented condemnation of North Korea by the UN Security Council. Russia too, opposed comprehensive sanctions and many Russians blame the U.S. for the crisis (Council on Foreign Affairs 2003:24).

With regards to these polls and described attitudes I conclude that the U.S. lacked both the domestic and international support that favours a successful implementation of coercive diplomacy. The parties' to the Six-party Talks, reluctance to implement sanctions against North Korea indicated that military action would never have been approved or accepted. Thus, U.S. credibility probably was further diminished in the eyes of Pyongyang.

5.3.3 Reputation

Reputation is yet another condition that decides the credibility of a coercer. The U.S. has a reputation for making credible threats. The U.S. did intervene in Kuwait 1991, crushed Serbian forces in operation Allied Force 1999 (although, through NATO), and did invade both Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 and

⁷ The poll of 1,063 American adults was conducted January 21-26 (margin of error plus or minus 3%) using the Knowledge Networks panel—a representative national sample that has been randomly selected and subsequently provided internet access to answer poll questions.

swiftly overthrew their regimes. All these actions were preceded with a threat of the use of military force in the case of non-compliance.

However, during the period of 2001-2006 the U.S. was still stretched to its limits since it was engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Had it not been, then the U.S. might have been able to take advantage of its reputation.

5.3.4 Fear of escalation

Pyongyang was despite its seemingly small size and heavy dependence on the outside world for fuel and food aid, not intimidated by the U.S. threats of military action and sanctions. In other words they did not fear an uncontrolled escalation. Rather, a North Korean fear of escalation was probably more likely to originate in a scenario where it stood defenceless against a U.S. attack –as Afghanistan did in 2001 and later, Iraq in 2003. Blix argues that security guarantees generally do not outweigh the search for reliance on a state's own capacity. This appears to be the case in this context.

George argues that fear of escalation only arises when the opponent believes that the resort to a warfare he is motivated to avoid, is imminent. But since there were no adequate reasons to regard a U.S. attack as credible due to the unfulfilled conditions discussed above, North Korea had no reasons so far to subject itself to U.S. coercive diplomacy.

5.4 Was the time pressure credible?

5.4.1 Creation of a sense of credible urgency

As I have argued, the U.S. resorted to an implementation of the tacit ultimatum, where a strong sense of urgency was articulated from the very outset of the crisis. As Blix states, the diplomatic process was characterized by a step-by-step approach. Accordingly, North Korea was given several deadlines to end its nuclear weapon programmes, of which one was May 1, 2006. The urgency was created by both the U.S., who proclaimed that their relations would not become normalized until Pyongyang complied, but also by the international community via the Six-party Talks. IAEA was yet another actor that was setting deadlines for compliance. Still North Korea did not cave in to the pressure to comply within the time limit.

However, George argues that creating a sense of credible urgency “may boomerang and encourage a desperate opponent to initiate war in preference to accepting onerous demands” (George 1991:78). In practical terms, the sense of urgency created by the U.S. was likely to have been credible enough to provoke North Korea to continue its nuclear weapon programmes. This may sound

paradoxical but given North Korea's rather isolated posture in combination with domestically deteriorating humanitarian conditions one may come to the conclusion that North Korea had been desperate long before the crisis started. Hence, exposing it to an ultimatum based on the threat of use of force in combination with the creation of a sense of urgency was a highly counter-productive strategy.

Added to these conditions should be the fact that North Korea at the time possessed the fourth-largest army in the world. It is almost twice the size of the South Korean one. In addition North Korea has the world's second-largest special operations force, which's main task is to operate behind the enemy lines in wartime (U.S. Department of State). Taking these facts into consideration, I argue that the U.S. threats were further undermined due to a rather confident North Korea that probably believed that it could resist a U.S. limited⁸ offensive.

5.5 Who was the most motivated to win?

5.5.1 Absolute terms

According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2003:27) there are major difficulties to estimate and assess North Korea's intentions. Official statements were frequently imprecise or ambiguous and there was an obvious difficulty in judging whether they were authentic or just tactical. I share their point of view and would therefore like to raise my concerns about the reliability of the proceeding analysis. By looking at how the domestic discourse was shaped and then analyze it, one might be able to distinguish the degree of absolute motivation of North Korea.

The use of the word "imperialist" when referring to the U.S. and its leaders was a common phenomenon in official North Korean pronouncements. Kim states the following:

"For North Korea, imperialism connotes aggression and expansion of one actor into the sphere of another to take control or impose authority. Ever since the Korean War, North Korea has viewed the United States as interfering in Korean affairs with hostile intentions." (Kim 2006:233)

Hence, one may draw the conclusion that what North Korea fear was actually based on was the firm belief that the U.S. was a threat to its sovereignty and therefore also to its ideal, *the Juche*. After all U.S. did categorize it as part of the

⁸ I argue that it would be *limited* due to U.S. concerns and military activities in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively.

“axis of evil”. The ideal stresses a “go it alone” mentality and that “man is the master of everything and decides everything” (Kim 2006:233). Exposing North Korea to the threat of the use of force and demanding it to comply appears to be in conflict with the Juche. Therefore, caving in to U.S. coercive diplomacy would probably have damaged Pyongyang’s credibility to uphold the regime’s values.

Even if something like the nuclear weapon programmes may be negotiated about, values seldom are. Hence, building up a nuclear capability despite U.S. coercion may be viewed as insurance for North Korea to be able to deal with both internal and external pressure. In other words, North Korean absolute motivation probably was founded in a fear of being subjected to regime change. This attitude was reflected in a statement of February 10, 2005 from the North Korean Foreign Ministry that said; “[North Korea has] manufactured nukes for self-defense to cope with the Bush administration’s evermore undisguised policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK” (BBC(b)).

There is however another dimension that I find necessary to assess in order to understand North Korea’s absolute motivation. One which should be understood in the light of the demise of the Soviet Union, cut backs in aid from China, and an incrementally successful normalization in the China-South Korea relations. These developments may have urged North Korea to look elsewhere for aid support. According to Kim, one of North Korea’s specialities during the Cold War was to play Moscow and Beijing off against each other in order to get economic, technical, and military aid. Blix and Kim (Interview 2007-05-29, Kim 2006:233) stress the fact that North Korea now realize that it pays off to keep Washington on the rack to gain concessions. For instance, North Korea was handed two Light Water Reactors from the U.S. by the end of the 1990’s and was also given the provision of 500,000 tons of heavy fuel per year, to compensate for the loss of nuclear power caused by the termination of operations at North Korea’s graphite-moderated facilities (The Acronym Institute).

According to the theory, absolute motivation rests on the size of national interests involved. From North Korea’s point of view, working against regime change and in the same time gaining provision of vital supplies are to be regarded as major national interests.

5.5.2 Relative terms

George argues that the absolute motivation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a successful strategy and that motivation is a two-side matter (George 1991:77). Accordingly, U.S. motivation must also be taken into account when assessing the conditions of motivations.

There are according to O’Hanlon four major reasons to why U.S. was motivated to prevent North Korea of developing a nuclear weapon capacity. First, North Korea might have had sold nuclear weapons or just fissile material to terrorists. Second, if the North Korean government would someday fall then the material could have entered the black market. Third, U.S. and South Korean deterrence could be weakened should the North have acquired nuclear weapons.

North Korea would then have possessed counter strike possibilities that probably would have been aimed at counter values against countries in its vicinity. Fourth and finally, North Korean nuclear weapons could have ignited a nuclear proliferation domino effect in North East Asia (O'Hanlon 2003:40).

However, none of these reasons would have had a direct impact on U.S. survival as a state, and were hence diminishing in the relation to motivation of North Korea. Although, terrorist might be able to challenge the U.S. to a much larger extent if they possessed nuclear weapons but still, this was a highly hypothetical scenario.

More so, U.S. has had similar concern with India and Pakistan, and even Israel. Yet, these states were able to become NWS while the West and the U.S. made huge efforts to avoid it. Israel and Pakistan even became close allies with the U.S. and India was in 2006 offered an agreement by the U.S. to develop their nuclear weapons capabilities. The latter development goes against the nuclear non-proliferation regime (Sauer 2006:26).

So, despite the fact that North Korea rightly can be accused of showing an ambiguous behaviour, so may the U.S. The U.S. actions contradicted official statements and undermined their motivation in relation to that of North Korea's.

To sum up and quote George, there are two ways to create an asymmetry of motivation i.e. to strengthen one's motivation in relative terms. These are:

- (1) "[b]y demanding of the opponent only what is essential to protect its own vital interest and by not making demands that engage the vital interests of its adversary"; or by (2) "offering a carrot that reduces the adversary's motivation to resist the demands." (George 1991:77)

The U.S. has undeniable demanded something that is *not* essential to protect its own *vital* interests. Instead the demands have engaged the vital interests of North Korea. And since the U.S. appears to have put a lot more effort into conducting coercive diplomacy without offering substantial and credible carrots (in the eyes of Pyongyang), the second way did obviously not reduce North Korea's motivation to resist U.S. demands.

6 Conclusion

The U.S. diplomatic strategy during the period of January 2001-October 2006 was clearly a case of coercive diplomacy. There existed a *demand* in which there was no ambiguity about what was exactly required from North Korea – CVID of all nuclear programmes. There was a *threat*, if yet implicit, that strove to create in North Korea an expectation of costs of sufficient size to erode its motivation to continue its development of its nuclear programmes. The threat entailed sanctions and the threat of use of force, which was backed by the exemplary use of military force. Finally, there was a *time pressure* involved, that did create a sense of urgency for compliance – several deadlines were set and Washington stressed the fact that normalization between the North Korea and the U.S. could not be achieved unless Pyongyang complied.

The United States combination of the demand, the threat, and the time pressure and how these were characterized, created a tacit ultimatum. To articulate this ultimatum the U.S. used both words and action and thus used a two-level way of communication and signalling. Yet, coercive diplomacy failed for a number of reasons.

First, the U.S. lacked a legitimate underlying objective for two reasons. It demanded from North Korea what it, and plenty of other states could not achieve themselves – disarmament and non-proliferation in accordance with the NPT. In more general terms the U.S. also demanded that North Korea should follow international treaties during a period where the U.S. itself trashed such treaties. This created a sense of double standards that undermined U.S. credibility.

Second, the U.S. specific demand lacked legitimacy. It demanded of North Korea what other states had the right to – a peaceful nuclear technology. The demand also entailed an implicit call for regime change. This further was undermined by concern of disproportioned consequences that the realization of the demand should result in.

Third, the U.S. demands did not entail a specific terms of settlement and appeared to include a North Korean change of behaviour in numerous domains. Thus, North Korea may have feared getting caught up in a slippery slope. This only created disincentives for compliance.

Fourth, neither U.S. public opinion nor the international community seemed to have supported U.S. coercive diplomacy. North Korea probably had no difficulties in detecting the lack of U.S. domestic and international support and was therefore able to question U.S. credibility to fulfil its threats of the use of force.

Fifth, the U.S. may have a credible reputation but since it was stretch to its limits in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively, a third intervention was unlikely to be

executed within the time frame it would take for North Korea to develop a nuclear weapon arsenal.

Sixth, whether or not Pyongyang feared an escalation is difficult to say. But since it seems that North Korea already felt that it was under U.S. “imperial” attack, fears for escalation seemed rather to have originated in the scenario of standing defenceless in case of U.S. military intervention. Therefore, such fears probably created incentives to pursue a deterrence strategy based on nuclear weapon capabilities.

Seventh, the time pressure i.e. the sense of urgency the U.S. created for compliance was neither too tight nor too loose and could hence not be apart of the reasons to why U.S. coercive diplomacy failed. However, exposing a desperate state with a large conventional military capacity like the North Korea to an ultimatum i.e. an all-or-nothing package, is a highly counter-productive strategy. Any time pressure will under such circumstances appear unreasonable.

Eight, North Korea had reasons to be more motivated than the U.S. to win. Resisting U.S. pressures may have been the only way of upholding the values and getting the concessions on which the North Korean government relied upon. Hence, North Korea probably was motivated by the fight for survival whereas the U.S. concerns only originated in highly hypothetical scenarios.

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