



**Melanie W. Sisson, James A. Siebens, Barry M. Blechman, eds.** *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy*. Routledge Global Security Studies Series. London: Routledge, 2020. Illustrations. xx + 230 pp. \$160.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-367-45997-0.

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*Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy: The Use of Force Short of War* is the follow-on to Barry Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan's *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (1978), a study on how the United States employed its armed forces below the threshold of war in support of foreign policy objectives from 1945 to 1975. Blechman is the cofounder of the Stimson Center and one of the book's editors.

Although this study is similar to Blechman's earlier work, it differs from *Force without War* in several ways. *Force without War* primarily addresses US efforts to coerce regimes in the context of Cold War alignments. *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy* expands the analysis of political objectives to include additional categories, like preventing conflicts, preserving peace agreements, and enforcing arms control. The book also shifts away from the focus on nuclear weapons because the US directed most coercive efforts after the Cold War toward non-nuclear capable governments.

The editors, Melanie W. Sisson, James A. Siebens, and Blechman, group the chapters into three informal sections. Chapters 1-3 provide the book's primary purposes, serve as a primer on how the armed forces support US national in-

terests, and present an analysis of the historical examples that the book uses. Chapters 4-8 are a collection of essays in which authors address historical examples of military coercion and the use of foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. In chapter 9, the editors provide their conclusions and include technical appendices that show their methodology. This review will primarily focus on the four chapters where the editors have collaborated. These chapters provide the book's structure, the analysis conducted by the editors, and their conclusions.

Chapter 1, "Coercion in a Competitive World," identifies the book's two primary purposes. First, the editors seek to address the conditions under which tailored US military employment increases or decreases the likelihood of coercive success. Second, they seek to determine the effect that integrating or not integrating military force with other foreign policy tools has had on US credibility and its ability to communicate resolve. Finally, chapter 1 concludes by providing individual summaries of each of the book's historical chapters.

Chapter 2, "Multitasking: How the Armed Forces Support US National Interests Short of War," focuses on the importance of force presence

as a demonstration of commitment. This chapter explains that a simple action like stationing US forces in an allied nation can serve several purposes, including showing US commitment to that nation, sending a message of deterrence to regional adversaries, and facilitating power projection. The editors also address other ways to communicate commitment, including joint military exercises, security assistance programs, and humanitarian relief. Combined, these methods of using US forces support coercive foreign policy toward targeted adversaries and avoid the need for the US to directly employ its forces to achieve its desired outcome. Chapter 2 concludes by stressing that the use of armed forces always carries costs and risks and that such actions also raise the likelihood of unintentional escalation.

Chapter 3, "Making Use of History," examines coercive events from 1991 to 2018 to better understand which strategies worked. It addresses two sets of important findings based on what they considered to be their statistical strength and their relevance to policy. First, the editors determine that moving military assets to a theater of interest significantly increases the likelihood of US success. In addition, they also find that the size of the deployed force has a greater impact than the type of force deployed. Second, the editors address the need for policymakers to determine what type of force packages to employ due to certain packages being more useful against specific adversaries than others. Lastly, the editors conclude that the coercive effect of employing military force is "optimized when US demands are made clearly and with specificity," thus highlighting the importance of having a coherent message (p. 56).

Chapter 9, "Coercion in the Past, and the Future of Competition," provides four recommendations to policymakers who wish to use persuasion instead of war to achieve their desired outcomes (p. 164). The editors first determine that policymakers need to know what motivates the target or risk coercive failure. They then address the im-

portance of clarity and specificity to get the desired outcome. The editors also explain that deploying forces into theater significantly increases the likelihood of coercive success. Lastly, they recommend against using sanctions after employing military coercion because it degrades the perception of US resolve.

Overall, *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy* successfully explores the theme of the use of force short of war by analyzing current events and case studies that span the gamut of strategic competition. The editors demonstrate the importance of their recommendations for coordinating and employing military force and foreign policy to ensure successful coercive effects. The one area where the book falls short is its failure to address nuclear weapons as a part of the coercion playbook. This issue is of key importance today, as the US appears unable to coerce the Chinese away from their aggressive activities in the South China Sea and as China actively expands its nuclear weapons program in "the largest expansion of China's nuclear force ever." [1] One thus cannot disregard the nuclear aspect of a coercion strategy, especially if nuclear weapons are an active part of an adversary's coercion plans. As a result, *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy* and *Force without War* should be studied together to get a more complete picture of the role that military coercion and US foreign policy play in the use of force short of war.

#### Note

[1]. Patty-Jane Geller, "China Is Rapidly Expanding Its Nuclear Force: Should the US Be Concerned?," MSN, July 28, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/china-is-rapidly-expanding-its-nuclear-force-should-the-us-be-concerned/ar-AAMFUGd>.

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