Understanding coercive nuclear reversal dynamics: a comparative case study of US coercive diplomacy against the nuclear programs of Iran, Libya, and South Africa

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

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T his chapter is divided into two sub-sections and aims to provide precise information regarding our theoretical and methodological choices. The second sub-section dwells on the methodology we relied upon to obtain and process our empirical data. This includes mainly the choice of the case study approach, the structured-focused comparative method, the process tracing, the triangulation, and the conduct of interviews. We will dwell on these methodological elements in the second sub-section. The first sub-section emphasizes the theory we chose to explain the social phenomenon we are studying in this thesis: the coercive dynamics between the US and Iran, Libya, and South Africa. Indeed, one should remember that a theory refers to "a set of related propositions that suggest why events occur in the manner that they do."[209]

3.1 SECTION I - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

Since World War II (WWII) ended in 1945, the international system has been characterized by a specific ordering and functional principle. Regarding the latter, the functional principle in international relations is international law. From this perspective, (international) laws should serve as the central reference for the behavior of States. Concerning the former, States interact in an anarchic system; in other words, they interact in a system free of an overseeing higher and central authority. Hence, States cannot confidently rely on institutions to protect or advance their interests. These two principles led to the emergence of two leading Schools of thought in International Relations (IR): the Realist and the Liberal Schools of thought.

Scholars from the Liberal School of thought share an optimistic view of human nature and the international system. Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, they maintain that man is born good, kind, and free. As Scott Burchill describes it well, "liberals have a belief in progress and the perfectibility of the human condition. Through their faith in the power of human reason and the capacity of human beings to realize their inner potential, they remain confident that the stain of war can be removed from human experience."[210] Applied to international relations, Liberals shares a common hostility of war which they consider as "a cancer on the body politic (which) could be successfully treated with the twin medicines of *democracy* and *free trade*."[211] Liberals will logically promote international cooperation and trade to defend the interests of States in the international arena.

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[209] DONOVAN Todd and HOOVER R., Kenneth: **The Elements of social scientific thinking**, Boston, Cengage Learning, 2013, p.32. (11th ed. - Accessed online)
[210] BURCHILL, Scott et al: **Theories of International Relations**, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.58 (3rd ed.)
[211] BURCHILL, Scott et al: **Theories of International Relations**, *Ibid.*, p.59

Unlike Liberals, scholars from the Realist School of thought share a pessimistic view of the human nature and thus of the international system. Just like Thomas Hobbes, they argue that *man to man is an errant wolf*; this is because as Machiavelli argues, "all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers."[212] Logically, Realists view the international system as nothing but a jungle or a "brutal arena where States look for opportunities to take advantage of each other."[213] This means that to the moral and reason ideals of the Liberals, Realist oppose necessity and security. As the Realist vision prevailed, the main goal of States in the international arena is to survive and the best way to achieve this is to acquire enough defensive/offensive capabilities. In other words, driven by the necessity to secure their survival in such a self-help environment, States opt to resort to any instrument deemed useful or necessary to achieve their core objective. And one of these instruments is power.

Compelling an actor (individual or State) implies obliging him or her to adopt a behavior he/she wouldn't have chosen on its own will. In other words, the notion of coercion puts at stake the ability of one actor to constraint or force another one to adopt a specific pattern of actions. To achieve its objective, the coercing actor must possess the resources needed to subject its target to its will; that is, he/she should be in a power position. But what does the notion of power refer to? There's no consensual definition of power in International Relations. As Robert Dahl argues in this regard, *most people have an intuitive notion of what it means. But scientists have not yet formulated a statement of the concept of power that is rigorous enough to be of use in the systematic study of this important social phenomenon*.[214]

Power can be apprehended from several approaches, including the relational', the resource' and even the intrinsic'. Scholar from the relational approach always stress on the ability of an actor to influence another one. In this case, *A seeks to influence B because it has established certain goals which cannot be achieved (it is perceived) unless B (and perhaps many other actors as well) does X*.[215] Resource theorists like Joseph Nye usually make a distinction between power instruments (military, economic),[216] the intrinsic approach refers to what Hannah Pitkin describes as "the power to" that is, the "ability

[212] DONNELLY, Jack: **Realism and International Relations**, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.9
[213] MEARSHEIMER J., John, **The false promise of international institutions**, International Security, Winter, 1994-1995, Vol. 19, N.3, p.9
[214] DAHL A., Robert, **The concept of power**, Behavioral Science, July 1957, Vol.2, N.3, p.201
[215] HOLSTI J., Kalevi, **The concept of power in the study of International Relations**, Background, 1964, Vol. 7, N. 4, p.181
[216] NYE Jr, Joseph S: **Soft power. The means to success in world politics**, New York, PublicAffairs, 2004, 228 pages.

to do or achieve something independent of others."[217] This thesis opted for the relational approach to power.

The relational approach of power is relevant for this thesis as it will permit us to understand how certain States attempt to shape or modify the behavior of other States. This reality is evident in the nuclear order as it is one of the most strategic realms in international relations. Indeed, since the 1945 bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US, several States have tried to acquire a credible nuclear deterrent capability. Nevertheless, five States have been legally authorized to maintain their nuclear arsenals since the advent of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968. This situation has created a divide between the "nuclear possessors and the nuclear deprived" among States. As sovereign actors driven by security imperatives, certain contesting States of this perceived unjust nuclear order also coveted nuclear weapons. However, as the sole Superpower since the end of the Cold War, the US has always mobilized all its available power resources to prevent these nuclear aspirants from achieving their objectives. The dynamics of these contradicting political objectives are described as power politics in IR.

Martin Wight considers power politics to be the "the relations between independent Powers."[218] In Wight's view, the concept of powers politics is observable among States which maintain "continuous and organized relations among them." However, Alan James stresses that power politics should not be applied to the interactions of all the States in the international arena, but only to those that can substantially impact the international system. As he argues in this regard, the notion of power politics "is quite frequently encountered, as is an associated one which refers to the relations not of all States but of the more important of them, of *the* Powers. They are seen as dominating international politics, so that the smaller States become mere 'pawns.'"[219] From this perspective, just like Daniel Abebe, one should talk about Great Power politics defined as the *images of the powerful nations of the world competing to maximize wealth, territory, and military influence across the globe. (It) refers to the pursuit of material power by powerful States in the international system to achieve security*.[220]

However, other scholars like Rob De Wijk disagree with the exclusivity of the Great Powers to get involved in power politics. Though he concedes that smaller countries

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[217] Hannah Pitkin cited by GÖHLER, Gerhard, *'Power to' and 'power over'* in CLEGG Stewart R. and HAUGAARD Mark (Ed.): **The SAGE Handbook of power**, London, SAGE publications, 2009, p.28
[218] WIGHT, Martin: **Power politics**, New York, Holmes and Meier publishers, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1978, p.24. (Edited by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad)
[219] JAMES, Alan, **Power politics**, Political Studies, October 1964, Vol. 12, N.3, p.307
[220] ABEBE, Daniel, **Great Power politics and the structure of foreign relations law**, Chicago Journal of International Law, Summer 2009, Vol. 10, N.125, p.127.

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can be "pawns" of Great Powers, he nevertheless maintains that they can pursue their autonomous agendas and promote their interests. "(…) smaller countries are by definition the object of a power struggle between the great powers and the superpowers. (…) That is not to say that smaller countries do not pursue power politics. By cleverly picking a side, they can exercise more influence than one might expect, given their position," he argues.[221] In fact, he considers power politics to simply be "a country's readiness to use its power and the way in which it uses it."[222] Thereof, one can expect States to resort either on unilateralism or multilateralism, on military power or diplomacy to achieve their objectives. Evidently, coercion is one of these power politics instruments.

There is no consensual definition of the notion of **"coercion"** in coercion studies; As Patrick Cronin put it, "the literature lacks a clear conceptual framework to analyze coercion."[223] According to Robert Pape, coercion refers to the "efforts to change the behavior of a state by manipulating costs and benefits."[224] Robert Art and Kelly Greenhill define it as *the ability to get an actor - a state, the leader of a state, a terrorist group, a transnational or international organization, a private actor - to do something it does not want to do*.[225] While this definition encompasses the different actors in international politics who can be subject to coercion, however, like Pape's definition, it fails to identify the instruments or tools used by the coercer. Rob De Wijk provides a more accurate and comprehensive definition of coercion by describing it as *the deliberate and targeted use – or threat to use – of power instruments to manipulate and influence the politico-strategic choices of an actor, or player, defined as an entity that plays an identifiable role in international relations*.[226] Due to the conceptual and theoretical challenges surrounding the notion of coercion, there are different types of coercion. Depending on the goal of the coercer, we have two main forms of coercion: compellence and deterrence.

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[221] DE WIJK, Rob: **Power Politics. How China and Russia reshape the world**, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, p.69

[222] DE WIJK, Rob: **Power Politics. How China and Russia reshape the world, *Ibid.*,** p.9

[223] BRATTON, Patrick: **When is coercion successful? And why can't we agree on it?,** Naval War College, 2005, p.99

[224] PAPE, Robert: **Bombing to win: air power and coercion in war,** New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, p.4

[225] ART Robert and GREENHILL Kelly, ***Coercion. An analytical overview*** in GREENHILL Kelly, KRAUSE, Peter: **Coercion. The power to hurt in international politics, *Op. Cit.*,** p.5

[226] DE WIJK, Rob: **The Art of military coercion. Why the West's military superiority scarcely matters,**
Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2014, p.16

Deterrence: According to the Cambridge dictionary, to deter means to prevent someone from doing something or to make someone less enthusiastic about doing something by making it difficult for that person to do it or by threatening bad results if they do it.[227] In IR, deterrence can be defined as a coercive strategy designed to prevent a target from changing its behavior. "Just keep doing what you are doing; otherwise, I will hurt you" is the refrain of deterrence.[228] To deter (deterrence) is preventing an actor or target from taking a strategic action that could undermine one's interests by wielding credible threats. One of the significant works on deterrence is Thomas Schelling's classic Arms and influence, where he highlighted the bargaining power of military power. Indeed, unlike the classic assumption that war, hence military power, is a zero-sum game, Schelling maintains that it appears to be, and threatens to be, not so much a contest of military strength as a bargaining process - dirty, extortionate, and often quite reluctant bargaining on one side or both - nevertheless a bargaining process.[229] Based on the rational model, he assumed that States would firstly behave according to what serves best their interest. Compellence is another strategic concept coined by Thomas Schelling.

The notion of **compellence** is one of the greatest conceptual added values of Thomas Schelling's contribution to coercion studies. For theoretical considerations, he could not use the notion of coercion to describe a "threatening action that is intended not to forestall some adversarial action but to bring about some desired action, through "fear of consequences."[230] In fact, the term coercion encompasses both deterrence and compellence. Hence, he coined the notion of *compellence,* which *involves initiating an action (or an irrevocable commitment to action) that can cease, or become harmless, only if the opponent responds (favorably)*[231] It is *a coercive strategy based on hurting the target (or threatening to do so), to force the target to change its behavior.*[232] In other words, it implies for a coercer to change the course of actions already taken by an adversary or target by the threat or actual use of force.

Consequently, compellence differs from deterrence in many regards, first in the timing and the initiative of the action. Deterrence *sets the stage*; that is, it draws a red line not to cross; In this regard, deterrence is a reactive strategy. On the other hand, compellence involves initiating the action - that is, taking the lead - which will not be stopped until the target has agreed on our demands. From this perspective, compellence is a proactive strategy. Another major difference between deterrence and

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[227] Accessed from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/deter on 15th of January 2020.
[228] ART Robert and GREENHILL Kelly, *Coercion. An analytical overview, Op. Cit.*
[229] SCHELLING, Thomas**: Arms and influence, *Op. Cit.*,** p.7
[230] SCHELLING, Thomas**: Arms and influence, *Ibid,*** p.x
[231] SCHELLING, Thomas**: Arms and influence, *Ibid,*** p.72
[232] ART Robert and GREENHILL Kelly, *Coercion. An analytical overview, Ibid.*

compellence is the importance of the deadline for compliance. As noted above, deterrence is a reactive strategy. Thus, the threat that underlies it could only be implemented when the adversary has crossed the previously defined redline. Schelling illustrates this by declaring, "if you cross the line, we shoot in self-defense, or the mines explode. **When? Whenever** you cross the line -preferably never, but the timing is up to you."[233] Conversely, compellence requires a deadline for compliance; otherwise, it would be considered a mere wish. Just like Schelling argues, *if the action carries no deadline, it is only a posture, or a ceremony with no consequences. [..] The compellent threat has to be put in motion to be credible, and then the victim must yield. Too little time, and compliance becomes impossible; too much time, and compliance becomes unnecessary.*[234]

However, Alexander George criticized the term compellence on two bases: first, it did not shed light on the offensive or defensive motivation of the coercer, and second, it emphasized too much on threats; As he noticed, "the term compellence, which Thomas Schelling introduced into the literature […] is often employed to encompass both coercive diplomacy and blackmail and sometimes deterrence as well. […] It is useful to distinguish between defensive and offensive use of threats; compellence does not. Second, the concept of compellence implies exclusive or heavy reliance on coercive threats, whereas I wish to emphasize the possibility of a more flexible diplomacy."[235] To address those issues, he coined the notion of coercive diplomacy, which differs from blackmail. While the latter describes the offensive-based use of threats or actual use of force, the former describes the defensive-based use of coercive actions.

Coercive diplomacy: The notion of coercive diplomacy was coined by Alexander George in his book *The limits of coercive diplomacy.* According to him, coercive diplomacy refers to the *efforts to persuade an opponent to stop or undo an action he is already embarked upon*.[236] More technically, Robert Art and Patrick Croning define coercive diplomacy as "the attempt to get a target, a State, a group (or groups) within a State, or a non-State actor-to change its objectionable behavior through either the threat to use force or the actual use of limited force"[237] It is important to emphasize that coercive diplomacy implies the simultaneous use of threat or actual use of *exemplary force* with classic diplomatic resources.

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[233] SCHELLING, Thomas: **Arms and influence, *Op. Cit.,*** p.72
[234] SCHELLING, Thomas: **Arms and influence, *Ibid.,*** p.72
[235] GEORGE Alexander and SIMONS Williams (ed): **The limits of coercive diplomacy,** The US, Westview Press, 1994, p.7 (2nd ed.)
[236] GEORGE L., Alexander: **Forceful persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war,** Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997, p.5 (3rd ed.) – Consulted online.
[237] ART Robert and CRONING Patrick: **The United States and coercive diplomacy, *Op. Cit.*,** p.6

However, when it comes to coercive diplomacy, there is yet to be a consensus regarding the content of the notion of exemplary force. As Melanie W. Sisson, James A. Siebens and Barry M. Blechman argue in this regard, "discerning the boundary between limited and full-scale uses of force, demonstrative or massive, is left open for interpretation."[238] Nonetheless, regarding the controversies over the expression of an exemplary use of force in coercive strategies, we argue that the symbolic use of force should be assessed based on two variables: the intentions of the coercer and the actual consequences of the use of force on the target. Another issue in coercion studies is the controversy over the notion of success. Indeed, the risk is too high to consider the complete defeat of the target as the main criterion for a successful coercive campaign. The issue over the notion of exemplary force in coercive diplomacy is intrinsically linked with the notion of success.

Another main issue in coercion studies in general and coercive diplomacy particularly is the assessment of the effectiveness, or more precisely the **success** of a strategy. Indeed, if one could easily validate the Cambridge dictionary's definition as the - *achieving of the results wanted or hoped for*,[239] assessing the success of a coercive strategy is more challenging from a practical perspective. In light of the previous definition, one could argue with Todd Sechser that *a target is considered to have capitulated if (…) it complied with all of the challenger's demands without the use of large-scale military force.*[240] Yet, as Peter Viggo Jakobsen warns, "the problem with this approach is that success in most cases is a question of degree."[241]

It's worth recalling that coercive diplomacy is a bargaining process (Schelling); hence, the outcome of the interaction between the conflicting parties cannot be easily anticipated. The context may lead the coercer to lower its demands. One should also pay attention to actual or perceived role of the threat in leading the target to comply, without forgetting the cost paid by the coercer to obtain the target's compliance. Finally, success should also be analyzed depending on the level of interactions between the conflicting parties. Indeed, the coercer can achieve either *tactical success* during specific periods of the bargaining process or complete or lasting success at the end of the bargaining process. Peter Viggo identified two forms of coercive success – cheap coercive diplomacy success and costly coercive diplomacy success – illustrated in the following table. The former refers to coercive diplomacy successes resulting from the

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[238] SISSON W., Melanie, SIEBENS A., James and BLECHMAN M., Barry (Ed): **Military coercion and US foreign policy. The use of force short of war**, London, Routledge, 2020, p.5 (1st ed.)

[239] Information provided by the **Cambridge online dictionary** accessed on the 30th January 2012 at 13h from the website https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/success

[240] SECHSER S., Todd, **Reputations and signaling in coercive bargaining**, The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2018, Vol. 62, N.2 p.327.

[241] JAKOBSEN V., Peter, *Coercive diplomacy, Op. Cit.,* p.248.

use of threats and sanctions (inducement may, but need not, be employed) whereas the latter refers to successes resulting from the use of limited force.[242] we will consider a diplomatic coercion campaign successful only if the behavior of the target matches the initial demands and objectives set by the coercer.

Table 17.1 Measuring success				
Strategies	Diplomacy	Coercive diplomacy (CD)		War
Instruments	Persuasion and inducements	Threats, sanctions (and inducements)	Limited force (and inducements)	Full scale/ brute force
Degree of success	CD unnecessary	Cheap CD success	Costly CD success	CD failure

Table 2: Peter Viggo Jakobsen's measuring success of coercive diplomacy.[243]

As an international crisis management strategy, coercive diplomacy did not enjoy the same political and academic interests as deterrence, at least until the end of the Cold War. Alexander George distinguishes two types of coercive defensive diplomacy based on the coercer's objectives. On the one hand, "type A" whose objective is to compel a target before it achieves its objective. On the other hand, "type B" consists of compelling an actor to undo an action. "Type C," introduced by Bruce Jentleson in a famous article,[244] is the most difficult one to implement as it consists of forcing an actor to make changes in the government or the nature of the political regime.[245]

According to Alexander George, coercive strategies usually involve four basic variables: the demand, the credibility which is translated by a sense of urgency created by the coercer, sanctions and incentives. Depending on the manipulation of the previous variables, he identified three variants of coercive diplomacy. These variants are the "classic ultimatum", "the tacit ultimatum", the "gradual turning of the screw" and "the try and see." Among the components of the classic ultimatum, we have: *the demand, a deadline to comply, the threat of punishment for non-compliance*. However, as A. George warned, an "ultimatum, although the starkest variant of coercive diplomacy, is not

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[242] JAKOBSEN V., Peter, *Coercive diplomacy, Op. Cit.,* p.249
[243] JAKOBSEN V., Peter, *Coercive diplomacy, Ibid.,* p.250
[244] JENTLESON W., Bruce, *The Reagan Administration versus Nicaragua: The limits of 'Type C' coercive diplomacy*, in GEORGE A., SIMONS W. and HALL K., David: **The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy**, 1994, San Francisco and Oxford, Westview Press, 1994, 310 pages.
[245] According to John C. Harrison, there is a "type D" coercive diplomacy whose aim is to create a government in a country that does not have one; basically, it's state-building-based coercive diplomacy. Read HARRISON C., John: **The limits of Type D coercive diplomacy in Somalia,** Master thesis, Monterey, California, Naval Postgraduate School, 1995, 91 pages.

necessarily the most effective."[246] Unlike the classic ultimatum, the tacit ultimatum does not contain a deadline for the opponent to comply with the request. Regarding the gradual turning of the screw, it refers to a gradual or progressive increase of the pressure on the opponent without creating a sense of urgency (this is the main difference with the classic ultimatum). The "try and see" variant is simply about formulating a request and observing the opponent's reaction. This conceptual clarification is important because it also clarifies the objectives or intentions of the coercing State.

Strategy: Etymologically, the concept of *strategy* is rooted in two Greek words: *strategia and strategos.* The first term refers to *the office or command of a general,* while the second term refers to a *general or commander of an army*. In modern times it usually describes *a plan of action that organizes efforts to achieve objectives.*[247] Rob De Wijk considers it to be *the link between political objectives, [expected effects] and the military means available.*[248] Lawrence Freedman contests these definitions because he considers them reductionist as they emphasize only the dialectic between means and goals. Conversely, he argues that we can identify a strategy when there are conflicting interests and a "resolution" from the parties in conflict.

From the previous perspective, the strategy refers to a dynamic process involving two competing sides over a specific issue. As Lawrence Freedman puts it, "strategy comes into play where there is actual or potential conflict, when interests collide and forms of resolution are required."[249] By highlighting the necessity to consider the reaction of one's adversary, he makes a clear difference between a *plan* which "supposes a sequence of events that allows one to move with confidence from one state of affairs to another" and a *strategy* which is "about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power."[250] We will consider both approaches of strategy because we assume that an actor always has a "plan" before engaging or confronting an adversary and depending on the outcome he might choose a different "plan" or not. There are several coercive strategies among which the strategy

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[246] The ultimatum variant of coercive diplomacy is risky as well. In fact, an opponent can perceive it either as a bluff or humiliating. It can also be considered seriously by the opponent who could wage a (pre-emptive) war. Lastly, the opponent can also diffuse the robustness of the ultimatum with partial compliance. See GEORGE L., Alexander: **Forceful persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war, *Op. Cit.*,** p.7

[247] DREW M., Dennis and SNOW M. Donald: **Making strategy in the twenty-first century: An introduction to national security processes and problems,** Air University Press, Alabama, 2006, p.13 (first published on Aug. 1988)

[248] DE WIJK, Rob: **The art of military coercion. *Op. Cit.*,** p.25

[249] FREEDMAN, Lawrence: **Strategy: A history,** Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.xi

[250] FREEDMAN, Lawrence: **Strategy: A history, *Op. Cit.*,** p.xii

of punishment, denial, risk. But before dwelling on these strategies, we must insist on the notion of military coercion.

Military coercion: According to Peter Viggo, military coercion refers to *the use of military threats and/or limited force to stop or undo undesirable actions already undertaken by other actors.*[251] This definition highlights the exclusive reliance on military instruments in the coercive strategy. Indeed, unlike coercive diplomacy, which involves non-military coercive instruments first and relies on military measures as a backup in case the target does not comply with the demand, military coercion relies heavily on military or raw power instruments. As Rob de Wijk put it, *according to Schelling "[...] it is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply." This may be true for coercive diplomacy, but certainly not for military coercion. To achieve political and military objectives, the coercer has no other option but to use force on a massive scale."*[252]

The nature of the demand formulated to the target, hence the strategic interests at stake in the conflict, explains the exclusive reliance on military instruments. Robert Pape describes this specific context in these terms: "in military coercion, the State issuing the threat (assailant) seeks to persuade the target state (victim) to concede territory or other political values that the assailant has not yet achieved on the battlefield. These goals may include compelling the target to reduce political or territorial aims, agree to a ceasefire, withdraw forces, or even surrender."[253] Robert Pape identified two main types of (military) coercion: strategic bombing and interdiction. The former mainly targets *fixed military, industrial, or civilian targets in and near political or economic centers* (while the latter) *focuses on lines of supply between military production and the combat theater, as well as theater logistics, command centers, and fielded forces, usually in support of friendly ground operations*.[254] Irrespective of the type or nature, coercion belongs to a specific type of foreign policy a State decides to rely upon to promote its interests.

Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin define foreign policy as "a set of actions or rules governing the actions of an independent political authority deployed in the international environment."[255] In the same line, David Kinsella, Bruce Russett and

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[251] JAKOBSEN V., Peter, **Pushing the limits of military coercion theory**, International Studies Perspectives, May 2011, Vol. 12, N. 2, p.156
[252] DE WIJK, Rob: **The art of military coercion.** *Op. Cit.,* p.18
[253] PAPE A., Robert, **Coercion and military strategy: Why denial works and punishment doesn't,** Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol. 15 – Issue 4, 1992, p.425
[254] PAPE, Robert: **Bombing to win: air power and coercion in war,** *Op. Cit.,* p.46
[255] MORIN Jean-Frédéric and PAQUIN Jonathan: **Foreign policy analysis. A toolbox**, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p.3 (Accessed online).

Harvey Starr argue that a foreign policy is "a guide to actions taken beyond the boundaries of the State to further the goals of the State."[256] Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen delve as they describe it as "the choices individuals, groups, and coalitions make that affect a nation's actions on the international stage."[257] However, Deborah Gerner provides a more accurate definition of foreign policy as she considers it to be "the intentions, statements, and actions of an actor — often, but not always, a state — directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements and actions.[258] The accuracy of Gerner's definition is twofold: on the one hand, it combines the inputs of the three previous definitions, notably the guiding or framework aspect of a foreign policy, its interest-driven dimension, and the diversity of the actors involved in its formulation and implementation. On the other hand, Gerner's definition emphasizes the interactive nature of foreign policy. In other words, a specific foreign policy is set not only proactively but also reactively.

From the previous definitions, one can identify several foreign policy's features: first, its level of implementation, which is the international system; second, the drivers behind a foreign policy mainly rooted in a State's national interests. A third feature is the diversity of the actors involved in formulating and implementing a country's foreign policy; they can be the national authorities, the domestic constituency or even the interest groups. Hence, a country's foreign policy results from a balancing strategy aiming at preserving the interests of a State in the international system while simultaneously reflecting the demands of the external world and the imperative of a domestic consensus. The fourth feature is the interactive nature of foreign policy. Based on these previous characteristics, (nuclear) coercive diplomacy can be rightly described as a foreign policy.

Indeed, in our specific case, the US coercive diplomacy targeted three states: Iran, Libya, and South Africa (**External world**). In addition, it aimed at compelling the States mentioned above to reverse their controversial (nuclear) programs (**objective**). It was also set in **reaction** to what Washington considered an infringement of the NPT: the controversial nuclear behavior of Tehran, Tripoli, and Pretoria. Furthermore, although the Administration was the leading implementer of US coercive diplomacy, other domestic actors like the US Congress also played an incremental role in achieving the coercive goals set by the US administration (**diversity of the actors involved**).

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[256] KINSELLA David, RUSSETT Bruce and STARR Harvey: **World politics: the menu for choice**, UK, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012, p. 99. (10th ed. – Accessed online).
[257] MINTZ Alex and DEROUEN J., Karl: **Understanding foreign policy decision making**, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.3. (Consulted online)
[258] GERNER J., Deborah, *The Evolution of the study of foreign policy*, in NEACK Laura, HEY A. K., Jeanne and HANEY J., Patrick (Ed.): **Foreign policy analysis: continuity and change in its second generation**, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1995, p.18. (Consulted online).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that these targets did not passively endure the effects of the US coercive diplomacy. Instead, they designed counter-coercive policies to what they perceived as a US violation of their legitimate right (**reaction**) to either possess a (peaceful) nuclear program (Iran), to assume a more significant international status (Libya), or even protect themselves against an "existential" threat (South Africa) – **the goal**. In some countries like Iran, the domestic constituencies (Revolutionary Guards) and bureaucratic settings played an incremental role in Tehran's recalcitrant nuclear foreign policy **(several actors involved)**. The previous information shows how interactive the coercive dynamics between the US and the targets could create confusion between the independent and the dependent variable.

Nonetheless, our research considers the US as the **primary sender** (with the EU and the UN as supportive actors of the US policy) and the three previous States as the **primary targets**. Indeed, our main research goal is to demonstrate the causality between the US coercive goals and strategies and the targets' response. In other words, we aim to explain how and why the coercer's objective-driven strategy (independent variable) shaped and explained the target's behavior regarding defiance or compliance (dependent variable) with the coercer's demand. However, despite Iran, Libya, and South Africa's commonalities regarding their controversial nuclear behavior, the US government addressed the nuclear challenge of different countries with their domestic specificities. Those specificities include, among others, the political system, the leadership style, and their strategic cultures.

Hence, the target countries' domestic features will be the intervening variables. As we will see later in the research, the US had recourse to several instruments like military threats, cyber-attacks, economic sanctions, and political pressure to implement its coercive strategies and achieve its coercive goals. These instruments fall under power politics and can logically be classified under the Realist school of thought. On the contrary, the elements of the intervening variable fall under domestic politics and can be classified under the *Innenpolitik* School of thought. The different roles of the constituents of the independent variable (systemic pressures) and those of the intervening variables (domestic settings) have an incidence on our epistemological and ontological stance, which is eclectic. However, before dwelling on the theoretical elements of our eclectic choice, it is worth emphasizing two specific aspects of coercive diplomacy.

While coercive diplomacy can be described as a foreign policy in theory, as we previously analyzed, in practice, it differs from other types of foreign policy like trade or global environmental policy. As we will see later in the literature review, coercive diplomacy is a unique form of foreign policy in many regards. First, it combines two

other forms of foreign policy: sanctions and diplomacy. Second, its implementation subtly entails a hierarchical relationship where an actor forces another to stop or undo a policy or set of actions the former deems problematic. However, both actors are *sovereign* entities from a legal standpoint,[259] implying that, in principle, none should impose its will on the other.

Therefore, for a State to successfully subject another to its will, two generic and basic conditions must be met: the coercer should have a higher resolution and more outstanding capabilities (political, economic, and military) than its target. As Bruce Jentleson confirms it, "the essence here is the combination of will and capabilities: that you would take action if necessary – whether that action is military force, sanctions, and/or some other coercive measure – and that your coercion can actually achieve the objectives stated or at least inflict substantial costs and punishment."[260] Nevertheless, as the research puzzle of this thesis highlighted, having the edge regarding power capabilities only does not always guarantee the success of a coercive strategy. Hence, identifying the additional missing ingredients justifies the research question of our thesis. However, why did we choose our specific research question and hypotheses?

3.1.1 Explaining the research question and hypotheses.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the research question of this thesis is: "what are the conditions under which coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear program?" Our research hypotheses are the following: coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear program under two main conditions: first, provided the coercer's strategy exploits the target's vulnerabilities; second, provided the coercer demonstrates a motivation to have a sustained campaign to compel the target. Furthermore, this motivation could be rooted in the vital threats posed by the target's nuclear program to the coercer's strategic interests or in the support of domestic/international constituencies for the coercive strategy. Concerning the research question, compelling an actor – another State – generally implies constraining or forcing its representative to adopt a behavior consistent with one's will or desire.

Thereof, our research question highlights the issue of decision-making in the shadow of force and the use of power at the international level. In this regard, Graham Allison warns that "treating national governments as if they were centrally coordinated, purposive individuals provide a useful shorthand for understanding policy choices and

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[259] **Art. 2 (1) of the UN Charter.** An information accessed on the 15th of January 2020 from https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf

[260] JENTLESON, Bruce, **Coercive diplomacy: scope and limits in the contemporary world**, The Stanley Foundation, Policy analysis brief, December 2006, p.7

actions. But this simplification - like all simplifications - obscures as well as reveals. In particular, it obscures the persistently neglected fact of government: the "decisionmaker" of national policy is obviously not one calculating individual but is rather a conglomerate of large organizations and political actors."[261] In other words, one should apprehend the State as a self and integrated-organizing system driven the goal and the need to ward off external threats and promote its strategic interests.

Concerning research on coercive decision-making, Daniel Drezner deplores that "most of the academic research treated the sender and the target as rational unitary actors. Little attention was paid to the causal mechanisms through which sanctions were supposed to lead the target government into acquiescing. (There is a need for) more attention to the causal logic through which sanctions were supposed to work. Both scholars and policymakers called for an opening up of the "black box" of the target State."[262] Based on Allison's and Drezner's advice, we adopted a theoretical framework that should be instrumental in two respects: first, it should enable us not only to identify the diversity of the actors involved but also highlight their roles in the coercive dynamics between the US and the countries mentioned above. Second, it should help us reveal or display the causal mechanisms between the causes and the effects: respectively the coercer's demands and the target's response. The neoclassical realism approach appears to be the best option in this regard. However, before dwelling on the theoretical assumptions of neoclassical realism, we will first justify the choice of our research hypotheses.

We formulated two research hypotheses as the tentative answers to our research question: first, coercive diplomacy can successfully compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons program, provided the coercer's strategy exploits the **vulnerabilities** of its target and second, provided the coercer demonstrates a **motivation** to have a sustained campaign to compel the target. The first hypothesis is rooted in the tradition of strategists and scholars like Rob De Wijk,[263] who emphasized that any coercive strategy's success depends on the coercer's need to consider the target's weaknesses when crafting his strategy. As Chang Yü commented and advised in the *Art of War* by the famous Chinese strategist Sun Tsu, "take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; attack him when he does not expect it; avoid his strength and strike his emptiness."[264]

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[261] ALLISON Graham and ZELIKOW Philip: **Essence of decision: explaining the Cuban missile crisis**, New York, Longman, 1999, p.3. (2nd ed. – Accessed online)

[262] DREZNER W., Daniel, *An analytically eclectic approach to sanctions and nonproliferation* in SOLINGEN, Etel: **Nuclear logics: Contrasting paths in East Asia and the Middle East**, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007, p.155 (Consulted online)

[263] DE WIJK, Rob: **The Art of military coercion. Why the West's military superiority scarcely matters**, *Op. Cit*.

[264] MCNEILLY, Mark: **Sun Tzu and the art of modern warfare**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.41. (Updated edition – Consulted online).

More precisely, we share Jentleson's and Whytock's approach to a State's vulnerability being "shaped by its domestic political and economic conditions."[265] In the same line, the American strategist Thomas Schelling advises that *to exploit a capacity for hurting and inflicting damage, one needs to know what an adversary treasures and **what scares him***.[266]

With specific regard to domestic political and economic conditions, there will be an attention to variables such as GDP, unemployment rate, trade, evolution in the public opinion, changes in the domestic constituencies related to the target's nuclear policies. Target states often find themselves economically dependent on external actors, making them susceptible to economic sanctions or trade restrictions during coercive diplomacy. These measures can result in significant economic costs and wield influence over their decision-making processes. Additionally, the domestic political landscape within a target state may be considered a weak-point, with leaders experiencing pressure from their constituents and public opinion playing a critical role in shaping their responses to coercive strategies. The success of these counter-coercion policies may ultimately depend on the target state's ability to effectively manage domestic pushback. Political and military alliances and international support should not be neglected; indeed, leaving target States without strong allies or diplomatic backing when facing coercive pressure can shape their preferences, thus limiting their resistance or negotiation capabilities.

The second hypothesis is rooted in the issue of the motivation of the belligerents involved in coercive dynamics. Several scholars argue that the balance of motivation among the protagonists is decisive for the outcome of a coercive dynamic. For example, Alexander George stresses that "coercive diplomacy is more likely to be successful if the side employing it is more highly motivated by what is at stake in the crisis than its opponent. What is critical in this respect, however, is that the adversary believes that the coercing power is more highly motivated to achieve its crisis objective than the adversary is to prevent it."[267] Robert Art and Patrick Cronin dwell on as they insist that "a coercer does not resort to force or threats of force unless the interests at stake are of sufficient importance that it is willing to call out the ultimate weapon. (…) Resolve refers to the strength of a party's will to prevail, and the balance of resolve refers to whose will – the target's or the coercer's – is the stronger. (...) Coercive diplomacy attempts are games of chicken that reveal to the target and the coercer which one cares

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[265] JENTLESON W., Bruce and WHYTOCK A., Christopher, **Who "won" Libya? The force-diplomacy debate and its implications for theory and policy,** The MIT Press, 2006, p.79
[266] SCHELLING, Thomas: **Arms and influence**, *Op. Cit.*, p.3
[267] GEORGE L., Alexander: **Forceful persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war**, *Op. Cit*, p.77 (3rd ed.)

more about something and just how much more."[268] Escalation dominance will serve as the main yardstick to measure the motivation of the coercer.

Escalation dominance is a critical concept in crisis management that revolves around the idea of gaining a strategic advantage by effectively managing and controlling the intensification of a crisis situation. Escalation, in this context, refers to "an increase in the intensity of dispute or conflict between two parties."[269] In other words, it's the process by which a crisis or conflict intensifies or worsens over time. It is often characterized by increasing tensions, the involvement of more actors, and a heightened potential for violence or damage. Understanding escalation is crucial because it helps decision-makers identify the key aspects of thresholds – the points at which a crisis transitions from one level of severity to another. These thresholds can include triggers such as the use of force, the mobilization of additional resources, or the crossing of political, economic, or social red lines. These triggers demonstrate a party's desire to acquire and maintain the "escalation dominance" over the adversary during the crisis. Paraphrasing Herman Kahn who coined the concept, Michael Fitzsimmons defines it as "the ability of a state to maintain such a markedly superior position over a rival, across a range of escalation rungs, that its rival will always see further escalation as a losing bet."[270]

The *escalation ladder*[271] is a fundamental framework within the concept of escalation dominance. It represents a series of steps or stages that a crisis can progress through, with each step indicating an increase in severity and risk. As a crisis escalates, it becomes more difficult to manage, and the potential for unintended consequences or uncontrollable outcomes grows. To maintain escalation dominance, decision-makers must strategically navigate this ladder, carefully considering their actions and responses at each stage to prevent further escalation. There are three primary mechanisms of escalation: vertical escalation, horizontal escalation, and diagonal escalation. Vertical escalation occurs when the crisis intensifies within a single actor's domain, such as increasing military operations or economic sanctions.[272]

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[268] ART J., Robert and CRONIN M., Patrick (Eds.): **The United States and coercive diplomacy**, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 361 and 365.

[269] SWEIJS, Tim, USANOV, Artur and RUTTEN, Rik: **Crisis and escalation. Back to the brink. Escalation and interstate crisis**, report, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, StratMon 2016, p.35

[270] FITZSIMMONS, Michael, **The false allure of escalation dominance**, War on The Rocks, November 16, 2017. Accessed from https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/false-allure-escalation-dominance/ on December 23, 2023.

[271] The term was also coined by Herman Kahn. See KAHN, Herman: **On Escalation. Metaphors and scenarios**, New York, Routledge, 2009, 336 pages. (Reprinted edition).

[272] SWEIJS, Tim, USANOV Artur and RUTTEN Rik: **Crisis and escalation. Back to the brink. Escalation and interstate crisis**, *Op. Cit.*, p.39

Horizontal escalation involves the widening of a crisis by drawing in additional elements such as the combination of military operations and economic sanctions at the same time, or different actors or stakeholders, often through alliances or coalitions. Effective crisis management involves recognizing these mechanisms and employing strategies to control them, ultimately ensuring that escalation dominance is maintained to achieve the desired outcomes. Neoclassical realism appeared as the most accurate framework for understanding the coercive dynamics between two actors. Based on the previous information, The thesis will analyze the outcomes of the interactions between the belligerents in light of the underlying indicators of the hypotheses mentioned above. Specifically, the thesis will assess **how the target's decision to comply or resist the sender's request relates to the political and economic effects of coercive diplomacy**. Additionally, the thesis shall examine **how the US escalation's tactics may have influenced the target's ultimate decision regarding the coercer's demands**.

3.1.2 Neoclassical realism as our theoretical framework

3.1.2.1 The philosophical assumptions.

Gideon Rose theorized neoclassical realism in his famous article *Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy*.[273] In theorizing neoclassical realism, Gideon Rose aimed to suggest a theoretical model of foreign policy which would fill the analytical shortfalls of domestic (*Innenpolitik* Schools of thought) and systemic approaches (offensive and defensive neorealism) of foreign policy. Indeed, both classical realists and neorealists emphasize specific units of analysis to explain a country's foreign policy. While the former dwells on the domestic elements (leadership style and vision, nature of the regime etc.), the latter dwells on systemic aspects. But as Rose warned, "the chief problem with *Innenpolitik* theories is that pure unit-level explanations have difficulty accounting for why states with similar domestic systems often act differently in the foreign policy sphere and why dissimilar states in similar situations often act alike. (While) pure systemic theories face the reverse anomaly from their *Innenpolitik* counterparts: States in similar structural positions do not always act alike."[274] From this perspective, both former theories provide partial explanations for the causes and ways a State reacted to international demands or pressures. Hence, Rose and his followers' goal is to provide a model that can comprehensively account for the international behavior of a State.

To achieve his goal, Rose developed an explanatory model rooted in the analytical strength of the two previous Schools of thought but changed their role in his analytical

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[273] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, World Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Vol. 51, N. 1, pp. 144–172.
[274] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, *Ibid.*, pp. 148 and 150.

framework. This framework is composed of three main elements: an independent variable, an intervening variable, and the dependent variable. This is because neoclassic realists argue that "to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, (…) one must analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and domestic state structure. In the neoclassical realist world, leaders can be constrained by both international and domestic politics."[275]

The neorealist premise on the importance of **the distribution of material resources** on a State's position and capacities in the international system serves as the **independent variable** in neoclassical realism. Indeed, neo-classical realists share the view that "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities."[276] The notion of the "international system" and its components are central in the neoclassical realist theory.[277] Unfortunately, there is usually confusion between the notion of "system" and "structure," as Kenneth Waltz deplored in one of his classic books.[278]

Kenneth Waltz maintains that international political systems are formed by the coaction of self-regarding units. International structures are defined in terms of the primary political units of an era, be they city-states, empires, or nations. Structure emerges from the coexistence of states. No state intends to participate in the formation of a structure by which it and others will be constrained.[279] Waltz argues that the international system differs from national/domestic systems in three regards: first, **the ordering principle** mainly characterized by decentralization and anarchy; second, **the character of the units** as "the States that are the units of international-political systems are not formally differentiated by the functions they perform."[280] The third element to consider is the **distribution of capabilities**: "the units of an anarchic system are functionally undifferentiated. The units of such an order are then distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks," Waltz argues.[281] But Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro and Steven Lobell regret the fact that "Waltz's conception of system and structure is spare. Nevertheless, it does capture two insights upon which neoclassical realism builds. The first is that while the structure of

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[275] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, *Ibid.*, p.152
[276] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, *Ibid.*, p.146
[277] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p.35
[278] WALTZ, Kenneth: **Theory of international politics**, Boston, Addison-Wesley publishing company, 2010, p.58 (1st ed.)
[279] WALTZ, Kenneth: **Theory of international politics,** *Ibid.*, p.91
[280] WALTZ, Kenneth: **Theory of international politics,** *Ibid.*, p.93
[281] WALTZ, Kenneth: **Theory of international politics,** *Ibid.*, p.97

the system imposes constraints by delimiting a range of possible strategic responses and bargaining outcomes. (…) The second insight is that the system's anarchic ordering principle generates pervasive uncertainty among the units."[282]

Regarding this thesis, we will use **the nature of the external threats** from the sender and **the perception of the related threats** from the receiver as our primary independent variable. We did not choose other variables like economic interdependence or international power changes because they were irrelevant in our context. Indeed, the US's power capabilities (military, economic, political, and normative) did not change over time during its coercive strategies with Iran, Libya, or South Africa. The US remained one of the Superpowers in the international system (during the Cold War) and the only Superpower after the Cold War. However, what really changed was the nature/type of the threats the US displayed or wielded and how it affected the calculus of its target. Of course, these coercive strategies were displayed within a specific context or international structure.

There is no consensual definition of the notion of (international) structure. As Colin Wight confirms, "despite the frequency with which the concept of structure appears in sociological and IR literature, the concept remains ambiguous and imprecise."[283] According to Kenneth Waltz, "to define a structure requires ignoring how units relate with one another (how they interact) and concentrating on how they stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged or positioned). (In sum,) a structure is defined by the arrangement of its parts. Only changes of arrangement are structural changes."[284] From the Waltzian perspective, three main criteria should be considered to distinguish one structure from another: the organizing principle, the differentiation of units, and the distribution of power.[285] The structure can also be defined as "a set of overarching principles, rules, roles, and constraints that binds actors together into a larger system. It can organize or order actors into different relative positions of strength, wealth, influence, and status."[286]

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[282] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics, *Op. Cit.*,** pp.36-37

[283] WIGHT, Colin: **Agents, Structures and International Relations. Politics as Ontology,** Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.123.

[284] WALTZ, Kenneth: **Theory of international politics, *Op. Cit.*,** p.80

[285] SHIPPING, Tang, **International system, not international structure: Against the agent–structure Problématique in IR**, The Chinese Journal of International Politics, Winter 2004, Vol. 7, N.4, pp.5-6

[286] **Structure in the International System. Differentiate types of structure and describe how they help shape outcomes in the international system**. Accessed from the link https://revelpreview.pearson.com/epubs/pearson_mcdonaldir1e/OPS/xhtml/fileP7001016344000000000000000000000D9.xhtml on the 15th of February 2022.

Two main traditions emerged regarding the nature of the structure in international politics: "the Continental tradition" and the "sociological tradition." *The collective representations account of social facts has been adopted by the continental tradition and tends towards a more qualitative and subjectivist treatment of structure. (And) the sociological tradition of structural inquiry has focused on the morphological variables. This means that this sociological tradition tends towards a rigorous objectivism and eschews all subjective elements.*[287] Depending on its philosophical assumptions, each paradigm emphasized specific constitutive elements of an international structure. For instance, Realists insist on materialist elements like technology or nuclear weapons, while neoliberalists emphasize interdependence and international institutions. Constructivists, on their side, emphasize firstly the power of ideas in shaping the international structure. As Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink argue in this regard, "in an ideational international structure, idea shifts and norm shifts are the main vehicles for system transformation. Norm shifts are to the ideational theorists what changes in the balance of power are to the realist."[288] Irrespective of the ontological elements we considered, analyzing the international structure is decisive in explaining the behavior of the units (States).

According to Jack Donnelly, "structures produce patterned behavior by encouraging, enabling, constraining, and ignoring actions (of actors or units)."[289] With respect to our research, we will consider the following periods as our structures because, as we previously analyzed, Iran, Libya and South Africa behaved in a specific way depending on the international context under which the US implemented its coercive strategies. These contexts are the following: **the Cold War, the post-Cold War, the 9/11 events, the 2003 military intervention in Iraq and the post-2003 US military intervention period in Iraq**. Yet, irrespective of the importance of the previously mentioned contexts, the targets reacted to the US demands based also on specific domestic parameters, which shaped and explain the nature of their response to the US demands. Hence, one can conclude with Michel Foulon that "international pressures from the structure are indirect and translate downward through states-specific domestic intervening variables at State level."[290]

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[287] WIGHT, Colin: **Agents, Structures and International Relations. Politics as Ontology,** *Ibid.***,** p.125
[288] FINNEMORE, Martha and SIKKINK, Kathryn, **International norm dynamics and political change**, International Organization, Autumn 1998, Vol. 52, N.4, p.894.
[289] DONNELLY, Jack, **The Elements of the structures of International Systems**, International Organization, 2012, Vol. 66, N.4, p.625
[290] FOULON, Michel, **Neoclassical realism: challengers and bridging identities**, International Studies Review, Vol. 17, N.4, p.648

3.1.2.2 The concept of strategic culture and its importance in a State's decision-making.

Jack Snyder coined the notion of strategic culture in his article "the Soviet strategic culture: implications for limited nuclear operations." According to him, the strategic culture of a State refers to "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other concerning nuclear strategy''[291] Like many concepts in Social Sciences, there is no consensual definition of the notion of strategic culture. There are two main approaches in this regard: the first, identified as the first generation, emphasizes a historical trajectory that shaped more or less permanent "values", "beliefs", and "habits" specific to a community and governed its mode of perception and response to an external threat. Among the authors belonging to this school of thought is Théo Farrell or Ken Booth, who defines the strategic culture as a *nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.*[292] Although he agrees with the subjective aspects of strategic culture (values etc.) Colin Gray insists on its contextual nature and the particular "behavior" of a community with an equally specific strategic culture.[293]

The second school of thought, spearheaded by Alastair Johnson, defines a State's strategic culture as not through values or beliefs but symbols which frame the "long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs."[294] According to Lord Carnes, the strategic culture of a State is shaped by a set of factors like the geopolitical settling, its international relations, the political and ideological culture of the State, the culture or the military history of the State, its international ties or dynamics with other States, the bureaucratic organization of the State, in particular the relations between the civil and military leadership, and finally the degree of technological advancement of the military forces.[295] The geopolitical setting refers to the geographic location where the State is located.[296] The state's international relations refer to the bellicose or friendly nature of

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[291] SNYDER L., Jack: **The Soviet strategic culture: implications for limited nuclear operations,** Santa Monica, California, Rand Corporation, 1977, p.8

[292] BOOTH, Ken, *The concept of strategic culture affirmed*, in JACOBSEN G., Carl (ed): **Strategic power: USA/USSR**, New York, St Martin Press, 1990, p.121

[293] GRAY S., Colin, **Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back,** Review of International Studies, Vol. 25, N.1, January 1999, p.50

[294] JOHNSTON I., Alastair, **Thinking about strategic culture,** International Security, Vol. 19, No.4, Spring 1995, p.46

[295] CARNES, Lord, **American strategic culture,** Comparative Strategy, Vol.5, Issue 3, 1985, p.272

[296] LANTIS S., Jeffrey, ***Strategic culture: from Clausewitz to constructivism*** in JOHNSON, Jeannie et al: **Strategic culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: culturally based insights into comparative national security policymaking,** London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.40

its interactions with its allies and/or adversaries. Political culture refers to the nature of the regime, which can be war-minded, as was the case for aristocratic societies, or anti-war in principle, as is often the case in democratic countries. The State's military culture reflects the country's past military experience, which may have deeply and painfully impacted the nation. A related important notion to a country's military experience is the conflict history of the belligerents. Indeed, *one indicator of a challenger's likely intentions is the historical frequency of conflict between the challenger and target. Frequent conflicts could suggest that there are outstanding disputes or long-standing rivalries that could provoke future demands from the challenger.[297]*

Regarding the bureaucratic relations between the civil and military authorities, Lord Carnes stresses that there should be a balance between civilian and military leadership regarding warfare issues. This is important to avoid "passivity" and spasmodic decisions from the former or drifts in terms of objectives from the latter. A final factor that can influence a state's strategic culture is ethnicity. According to Théo Farrell, "racial and ethnic differences can reduce restraint in the use of force by states and other communities. Against opponents deemed to be lesser beings, anything goes, whereas against other civilized opponents, certain tacit restraints come into force."[298]

Concerning the beliefs, the US considers itself above all as a unique, exceptional country, blessed by the Gods, and invested with a mission of moralizing and granting freedom the other peoples on earth. From this perspective, the primary purpose of American foreign policy is to give "freedom" to people trapped in the net cage of servitude and oppression. The resulting Messianism explains the presence of religious symbols referring to crusades between the forces of the Good on one side (the US) and the forces of Evil (non-democratic nations) on the other. Therefore, resorting to force aims at achieving one primary objective: to defeat the enemy who threatens the stability of the liberal order. According to Walter Lippman, in the American vision, "an aggression is an armed rebellion against the universal and eternal principles of the world society. [Hence] no war can end rightly, therefore, except by the unconditional surrender of the aggressor nation and by the overthrow and transformation of its political regime." Consequently, the American vision of war is different from the European's. While the latter views war as a military instrument in the service of a political project, the former considers it first as the corollary of political failure but also as an opportunity to correct this anomaly. In other words, while Europeans perceive war as a bargaining process (Clausewitz), the Americans consider it to be a zero-sum game whose main objective is

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[297] SECHSER S., Todd, **Reputations and signaling in coercive bargaining**, *Op. Cit.*, p.324
[298] FARRELL, Theo, **Strategic culture and American empire,** SAIS Review of International Affairs, vol. 25, N.2, 2005, p.6 (Project MUSE)

annihilating the enemy. To ensure victory in the various battles, the Americans always make sure to have the technological edge.

Traditionally, the US has a defensive attrition warfare culture and an offensive annihilation warfare culture. Each of these strategies was developed in a specific context; the first occurred during the War of Independence against England, during which American troops lacked economic resources and significant popular support.[299] The second was first experienced during the American civil war before being confirmed in World Wars. The strategy of annihilation in continental, maritime and air space has been theorized respectively by Ulysse Grant, Alfred T. Mahan and William "Billy" Mitchell. Regarding the geopolitical settling, Lord Carnes argues that the isolated character of the United States (surrounded by two oceans) predisposes it to a defensive operational culture. Regarding technological capabilities, "no nation in recent history has valued the role of technology in planning and waging war more highly than the United States."[300]

Indeed, the Americans have developed an obsessive quest for technological superiority in the military realm; this is what Theo Farrell described in terms of "technological fetishism." Several factors explain this obsession with technology; firstly, the solid American desire to be an undisputed leader in all fields, in line with Clausewitz's maxim, which advises "excellence in no single dimension."[301] The American belief also explains the obsession for the technological edge in the American strategic culture in technological progress not only as a guarantee of victory in a conflict but also because of the need to reduce the risk of collateral victims. In this regard, Theo Farrell argues that *the armed forces harness high technology as a means of minimizing U.S. casualties - principally through reliance on airpower and other distance strike assets*.[302]

However, the American passion for technological superiority is mistakenly often interpreted as a panacea, thus becoming a substitute for a strategy which remains one of the main criteria for a military victory. Jeannie Johnson regrets it as she declares, "America's traditional reliance upon technology in war is certainly no recipe for success. Indeed, it is a poor substitute for strategic thinking."[303] The absence of efficient strategy planning results from the divergence between political and military objectives.

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[299] SONDHAUS, Lawrence: S**trategic culture and ways of war,** London, Routledge, 2006, p.54 (1ˢᵗ ed.)
[300] JOHNSON, Jeannie et al: **Strategic culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally based insights into comparative national security policymaking, *Op. Cit.,*** p.74
[301] HARRIS, Brice: **America, technology and strategic culture: A Clausewitzian assessment** (Strategy and History), London, Routledge, 2015, p.153. (Consulted online.)
[302] FARRELL, Theo, **Strategic culture and American empire, *Op. Cit.,*** p.10
[303] JOHNSON, Jeannie et al: **Strategic culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: culturally based insights into comparative national security policymaking, *Ibid.,*** p.75

Although military leaders are subject to political leaders, the US has often stood out with a surprising and paradoxical deficit in strategic planning. According to Mackubin Owens, three main factors explain the shortcomings in the American planning strategy. Firstly, the persistence of a rigid line between the political decision-makers responsible for planning the military strategy and the soldiers in charge of implementing it. In other words, a clear difference between theory and practice, or what Eliot Cohen calls a "normal" theory of civil-military relations.[304] The second factor is the existence of a specific "strategic concept" in each military service. The "strategic concept" determines the "personality, identity, behavior, privileged means of combat" of each military service.[305] Finally, the third factor is the 1986 reform of the Department of Defense which enshrined the idea that "there is an autonomous realm of military action within which civilians have no role. The result of such a disjunction between the military and political realms is that war plans may not be integrated with national policy and that strategy.[306]

Nonetheless, the American strategic culture also has shortcomings that can reduce the credibility of the American threat if its strategic interests are undermined. Among these shortcomings is the aversion to casualties which impacts the use of force, as underlined by Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman.[307] Furthermore, the excessive use of technological tools can clumsily connote the lack of American determination against its adversaries. Indeed, although the use of highly advanced technological instruments makes it possible and easier to protect the American military and limit the risk of collateral damage, it can also be interpreted by the adversaries of the US as a lack of will to pay the high price to preserve its interests, thereby reducing American credibility and determination. In this regard, Jeannie Johnson argues, for example, that "Saddam Hussein saw high-technology warfare as a sign of American weakness rather than strength."[308]

Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman also criticize the American preference for multilateralism, which, for the unity of the coalition, force the Americans to meet the

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[304] Eliot Cohen, cited in OWENS, Mackunbi, **Civil-Military relations and the US strategy deficit**, Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2010, p.2. Accessed on the 12th of August 2020 from https://www.fpri.org/docs/media/owens_civil-mil.pdf..

[305] OWENS M., Mackunbi, **Civil-military relations and the US strategy deficit**, *Ibid.* The US Department of Defense defines the "strategic concept" as a "statement of what is to be done in broad terms sufficiently flexible to permit its use in framing the military, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures which stem from it." See LEONARD, Barry: **Department of Defense. Dictionary of military and associated terms**, 12 April 2001 (As amended through April 2010), p.448. (Accessed online).

[306] OWENS T., Mackunbi, **Civil-military relations and the U.S. strategy deficit,** *Ibid*., p.3

[307] BYMAN Daniel and WAXMAN Matthew: ***Defeating US coercion, Op. Cit.***

[308] JOHNSON, Jeannie et al: **Strategic culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally based insights into comparative national security policymaking,** *Op. Cit.,* p.75

requirements of their allies and comply with international standards in this area. On the other hand, Alexander Thompson maintains that multilateral coercion strengthens the threat's credibility beyond the mere search for legitimacy. In a famous article,[309] he demonstrates, for example, how reaching an international consensus on military intervention in a highly politicized organ like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) signals the target about the risks he runs if he does not comply with the demand of the coercer.

3.1.2.3 The practical applications of the theory.

The role of the intervening variables in explaining a country's foreign policy is one of the most significant added values of the neoclassic realists. Indeed, as Gideon Rose argued in this regard, "to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, (…) one must analyze how systemic pressures are **translated** through unit level intervening variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and domestic state structure. In the neoclassical realist world, leaders can be constrained by both international and domestic politics."[310] From this perspective, as illustrated in figure 3 below, the intervening variables play the role of the (imperfect) transmitting belt between systemic pressures and a country's decision-making. Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro and Steven Lobell grouped these variables into four (4) categories: *the images and perceptions of state leaders, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutional arrangements. (They) include psychological, bureaucratic/organizational, societal, and institutional models, which reflect alternative approaches to foreign policy analysis*.[311]

Concerning leadership, perception refers to "a set of beliefs about fundamental issues of history and central questions of politics as these bear, in turn, on the problem of action. (…) these beliefs also provide norms, standards, and guidelines that influence the actor's choice of strategy and tactics, his structuring and weighing of alternative courses of action."[312] Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro and Steven Lobell argue that "these "images" are highly personalized, as they are informed by the individual's prior experiences and values. (…) Once formed, they act as cognitive filters that inform how leaders process information – what they pay attention to; what they ignore; and how they understand signals, information, and events. (…) As a result, leaders will react differently to international challenges and opportunities depending on the content of

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[309] THOMPSON, Alexander, **Coercion through IOs: the Security Council and the logic of information transmission, *Op. Cit.***

[310] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, *Op. Cit.*, p.152

[311] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics, *Op. Cit.*,** p.59

[312] GEORGE L., Alexander, **The "Operational code": A neglected approach to the study of political leaders and decision-making**, International Studies Quarterly, 1969, Vol. 13, N.2, p. 191

their images."[313] Another important intervening variable to consider is what Gideon Rose called *the country's State apparatus and its relation to the surrounding society*. This intervening variable to relations between key foreign policy decision-makers and the different bureaucratic institutions which will be directly or indirectly affected by the foreign choices of the country's elite. This parameter puts at stake *the ability of governments to extract and direct the resources of their societies* to support their foreign policy choices.[314]

These domestic actors include but are not limited to the military, economic agents, political actors, and even ethnic groups to some extent. Norrin Ripsman describes them as *veto players* and advises policymakers to consider their role in the target country when framing their foreign policy. In democratic States, for example, "single-issue interest groups (…) can provide an electoral payoff, the legislature that can act as a veto for the government's policy agenda, groups that can frame executive thinking on foreign affairs, and, occasionally, the public as a whole. (While) in non-democratic states, kingmaker societal groups, and those such as the military that can lead a revolt against the leader, should have the greatest influence on national security policy, followed by bureaucratic or economic actors that have the potential to obstruct policy implementation, and in unusual circumstances, public opinion as a whole."[315] This imperative of an internal bargaining between decision-makers and domestic actors is similar to Robert Putnam's two-level analysis model.[316] Another critical intervening variable to consider in the neoclassic realist model is strategic culture.

The strategic culture also plays a determinant role in a country's response to systemic pressures. "Strategic culture or collective expectations shape the strategic understanding of political leaders, societal elites, and even the general public. (…) Theories of the role of strategic culture focus on norms, such as moral restraint on the use of military power, non-use of weapons of mass destruction, and humanitarian intervention."[317] From this perspective, the strategic culture falls under the psychological components of foreign policy analysis. Hence, it helps to understand the

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[313] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics,** *Op. Cit.*, p.59

[314] GIDEON, Rose, **Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy**, *Op. Cit.*, p.161

[315] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realism, the State, and foreign policy,** Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.184

[316] According to Robert Putnam, the bargaining stance of a State at the international is the outcome of its domestic factions. Hence, when interacting at the international level, States' representatives negotiate with their counterparts and domestic constituencies whose interests are at stake. Read PUTNAM D., Robert, **Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games**, International Organization, Vol. 42, N.3, 34 pages.

[317] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics,** *Op. Cit.*, p.67

preference for the military response to a specific crisis based on the social representation or identity the country has of itself.

Concerning crisis management, the strategic culture tends to be a double edge sword. While it can mobilize popular support toward the foreign policy of the elites thanks to shared ideas with decision-makers, nevertheless, it also *constrains elites by raising the domestic political costs of reorienting grand strategy to unacceptable levels and/or by imbuing the elite community with powerful strategic images and conceptions that so orient individuals and bureaucracies toward the attainment of specific goals that desirable policy options are effectively removed from consideration.*[318] The last intervening variable to consider is the setting of domestic institutions related to the power, function and bureaucratic process of the country's institutions when coping with external threats. Why is neoclassical realism an excellent approach to understanding coercive diplomacy?
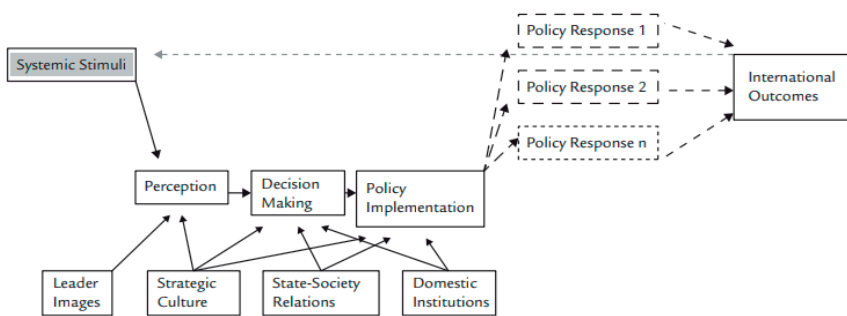

Figure 3: Type III neoclassical realist model.[319]

3.1.3 Neoclassical realism and coercive diplomacy.

As noted earlier, most previous research projects on the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy in the context of nuclear proliferation considered the State a unitary actor. The principal shortcoming of such approach rest on its exclusive focus on the systemic pressures, hence its inability to dig in on the nuclear decision-making of the target by identifying the actors involved, the interests at stake and how the final decision of the State reflects these domestic inputs. *Innenpolitik* perspectives, on the contrary, stress only the role of domestic actors in the foreign policymaking of a State and neglect the importance of systemic configurations (both the system and the

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[318] KUPCHAN, Charles: **The Vulnerability of Empire**, Ithaca, Corneil University Press, 1994, p.15 (1st ed.)

[319] RIPSMAN M., Norrin, TALIAFERRO W., Jeffrey, and LOBELL E., Steven: **Neoclassical realist theory of international politics**, *Op. Cit.,* p.34

structure). This approach can easily mislead decision-makers through miscalculations and misinterpretations about how the international system or the hegemonic Power will react to their defiance. The neoclassical realist approach to foreign policy analysis alleviates both previous analytical shortages by highlighting the crucial role played by the domestic inputs in the foreign policy decision-making of a State in the context of external pressures.

As the previous figure clearly illustrates, domestic configurations serve as a filter between systemic pressures and the final decision to comply with external demands. In other words, by describing domestic settings as intervening variables, neoclassic realists highlight their roles as circuit-breakers or transmitting belts of systemic pressures. Peter Trubowitz shares this point of view as he argues that "the domestic politics approach starts from the premise that societal interests (e.g., industrialists, bankers, merchants, interest groups) have a stake in whether a nation's foreign policy is expensive or cheap, offensive or defensive, or coercive or cooperative. (...) In *Innenpolitik* accounts of grand strategy, States' foreign policy choices are thus constrained, and perhaps even distorted, by societal interests and pressures."[320] Thus, the neoclassical realist perspective permits not only an accurate identification of the interests the decision-makers consider when crafting their foreign policy and the actors involved in the process-making but also considers or integrates the weakness of the target State. In addition, the neoclassic realist eclectic foreign policy analysis model helps unfold the coercive mechanism better and thus the causal explaining process of the target's answer to the coercer's demand.

The combination of different, if not contradicting, Schools of thought's philosophical considerations by the neoclassic realist approach is also relevant for our thesis as it fits with the characteristics of coercive diplomacy as such. As we previously analyzed, coercive diplomacy is a foreign policy set by a State to achieve its goals. Thus, it is important to remember that "in FPA, there is no trench warfare between paradigms. (...) By freeing ourselves from the pursuit of a single explanatory variable, a confusing first impression can be transformed into a creative impulse. (...) FPA is not only multilevel and multidisciplinary; it is resolutely multicausal," Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin argue.[321] In addition, as Alexander George emphasized, *coercive diplomacy is highly context-dependent, many different variables can affect the variant of the strategy the policymaker selects, its implementation, and its outcome. These contextual factors vary from one case to another so that one must be careful not to assume*

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[320] TRUBOWITZ, Peter: **Politics and strategy. Partisan ambition and American statecraft**, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, p.3
[321] FPA stands for Foreign Policy Analysis. See MORIN Jean-Frédéric and PAQUIN Jonathan: **Foreign policy analysis. A toolbox**, *Op. Cit.*, p.8

that because the strategy worked in one case, it ought to be successful in other cases as well.[322] This means that how and why the US implemented a specific type of coercive strategy depended not only on the target but also on additional variables like the perception/beliefs of the leader, the nature of the historical relations with the country, the geopolitical implications of the (actual or perceived) possession of nuclear weapons by the country etc.

Concerning this thesis, we will mainly rely on the following domestic variables to analyze the targets' responses to the coercer's threats and demands: the leaders' perceptions, the strategic culture, the regime type and the related institutions of the country, and the State-Society relations. In other words, we will always pay closer attention to how the policy responses of the target States regarding the coercer's demands and threats reflect the instrumental role played by the previous intervening domestic variables. Were the target's answers to the coercer's demands and threats shaped by its strategic culture, the leaders' perceptions, the interaction of the domestic institutions or the capacity of the State to mobilize the society's resources in terms of popular support? Our analysis of the coercive interactions between the protagonists will be carried out against the backdrop of these questions. This will be done by identifying the causal mechanism related to the drivers of the policy response of the target State. The notion of mechanism will be substantially analyzed in the following sub-section dedicated to our methodology. Yet, we will first emphasize the concept of a case study before delving into the causal mechanism.

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[322] GEORGE L., Alexander: **Forceful persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war,** *Op. Cit.*, p.69

3.2 SECTION II - METHODOLOGY

This sub-part aims at explaining and describing our methodological choices. In other words, it will provide details regarding our *ways of acquiring data*,[323] or more precisely, about the "standardized set of techniques for building scientific knowledge, such as how to make valid observations, how to interpret results, and how to generalize those results."[324] To investigate the conditions under which the US coercive diplomacy could successfully compel Iran, Libya and South Africa to abandon their nuclear (weapons) programs, we adopted the **case study** as our research strategy and **process tracing** as our principal method of investigation. Consequently, this subchapter is divided into two parts: the case study and the process tracing.

Concerning the case study, we will first emphasize the definition of case study research, its strength, and weaknesses as a research strategy, and thus its relevance for this PhD thesis. Then, we will dwell on the choice of our specific variant of the case study and its relevance for the explanation and the understanding of the outcomes of the coercive dynamics between the US and the countries mentioned above. Regarding process tracing, we will first analyze the definitions of the concepts and the type or variant that we relied on (the **explanatory variant of process tracing**) to unfold the causal mechanisms which explain the different outcomes of the coercive dynamics between Washington and Tehran, Tripoli, and Pretoria. This unfolding power of process tracing in general, particularly its explanatory variant, demonstrates the relevance of this method of investigation for our research. We also relied on the structured-focused comparative method to obtain substantial information regarding the similarities and differences among our cases.

For data collection, we used both primary and secondary sources. Our primary sources included memoirs, speeches, official statements, and interviews with key actors like diplomats and civil servants involved in implementing the coercive strategies. Most interviews were conducted online via Skype due to practical reasons, including COVID-19 restrictions and the overseas locations of the interviewees, with only one interview conducted in person at the Iranian embassy in The Hague. We interviewed 11 experts, including theorists and practitioners, for their expertise in our topic. These experts, such as policymakers like Richard Nephew and an Iranian diplomat, along with academic lecturers and researchers, played a crucial role in enhancing our understanding of the nuclear dynamics between conflicting parties.

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[323] PORTA D., Donatella: **Approaches and methodologies in the Social Sciences: A pluralist perspective,** Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.28
[324] BHATTACHERJEE, Anol: **Social Science research: principles, methods, and practices,** Zurich, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, p.5 (2nd ed.)

The interviewees provided invaluable firsthand insights into decision-makers' motivations and factors shaping their choices, helping us in challenging established literature on the topic. Regarding secondary sources, books and articles were instrumental in understanding the main actors' coercive dynamics. We also used information from several newspapers chosen on the credibility of the information shared with the public. This credibility is based on the providers of the sensitive data (intelligence community, anonymous sources from ministries etc.) Combined with secondary sources, the primary sources helped strengthen the internal validity of our findings by testing the consistence of the opinions of the experts and researchers (books, articles) with the decisions that were made in the International political arena, especially in the case of Iran.

For the data processing, we mainly relied on the triangulation method. In other words, we compared the relevance of the data collected based on the aforementioned different sources (speeches, official statements or declarations, books etc.) Considering that we interviewed experts as previously mentioned, we also relied on the (inductive and deductive) thematic analysis method which helped us processing with the transcripts of the interviews. Thanks to the choice of specific terms or themes, these methods helped us to understand how and why leaders perceived specific issues and highlighted the importance of particular interests at stakes for the parties involved in the coercive dynamics. As previously mentioned, we will start this section by analyzing the case study as a research strategy with an emphasis on what it is, why it's a good research strategy for our topic, its strengths and weakness, and the different types of case studies.

3.2.1 Case study as our research strategy: what it is.

Colin Robson and Kieran McCartan argue that the case study approach is one of the three main research strategies in social sciences, as the two others include ethnographic study and grounded theory.[325] Like the notions of development or power, there is no consensual definition of a case study in social sciences. But before delving into the notion of a case study, what does the notion of the ***case*** refer to? Alexander George and Andrew Bennett define a ***case*** as an "instance of a class of events," that is, "a phenomenon of scientific interests, such as revolutions, types of governmental regimes, kinds of economic systems, or personality types that the investigator chooses to study with the aim of developing a theory regarding the causes of similarities or

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[325] ROBSON Colin and MCCARTAN Kieran: **Real world research**, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons, 2016, p.71 (4th ed.)

differences among instances (cases) of that class of events."[326] Thereof, a **case study** refers to a "well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself."[327] Colin Robson and Kieran McCartan consider a case study to be *a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence*.[328] Tricia Moore, Stephen Lapan and MaryLynn Quartaroli define it as "an investigative approach used to thoroughly describe complex phenomena, such as recent events, important issues, or programs, in ways to unearth new and deeper understanding of the phenomena."[329]

3.2.1.1 Why is the case study approach relevant for this thesis?

As previously analyzed, the case study approach is not the only research strategy to understand social reality. Hence, under which conditions can it be the most suitable research strategy? In this regard, Robert Yin argues that "the more that your (research) questions seek to *explain* some contemporary circumstance (e.g., "how" or "why" some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant. Case studies also are relevant the more that your questions require an extensive and "in-depth" description of some social phenomenon."[330] Our research question meets these two conditions. Indeed, the research question of this PhD thesis is "to what extent can coercive diplomacy compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons program?" Regarding the first condition, our research question can be transformed into a *how or why question* if we ask, "how can coercive diplomacy compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons program?" or "why was coercive diplomacy effective at compelling a State to abandon its nuclear program in the X case, and ineffective in Y case?" However, our choice of the case study approach is not rooted only in the previous methodological considerations.

3.2.1.2 Case study as a research strategy: strengths and weaknesses.

The choice of our case studies falls under a specific type of case study. But before dwelling on the typology of case studies, we will first analyze their assets and weaknesses as a research strategy. The main advantage of the case study research approach is its capacity to fix the flaws of quantitative techniques. As Alexander George

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[326] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2004, p.17 (Consulted online).
[327] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Ibid.*, p.18
[328] ROBSON Colin and MCCARTAN Kieran: **Real world research,** *Ibid.*, p.150 (4th ed.)
[329] MOORE S., Tricia, LAPAN D., Stephen and QUARTAROLI T., MaryLynn (Eds): **Qualitative research. An introduction to methods and designs**, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2011, p.243 (1st ed.)
[330] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, Los Angeles, SAGE publications, 2017, p.33. (6th ed. - Consulted online.)

and Andrew Beneath argue, "case studies are generally strong precisely where statistical methods and formal models are weak."[331] In this regard, they identified four main advantages of the case study research approach: "their potential for achieving high conceptual validity; their strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses; their value as a useful means to closely examine the potential or the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases; and their capacity for addressing causal complexity."[332]

Furthermore, Chih-Sheng Hsieh argues that another important asset of the case study approach is its flexibility which is visible in several steps of the investigation, starting with the choice of the case. In addition, "multiple methods of data collection are likely to be adopted depending on how the researcher thinks *reality* can be best revealed. The procedure of data collection is also flexible because there is no fixed end point in data collection."[333] Case study research strategies are also suitable for any epistemological stance adopted by the researcher, whether critical, interpretative or positivist.[334] But "probably the most important feature of case studies is the fact that limiting the research to one or a few cases allows the researcher to invest time and intellectual energy in reflecting on the relationship between empirical observations and the abstract concepts that form the core elements of hypotheses, theories, and mechanism-based explanations. (…) Furthermore, internal validity is enhanced because case study researchers can more easily employ context-specific indicators for theoretical concepts. Finally, case study researchers can take into account a broader set of theories and more abstract theories when analyzing and interpreting cases," Joachim Blatter and Markus Haverland argue.[335] Yet, case studies were also subject to several criticisms.

Alexander George and Andrew Benneth advise differentiating two types of limits regarding the criticism of case studies: *trade-offs* and *inherent limits* of case studies on the first hand and external limits usually highlighted by scholars of quantitative approaches on the other hand. Inherent limits refer to case study researchers' mistakes and methodological biases when conducting their investigations. Those methodological biases include, among others, the case selection bias. Barbara Geddes argues that "the problem with selecting cases for study on the dependent variable stems from the logic

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[331] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences, *Op. Cit.*,** p.19

[332] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences, *Ibid.*,** p.19

[333] HSIEH, Chih-en, **Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative case study research**, Research articles, University of Leicester, 2004, p.95

[334] CROWE, Sarah et al., **The case study approach**, BMC Medical research methodology, 2011, p.4

[335] BLATTER Joachim and HAVERLAND Markus: **Designing case studies. Explanatory approaches in small-N research**, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.20

of explanation."[336] Indeed, case study researchers usually select their cases based on the dependent variable when explaining the discrepancies between two cases in comparative analysis. In other words, in their attempt to explain the difference in outcomes between two or more cases, case study researchers implicitly make assumptions about the explaining factors of the outcome and focus only on cases with similar features. This approach can easily lead to two mistakes: first, to reach conclusions based on partial and oriented observations, that is, *jumping to the conclusion that any characteristic that the selected cases share is a cause*.[337] Second, on the risk of drawing general conclusions about the outcome based on non-representative sample cases.

To overcome the previous challenges, Barbara Geddes suggests a radical approach consisting of identifying the universe of cases to which the hypothesis should apply and to *finding or developing measures of the variables. A sample of cases to examine then needs to be selected from the universe in such a way as to ensure that the criteria for selecting cases are uncorrelated with the placement of cases on the dependent variable*.[338] Though they acknowledge the previous warnings, Alexander George and Andrew Benneth do not completely dismiss the relevance of the dependent variable-based case selection. In fact, they maintain that *cases selected on the dependent variable, including single-case studies, can help identify which variables are not necessary or sufficient conditions for the selected outcome. (...) Selection on the dependent variable can serve the heuristic purpose of identifying the potential causal paths and variables leading to the dependent variable of interest*.[339]

The second inherent limit identified by Alexander George and Andrew Benneth is related to the difficulty for the researcher to *identify the scope conditions and "necessity."* More precisely, they argue that "a limitation of case studies is that they can make only tentative conclusions on how much gradations of a particular variable affect the outcome in a particular case or how much they generally contribute to the outcomes in a class or type of cases. (...) Case studies remain much stronger at assessing *whether* and *how* a variable mattered to the outcome than at assessing *how much* it mattered."[340]

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[336] GEDDES, Barbara, **How the cases you choose affect the answers you get: selection bias in comparative politics**, Political Analysis, 1990, Vol. 2, p.132
[337] GEDDES, Barbara, **How the cases you choose affect the answers you get: selection bias in comparative politics**, *Ibid.*, pp.132-133
[338] GEDDES, Barbara, **How the cases you choose affect the answers you get: selection bias in comparative politics**, *Ibid.*, pp.134-135
[339] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Op. Cit.***,** p.23
[340] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Ibid.***,** p.23

Concerning the external limits of case studies, they usually refer to critics addressed by quantitative scholars to case study researchers. These critics revolve around the alleged absence of "rigor" in case studies. As Patricia Lucas, Jenny Fleming, and Julie Bhosale argue, *it has been well cited that a short coming to case study research is generalizability; or, more specifically the lack of valid generalization*.[341] The challenge of generalizability of the findings of a case study – *the extent to which the findings of the enquiry are more generally applicable outside the specifics of the situation studied*[342] – stems from the property or characteristics of the case studied. Indeed, one should remember with Helen Simons that "case study is the study of the **singular**, the **particular**, the **unique**, whether that single case is a person, a project, an institution, a program or a policy."[343] In other words, each case is unique, and this uniqueness makes the applicability of the study's findings in other cases difficult. Therefore, scholars like Henry Mintzberg can logically argue that "if there is no generalizing beyond the data, no theory. No theory, no insight."[344] But qualitative researchers like Sangeeta Mookherji and Anne LaFond suggested alternatives like theory-based case selection to generalization issues.[345] Various case studies in social sciences use different methods but with powerful explanation capabilities of the social reality.

3.2.1.3 Types of case studies

The typology of case studies can be established based on several criteria, and the functionality of the case study is one of the parameters to consider in this regard. For instance, Stenhouse identified four types of case studies: ethnographic, evaluative, educational and action research.[346] Robert Yin suggests a typology of case studies based on the research outcome sought by the analyst: "exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory *case* studies."[347] In explorative case studies, the researcher aims to *develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry.* In contrast, explanatory case studies usually *deal with the tracing of operational processes over time, rather than mere*

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[341] LUCAS Patricia, FLEMING Jenny, BHOSALE Julie, **The Utility of case study as a methodology for work-integrated learning research**, International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, Special Issue, 2018, Vol. 19, N.3, p.217

[342] ROBSON, Colin: **Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers**, Malden, Blackwell publishing, 2002, p.93. (2nd ed. – Accessed online)

[343] SIMONS, Helen, **Interpret in context: Generalizing from the single case in evaluation**, Evaluation, April 2015, Vol.21, N. 2, p.175.

[344] Henry Mintzberg, cited in WIKFELDT, Emma, **Generalizing from case studies**, Halmstad University, 2016, p.2

[345] SANGEETA Mookherji and LAFOND Anne, **Strategies to maximize generalization from Multiple Case Studies: Lessons from the Africa Routine Immunization System Essentials (ARISE) project**, Evaluation, July 2013, Vol. 19, N.3, pp.284–303.

[346] Lawrence Stenhouse, cited in ROSE Richard and GROSVENOR Ian: **Doing research in special education. Ideas into practice**, London, Routledge, 2001, p.71. (Consulted online).

[347] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, *Op. Cit.*, p.38

frequencies or incidence.[348] More precisely, "a descriptive case study is one that is focused and detailed, in which propositions and questions about a phenomenon are carefully scrutinized and articulated at the outset."[349]

There is also the distinction made by Robert Stake between *Intrinsic, Instrumental* and *Collective* case studies. Intrinsic case studies refer to situations where *the researcher wants better understanding* of the case. (The research) *is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest.*[350] In Instrumental cases, on the other hand, the case is analyzed to *provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else*.[351] Collective case studies refer to scenarios where *a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. (…) Here, the instrumental case is extended to several cases that are chosen because it is believed that investigating these will lead to a better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases*.[352]

Another variable to consider when establishing a typology of case studies is the number of *cases* being analyzed. Hence, we have single hard cases and collective case studies, usually described as comparative case studies. *Single case studies are those conducted using just one incidence or example of the case at a single site*, (while) *Multiple case studies can be conducted at one site where many examples of the case are examined*.[353] However, irrespective of its typology, every case study must rely on a clear research design to account for the case being analyzed insightfully. The research design can be defined as "logical blueprints. (…) The logic involves the links among the research questions, the data to be collected, and the strategies for analyzing the data — so that a study's findings will address the intended research questions. The logic also helps to boost the accuracy of a study."[354] Robert Yin suggested a generic model of research design composed of five (5) key elements: *the case study's questions, its propositions (or*

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[348] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, Los Angeles, SAGE publications, 2002, p.6 (3rd ed.)

[349] TOBIN, Ruthanne, *Descriptive case study* in MILLS J., Albert, DUREPOS, Gabrielle and WIEBE Elden (Eds): **Encyclopedia of case study research**, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, 2010, p.288. (Vol. 1)

[350] Robert Stake cited in THOMAS, Gary: **How to do your case study**, London, SAGE publications, 2011, p.98 (Consulted online)

[351] THOMAS, Gary: **How to do your case study**, *Ibid.*, p.98

[352] SPARKES C., Andrew and SMIT, Brett: **Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product**, Oxon, Routledge, 2013, p.56 (1st ed.) Consulted online.

[353] MOORE S., Tricia, LAPAN D., Stephen and QUARTAROLI T., MaryLynn (Eds): **Qualitative research. An introduction to methods and designs**, *Op. Cit.*, p.247

[354] YIN K., Robert: **Qualitative research from start to finish**, New York, The Guilford Press, 2015, p.83 (2nd ed. - Consulted online.)

hypothesis), if any, its case (definition and boundaries), the logic linking the data to the propositions, the criteria for interpreting the findings.[355] Our PhD developed a research design which includes all the previous elements. But before dwelling on our research design, we will first justify the choice of our specific cases.

3.2.1.4 Case study and the choice of the US as the main coercer, with Iran, Libya, and South Africa as the main targets.

3.2.1.4.1   Why the US as the main coercer?

Since the advent of the NPT in 1970, Great Powers like France, Russia, UK have played an instrumental role in preserving and sustaining the international nuclear regime. Mohan Malik demonstrates, for example, how China moved from being *a challenger to an upholder of the global non-proliferation regime*.[356] Yet, survival imperatives are the primary motivators for every State. Therefore, it is unsurprising to observe their engagement in strategic areas that enhance their fundamental security. This includes nuclear capabilities for those who demonstrate the technological capabilities and, to some extent, the political will to build and maintain a nuclear (weapons) program. Hence, what makes the US specific compared to the other States?

Regarding the normative power of the US, Joseph Nye argues that Washington, as "the most powerful state in the nuclear issue area used its power to attract others to a normative framework."[357] Rebecca Gibbons dwells on this as she maintains that "as the most powerful State in the system during the nuclear age, the United States has had many tools with which to persuade other States to join or otherwise support non-proliferation agreements. Some States, however, require more persuasion than others. States that are more embedded within the US-led order - States whose policy preferences and political values are largely shared with the United States - adhere relatively quickly. The United States must work harder to persuade states that are less embedded."[358] Therefore, our choice of the US as the main coercer is mainly driven by its tremendous power (political, economic, military and normative) capabilities compared to the other Great Powers.

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[355] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, *Op. Cit.*, p.38

[356] MALIK J., Mohan, **China and the nuclear Non-Proliferation regime**, Contemporary Southeast Asia, 2000, Vol. 22, N.3, p.445.

[357] NYE S., Joseph, **Maintaining a Nonproliferation regime**, International Organization, 1981, Vol. 35, N.1, p.17

[358] GIBBONS D., Rebecca: **The Hegemon's tool kit. US Leadership and the politics of the nuclear nonproliferation regime**, Ithaca, Corneil University Press, 2022, p.13

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3.2.1.4.2   Why Iran, Libya, and South Africa as the targets?

Theoretical considerations mainly explain our choice of the case study approach as our research strategy. Indeed, coercive diplomacy is a very context-dependent phenomenon to study, which explains the challenges related to generalizing the findings of a specific hard case or multiple cases. In this regard, Alexander George advised diversifying the case in coercive diplomacy studies that could lead to more generalizable theoretical conclusions. In addition, the specific choice to analyze the coercive dynamics between Washington and Tehran, Tripoli and Pretoria are not empty-grounded. Our preference is rooted in two main assumptions regarding the success of coercive diplomacy: first, the nature of the demands formulated by the coercer on the first hand (A. George), and second the level of advancement of the nuclear program. Also, unlike several previous research on this topic, we did not choose countries based only on their anti-US foreign policy; in fact, the choice of South Africa (an ally of the US) helped us to assess the resolve of Washington to prevent all countries (foes or allies) from illegally joining the nuclear club. In addition, the level of advancement and the related importance of its nuclear program for the target also plays an instrumental role in the readiness of the target State to abandon its nuclear program.

As Peter Feaver and Emerson Niou advised US policymakers when crafting their coercive policies, one should consider, among others, *the phase in the proliferation process to which the proliferator has advanced: pre-weaponization, after weaponization but before deployment, the deployment phase, and, finally, full deployment*.[359] Regarding our research thesis, each target country was at a certain level of advancement of its nuclear (weapons) program when being challenged by the US: Libya's nuclear weapons program was still at a rudimentary level, while Iran had managed to reach a nuclear latency capability and South Africa had successfully built several nuclear weapons. These different levels of advancement could explain the reluctance of the target to comply with the sender's demands, considering the importance of the nuclear program and the related cost of abandoning it. Hence, concerning the nature of the nuclear demands formulated by Washington, each of these cases will provide insightful theoretical and political recommendations regarding the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy. Moreover, the exclusion of case studies such as the US engagement with North Korea's nuclear program stems from the formidable challenges associated with accessing primary source materials.[360]

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[359] FEAVER D., Peter and NIOU M. S., Emerson, **Managing nuclear proliferation: Condemn, strike, or assist?,** International Studies Quarterly, June 1996, Vol. 40, N.2, p.209
[360] This decision suggests a cautious approach to case selection, aiming to ensure that the chosen cases can be thoroughly researched and analysed with access to reliable primary sources. Additionally, it indicates a desire to avoid potential biases that could arise from selecting cases driven only by conflictual political agendas.

3.2.2 The research design of the thesis

Regarding the research question and its propositions, the central question posed is, "what are the conditions under which coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons program?" The related-hypotheses are: coercive diplomacy could compel a State to abandon its nuclear program under two conditions: first if the coercer's strategy exploits the target's vulnerabilities and second, if the coercer demonstrates a motivation to have a sustained campaign to compel the target. Concerning the cases, we identified Iran, Libya, and South Africa as our case studies. This choice was mainly rooted in the level of advancement of these countries' nuclear programs when coerced by the US. Concerning the boundaries, each case had specific actors and time scope.

Regarding **Iran**, we focused on the coercive dynamics between the Islamic regime (post-1979 revolution). The time scope of the chapter spans from **1979 to 2013,** emphasizing the time frame between **2002 and 2013**. Indeed, it was only in 2002 that Iran's nuclear program effectively became a significant source of concern for the West. Tehran was confronted on this issue until 2013, two years before the 2015 nuclear agreement.[361] The time scope of the **Libyan** case spans from **1969 (after Gadhafi's coup d'état) till 2003,** when Libya signed a deal with the US and UK over its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program. It is worth emphasizing that several scholars agreed that achieving a nuclear deterrent capability was an essential goal of Gadhafi's regime since the early hours of his revolution. Lastly, the **South African** case spans **from 1948 (the beginning of the Apartheid regime) till 1994,** when the South African leaders ended the Apartheid regime. However, we are only interested in the nuclear dynamics and the related issues of the Apartheid regime's relations with the US.

Regarding the *logic linking the data to the propositions*, Robert Yin suggested four models of analytical strategies applicable to case studies. The first one, which relies on theoretical propositions, can also be defined as a deductive research strategy as the researcher sets a couple of theoretical propositions at the beginning of the research; these propositions then *shape* the researcher's data collection plan and *yield his/her analytic priorities*.[362] The second research strategy refers to the "ground up" approach and can also be defined as an inductive approach. *Instead of thinking about any theoretical propositions, pour through your data*, Robert Yin advises scholars interested in this strategy. The third analytical strategy can be described as the "time-series analysis." Robert Yin argues that *the important case study objective is to examine some relevant "how" and "why" questions about the relationship of events over time, not merely*

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[361] The nuclear deal between Iran and the E3+3 or P5+1 group was signed on July 14, 2015, and is formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

[362] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, *Op. Cit.*, p.216

to observe the time trends alone.[363] The fourth strategy – the logic models – *consists of matching empirically observed events to theoretically predicted events. Conceptually, you therefore may consider the logic model technique to be another form of pattern matching. However, because of their sequential stages, logic models deserve to be distinguished as a separate analytic technique from pattern matching.*[364]

This thesis opted for the fourth research strategy for its pragmatic and explanatory approach. Indeed, it combines deductive and inductive inputs, which fit with our research strategy. Indeed, we formulated two hypotheses (propositions), which served as the backdrop of our data collection and analysis. In other words, the design of our interviews, the review of books and articles and the related data collected was done against the backdrop of one main goal: identifying the causal mechanisms which could either confirm or refute our theoretical propositions related to our research questions. This deductive perspective helped us to remain focused on our research goal. However, we also ran the risk of missing unanticipated or accidental factors, which would not necessarily undermine the relevance of our theory but strengthen it by unfolding new insights. Hence, we combined the deductive perspective with an inductive approach to let the facts or data *speak for themselves*. This allowed us not to be bounded by a single perspective of our different cases, thus, to understand their complexity. Yet, we chose the structured-focused comparison method to obtain insightful findings that could be applied in other cases of nuclear-related coercive diplomacy.

3.2.3 The Structured-focused comparison method

Described as *simple and straightforward,* Alexander George and Andrew Benneth developed the structured-focused comparison method in their classic book: *Case studies and theory development.* They argue that "the method is "structured" in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of the cases possible. The method is "focused" in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined."[365] The method was developed in response to scholars who criticized previous case studies either because of the lack of accumulation of their findings or because they were not "theory-oriented." To fix these flaws, George and Benneth suggested three requirements or criteria based upon which the *scientificity* of

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[363] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, Los Angeles, SAGE publications, 2008, p.148. (4th ed. - Consulted online.)
[364] YIN K., Robert: **Case study research and applications: design and methods**, *Ibid.*, p.145 (4th ed. - Consulted online.)
[365] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Op. Cit.*, p.67

case studies could no longer be contested. The criteria are the following: first, *a clear limitation of the "class" or "subclass" of events - of which a single case or a group of cases to be studied are instances*. Then, *a well-defined research objective and an appropriate research strategy to achieve that objective should guide the selection and analysis of a single case or several cases within the class or subclass of the phenomenon under investigation*. Finally, *case studies should employ variables of theoretical interest for purposes of explanation*.[366]

This PhD included both structured and focused aspects on its methodological design. Concerning the *structured* aspects, we aimed to answer our research questions through a set of questions we applied to our three case studies. These questions are the following: what was the coercive strategy adopted by the US while addressing the nuclear issue of the target State? What were its coercive goals, the expected mechanisms, and its expected outcomes? What were the actual outcomes, and the causes for such outcomes? As our research question is "to what extent can coercive diplomacy compel a State to abandon its nuclear program," applied to each of our case studies, the previous questions will help us understand the specificities of each case when confronted by the US. Hence, by combining and cumulating the findings of the other cases, we obtain more insightful answers to our research question. After all, as George and Benneth emphasized, "a single (case) study cannot address all the interesting aspects of a historical event."[367]

Concerning the *focused* aspects, our research aims to identify the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy in the context of nuclear proliferation. Therefore, we focused only on aspects highlighting the nuclear-related coercive dynamics between the US and its targets. In doing so, we could better achieve the broader objective of improving the theory of coercive diplomacy. However, to understand the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy in the nuclear proliferation context, one must identify the causal mechanisms underlying the process which led to a specific outcome. Process tracing is the best option in this regard. Indeed, as Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen confirm, *when causation is understood in mechanism terms, the most appropriate designs for investigating this involve tracing these processes using within-case methods like congruence or process-tracing*.[368]

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[366] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Ibid.***,** p.69
[367] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Op. Cit.***,** p.70
[368] BEACH Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus: **Causal case study methods. Foundations and process for comparing, matching, and tracing**, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2016, p.16

3.2.4 The process-tracing method: what it is.

Initially used in cognitive studies areas, process-tracing methods have recently experienced a surge in popularity within qualitative social science, with numerous doctoral students and established scholars attempting to use process-tracing methods in their research.[369] However, just like several other notions in social sciences, there is no consensual definition of this method. For instance, Alexander George and Andrew Benneth define it as a method that "attempts to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and causal mechanism—between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable."[370] But Derek Beach considers it "a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case."[371] However, irrespective of their definitions, process tracing scholars agree on the central role of the **causal mechanism** in explaining the causality of a phenomenon; "it's all about mechanism," as Derek Beach accurately summed it up.[372] But what is a causal mechanism?

According to Derek Bleach, "causal mechanisms are one of the most widely used but least understood types of causal claims in the social sciences. (…) Mechanisms are not causes, but causal processes that are triggered by causes and that link them with outcomes in a productive relationship."[373] Thomas Gehring and Sebastian Oberthür argue that "a causal mechanism opens the black box of the cause-effect relationship between the institutions involved and provides an explanation for the causal effect observed. (…) It may be conceived of as a set of statements that are logically connected and provide a plausible account of how a given cause creates an observed effect."[374] The mechanism appears as the intermediary between a cause and effect from the two previous definitions. Unfortunately, this has led several authors to confuse a mechanism with an intervening variable.[375]

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[369] BEACH Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus: **Causal case study methods. Foundations and guidelines for comparing, matching, and tracing**, *Ibid.*, p.2

[370] GEORGE L., Alexander and BENNETH, Andrew: **Case studies and theory development in the Social Sciences,** *Op. Cit.*, p.206

[371] BEACH, Derek, **Process-tracing methods in Social Science**, Oxford research Encyclopedia of politics, January 2017, p.2

[372] BEACH, Derek, **It's all about mechanisms - what process-tracing case studies should be tracing**, New Political Economy, 2016, Vol. 21, N.5, pp.463-472.

[373] BEACH, Derek, **Process-tracing methods in Social Science**, *Ibid.*, p.2

[374] GEHRING, Thomas and OBERTHÜR, Sebastian, **The causal mechanisms of interaction between international institutions**, European Journal of International Relations, 2009, Vol. 15, N.1, pp.128-129.

[375] MAHONEY, James, **Beyond correlational analysis: recent innovations in theory and method**, Sociological Forum, Vol. 16, N.3, 2001, p.578.

Nonetheless, Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen counter-argue that causal inferences are possible (in process tracing) only when we have either mechanistic within-case evidence or the manipulated, experimental evidence of difference-making.[376] The authors developed two main types of process tracing (illustrated in figure 4 below) with different ontological and epistemological claims: case-centric process tracing (explain outcomes variant) and theory-centric process tracing (theory building and theory testing variant). "The ambition in theory-centric variants is to build generalizable theories about mechanisms that can travel across cases, within the context in which they are predicted to operate. (…) In contrast, case-centric scholars who employ what we term explaining outcome PT operate with a very different understanding of the social world, viewing it as very complex and extremely context-specific. In this understanding of the world, generalizations become difficult, if not impossible, meaning that the ambition becomes to account for particularly puzzling and historically important outcomes."[377] This thesis relied on the explanatory variant of process tracing as we are interested in understanding the different outcomes of the US coercive policies when confronting our case study States.
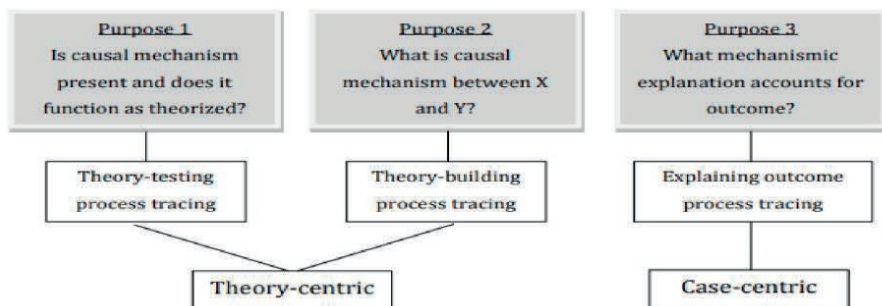

Figure 4; Three different variants of process tracing and their analytical purposes.[378]

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[376] BEACH Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus: **Causal case study methods. Foundations and guidelines for comparing, matching, and tracing**, *Op. Cit.*, p.303

[377] BEACH, Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus, **Case selection techniques in process-tracing and the implications of taking the study of causal mechanisms seriously**, SSRN Electronic Journal, 2012, p.7

[378] BEACH, Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus, **Case selection techniques in process-tracing and the implications of taking the study of causal mechanisms seriously, *Ibid.*,** p.7

3.2.4.1 Process tracing and coercive diplomacy.

Why is process tracing a suitable method for research on coercive diplomacy? As we formerly analyzed, previous research projects on this topic apprehended the State as a unitary actor. From this departing point, their authors logically relied on theories that highlighted not only power politics (hegemonic stability, the balance of power, etc.) but also relied exclusively on a State-based understanding of the coercive dynamics between the sender and receiver. As Paik Seunghoon argues, "coercive diplomacy theory is based on the realism of international politics. Realism assumes the state is the single most important actor that has clear sovereignty. Thus, the agent in a coercive diplomacy model is the state and the analysis has to take a state-centric view."[379] We partially share this point of view as we must also emphasize that such a theoretical perspective misses a subtle but critical aspect of coercive studies: first and foremost, coercion is a decision-making-related issue. Indeed, it's about compelling an actor to behave according to one's will or desire, thus leading him/her to realize or decide that his/her interests are better protected when he/she complies with the coercer's demands. Consequently, an accurate and substantial understanding of coercive decision-making requires an assessment of all the hidden and visible parameters or factors that shaped the leader's decision to defy or comply with an external demand. And this is precisely where neoclassical realism and process tracing play an instrumental role in describing the causal mechanism of coercive dynamics outcomes.

Indeed, one of the most substantial added values of process tracing in understanding a phenomenon rests on its ability to dig into the process leading to a specific outcome; in fact, it helps unfold the causal mechanism related to the analyzed outcome. As Rosemary Reilly puts it, "process tracing effectively captures how an issue, situation, or pivotal event evolves, especially when the focus of the case is subject to the dynamics of change and time is an organizing variable. It is used to "unwrap" the causal links that connect independent variables and outcomes, by identifying the intervening causal processes, that is, the causal chain and causal mechanisms linking them. It also is able to consider responses of social actors in their context and to trace events from a static pre causal point to the eventual outcome of interest."[380] Therefore, thanks to the process tracing approach, one can quickly identify the actors involved in the decision-making of the State and their related interests, thereof, the target State's weak points.

Considering the previous perspective, process tracing fits well with the neoclassical realism approach of FPA we previously analyzed. In addition, process tracing helps to

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[379] PAIK, Seunghoon: **Taming the Evil: US Non-proliferation coercive diplomacy and the counter-strategies of Iran and North Korea after the Cold War**, *Op. Cit*., p.69

[380] REILLY C., Rosemary, *Process tracing* in MILLS J., Albert, DUREPOS Gabrielle and WIEBE Elden (Eds): **Encyclopedia of case study research**, *Op. Cit*., p.734. (Consulted online)

study the evolution of the relations and coercive dynamics between the actors over time, which permits understanding the classic or unanticipated factors that explain how and why a State decided to behave in a specific way. In other words, it helps to reveal the set of elements which shapes the reaction of a State under external pressure, thus identifying a pattern of behavior of the actor under specific circumstances over time.

3.2.5 Collection and analysis of the research data.

3.2.5.1 Data collection

One of the biggest challenges regarding the understanding of the outcomes of coercive dynamics in an area like nuclear weapons is access to credible information. This is due to several factors, including the sensitive nature of the information and the readiness of diplomats and policymakers involved in the negotiation process to answer our questions, except for Iran, where we could interview an Iranian diplomat and a US key policy advisor. This issue mainly explains the imbalance among our case studies as one can notice later. Indeed, most of the primary sources[381] used in this research are composed of semi-structured interviews (Iran case), speeches and official statements of leaders, memoirs, UN Resolutions, EU restrictive measures, Presidential executive orders, Congress bills from the sender and target country which provided us with factual information related to our research goals.

With respect to the interview, we set several questions[382] aiming at solving our research puzzle, emphasizing issues related to each party's strategies. The memoirs helped us have first-hand information from actors directly involved in the process; indeed, by sharing their negotiation experience, they illuminated the interactions behind closed doors and the parameters the leaders considered when making decisions.

Official statements and speeches by leaders provided valuable insights into their psychology and motivations. Analyzing their choice of words, tone, and recurring themes when addressing or responding to leaders revealed the significance of past experiences with coercive actors, notably evident in Libya and Iran, where leaders often emphasized themes of humiliation and injustice. UN and EU resolutions shed light on the increasing urgency of nuclear proliferation among Great Powers and the negotiations between protagonists to block or secure their adoption. Congress Bills were used to assess how the nuclear issue was dealt with beyond traditional administration members, offering insights into how leaders' declarations resulted from

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[381] "A primary source is a work that gives original information. It comes from a time being studied or from a person who was involved in the events being studied." Read KELLER, Susanna: **What are primary sources? Let's find out. Social studies skills**, New York, Britannica Educational Publishing, 2019, p.4. (Consulted online)

[382] The questionnaire for the Iranian case is in the appendix.

interactions between the government and other domestic constituencies of the state. While primary sources supplied some factual information, we also drew upon secondary sources to bolster our research.

A Secondary source can be defined as "research that someone else has already done on a subject."[383] We bolstered our research with secondary sources, including books and articles authored by experts with professional and academic backgrounds in our research topic and case studies. This approach provided diverse perspectives on the same topic, allowing us to triangulate information from these sources to strengthen our findings. By acknowledging the limitations of each source, we adopted the triangulation method to enhance the validity and credibility of our results.[384] Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison consider triangulation to be an *attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint*.[385] In the same line, Uwe Flick argues that "triangulation means to take several methodological perspectives or theoretical perspectives on an issue under study."[386]

As previously analyzed, each of the previously mentioned methods to collect data presents strengths but also weaknesses. Regarding the interview method, for example, Siti Abdullah and Madya Raman argue that "the major advantage of the interviews is their adaptability. A skilled interviewer can follow up a respondent's answer to obtain more information and clarify vague statements. (…) However, these advantages are offset by certain limitations. It is difficult to standardize the interview situation so that the interviewer does not influence the respondents to answer questions in a certain way."[387] Therefore, to capitalize on the assets of the research methods and alleviate their weaknesses, triangulation appears to be the best alternative. As Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen confirm it, "the best solution to the problem of unreliable measures is to collect multiple independent observations. This approach is commonly referred to as triangulation. (…) However, triangulation does not help unless we can substantiate that the sources are independent of each other. Doing three interviews and postulating

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[383] HAMILTON, John: **Primary and secondary sources**, Minnesota, Abdo Publishing Company, 2004, p.8. (Consulted online)

[384] DUBEY RASHI Mishra and RASUNDRAM Jovita, **Triangulation an essential tool to enhance the validity of a case study**, SRJIS, Mar-Apr 2017, Vol. 4, N.31, pp.69-74

[385] COHEN Louis, MANION Lawrence and MORRISON Keith: **Research methods in education**, London, Routledge, 2007, p.141. (6th Ed. – Consulted online)

[386] FLICK Uwe (Ed.): **The SAGE Handbook of qualitative data analysis**, Los Angeles, SAGE publications, 2014, p.17 (Consulted online).

[387] ABDULLAH H., Siti and RAMAN S. O., Madya, **Quantitative and qualitative research methods: some strengths and weaknesses**, Jurnal Pendidik dan Pendidikan, Jilid 17, 2000/2001, p.129

that sources have been triangulated is not enough - the researcher needs to substantiate the fact that the interviews are independent of each other."[388]

There are four types of triangulations: method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and data source triangulation. "Method triangulation involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon. This type of triangulation, frequently used in qualitative studies, may include interviews, observation, and field notes. Investigator triangulation involves the participation of two or more researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions."[389] Concerning theory triangulation and data source triangulation, Phil Turner and Susan Turner argue that the former *involves using more than one theoretical framework in the interpretation of the data. Theoretical triangulation is the use of more than one theory hypotheses when investigating a phenomenon*; and the latter *involves the use of heterogeneous data sources, for example, qualitative and quantitative. Alternatively, data may be gathered (using the same method) from different sources or at different times, for example, the pre and the post use of a questionnaire*.[390] Based on the previous information, we opted for the method of triangulation for its practical aspects and the easiness of accessing the information we needed, especially regarding books, articles, official documents, and speeches.

3.2.5.2 Analysis of the data.

The analysis of the data collected through the previously mentioned methods was carried-out thanks to several approaches and methods or techniques. Regarding the techniques, we opted for an inductive approach. The inductive approach refers to *a process of reasoning that follows a reverse path — observation precedes theory, hypothesis, and interpretation. Qualitative researchers let the data "speak" to them and try to avoid going into a study with a preconceived idea of what they will find*.[391] It logically follows our research pattern, which is essentially driven by the objective of avoiding any theoretical and methodological restrictions when collecting, processing, and analyzing our empirical data. Thereof, we could confidently identify the causal links and mechanisms related to analyzed coercive dynamics between the US and Iran, Libya, and South Africa. Regarding the methods of analysis of the data, we also triangulated the data obtained via the different collecting data methods previously mentioned. In

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[388] BEACH Derek and PEDERSEN B., Rasmus: **Process-tracing methods: Foundations and guidelines,** Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2013, p.128. (Consulted online).

[389] CARTER, Nancy et al., **The use of triangulation in qualitative research**, Oncology Nursing Forum, September 2014, Vol. 41, N. 5, p.545

[390] TURNER Phil and TURNER Susan, **Triangulation in practice**, Virtual Reality, September 2009, Vol. 13, N.3, p.171

[391] VANDERSTOEP W., Scott and JOHNSTOND D., Deirdre: **Research methods for everyday life. Blending qualitative and quantitative approaches**, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2008, p.168. (1st ed.)

other words, we compared the information from interviews, political speeches, and articles with the actual political actions of the leaders on the field. Thus, by *comparing and contrasting results to find and explain commonalities and differences*,[392] we could comfortably reach more credible and reliable findings related to our research questions and goal.

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It's important to note that this research also paid attention to the feelings and lexical choices exhibited by leaders of the target states in reaction to US the coercive strategies. The utilization of both thematic and narrative methods assumed pivotal roles in this endeavor. Thematic analysis, characterized by the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data, served as a robust framework for systematically coding and categorizing information. [393] This method, indispensable in deciphering recurring themes and patterns, allowed for the extraction of profound insights from a voluminous body of data. Simultaneously, the narrative analysis method delved into the intricate ways individuals construct and communicate their experiences and perspectives through the medium of storytelling. [394] Its significance lies in the ability to unravel the narratives of influential stakeholders, including diplomats, policymakers, and affected parties, thereby illuminating their perceptions and experiences concerning the nuclear issue.

These two methods played a pivotal role in this research endeavor by offering a profound understanding of the mindset of target State leaders when confronted with challenges posed by the United States. Notably, Iran's leaders exhibited expressions of pride, mistrust, and defiance in their responses to US demands. Conversely, Libyan leaders emphasized notions of grandeur and global injustice when contending with American pressure, while South African leaders underscored the theme of security and threats from their regional surroundings to galvanize public support for their nuclear policies. Importantly, within the framework of this research, these methods unveiled how leaders strategically employed specific terminology and concepts to garner political support from their respective populations. The triangulation of the findings, also a result of the synergy between thematic and narrative analyses methods, bolstered the credibility of the research outcomes derived from each method. The forthcoming chapter will delve into the coercive nuclear dynamics between the United States and Iran.

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[392] MOORE S., Tricia, LAPAN D., Stephen and QUARTAROLI T., MaryLynn (Eds): **Qualitative research. An introduction to methods and designs,** *Op. Cit.*, p.99
[393] Read BRAUN Virginia and CLARKE Victoria: **Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners**, SAGE Publications, 2013, 400 pages. (1st ed.)
[394] Read RIESSMAN K., Catherine: **Narrative methods for the Human Sciences**, Los Angeles, SAGE Publications, 2007, 262 pages.