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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CONCLUSION

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6.6 SECTION I- THEORETICAL ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION.

This chapter's aim is to present and discuss the results and findings of our thesis. This will be done based on the previous empirical analysis of the coercive dynamics between the US and Iran, Libya, and South Africa. The main stake here is to demonstrate the consistency between the assumptions of our theoretical framework, our methodological stances, and the results we reached. In other words, the main goal of this chapter is to answer our research question and elaborate on the validity of our hypotheses. But more importantly, as we will demonstrate later, our theoretical findings reflect the relevance of our theoretical expectations (neoclassical realism) and methodological stance, notably process-tracing. In other words, the outcomes of the coercive dynamics between the US and each case study reflect the interplay between the external demands and the domestic configurations over time, through the international structure or context during which the coercive dynamics took place.

6.6.1 Presentation of the results of the empirical investigation.

"**What are the conditions under which coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons program?**" This thesis aimed at substantially answering the previous (research) question. That is, we aimed at identifying the conducive conditions of a coercive nuclear strategy based on the US interactions with three States: Iran, Libya, and South Africa. In this regard, we formulated the hypotheses that coercive diplomacy could compel a State to abandon its nuclear weapons on two conditions: first if the coercer's strategy exploits the weakness of the target's weakness and, second, if the coercer demonstrates a motivation to have a sustained campaign to compel the target. Based on of the data from our empirical investigation, the previous analysis confirmed our argument that coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear (weapons) programs provided four essential factors are gathered: the display by the coercer of strategic empathy towards its target, the formulation of clear and acceptable demands to the target, the display by the coercer of a higher resolve than the target to achieve his/her objective, and the offer of credible incentives to the target if the target complies.

More specifically, regarding the first criterion, – the display by the coercer of strategic empathy towards its target – the coercer's strategy should be crafted based on the drivers behind the target's motivation to build a nuclear program. Concerning the second criterion, the formulation by the coercer of clear and acceptable demands by the target must be done based on a decisive element: the importance of the nuclear program for the target. With respect to the third criterion, the coercer should display a

greater or higher motivation and/or resolve to achieve his goals than his target. In other words, to successfully compel its target, the coercer should effectively rely on all its raw power capabilities, including the political, economic, and military – via the deployment of ground boots. The fourth criterion the credible incentives, – refers to the coercer's ability to offer a credible exit gate to the target in the advent of compliance; and these incentives must alleviate the political costs of the compliance of the target both at the domestic and international level.

Furthermore, the previous analysis helped confirm our two hypotheses' veracity. Regarding the first – if the coercer's strategy exploits the weakness of the target – as we will discuss later, the coercer's (in this case, the US) strategies' failure or success depended on its leaders' ability to accurately identify and decisively exploit the weaknesses of the target State. Moreover, these weaknesses did not appear only in terms of political and economic settings but also in terms of the aspirations and drivers of the target. While the level of advancement of the nuclear (weapons) programs of the targets never presented a vital threat to the coercer's (US) strategic interests, our three cases clearly demonstrated the instrumental role of the coercer's coercive signals in influencing the nuclear calculus of the target. In other words, the display by the coercer of a higher motivation than the target played a decisive role in shaping its decisions. This finding confirms our second hypothesis' relevance related to the needs for the coercer to demonstrate the motivation to carry a sustain campaign to compel the target. However, motivation alone is not enough to bend the target's will, as the Iranian case demonstrated though it (the resolve) lacked in the US coercive strategy against South Africa. Hence, the coercer must not only demonstrate a higher motivation than the target but also craft his/her coercive strategy depending on the characteristics (economic configurations and political systems) of the target. However, we could reach these conclusions thanks to the decisive role of neoclassical realism and process tracing.

It's also noteworthy to mention the essential role of the nuclear reversal theories we analyzed in the literature review. Indeed, each of the approaches developed by each scholar also shed insightful on the outcome of the coercive dynamics. For instance, Jacques Hyman's NIC helped us identifying the recalcitrant leaders' political profile while Etel Solingen's political regimes types also provided input on the likelihood of the coercer's strategy to succeed. Regarding the NIC, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and most of the South African leaders were oppositional nationalists; this profile rendered the US coercive strategy almost ineffective as these leaders had very prestigious perceptions of their country's role and status. Eleonora Mattiacci and Benjamin Jones's theory of the level of progress of the nuclear program was also relevant in the Libyan case as the improvement of the enrichment and reprocessing capabilities of the country partly explained the firmer stance of President Ahmadinejad.

The NIC's input was even more visible in the Libyan case as Khadafi's profile evolved from an oppositional nationalist to a sportsmanlike subaltern. The evolution of these profiles reflected also the relevance of Etel Solingen's theory as the Libyan leader's oppositional nationalism matched with the inward looking of his regime and the sportsmanlike subaltern profile matched with the outward looking of his regime. Finally, the mixed signals he sent to the West matched with hybrid compromise profile and enlighten of the weak points of the regime in terms of the coalition building to support the contradicting patterns he had chosen (non-proliferation and violation of the NPT). Rupal Mehta's theory of a simultaneous application of sticks and carrots transpired also in the Libyan case. Her argument of the impact of a new leadership in a country's nuclear posture was more visible in the South African case, with the arrival of President De Klerk.

6.6.2 Unfolding the coercive causal mechanisms and describing the causal process: the strategic role of neoclassical realism and process tracing.

As previously noted, beyond the main research goal of identifying the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy in the context of nuclear proliferation, this thesis also aims at identifying the causal link between the coercer's demands and the receiver's answer. Thus, the core stake is to unfold the causal mechanism underlying the coercive dynamics between the sender (the US) and its targets (Iran, Libya, and South Africa). To achieve this objective, we opted for the neoclassical realist approach of foreign policy and the process tracing method. The neoclassical realism's analytical model provided a clearer pattern of understanding of the drivers behind a State's reaction to systemic pressures. And the process tracing helped us to analyze the interactions between the main protagonists and reveal the empirical evidence of the causal mechanisms underlying the outcomes of the analyzed coercive dynamics. Our theoretical gamble was right as each case demonstrated the decisive role played by the domestic settings or factors and the international context in shaping the target's responses to the coercer's demands on the first hand, and the unfolding of unexpected mechanisms on the second hand.

6.6.2.1 Discussion of the findings: a theoretical perspective of coercive diplomacy.

6.6.2.1.1 What did we learn from our case studies?

The analysis of US interactions with Iran, Libya, and South Africa underscores the critical importance of assessing the resolve and understanding of the target's political and economic strengths or vulnerabilities. This assessment of resolve necessitates a careful examination of the interests of an actor seeking to influence or deter another's nuclear program, along with their willingness to escalate or de-escalate tensions, leveraging their available power capabilities. For instance, the Iranian case underscores the imperative for the coercing party to exhibit superior determination relative to its target, not only through the presentation of credible threats but also through the strategic empathy employed in devising its coercive strategy. This approach serves to erode the pro-nuclear discourse within the target's domestic landscape, demonstrating a profound grasp of the drivers behind their nuclear pursuits. In this context, when addressing a controversial nuclear program, Washington must formulate clear and mutually acceptable demands that consider both its concerns and those of the target.

Concerning the Libyan case, the main finding of our investigation is the need for the coercer to exploit the target's weaknesses, notably by raising the stakes that jeopardize the survival of the regime of the target and provide credible incentives to the target. Finally, the main lesson of the South African case is the need for the coercer to demonstrate a stronger resolve than the target. This should be done by effectively having recourse to all power capabilities available and a clear mastery of escalation dominance in the crisis. Based on these three case studies, our investigation logically led us to argue that coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear (weapons) provided the coercer:

- **displays strategic empathy towards its target.**
- **formulates clear and acceptable demands for the target.**
- **displays a higher resolution than the target to achieve his/her objective.**
- **offers credible incentives to the target in the advent of compliance.**

6.6.2.1.2 From the theoretical and practical perspective, why do the lessons from our case studies matter for a substantial understanding of a nuclear-oriented coercive diplomacy strategy?

The interactions between the US and each of the previously mentioned targets provided insightful findings about improving coercion from theoretical and practical perspectives. Concerning the motivations of a State to acquire nuclear weapons, Scott Sagan suggested three models which explain the drivers behind a State's decision to go nuclear. These models are the following: the security model, the domestic politics model, and the norms model.[1168] Regarding the first model, Sagan argues that the necessity to address the military threat posed by a rival State with a matching military capability is the first driver of a State's desire to acquire a credible deterrent capability. As he puts it, "because of the enormous destructive power of nuclear weapons, any state that seeks to maintain its national security must balance against any rival state that develops nuclear weapons by gaining access to a nuclear deterrent itself."[1169] From this perspective, the coercer must consider the security concerns of the target when formulating his/her demands.

The second model highlights the instrumental role of domestic constituencies in fostering the State's willingness to follow a military nuclear pattern. Indeed, private actors – such as "the state's nuclear energy establishment, important units within the professional military, and politicians in states in which individual parties or the mass public strongly favor nuclear weapons acquisition"[1170] – with *parochial* interests can lead the main decision-maker (the Head of State or government) to build nuclear (weapons) programs because of the economic advantages they can obtain from those programs. From this perspective, the coercive strategy of the sender must not exacerbate the pro-nuclear faction within the target State.

Lastly, a State might choose to go nuclear if its leaders perceive the possession of a nuclear arsenal as an essential element of the envisioned prominent statute of his/her country. In other words, a nuclear arsenal is considered in this case not only as a symbol of prestige but become a core element of the identity of the State (third model).[1171] From this perspective, the coercer should demonstrate to the target the irrelevance and triviality of his/her controversial nuclear policy. In this regard, the coercer could either increase the cost of resistance or decrease the cost of compliance.

[1168] SAGAN D., Scott, **Why do States build nuclear weapons?: Three models in search of a bomb**, International Security, Vol. 21, N. 3, 1996, 33 pages.
[1169] SAGAN, Scott, **Why do States build nuclear weapons?, *Ibid,*** p.57
[1170] SAGAN, Scott, **Why do States build nuclear weapons?, *Ibid,*** pp.63-64
[1171] SAGAN, Scott, **Why do States build nuclear weapons?, *Op. Cit.,*** p.73

Before dwelling on the coercer's (the US) determination to compel the targets (Iran, Libya, and South Africa) subjected to his coercive strategy, it is also worth stressing the domestic theoretical aspects of neoclassical realism in the coercive dynamics between the protagonists. All the previous four intervening variables (Leader image, strategic culture, State-Society relations, domestic institutions) transpired in our different case studies. Obviously, some were more instrumental in all the three cases, while others were more relevant within a specific one. For example, the leader's perception variable was visible in all the three cases: the Iranian leadership's (both the Supreme Guide and the President) sceptical perception of the international system played an important role in shaping the response of Tehran to the US demands. This was also the case in Libya where Gadhafi's vision of the international system predominated in Libya's foreign decision-making as we will see later.

In South Africa, almost all the successive leaders of the Apartheid regime shared the vision of a hostile region Pretoria interacted in. The strategic culture variable was visible in Iran and Libya but not in South Africa. The Iranian strategic culture framed Tehran's response from 1979 till 2002, but the 2003 Iraqi syndrome convinced Iran to radically shift its policy and suggest a grand bargain to the US. The Libyan strategic culture was essentially rooted in Gaddafi's belief of the Messianic role Libya had to play in the implementation of Pan Arabism. Yet, the 9/11 events and the US-led 2003 Iraqi intervention partially convinced Gaddafi to change the course of its regional policy.

Regarding State-society relations, the Iranian authorities capitalized on the acrimonious historical relations between Tehran and Washington to mobilize popular support for their defiant policies vis-à-vis the US. In addition, thanks to the support of the Revolutionary Guards and the Constitutional powers granted to the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad challenged the Supreme Guide, implemented his nationalist and populist agenda against the US, and defied its nuclear reversal demands. The South African leaders also stressed the siege mentality and the (perceived) imminent invasion of the Soviet Union and the neighboring, Black-led regimes to maintain their racist and controversial nuclear policies. Concerning the last variable, the institution's relations were also more visible in Iran and South Africa but not in Libya. Although Iran adopted an authoritarian regime after the 1979 Revolution, Tehran has always been characterized by a dynamic political landscape.

The Iranian political dynamism was visible through the intense factionalism the country experienced, which transpired through the different and contradicting visions of the country's nuclear policy. In South Africa, despite the domestic consensus on the hostile environment, political actors had different views regarding the firmness of the Apartheid regime. Nevertheless, this is entirely different in Libya, as the Jamahiriya

regime did not permit official debates on the country's foreign policy. Indeed, foreign policy was the exclusivity of the top leadership. In sum, each intervening variable played an incremental role in our specific cases, which explains the different outcomes in terms of foreign policy (dependent variable) in their coercive dynamics with the US and provides more insightful responses regarding the conducive conditions of coercive nuclear diplomacy.

Regarding the determination of a State to compel another one to forgo its nuclear weapons, Peter Feaver and Emerson Niou argue that when addressing a controversial nuclear program, the coercer in general, and the US in particular, should consider certain variables: *the U.S. preferences on proliferation, whether purist or pragmatist;*[1172] *the proliferator's type, which can vary by size, affinity, and risk tolerance; and 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*. [1173] Regarding the motivations of the (potential) proliferators, except for South Africa, where security imperatives were more visible than Iran and Libya, the two other target States were driven by status (prestige or norms) and bureaucratic imperatives. Indeed, they did not face a vital threat to the survival of their regimes; instead, they perceived the international system as the avatar of Western imperialism in general, particularly that of the US hegemony. Their tumultuous historical relations with the US, which mingled in their domestic affairs for decades and shaped their history, fostered their sceptical perception of the US-led international system.

Another important element to consider is the identity of the State. Having been manipulated by the US, the Iranians sought to take their revenge against history (Persian empire and the rivalry with Saudi Arabia) and any technological progress was considered as a milestone step in achieving their objective. In the case of Libya, though the country had also experienced Western imperialism, Gadhafi embarked on a nuclear pattern mainly for ideological reasons (pan Arabism) and a regional status seeking. Yet, regarding South Africa, the country assumed a passive position as a uranium supplier, it's leaders (mis) perceived the likelihood of a Soviet invasion as the main threat to their political survival. Hence the nuclear deterrent appeared as the ultimate shield against any potential invasion. But political survival undoubtedly shaped their reaction toward the West. Thereof, any coercive strategy against the target States should have primarily considered the previous drivers of the nuclear patterns of these States.

[1172] The purist approach refers to the US absolute commitment to reverse the nuclear pattern of an actor while the pragmatist pattern refers to the scenario where the US decides to tolerate or accept a nuclear proliferation pattern for strategic purposes. See FEAVER D., Peter and NIOU M. S., Emerson, **Managing nuclear proliferation: condemn, strike, or assist?, *Op. Cit.***, p.211

[1173] FEAVER D., Peter and NIOU M. S., Emerson, **Managing nuclear proliferation: condemn, strike, or assist?, *Op. Cit.*,** p.209

Regarding the US approach when confronting the nuclear challenge of the three States mentioned above, Washington relied on a purist approach regarding Iran and Libya and a pragmatist approach regarding South Africa. However, the purist approach is unfit for the target specificities in the Iranian case. Indeed, the US leaders (until the Obama administration) decided to rely on ideology-driven strategies, as they addressed Iran only through the prism of their acrimonious history (the hostage crisis). Consequently, this Manichean approach influenced the outcome of the US strategy negatively. Indeed, it precluded Washington from identifying the critical domestic constituencies which played an incremental role in the continuity of the nuclear program and the core drivers behind Iran's nuclear behavior. Of course, Iran did not possess nuclear weapons, although the progress of its nuclear program granted a virtual nuclear deterrent capability to the country *had its leaders decided to go nuclear*. Consequently, the external demands for stopping nuclear enrichment were deemed unacceptable by the Iranian establishment, and Tehran had a greater motivation to achieve its objective than Washington. This outcome confirms Alexander George's warning that "the strength of the opponent's motivation not to comply is highly dependent on what is demanded of him."[1174] One should also consider the tarnished reputation of the US following the 2003 Iraqi military campaign, together with the lack of a credible military threat and credible incentives.

On the contrary, Washington's coercive approach with Tripoli was more realistic, although Libya had challenged the US more violently than Iran (terrorist attacks). This contrast sheds light on the strategic role of the US leader's beliefs when addressing a nuclear proliferator. The US's indirect threat to the survival of Gaddafi's regime partly triggered the Libyan's decision to comply with the US demands. Nevertheless, this partial driver happened against the backdrop of the failure of Libya's second central foreign policy: challenging the US-led system through the support to terrorist groups, without forgetting the domestic challenges the regime faced with economic mismanagement and failed attempted *coups d'états*. Nevertheless, the Iraqi military precedent sent an indirect yet unambiguous message to Gaddafi about his personal and political fate shall he not comply with the US demands. The previous information clearly shows that the US demonstrated an unwilling higher resolve than Libya to achieve its objective. The offer of incentives in terms of security guarantees for the Libyan leadership and its regime appeared as the only rational choice or good decision Gaddafi could make. We can thus conclude with James Fearon that "a threat may be rendered credible when the act of sending it incurs or creates some cost that the sender would

[1174] GEORGE L., Alexander: **Forceful persuasion: coercive diplomacy as an alternative to war, *Op. Cit.*,** p.12

be disinclined to incur or create if he or she were in fact not willing to carry out the threat."[1175]

The South African case was the trickiest among the three. In fact, the US relied on a pragmatist approach and the coercive strategy its leaders (Jimmy Carter – Ronald Reagan) adopted clearly reflects the geopolitical and strategic constraints the country faced (Cold War). This reality logically refrained Washington from picking the right tool in dealing with Pretoria. Indeed, facing two security existential threats from both the Black community and a (mis) perceived Soviet invasion, the Apartheid leaders demonstrated a higher resolve than their US counterparts to achieve their objectives to obtain a nuclear deterrent capability. Furthermore, the *symbolic* coercive measures taken by the US implicitly hinted at Washington's readiness to accommodate a South African nuclear status than losing a strategic partner in its battle against the Soviet rival.

However, we are not arguing that imposing more crippling sanctions was the only best alternative; the US could have demonstrated strategic empathy as it should have been with Iran. Suggesting a nuclear umbrella to Pretoria in exchange for domestic reforms could have been a good solution in this regard, as it would have undermined South Africa's security rationale for its nuclear objective. Nevertheless, the South African case was even trickier because Pretoria had successfully managed to build nukes though they had not yet been deployed. The regional dynamics and the advent of a new leadership confirm the relevance of our previous information. Therefore, the previous information suggests that coercive diplomacy can effectively compel a State to abandon its nuclear provided four essential elements are gathered:

- **the crafting of a strategic empathy-based coercive strategy.**
- **the formulation of acceptable demands by the coercer.**
- **the demonstration of a higher resolve than the target to achieve one's objective.**
- **the offer of credible incentives to the target in the advent of compliance.**

While none of the three nuclear programs of the target posed a vital threat to the strategic interests of the sender (in this case, the US), coercive diplomacy proved to be successful only in the case (Libya) where the coercer clearly and accurately identified the weakness of the target and crafted its strategy accordingly and demonstrated a higher resolve than the target to achieve his/her objective. In addition, the inability of the coercer to identify and exploit the weaknesses of the target due to either ideological or strategic factors in the two other cases supports the relevance of our hypotheses.

[1175] FEARON D., James, **Signaling foreign policy interests: tying hands versus sinking costs**, SAGE, The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 1997, Vol. 41, N. 1, p.69.

This thesis shares similar and different findings with previous PhD thesis on the coercive nuclear issue.

Concerning the former, we reached similar findings with Ebrahim Mohseni-Cheraghlou, who identified the US lack of strategic empathy and inability to understand the domestic dynamics and drivers behind Iran's continuation of its controversial nuclear program.[1176] Regarding the latter, unlike Aessa Ahmed Yusef's PhD thesis[1177] which concluded that Libya's decision to dismantle its nuclear program was rooted only in the threats posed by the potential US military invasion, we argue that Libya has successfully disarmed thanks to the wise and simultaneous application of (indirect) threats and incentives. This divergence in findings can be explained by the fact that Aessa Yusef stressed the nature of the Libyan regime, which was characterized by the extreme personalization of the institutions. He logically argued that "the threat of using military force can also be considered as a useful tool, especially when used with a combination of other measures such as economic sanctions and political isolation, as was the case with Libya."[1178]

6.6.2.2 Limitations of thesis.

This thesis contains certain shortcomings that should be alleviated by future research on coercive studies for a better understanding and mastery of the conducive conditions of coercion in general, and particularly that of coercive diplomacy. One of these drawbacks is the issue related to case sampling. Indeed, identifying the conducive conditions of the implementation of a coercive strategy requires a larger number of case studies. As we previously emphasized, each case study is unique and provides equally unique results which need to be added to the broader set of coercive case studies. Paraphrasing Paul Hanly Furfey, Steward Harrison noted in this regard that the *sampling problem (…) is associated with selecting a sample that is adequate for a given research problem*.[1179] As the general research problem of this thesis is the paradoxical inability of a stronger actor (the US in this case) to compel weaker States (Iran, Libya, South Africa) to comply with its demands, future research on this topic should include more case studies.

[1176] MOHSENI-CHERAGHLOU, Ebrahim: **When coercion backfires: the limits of coercive diplomacy in Iran, *Op. Cit.***

[1177] AHMED YUSEF, B. Aessa: **Libyan foreign policy: a study of policy shifts in Libya's nuclear programme**, PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014, 303 pages.

[1178] AHMED YUSEF, B. Aessa: **Libyan foreign policy: a study of policy shifts in Libya's nuclear programme, *Ibid*.,** 276

[1179] OPPONG H., Steward, **The problem of sampling in qualitative research**, Asian journal of Management Sciences and Education, April 2013, Vol. 2. N.2, p.204

Another shortcoming of this thesis pertains to the data collection technique. Although we managed to conduct interviews with various important figures (such as diplomats, policymakers, and experts) regarding the Iranian case, we regrettably did not pursue interviews for the Libyan and South African cases. This limitation arose because the experts we attempted to reach had either passed away or were too elderly to participate in our inquiries. Consequently, we relied on secondary sources and mainly on primary sources like memoirs published by key figures involved in the negotiation process during that period.

Despite these drawbacks, our research project still yields significant insights into the evolution of studies on coercive diplomacy. Notably, the triangulation method enabled us to mitigate the weaknesses inherent in each method. It facilitated the comparison of various perspectives or information provided by each source with empirical data obtained from the official stances of both the coercer and the target. In doing so, this approach bolstered the internal validity of our findings.

6.7 SECTION II- CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS.

This section has two main objectives: providing an overview of the thesis and suggesting policy recommendations regarding the applicability of coercive diplomacy as a counter-proliferation foreign policy instrument. With respect to the former, we will remind the research objectives of the thesis, our main findings, and the contribution of the research to coercion studies. Regarding the latter, we will highlight potential research avenues for future research on this topic and provide key practical tips and ideas to policymakers when addressing future challengers to the current nuclear order.

The research goal of this PhD thesis was to identify the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy in the context of nuclear proliferation. More specifically, we chose the US coercive strategy with Iran, Libya, and South Africa as the case model for our analysis. This decision is primarily driven by two factors: first the fact that the US is the only Superpower with unprecedented and unrivalled power capabilities (political, economic, and military). Second, our case studies gather two theoretical interesting factors: two countries with anti-US driven foreign policy and one ally of the US on the one hand. On the second hand, we also chose countries with different level of nuclear advancement.

Our investigation led us to conclude that coercive diplomacy can compel a State to abandon its nuclear program provided the coercer's strategy exploits the weaknesses of the target. In other words, the coercer should lift the nuclear appeal or attractiveness in the target's calculus by threatening what the target treasures (Schelling). From a

practical perspective, our investigation led us to the finding that to succeed, the coercer's strategy must include the four following elements: **a strategic empathy-based coercive strategy, the formulation by the coercer of acceptable demands by the target, the display by the coercer of a higher resolve to achieve its objective and the offer of credible incentives to the target**. We could reach these conclusions thanks to the strategic and insightful role of our theoretical framework and methodological choices.

With respect to the theoretical framework, we expected the neoclassical realism to help us digging in the coercive dynamics between the main proliferators by demonstrating our systemic pressures were translated or filtered through key domestic variables (the strategic culture, the leaders' perceptions etc.) within the target State. The objective was to unfold the domestic drivers behind a State's nuclear decision. With respect to the methodological choices, the process tracing also played an incremental role in the reaching of our findings. In fact, thanks to its unique explanatory or describing power to unfold the mechanisms behind a causal process, we could dwell on the dynamics of the decision-making process of the target. Thereof, we accurately identified the priorities of a government when responding to an external demand, thus revealing the weaknesses of the target. More importantly, the previous findings derive from the coercion model of Christopher Whytock and Bruce Jentleson, thus improving the study of coercive diplomacy in general, and particularly in the non-proliferation realm.

6.7.1 Theoretical and methodological contributions of the thesis to coercion studies.

The theoretical added-value of a research involves the contribution of its findings to the to the improvement of the phenomenon studied, ideally from a theoretical point of view. But the methodological added-value stresses on the contribution of the findings to a better use of a specific or set or set of method. We will first analyze the theoretical contributions of the thesis, then it's methodological added-value.

6.7.1.1 The theoretical contribution of the study.

As previously mentioned, this research has four findings concerning the conducive conditions of coercive diplomacy: the display by the coercer of **a strategic empathy towards its target**, the formulation of **clear and acceptable demands** to the target, display by the coercer of **a higher resolve than the target** to achieve his/her objective, and the offer of **credible incentives** to the target if the target complies. The theoretical contribution of these findings is twofold: first they provide practical tools that can be applied to other coercive nuclear cases with similar or different characteristics than those of our case studies. Indeed, as we previously highlighted, one of the greatest

added-value of our research is the choice of our empirical cases with common and contrasting features. This permitted us to reach stronger and duplicable findings.

The level of advancement of a State's nuclear program plays a crucial role in determining its readiness to comply or defy the demands formulated by a coercer. Indeed, technological prowess influences the dynamics of coercive diplomacy and the State's response to external pressure. As a State progresses along the nuclear development continuum, its perception of its own security and strategic interests evolves, shaping its response to external pressure. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers and diplomats when formulating effective strategies for dealing with states possessing varying degrees of nuclear capability. In the initial stages of nuclear program development, a State may be more susceptible to coercion as demonstrated by the Libyan case. The lack of a mature nuclear capability could mean that the state has limited capacity to withstand the coercer's pressure. But the more advanced nuclear capabilities less inclined it will be to comply with the coercer's demands (Iran); indeed, considering the (political and economic) cost to acquire its technological prowess and its related-strategic asset make a State less receptive to the coercer's demands, unless its core security concerns are addressed (South Africa).

The nature of bilateral relations between the coercer and the target state is a critical factor that deeply influences the target's readiness to comply or defy the demands formulated by the coercer. The quality of these relations can either facilitate cooperation or exacerbate resistance, making it an essential aspect of coercive diplomacy. the nature of bilateral relations between the coercer and the target is a multifaceted and dynamic factor that significantly shapes a state's readiness to comply or defy coercive demands. A nuanced understanding of these relations, combined with a careful assessment of other contextual factors, is essential for effective coercive diplomacy and nuclear reversal.

Indeed, in case of **friendly relations**, characterized by trust, cooperation, and shared interests, the target is more likely to be receptive to the coercer's demands. In such cases, the target may view the demands as reasonable and in line with the overall positive relationship, making compliance a more attractive option. In case of **alliance or security partnerships**, the target may feel obligated to consider the coercer's demands more seriously. The depth of the alliance can vary, but the existence of security commitments may pressure the target into complying to maintain the alliance's integrity. Finally, in case of **acrimonious relations**, situations where bilateral relations are strained or characterized by historical grievances, mistrust, or disputes, the target state may be more inclined to defy the coercer's demands. The contentious history may lead the target to view the demands as unjust or driven by ulterior motives,

making it less likely to acquiesce. Our findings also contribute to the theory as they reflect the inputs of both the sender and the receiver. Thereof, they draw the researcher's attention on the features (strengths and weaknesses) of the sender and the receiver, thus enabling him or her to accurately understand the outcome of the coercive dynamics he/she studies. But it is essential to note that this dualist approach is the main asset of Whytock and Jentleson's coercion model.

6.7.1.1.1 The merits of Christopher Whytock and Bruce Jentleson's theoretical model.

As previously mentioned at the end of the literature chapter, we relied on the Whytock and Jentleson's model of coercion[1180] to analyze the coercive interactions between the US and Iran, Libya and South Africa. Hence, we will emphasize on the decisive role of this model in helping us to reach our findings. But it is essential to first recall the theoretical propositions of this model. Christopher Whytock and Bruce Jentleson's theoretical model identified five critical elements for the success of a coercive diplomacy strategy; these include: first, the set made of **proportionality, reciprocity, and credibility**, second **limited objectives from the coercer**, third **a strong multilateral support** for the coercive diplomacy; fourth the consideration of the **target weaknesses or vulnerability** and five the offer of **positive inducements**.

Our findings support Christopher Whytock and Bruce Jentleson's theory of coercive diplomacy, as evidenced by the following factors. First, a thorough analysis of their model demonstrate that the first three elements focus on the coercer, while the remaining two dwell on the target. Hence, this model considers the inputs of both the sender and the receiver, and this is a major added-value of this model. Indeed, unlike the coercion models of Alexander George and Peter Viggo Jakobsen which emphasize only on the sender, their model stresses on the necessity for the coercer to have an optimal knowledge of the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, like our findings, this theoretical model also confirms the relevance of Sun Tsu's advise that "he who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk."[1181] Yet all the five elements can be encompassed in the first three elements (proportionality, reciprocity and credibility).

Second, like our findings, their propositions can be applied in other cases and the relevance of their five propositions transpired in our thesis. Indeed, the presence or the absence of all the elements demonstrate the relevance of Whytock and Jentleson's

[1180] JENTLESON W., Bruce and WHYTOCK A., Christopher, **Who "won" Libya? The force-diplomacy debate and its implications for theory and policy, *Op. Cit***.
[1181] AMES T., Roger: **Sun Tzu: the art of warfare, *Op. Cit.,*** p.80

model. Thereof, as previously analyzed, only the Libyan case gathered all the five conditions and logically explain the positive outcome of the coercer's strategy. In the other cases, either the coercer did not display proportional and credible threats to increase the cost of non-compliance as it was the case with South Africa and Iran, or he failed to offer credible positive incentives and formulated unacceptable demands to the target, especially in the Iranian case. This clearly demonstrated that the sender did not substantially know, accurately identify, and effectively exploit the target's weaknesses.

However, Christopher Whytock and Bruce Jentleson's theory of coercive diplomacy also contains certain flaws. For example, their model emphasizes state-centric variables like force, *deft diplomacy*, or the target's economic structures. Thus, adding psychological variables like a State's strategic and political culture or the leader's perceptions would improve this model's relevance. In addition, their model falls under the binary model of win/lose, which does not always provide concrete answers regarding the international behavior of States. As this thesis has demonstrated, a common error made by coercers is often framing their strategy with a "winner takes all" mentality. Instead, coercers should focus on offering credible incentives to the target, aiming to either decrease the cost of compliance or increase the benefits of compliance. This approach significantly enhances the likelihood of success for the coercer's strategy.

6.7.1.2 The methodological contribution of the thesis.

Another important contribution of this thesis to coercion studies is its methodological stance. In fact, thanks to the neoclassical realist approach of foreign policy, we shifted from the classic unitary perspective of the State, we had a more accurate understanding of the decision-making related to coercive nuclear reversal dynamics. Indeed, this research strategy helped us to unveil the hidden but strategic drivers behind a State's compliance or defiance to external demands. It also helped to expose to weaknesses of the target (Iran, Libya, and South Africa) and the potential flaws of the coercer's (US) coercive strategy. In addition, by combining the strength of our inquiry methods (process tracing method, structured-focused comparative method, triangulation) we could unfold the mechanism, thus the causal link between the sender's demands and the receivers' responses. Such approach helped us to capitalize on the strengths of each method while lessening its weaknesses.

The eclectic approach's major explanatory power lies in its ability to offer insights into why and how coercive diplomacy can succeed in reversing a State's nuclear course. By considering a State's emotional and historical context, alongside structural and regional factors, this approach unveils the intricate web of motivations, calculations, and perceptions that drive a State to change its nuclear policies in response to external pressure. It provides a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which coercion

can effectively alter a State's strategic trajectory, contributing significantly to the field of international relations and security studies.

The inclusion of constructivist elements, such as emotions, leader's perceptions, and historical context, adds a unique dimension to the analysis. By considering the emotional and historical backdrop of a state's decision-making process, this approach recognizes that the subjective experiences and collective memory of a nation play a crucial role in shaping its response to coercion in general and particularly coercive diplomacy. Understanding the nuances of how emotions and historical narratives influence policy choices is pivotal in comprehending the success or failure of coercive strategies. Neorealism's contributions to the framework, which encompass concepts like the balance of power, security dilemmas, threat perceptions, and regional dynamics, offer a solid foundation grounded in realpolitik.

This perspective acknowledges the systemic factors that influence international relations, emphasizing the importance of power dynamics, security concerns, and the regional context within which states operate. Recognizing the significance of threats and the complex interplay of power dynamics at both the global and regional levels enrich the analysis of coercion's efficacy. Furthermore, the incorporation of domestic politics, including the nature of the regime and decision-making processes, introduces a crucial dimension to the framework. It acknowledges that a State's internal politics and governance structure have a profound impact on its response to external pressure. Understanding how decisions are made within a State, the role of various actors, and the nature of the regime in place, provides valuable insights into the feasibility of successful diplomatic coercion.

6.7.2 Potential avenues for further research.

This thesis, despite its acknowledged limitations, offers valuable contributions. Firstly, it employs neoclassical realism and process tracing to gain a nuanced understanding of why targets comply with coercive demands. It shifts away from the traditional state-centric view, providing insights into the decision-making processes of states facing external pressures to alter their nuclear policies. Further research projects could apply this research method and our theoretical model (4 key elements of a successful coercive diplomacy) to large N qualitative studies; this will certainly provide strengthen the external validity of their findings.

Secondly, the inclusion of diverse case studies underscores the context-dependent nature of coercive diplomacy, akin to gastronomy—an art that demands creativity and adaptability. Future research in this area should employ a symbiotic approach, embracing non-unitary perspectives to enhance explanatory power. Researchers must

select cases judiciously, focusing on objective criteria that enrich coercive theory rather than opting only for quantity, for less is more sometimes.

6.7.3 Policy recommendations for decision-makers.

As this thesis has demonstrated, compelling an actor to adopt a specific action pattern is sometimes more difficult than expected. While a clear edge in power capabilities should guarantee the success of a coercive strategy in theory, the reality demonstrates the contrary, unfortunately. Indeed, to successfully compel a target to stop or change its controversial policy, the coercer must craft a good strategy. This strategy implies **first** an understanding of the characteristics (strategic culture) of the targets on the first hand, and the imperative to understand the target's motivations, thus the interests of the target in adopting the controversial behavior on the second hand. Such an approach is worthy in two regards: first, it helps the coercer assess the importance or stakes related to the contested policy; **second** and consequently, it sheds insightful light on the nature of the demands the coercer should submit to the target. Indeed, those demands must be politically acceptable to the target and should meet its legitimate aspirations; failing to adopt this strategic empathy will lead to a misinterpretation by the target of the coercer's true intentions. This failure to understand the target explains, for example, the paradoxical failure of the US to bend Iran's will to pursue nuclear enrichment.

Third, the coercer should send a clear message to his target about its readiness to effectively resort to military power to achieve its objectives. These *costly signals* will undoubtedly create a sense of urgency in the target's establishment and trigger a swift response to avoid a risky or suicidal escalation of tensions between the two parties. For example, the 2003 Iraqi events sent an unambiguous message to Tripoli and Tehran about the US resolve to eliminate any credible adversary to its interests. This survival backdrop partially explains why Gaddafi quickly contacted the West to "clear the air" regarding its WMD. In the Iranian case, after witnessing the rapid downfall of an adversary they could not defeat over eight years, Tehran offered a grand bargain to the US through the Ambassador of Switzerland. Unfortunately, trapped in ideological considerations, the US administration missed this golden opportunity to recalibrate Iran's growing regional influence. The absence of a credible threat also explains South Africa's defiant policy toward the US, considering its strategic role during the Cold War. It also means that the denial strategy needs to be carefully capitalized as it does not always send the expected signals to the target.

Fourth, the coercer must also be ready to offer incentives proportional to the nature of the demands it submits to the target. Indeed, complying with external demands, especially in a sensitive area such as nuclear weapons, implies domestic and

international political costs for the target. Therefore, the coercer must be eager to offer inducements that will either alleviate the cost of compliance or decrease the advantage of defiance from the target. In the Libyan case, for instance, the US offer of security guarantees and economic stability partially convinced Gaddafi about the advantage of complying with the external demands. Along the same line, offering a security umbrella to the Apartheid regime could have convinced its leaders to stop their nuclear quest. The offer of incentives must be made based on the motivations of the target to engage in a controversial pattern (in this case, nuclear proliferation) and also inform on the coercer's eagerness to pay the price of its expected concessions from the target. In a nutshell, for coercive diplomacy to reverse a target's nuclear program, the coercer must be realistic in his demands and incentives and pragmatic in his strategy and instruments.