
**COERCING NONSTATE ACTORS: A CHALLENGE
FOR THE FUTURE**

Humanitarian operations and crises involving confrontations with nonstate actors—communal militias, violent political movements, and other organized political actors that are not nation-states—are increasingly common in the post-Cold War world. In 1991, the United States intervened in post-Operation Desert Storm fighting in Iraq, providing aid and assistance to the country's Kurdish and Shi'a populations. In 1992 and 1993, it sent combat troops to help stave off a humanitarian disaster in Somalia. And in 1995, it deployed forces to the former Yugoslavia to solidify a peace agreement between rival ethnic groups.

Coercion will be a critical foreign policy tool in crises involving nonstate actors. The United States will turn to military force because many nonmilitary forms of pressure, such as economic sanctions and diplomatic efforts, are difficult to target against nonstate adversaries. At the same time, crises will often involve issues that do not directly implicate vital U.S. interests; more frequently, they will involve interests perceived as peripheral to the American public, and will therefore demand strictly limited, as opposed to overwhelming and brute, uses of force.

This chapter describes two common missions involving nonstate actors: coercing the nonstate actor directly and coercing its state sponsor. It then describes several common characteristics of nonstate actors that make them more difficult to coerce. The evidence suggests that difficulties encountered are rarely unique to nonstate actors; they are often present when coercing state actors as well. These

problems, however, are often exacerbated in the nonstate context, and therefore deserve separate analysis and elaboration. It is difficult to generalize about nonstate threats. Although adversary states differ in a number of important attributes, the spectrum of potential nonstate actor threats is virtually limitless. This chapter therefore examines a variety of recent crises involving attempts to coerce nonstate adversaries to illustrate a wide range of issues associated with such strategies.

TYPES OF MISSIONS

Conflicts with nonstate actors involve a wide range of interests and military missions, from humanitarian operations to those related to guerrilla and terrorist groups. But the coercion of nonstate actors typically involves coercing local warlords and the sponsors of nonstate actors to accede to a variety of demands.

Coercing Local Warlords

The United States has been called on to coerce local warlords who have threatened the security of U.S. and allied citizens or the citizens of their own country. Such a task is particularly common during humanitarian operations such as in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, where local warlords interfered with the success of the mission.

Aiding humanitarian relief efforts is a common mission that itself may not require coercion. In Bangladesh, the United States provided vital relief following Cyclone “Marian” in 1991—in Operation Sea Angel—without incurring opposition. Many humanitarian operations, however, are not so straightforward. Nonstate actors sometimes interfere with the distribution of humanitarian relief, requiring the intervening power to intimidate them into cooperation or at least noninterference. As central authority broke down and civil war spread in Somalia, the resulting anarchy allowed widespread banditry and looting of relief supplies; it also presented rival clan leaderships the opportunity to exploit control over vital delivery routes and to extort profits to enhance their power bases. In spring 1992, the UN authorized a relief mission, the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I). The operation included a small peacekeeping force to establish a secure environment for humanitarian relief organizations

to carry out their functions. The UN presence found itself ill-equipped to secure transportation of aid through the many armed, tribal bands which themselves lacked centralized control. The humanitarian mission was failing and the warlords would not cooperate.

In late 1992, the UN Security Council responded to the failure of UNOSOM I by authorizing a more militarily robust intervention by a United States-led coalition, the Unified Task Force (UNITAF). The initial phase of Operation Restore Hope included 28,000 U.S. servicemen and considerable combat potential.¹ In a more aggressive approach, UNITAF began limited efforts to disarm the various factions that posed threats to humanitarian aid. UNITAF planners concluded that force, or a credible threat of force, was required to ensure the safe distribution of food, particularly in the “triangle of death” south-central region, which was largely under the control of Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed.² Because the violence endemic to the region was carried out by individuals and local militias aligned largely according to clan loyalty, and because the Somali lifestyle valued self-reliance highly, UNITAF disarmament efforts aimed both carrots and sticks at the individual Somali: UNITAF initiated small-scale, weapon-exchange incentive programs as well as more comprehensive confiscation policies (particularly directed at crew-served weapons and heavily armed vehicles).³

In summer 1993, UNITAF handed responsibility over to a second UN force, UNOSOM II. Relations between UNOSOM II and Aideed quickly broke down. UN planners likely miscalculated the extent to which Aideed would perceive peacekeeping operations as a threat to his emergent authority within interclan political rivalries. Whereas the UN traditionally engaged in peacekeeping efforts at the invitation of host governments, there was no host government with which the UN could officially negotiate consensual terms. Envoys therefore had to manage precarious relations with various rival factions.

¹U.S. deployments included a Marine Expeditionary Force, the 10th Mountain Division, Air Force and Navy units, and special operations forces including psychological operations and civil affairs units.

²Clarke (1993–1994), pp. 45–46.

³Lorenz (1993–1994), pp. 30–32.

Aideed perceived UN actions—especially attempts to seize his heavy weapons—as intended to marginalize him, and UN efforts eroded his power base, which had relied heavily on profits gained from looting humanitarian aid.⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, the result was an escalating spiral of violence between UN and Aideed's forces as the UN launched military operations to detain Aideed or to coerce him to comply with UN efforts.⁵

The Somalia experience illustrates that warlords often continue fighting amid a humanitarian disaster and see the aid as a threat. Outsiders thus face the twin challenges of stopping intrastate fighting and providing aid. Each task, in turn, poses complications for coercion; these difficulties are compounded when the tasks are concurrent.⁶

Coercing State Sponsors

Although nonstate actors may themselves be aggressors or otherwise pose a danger to U.S. and allied interests, these actors often receive state backing. Outside powers regularly meddle in civil wars, supporting irredentist or secessionist movements or simply trying to offset the meddling of other powers. In addition, outside governments sponsor communal militias to advance their foreign policies. Rather than threatening a nonstate actor directly, a coercer can threaten its state patron, thereby reducing outside support or leading the sponsor to crack down on the nonstate actor's activities. In essence, this

⁴Absent a centralized state, several prominent warlords governed various regions of Somalia with shifting boundaries. Even "neutral" international intervention would inevitably affect this balance of power. Since Aideed saw himself as poised to overturn the status quo balance and assert greater personal authority, he naturally perceived UN stabilization efforts as an obstacle to his objectives.

⁵On June 5, Aideed's forces ambushed UNOSOM II peacekeepers, resulting in the death of 23 Pakistani soldiers. The UN responded by calling for the arrest of Aideed and his allies. U.S. forces and Cobra gunships conducted several military strikes against Aideed's Somali National Alliance (SNA) strongholds, further provoking anti-UN hostility among the Somali people. The strikes included a June 17 attack with AC-130 Spectre gunships on Aideed's residence/command bunker and a July 12 attack by U.S. Cobra gunships on the house owned by Aideed's defense minister, where intelligence sources reported top Aideed aides were meeting. Lippman and Gellman (1993), p. A1; Richburg (1993b), p. A1; and Tubbs (1997), p. 33.

⁶Pirnie and Simons (1996a), p. 16.

is a second-order coercive strategy that requires coercing the sponsor to coerce the nonstate actor—an inherently difficult undertaking.

The conflict in the former Yugoslavia illustrates the relationship between nonstate actors and state sponsors. President Slobodan Milosevic, operating out of the Serbian capital of Belgrade, was the original architect and primary manager of the Serb war effort, even though his authority was based on loosely established lines of command and loyalties in place before the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In May 1992, the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) split into the Army of Yugoslavia (YA) and the Serbian Army in Bosnia, which later became the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA). The BSA continued to consult closely with its parent organization throughout the conflict, and it received supplies and operational support.⁷ Belgrade's influence over military operations in Bosnia derived from this military and other forms of support. As a result, the United States and its allies employed a variety of means to pressure Belgrade in the hope that Milosevic would, in turn, squeeze the BSA.

Perhaps the best illustration of the successful coercion of a state sponsor is Israel's attacks on Palestinians in Jordan during the 1950s. Israel recognized that the terrorism itself could not be stopped by Israeli actions, and that a third-party host was better positioned to control activities from within its territory. As Moshe Dayan declared about Israel's policy in the early days of the state's existence:

We cannot guard every water pipeline from explosion and every tree from uprooting. We cannot prevent every murder of a worker in an orchard or a family in their beds. But it is in our power to set a high price on our blood, a price too high for the Arab community, the Arab army, or the Arab government to think it worth paying. We can see to it that the Arab villages oppose the raiding bands that pass through them, rather than give them assistance. It is in our power to see that Arab military commanders prefer a strict performance of their obligation to police the frontiers rather than suffer defeat in clashes with our units.⁸

⁷Gow (1993), pp. 243–246; Vego (1992), pp. 445–446.

⁸Dayan (1968) as quoted in Bar-Joseph (1998), p. 152.

Israel relied on third parties—Arab military commanders—to restrain movements that Israel itself could not stop. Israeli reprisals in the 1950s succeeded—after several years of unsuccessful attempts to stop infiltration that led to 100 casualties a year from 1951 to 1954—in forcing the Jordanian government to stop Palestinian infiltration. Israeli reprisals against refugee camps and villages in Jordan led to demonstrations against the Jordanian government for failing to protect them.⁹ Although King Hussein became militantly anti-Israel in his public diplomacy, at the same time he ordered the army to crack down on any infiltration to prevent domestic unrest. After 1954, infiltration fell dramatically. Israeli raids had threatened King Hussein's quest for national integration, prompting him to seek the *status quo ante*.¹⁰

Jordan became a key base of Palestinian operations again after the 1967 war. To stop the attacks, Tel Aviv once more relied on a combination of direct strikes on Palestinian targets and pressing the Jordanian government. As in the 1950s, this back and forth created the specter of instability in Jordan. If the Palestinians had been allowed to expand recruitment in Jordan and defend themselves vigorously, they might have become stronger than the Jordanian government itself. The result was "Black September," the month King Hussein cracked down on radical Palestinian activity in 1970 and drove the Palestinian movement outside his borders to Lebanon.

The option of coercing state sponsors will likely be constrained, however, in many cases. Some nonstate threats will not draw substantial support from states (for example, Aided). Targeting state sponsors may be politically or diplomatically impossible. And many nonstate actors have multiple or ambiguous state sponsors (in the 1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO] drew financial support from a large number of Arab states as well as many private citizens). As a result, the United States may choose to coerce the nonstate actor directly.

⁹Israel struck primarily at Arab military objectives instead of towns and villages after attacks on Palestinian civilians in Jordan led to condemnation in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere. Morris (1997), pp. 274–276.

¹⁰Shimshoni (1988), pp. 37–51; Morris (1997), pp. 100–101.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COERCIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST NONSTATE ACTORS

As the above mission descriptions highlight, coercing nonstate actors is both important and complex. Drawing on the lessons identified earlier and applying them to the context of nonstate adversaries, additional insights emerge. Several key features of nonstate actors affect the conditions and challenges identified in Chapter Three and, ultimately, the success of coercion.

Characteristics that distinguish attempts to coerce nonstate actors include:

- Nonstate adversaries may lack identifiable and targetable assets.
- Inaccurate intelligence estimates are particularly common.
- Nonstate adversaries may lack control over constituent elements.
- Indirect coercion is often difficult, unreliable, and counter-productive .
- Nonstate actors are adept at exploiting countermeasures to coercion.

Most of these problems are not unique to nonstate actors, but they have shown themselves to be magnified in the nonstate context.

Nonstate Adversaries May Lack Identifiable and Targetable Assets

Coercion assumes an ability to hold some adversary interest at risk. For a variety of reasons, the nonstate context complicates this core assumption. Military forces and territory are less often vulnerabilities of nonstate actors. The August 1998 missile attacks against terrorist financier Usama bin Laden illustrate this problem. The target was bin Laden's "network," but it was not clear what this comprised beyond the people involved, because he had few assets associated

with the network that were vulnerable to military force.¹¹ Similarly, the Chechens presented no major military targets for the Russian air force.¹² Compared with many nonstate actors, the Bosnian Serb military was relatively sophisticated. Operation Deliberate Force planners targeted infrastructure and communications networks seen as critical to Serb military effectiveness.¹³ Against a less military-technologically sophisticated adversary, such target sets will not be available. In addition, nonstate actors may be less susceptible to coercive threats to armed forces or territory than state actors if their power and legitimacy do not rest on control over that territory.¹⁴ Threats to an adversary's territory, population, and economic well-being are sometimes elements of coercion, but these can mean little to guerrilla groups. Defeating an adversary's military strategy (denial) is far easier when that strategy is conventional—insurgency operations are by nature less resource-intensive than conventional ones and neutralizing them requires far more time. Even after a devastating military defeat, a nonstate actor can survive as a political institution and revive its armed forces for a continued guerrilla war.

The case of Somalia most clearly illustrates that nonstate adversaries may not possess the multitude of targetable assets possessed by state actors. Aideed's military assets consisted of little more than several thousand militiamen and a few hundred "technicals"—or vehicles equipped with machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, or recoilless rifles.¹⁵

¹¹The missile attacks on bin Laden fall on the "brute force" end of the coercion spectrum, as their ostensible goal was to remove capabilities by killing people rather than to coerce change in behavior.

¹²Lambeth (1996), p. 365.

¹³Atkinson (1995), p. A1; Covault (1995), p. 27. The costs inflicted by these strikes cannot be measured simply by looking at the targeted assets. Their value lay in magnifying the threat to the Bosnian Serbs posed by the simultaneous Croat and Muslim ground offensives.

¹⁴In Sri Lanka, government forces believed that capturing key territorial strongholds of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would force a favorable negotiated settlement; instead, their operationally successful offensive failed to bring such a result, when the movement proved more adaptable and less reliant on territorial control than predicted. Harris (1996), p. 56.

¹⁵Intelligence estimates put Aideed's forces at about 5000 men, several hundred of which were ardent supporters constituting his key forces. In addition to "technicals," these forces possessed small arms, limited quantities of artillery and old, Soviet-model tanks. Richburg (1993a), p. A14; Perlez (1992), p. 14.

As an undeveloped country, Somalia lacked military or administrative targets valuable to Aideed. UN planners were limited to targeting Aideed himself (along with his closest advisors), his SNA headquarters, and an SNA-operated radio station. Given that Somali society was already in a state of chaos, there was little that could be held at risk by UN military forces.

This lack of targets can limit the utility of air power when trying to coerce nonstate actors. In Rwanda, President Clinton noted that, unlike the former Yugoslavia, air strikes were not feasible: "Here you had neighbors going from house to house cutting people up with machetes. Who was there to bomb?"¹⁶ Russia faced this problem in Chechnya, where the Chechens avoided any direct challenge to Russia's command of the air. After the pitiful Chechen "air force" was destroyed by Russian forces, Chechen leader Dudayev mockingly congratulated the Russian commander, wiring him a message that read "I congratulate you and the Russian [Air Force] on another victory in achieving air superiority over the Chechen Republic. Will see you on the ground."¹⁷

The operational concepts used to coerce state actors generally assume an ability to discriminate between military and civilian targets, but this is difficult when confronting nonstate actors. As Chapter Four illuminated, perceived public sensitivity, both at home and abroad, to civilian casualties at times requires that coercive operations avoid damage to civilian lives and property. This is particularly true when the mission is humanitarian. Like most of the problems addressed in this section, the issue of target discrimination is not unique to nonstate actors. However, it is likely to be exacerbated in contexts where the adversary lacks a professional military (which may be identifiable by official markings) and particularly where nonstate actors operate within highly militarized societies. In Somalia and southern Lebanon, for example, the UN and Israel respectively faced enemy personnel virtually indistinguishable from the heavily armed civilian populace.¹⁸ As discussed below, this presents non-

¹⁶Shogren (1998).

¹⁷As quoted in Lambeth (1996), p. 370.

¹⁸Schow (1995), p. 23.

state actors with potentially effective countermeasures to coercive air strategies.

Inaccurate Intelligence Estimates Are Particularly Common

The intelligence challenges identified in Chapter Three are particularly acute with regard to nonstate actors. Often the groups in question are poorly known to the West before a crisis occurs. Intelligence about Somali warlord Aideed was extremely limited, making it difficult to track his whereabouts.¹⁹ In addition, the nonstate nature can reduce the availability of even basic information: the United States does not have diplomats, businessmen, or cultural figures visiting, and learning about, “Hezbollahland.”

Underestimating or misunderstanding nonstate adversary motivations is particularly likely. Even if a nonstate actor is weak, its motivations are likely to be strong, particularly when compared with those of the coercing power. The perceived benefits of resisting coercive threats are likely to be considerable. In civil war or ethnic conflict, the parties will have already resolved to accept extremely high costs in pursuit of their goals. In the case of religious or ideological movements, nonstate organizations may be driven by intense desires to achieve more transcendent objectives. And in humanitarian crises, violence may stem from perceived necessities of survival. In all of these situations, the United States is likely to face adversaries highly motivated to absorb costs. Whereas nonstate crises will often implicate interests seen as peripheral to the United States and its allies, they may implicate the highest stakes for nonstate adversaries.

Indeed, the coercing power’s entry into a conflict often changes the political dynamic of an entire country, making resistance more probable. A segment of the population may not welcome an outsider’s intervention and instead may laud obstruction of the intervening power. Aideed’s violent responses to UN coercive pressure immediately enhanced his stature within Somalia. Similarly, the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah increased the movement’s credibility with the anti-Israel, although not pro-Hezbollah, Lebanese populace.

¹⁹Smith (1993), p. A19.

In formulating coercive strategies against nonstate actors, it is also difficult to establish causal links between identifiable assets and an adversary's cost-benefit calculations. The lack of institutionalized and formal state structure may mean that a substate adversary will prove more resilient than expected with respect to seemingly vulnerable assets or nodes. Russian efforts to eliminate Dudayev, the Chechen separatist leader, in 1996 were premised on the belief that the guerrilla organization depended heavily on Dudayev's personal leadership; after his death, the organization survived and adapted.²⁰ Somali factions were organized around clan loyalties. Even without a charismatic leader like Aideed, it is likely that another figure would have filled the leadership void. In Hezbollah, Israel faced a diffuse target. Its structure was only partially known to Israeli planners, complicating the process of finding, and then threatening, key organizational nodes.

Nonstate Adversaries May Lack Control over Constituent Elements

Nonstate actors are less likely to control their constituents and agents and thus often cannot make or implement concessions. Because they may lack formal or well-institutionalized control and decisionmaking structures, the lines of authority within nonstate actors can blur or break. Altering the adversary leadership's cost-benefit calculus may therefore not generate the desired changes in behavior by subordinate agents. More broadly, even when coercion has its usual desired primary effects—persuading the adversary *leadership* to change course—these effects may not translate into the desired secondary effect—*compliance*.

In war, disrupting or paralyzing an adversary's command and control often contributes directly to success. In coercion, in contrast, disruption or paralysis can impede success by delaying or preventing full compliance. Similar difficulties inhere to coercing nonstate actors when they lack well-entrenched lines of authority. The PLO proved far easier for Israel to coerce than Hezbollah in the early 1980s, in part because the PLO functioned as a state within a state in

²⁰“Chechnya After Dudayev” (1996), pp. 1–2.

Lebanon. As Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari contend, "Paradoxically, the more the PLO prospered through the 1970s, the more vulnerable it became, if only because it had more to lose than ever before from any threat to its new stability in Lebanon."²¹

The Serbia-Bosnian entity indicates the reverse phenomenon: it operated much like a state at the outset of the Yugoslav conflict but gradually became less centralized. At the beginning of the conflict, the initial allocation of military resources set up a series of dependency relationships among the various levels in the overall organization. As the conflict intensified, however, this hierarchical structure appeared to suffer from disrupted chains of command. Radovan Karadzic, heading the Bosnian Serb political leadership in Pale, and his self-styled government continually strove to circumvent the control of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, even though the Bosnian Serb war effort remained largely dependent on its benefactor in Belgrade. Similarly, the Bosnian Serb military leadership, particularly the senior commander, General Ratko Mladic, frequently defied the Bosnian Serb political leadership. Finally, General Mladic often seemed to lack control over individual Bosnian Serb military officers and militia units.

The Serb leadership was therefore able on several occasions to avert the launching of NATO strikes by claiming lack of control over certain military units. Following air strikes or the threat of them, the Serb leadership could comply satisfactorily with NATO and UN demands while some Serb agents remained noncompliant. In a sense, so-called "renegade" units remained insulated from NATO strikes because NATO's coercive strategy aimed almost exclusively at altering the Serb leadership's cost-benefit calculation. At the same time, the "dislocation of authority" insulated those at the top from the threat of follow-on, escalatory strikes—the Serb leadership could comply with Western demands while its agents ignored them.²²

Operation Deliberate Force further illustrates how the resulting multiheaded structure can degrade the effectiveness of coercive threats. By September 4, 1995, air strikes appear to have had their in-

²¹Schiff and Ya'ari (1984), p. 79.

²²The challenges posed by "dislocation of authority" for coercive strategies are discussed in Waxman (1997b).

tended *direct* effects: the Bosnian Serb political leadership issued a written commitment to pull back heavy weapons from around Sarajevo. For the next several weeks, however, General Mladic refused to withdraw his forces. The siege of Sarajevo continued and the Western powers were forced to escalate the intensity of their air campaign.²³ NATO strikes successfully altered decisionmaking at the political leadership level, but the organizational structure of the adversary impeded transmission and execution of these decisions. Even as costs of maintaining the siege mounted in the eyes of the political leadership, prompting an agreement to comply with Western terms, the effects did not trickle down in the way coercion theory traditionally assumes. Mladic eventually complied, though not before raising the costs to all parties.

The Israeli experience with Hezbollah and the PLO within Lebanon illustrates a related but distinct challenge in confronting nonstate actors: the inability to make concessions without losing power. Recall from Chapter Three that the costs of acquiescence to a coercer's demand can be prohibitively high, especially in noninstitutionalized democracies where a compliant regime may fear for its very survival. In the early 1970s, the PLO had few high-value targets in Lebanon. More important, Israeli military strikes actually helped PLO recruitment by demonstrating its commitment to the struggle against the Zionist Israel. If the PLO refrained from attacks, other Palestinian groups would gain recruits. Both Hezbollah and the PLO faced constant political competition from rivals within their communities. Any leadership concessions to the Israelis were fiercely criticized and often caused a loss of popular support.²⁴ Thus, the Israelis risked obtaining concessions that would be meaningless when rivals quickly denounced them.

The structure of nonstate organizations may change as a result of coercive strikes, making it harder to coerce them or to secure im-

²³Hedges (1995), p. 10; Pomfret (1996), p. A24.

²⁴Defying coercive threats also provides a way for radicals within a nonstate group to show their disapproval of the dominant group. The PLO was often cautious in its dealings with Israel. More radical groups, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian and smaller splinter groups, used their defiance of Israel to embarrass the PLO, hoping to force the PLO's leadership to choose between kowtowing to Israel and the loyalty of their own supporters.

plementation. In extreme cases, tenuous lines of authority may become severed in the face of coercive threats. The impact may even be counterproductive in the long run. The above examples of competing power centers—such as that between the Milosevic and Karadzic governments and between Karadzic and his military leadership (Mladic)—highlight the potentially adverse interactions of coercive threats when directed at a multiheaded adversary. Belgrade's August 1994 decision to end political and economic support to the war effort marked a split between Belgrade and Pale. At that point, Milosevic's future became tied more closely with preserving his domestic power base and placating the international community than with propagating the war in Bosnia. Karadzic's position, by contrast, became linked even more strongly to perceived adherence to the ultranationalist banner.²⁵ Similarly, as commander of Bosnian Serb forces, Mladic's stature was based largely on the conflict itself. Resolution of the conflict, barring a clear-cut Serb victory, would undermine the very basis of his authority.²⁶ The divergent interests in turn conditioned the various centers of power to react very differently to coercive threats. Coercion, designed to induce submission on the part of Serbia, might play into the hands of its rival, the Bosnian Serb political leadership, which could exploit Belgrade's capitulation to harness nationalist sympathies among the population. The simplified, though illustrative, circumstances described here also help explain why coercive threats and air strikes can exacerbate the breakdown of chains of authority between components of the adversary's structure. When the heads of a multiheaded structure have divergent interests, coercive threats may pull them further apart.

Indirect Coercion Is Often Difficult, Unreliable, and Counterproductive

The cases examined in this study suggest that indirect coercion by promoting third-party threats to the nonstate actor—whether from its rivals or from a government—is potentially effective against state

²⁵Stieger (1994), pp. 23–24; Kinzer (1994); Djilas (1994), p. 11; Silber (1994), p. 2.

²⁶“Ratko Refuses to Leave the Sinking Ship” (1995), p. 57.

and nonstate actors alike, but can more easily spin out of control in the nonstate context.

Because of their relative military weakness, many nonstate groups are highly vulnerable to even poorly armed and organized rivals. Operation Deliberate Force demonstrated that nonstate actors, like their state actor counterparts, are susceptible to coercion when coercive threats magnify third-party military threats:

Militarily, Deliberate Force was an excellent example of using air-power coercively, to get the Serbs to lift the siege of Sarajevo. For the first 48 hours, NATO aircraft bombed key military targets around Pale with an overabundance of force and were generally impervious to Serb retaliation. . . . Hitting communication nodes, weapons and ammunition storage areas, and lines of communication took away Serb mobility and did not allow them to respond to . . . offensives elsewhere in Bosnia.²⁷

Similarly, the Jordanian government quashed Palestinian activity in Jordan after Israeli operations mounted. In each of these cases, however, the coercing power needed a sustained effort to succeed. Israel took years to stop Palestinian cross-border activity, and it flared up anew after years of relative passivity. Similarly, in Yugoslavia the Croat and Bosnian armed forces required several years to mobilize, arm, and train.

Promoting a government crackdown can backfire, however, when the government in question is too weak to control the resulting instability. Israel's effort to force the Lebanese government to quash the Palestinians failed because the Lebanese government, in contrast to that of King Hussein in Jordan, could not provide security. Maronite Christian officers led the Lebanese army into clashes with Palestinian commandos but, by 1969, the army was forced to retreat and give the PLO *de facto* military autonomy in the so-called Cairo Agreement. At the same time, a change of government among the Maronite factions in 1970 resulted in purges of the army and intelligence services, reducing information on Palestinian commandos.²⁸ In fact, Israeli efforts to prompt a crackdown only highlighted the

²⁷Beale (1997), p. 37.

²⁸Hiro (1992), p. 13.

weakness of the Lebanese government, leading other communal groups to take up arms and hastening the onset of civil war. Thus, the “mechanism” intended by Israel succeeded, but the final result failed.

This tactic can backfire even when the state remains intact. Just as coercive threats or strikes can risk buttressing a state adversary’s leadership stature at home and abroad, they can inadvertently increase the support a nonstate organization receives from sympathetic international and local sponsors. Israeli strikes helped Hezbollah attract more money from abroad,²⁹ and provoked a nationalist backlash, strengthening Hezbollah within the Lebanese community. Israeli military activity and withdrawals from parts of Lebanon in response to Hezbollah violence further bolstered the movement’s reputation.³⁰ Somalia also illustrates similar problems associated with strategies designed to provoke unrest against nonstate actors. The twin objectives—to destroy Aideed’s ability to lead resistance to UN efforts while pressuring him to desist—reflected misconceptions of the warlord’s position within his factional organization. Traditional clan loyalties would likely have maintained the coherence of Aideed’s SNA even without his leadership; among a people that had recently waged a protracted struggle to oust a state regime perceived as illegitimate and sympathetic to imperialism, Aideed gained stature merely by resisting the UN presence.

Working with enemies of nonstate actors can leave the coercer far worse off by strengthening the hands of more radical factions within the nonstate actor. Israeli Air force (IAF) strikes in southern Lebanon provoked a nationalist backlash. While Israel sought to work with moderate militia groups against Hezbollah, air strikes helped rally public support for more radical elements.³¹

²⁹Schow (1995).

³⁰Ranstorp (1997), pp. 38–39.

³¹Because the Lebanese state was weak, and because Hezbollah had tremendous resources and sophisticated social and political networks at its disposal, Hezbollah was able to combine resistance to air strikes with provision of aid to the Shi’a public, further enhancing its standing. After Israel’s 1993 Operation Accountability, which caused widespread civilian property damage in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah rebuilt and repaired every damaged building within several weeks, before international organizations could respond. Venter (1996), p. 83.

Nonstate Actors Are Adept at Exploiting Countermeasures to Coercion

Even though nonstate actors may lack institutionalized control of national resources and state infrastructure, they still often possess great ability to employ counter-coercive strategies. In some cases, nonstate actors might even possess greater flexibility and capacity to exploit potential countermeasures than would state actors.

Despite lacking monopoly control over state infrastructure, nonstate actors often have tremendous ability to manipulate domestic and international popular opinion. Aideed was able to garner increased public support by depicting UNOSOM II as yet another foreign effort to dominate the Somali people and exploiting civilian casualties resulting from engagements with UN forces.³² He was able to do this despite the fact that Somalia lacked high-technology communications for disseminating propaganda (several UNOSOM attacks were directed at an Aideed-controlled radio broadcasting station, used to spread propaganda). Hezbollah successfully depicted Israeli operations as oppressive not only to southern Lebanon's own population but to the international community as well, thereby gaining outside support. Hezbollah has its own public relations office and has proven adept at publicizing its successful operations.³³

In some cases, the lack of state institutions may present nonstate actors with enhanced opportunities to counteract coercive threats. The lack of state institutions, in particular state military forces, may allow nonstate actors to take advantage of restrictive rules of engagement. In Somalia, Aideed and his followers employed "human shields" to prevent UN reprisals.³⁴ Nonstate actors are often particularly adept at exploiting human shields and blurring combatant-noncombatant distinctions. In Somalia, the various factions had long organized militia forces according to clan loyalty rather

³²Tubbs (1997), p. 35.

³³Venter (1996), pp. 81–82.

³⁴State actors also employ this technique. Saddam Hussein has used his authoritarian state apparatus with great success to put civilians in harm's way when faced with the threat of air strikes. Crossette (1998), p. A6.

than military professionalism. As Colonel F. M. Lorenz (USMC), the senior legal advisor for Operation Restore Hope, explained:

Somalis are a nomadic people organized into an extensive clan structure that has existed since the middle ages. The tactics used by the opposing factions were not new. . . . Both [Somali factions] used women and children as active participants. Since women and children were willing participants in the conflict, there was no apparent violation of international law.³⁵

The tactics proved easily transferable to conflict with the UN, hindering U.S. and UN efforts to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants. Especially when coercive threats are employed concurrently with humanitarian operations, nonstate adversaries can exploit restrictive ROE to escalate successfully. Requirements such as using minimum force and ceasing fire when hostile forces disengage allow the adversary to push the threshold of retaliatory response.³⁶

Nonstate actors are also relatively flexible at countering coercive threats by escalating in unpredictable and unconventional ways. Nonstate actors can rarely escalate in kind, but they can still impose the threat of large costs on militarily far superior coercers. Rather than escalating *vertically*, to match the new degree of violence by the militarily dominant side, the weaker, nonstate power is more likely to escalate *horizontally*, by exploiting the dominant side's vulnerabilities.

Serb forces obviously did not possess the military capabilities to retaliate in-kind to NATO air strikes. However, the ability of the Serbs to counter-coerce the Western powers became readily apparent in April 1993, when NATO began enforcing the "no-fly zone." Although no specific threats were offered by the Serbs, UN aid flights were suspended the day before the first NATO air patrols for fear of reprisals.³⁷ On several occasions, the Serbs responded to NATO air strikes against military installations by detaining lightly armed

³⁵Lorenz (1993–1994), p. 36.

³⁶Berkowitz (1994), pp. 635–646.

³⁷Tanner (1993).

peacekeepers on the ground. In all of these cases, the Serbs threatened the weakest points of the overall UN effort—the vulnerability of humanitarian assistance and ground personnel—to up the ante and deter immediate follow-up strikes. Threats to peacekeepers and to aid flights have tremendous political significance, far greater than their direct military significance. Hence, the Serbs, even without matching the Western powers militarily, were able to manipulate the cost-benefit equation of the UN with relative ease.³⁸

Nonstate actors may be more willing to escalate coercive contests by engaging in terrorism than would be state adversaries. The PLO used terrorism to offset Israeli attacks, thereby undercutting Israel's drive to gain escalation dominance through superior conventional might. In the 1970s and 1980s, radical Palestinians hijacked planes and assassinated Israelis overseas and in Israel, killing dozens of Israeli civilians. When Russian forces finally seemed to have taken control of Chechnya, Chechen forces engaged in a number of terrorist acts, including hostage taking, far from the breakaway republic. The Serbs, fearing NATO air strikes, took UN soldiers hostage. As with their ability to exploit political constraints facing coercers, nonstate actors are often well positioned to exact costs of unpredictable kinds and levels against much stronger state actors.

CONCLUSIONS

Nonstate adversaries pose additional challenges for coercion both because of the nature of the actors and the missions often conducted simultaneously with coercive operations. Despite an extremely favorable balance of conventional military power, the United States is likely to face huge obstacles in securing escalation dominance over or denying the strategic objectives of these adversaries. Such actors

³⁸Of greater import may be the issue that the use of coercive force may undermine the international community's ability to fulfill humanitarian objectives. Humanitarian operations already face great difficulties in war-torn environments because humanitarian aid inevitably benefits certain parties to the conflict. This is especially true in cases such as the former Yugoslavia, where Serbs gained control of territory through denial of sustenance as a means of forcing ethnic civilian population movements. Woodward (1995), p. 319. The difficulties facing humanitarian operations in maintaining an image of impartiality are complicated one step further once coercive force is employed—in Bosnia and Somalia, warring parties did not make a distinction between the UN's humanitarian and military missions.

provide few easy targets to destroy or hold at risk; they can flexibly adapt to or counter military strikes. Working with local, opposing parties (state or nonstate) will often be necessary. These strategies, however, have their own drawbacks and require a more sophisticated understanding of local dynamics and an adversary's internal workings than may be available.

Coercion, and coercive air power more specifically, has proven effective against a number of nonstate adversaries. Yet air power often cannot overcome inherent problems of dislocated authority or a lack of targets to strike. Success in these cases will often require a convergence of factors, many of them far beyond the control of air planners.