

# WILEY



---

Ultimata and Coercive Diplomacy

Author(s): Paul Gordon Lauren

Source: *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Jun., 1972), pp. 131-165

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of [The International Studies Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3013977>

Accessed: 29/09/2013 15:02

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Wiley and *The International Studies Association* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Studies Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# *Ultimata and Coercive Diplomacy*

PAUL GORDON LAUREN

*Stanford University (History)*

The role of force and threats of violence in international politics has long occupied the thoughts of concerned philosophers, historians, generals, and statesmen. Early speculation of a general nature, however, has been more recently expanded and refined by political and strategic theorists. Most notable are the studies of bargaining techniques and power (Schelling, 1966, 1960; and Young, 1968), patterns of negotiation and problems of communication (Iklé, 1963; Wohlstetter, 1962; and Jervis, 1970), conceptualizations of limitation and escalation (Halperin, 1962; Brodie, 1966; and Kahn, 1968), and theories of coercive diplomacy (George et al., 1971). Yet despite all the attention of past and contemporary literature on bargaining and coercive techniques, remarkably few have examined one of the most distinctive, interesting, and dangerous of all forms of communication and persuasion in international crises—the ultimatum.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association on April 10, 1971, at a panel entitled "Diplomatic History and Contemporary Strategic Theory: Some Possible Interactions." It is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance and encouragement received in the original preparation of this study from Alexander L. George of the Institute of Political Studies, the comments and suggestions from Peter Paret and Ivo Lederer of the Department of History, and the financial assistance from the Committee of International Studies, all of Stanford University. Any italics that follow are my own.

[131]

*Introduction*

Ultimata are particularly well-suited for assessing and elaborating the available theory and practice of using force (or potential force) as instruments of foreign policy. It is in the explicit, serious, and urgent nature of an ultimatum that features of negotiation and coercion frequently reach their extreme forms. These extremities are precisely those that amplify distinctive elements and important nuances of international bargaining situations: forms of communication during crises; techniques of exerting influence; and, most importantly, features and dangers of coercive demands, time limits, and threats.

Despite their value for understanding bargaining techniques and their appearance during critical watersheds in history, the study of ultimata heretofore has been seriously neglected. The characteristics, requirements, types, uses, and limitations of ultimata have seldom been systematically articulated by practitioners of diplomacy or adequately formulated by contemporary theorists. In an attempt partially to fill this lacuna and to increase our understanding of bargaining and coercion, the present study proposes to employ an analytical, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach. Relevant material and frameworks are utilized from political and strategic theory, juristic thought of international law, and diplomatic history from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Analyzing past behavior within a specific conceptual framework and focusing attention on largely unexplored nuances will hopefully accomplish several objectives. It will perhaps provide greater theoretical precision regarding the role of ultimata in bargaining, demonstrate a range of possibilities for moderating and controlling force and coercion, and suggest a potentially fruitful interchange between diplomatic history and strategic theory for problems in international studies.

*A Note on Diplomatic History and Strategic Theory*

As early as 1716, the renowned diplomat François de Callières recommended that knowledge of diplomatic history

should be an essential foundation and source of understanding for those involved in and concerned with foreign affairs, diplomacy, and negotiation. His advice has largely gone unheeded, particularly by theoreticians who formulate their concepts and classifications without reference to sufficient historical evidence. One result of this neglect can be seen in the relative simplicity of game theory and some systems analysis and their respective images and models of the international arena. There are now encouraging indications, however, that this negligence of the past may soon be corrected.

At least two leading strategic theorists (Young, 1968; George et al., 1971)<sup>1</sup> now recognize the substantial need to formulate a new relationship between abstract, ahistorical conceptualization and systematic empirical analyses of historical cases. Such an interaction is long overdue, for despite their mutual interest in international relations, diplomatic historians and political scientists frequently disparage the value of synthesis or exaggerate the differences in perspective and methodology between their two disciplines. Historians are often unwilling to explore observable patterns of behavior, examine the more recent past, or learn the language and analytical concepts of strategic theory. Contemporary theorists, on the other hand, generally lose the perspective of time by ignoring events from the pre-atomic era, forfeit many sources of evidence by dealing primarily with American experiences, and sacrifice much depth and variety by eschewing complex historical facts for their hypothetical paradigms and logically plausible solutions. In the words of Schelling's well-known observation, history is used by most strategic theorists only as *illustration*, rather than as *evidence*.

To suggest a fruitful interchange between disciplines is not to minimize the difficulties or to argue that the distinctive objectives and perspectives of each be discarded. The historian, for instance, need not neglect the complexities and divergences of personalities and events, nor the theorist abandon his search

1. Also see the related general comments in Aron (1960), Rosecrance (1963), Russett (1970), and Pfaltzgraff (1971).

for constants to create theory and policy recommendations. The interchange should be considered rather for its potential value to the work of each scholar and to international studies. Diplomatic history, for example, could become much more sophisticated and enriched by a utilization of methodological experimentation and systematic analyses of phenomena, sharper identification of variables, and explicit definitions of problems and concepts. Strategic theory, in turn, could be extended, qualified, differentiated, and highly enlivened by drawing upon the wealth and variety of the evidence and thought of the past.

There are essentially two methods by which diplomatic history and strategic theory can be related to each other.<sup>2</sup> One is the single, intensive case study of, say, a particular process, institution, crisis, or war. This mode of operation traditionally examines in detail chains of cause and effect, relevant variables, major decisions and events, and leading personalities. It is this approach which is most familiar to both the historian and the contemporary strategist, although the former generally restricts his cases to those prior to 1945 and the latter to the Cold War era.

The other major approach is that suggested and employed by the present study: the intensive examination of a single concept or feature of international politics as it has manifested itself in numerous cases. Here one takes an idea central to current strategy (such as "escalation," "systems," "deterrence," or, in this case, "coercion") and examines it within a larger universe of historical examples to enrich its meaning. One could also examine a traditional concept or feature of diplomacy (such as "balance of power," "national interest," or, in this case, "ultimata") and demonstrate its relevance for strategic thought. An iterative research approach that thus alternates between and combines some elements of the historian's craft with those of the political theorist may substantially improve both diplomatic history and contemporary strategic theory. It might also assist in improving existing methodologies or in discovering entirely

2. For this observation I am indebted to Richard Smoke of the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

new means to examine problems and articulate hypotheses in international studies.

### *Characteristics of Coercive Diplomacy and Ultimata*

Strategies for influencing calculations and behavior of others in international politics have often employed violence and threats of force. One such strategy is that of coercive diplomacy,<sup>3</sup> which focuses upon affecting an opponent's *will* rather than upon his military capabilities. As a method for resolving or reconciling a conflict, coercive diplomacy attempts not to destroy an opponent, but rather to persuade him to terminate those policies that are viewed as undesirable. To this end, the strategy of coercion seeks to erode an opponent's motivation by exploiting the capacity to inflict damage, and thus creating the expectation of unacceptable costs in the event of noncompliance with demands.

To achieve its objectives, this strategy must effectively communicate the coercing power's demands for a resolution of the conflict and those threats of unacceptable costs. Communication is thus of essential importance (Young, 1968: 40 defines it as "the basis of all bargaining") and can be analyzed here on two levels: its verbal or nonverbal characteristics and the portrayed sense of urgency. A power engaging in coercion, for example, may be reluctant to rely exclusively upon crude contextual materials or structure of the situation to convey adequately its intentions, resolve, and credibility. A diplomatic situation at an impasse, for example, or the limited deployment of forces might be considered far too equivocal and subject to wide varieties of misinterpretation. The costs and risks of ambiguity may thus require that actions either be reinforced or replaced by more precise, direct, and explicit words of verbal (written or oral) messages. Yet, whether the application of coercive measures is preceded, accompanied, or even replaced

3. The most articulate discussions and valuable analytical concepts of coercive diplomacy yet to appear are presented in George et al. (1971).

by verbal statements, communication can still portray various degrees of urgency. A coercing power, for instance, may determine at any point in a crisis that the weakest "try and see" approach only postpones decision in time of conflict and lacks sufficient coercive impact on the opponent. It may then resort to the strongest and most serious variant in communicating an explicit sense of urgency for compliance with demands—the ultimatum.

*DEFINITION*

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ultimata have been issued and received with alarming frequency. Their use, however, has seldom been accompanied by any explicit definition or systematic empirical analysis. Nor have contemporary theorists explored the characteristics of these ultimata in their proper historical and political setting. As a consequence, the theory and practice of ultimata has been understood only implicitly, as part of the conventional wisdom of statecraft, and based merely upon imprecise custom, precedent, and inconsistent expectations.

Lacking previously established, objective criteria, references to ultimata have traditionally suffered from terminology that is inconsistently used, conceptually inadequate, and even emotionally biased.<sup>4</sup> Past attempts, therefore, to use or define this term have been confused, inexact, and noted either for their narrowness of interpretation (e.g., Brownlie, 1963; Iklé, 1963; Oxford English Dictionary, 1961; Lauterpacht, 1952; Academie Diplomatique Internationale, 1933; and Asbeck, 1933) or for indiscriminant, all-encompassing generalizations that rob the word of specific meaning (e.g., Kahn, 1968; Gamboa, 1966; and Holland, 1933). An ultimatum, to illustrate, is much too specific and unique to be described simply as a warning, a threat, or an expression of categorical terms respecting a dispute. On the other hand, a communication need not be restricted to a requirement that it be "written" in order to

4. This problem frequently occurs with reference to definitions of national security questions and the "state of war doctrine" (see Kahn, 1968; Brownlie, 1963).

qualify as an ultimatum. In practice, ultimata have occasionally been issued orally or, to use the French phrase, in the form of a "note verbale." Neither is it necessary to require that all elements of an ultimatum be entirely "unambiguous," for certain features have been somewhat unclear from time to time. More serious is the assumed restriction, as often suggested, that the threats contained in ultimata must be related to war. As this study will demonstrate, an ultimatum may threaten a wide range of coercive measures, including even means short of force.

The value of an adequate and precise characterization of ultimata should thus be apparent. A descriptive and normative definition would allow us to identify and specify the relevant universe of ultimata in the past, provide accuracy and consistency in terminology, and enrich our theories of coercive diplomacy for the future. We may, therefore, define the term as follows: an ultimatum is a communication issued by one state or group of states to another which threatens to employ coercive measures unless compliance with formulated demands is forthcoming within a certain time limit.

#### *ELEMENTS OF THE CLASSIC ULTIMATUM*<sup>5</sup>

By our definition, an ultimatum must convey: certain conditions upon which the state in whose name the declaration is made will insist; a sense of urgency; and a threat that noncompliance will lead to coercive measures. These characteristics have traditionally been expressed by the three elements of the classic ultimatum: (1) specific *demands*, (2) a *time limit* for compliance, and (3) a *threat* of punishment or reprisals for failure to comply. The ultimative character of such elements, it should be observed, is not necessarily derived solely from their written or spoken forms, for the surrounding circumstances may also give the message both meaning and credibility.<sup>6</sup>

5. Although these elements are referred to individually, it is to be recognized that they are not necessarily independent. A more penetrating analysis of the interrelationship between such elements, however, remains for future research. For previous recognition of specific elements in ultimata, see Asbeck (1933); Hill (1948); Satow (1957); and George et al. (1971).

6. In addition to their occurrence in the texts of ultimata, words can also be



*Specific demands or terms of compliance.* In issuing an ultimatum, a state insists upon certain specific demands requiring unconditional acceptance, and from which it declares no retreat to be possible. In fact, the specificity and clarity generally associated with the demands of ultimatums have frequently facilitated the effectiveness of coercive diplomacy, by defining the precise obligations to be fulfilled and by informing the opponent what is *not* being required of him. In the past, the spectrum has ranged from limited demands regarding the payment of a debt by the target state, through such intermediate-level conditions as the relinquishment of control over a specific portion of territory, to extreme demands such as various degrees of absorption of the opponent.

Regardless of what is specifically demanded, however, the *sine qua non* of ultimatums is an understanding on the part of both disputants that the conditions presented are *final* and that noncompliance will very probably result in the implementation of the announced coercive threats. The recipient of an ultimatum should thus recognize the interdependent nature of the two states' decision-making in crisis: his own actions and response to demands will condition the subsequent behavior of the coercing power.

Upon receiving an ultimatum, a state will communicate<sup>7</sup> its intention of either refusing or accepting the stated terms of compliance. In so doing, it responds to the demand for a *reply*. Although that response may be a formal, written answer provided within the specified time limit, the mere existence of such a reply does not constitute compliance even with this demand. Implicit in all demands for a reply is the further condition that they be prompt, clear, categorical, and express unconditional acceptance of the demands made. Such qualifications may even be explicitly expressed, as in the case of South Africa's 1899 ultimatum to Britain which demanded an

---

given meaning by the surrounding circumstances such as troops poised on a border, naval demonstrations, or an issuing state with a reputation for aggressive moves.

7. Silence, it should be recognized, may also communicate intent in this case.

“affirmative answer,” the 1938 Polish ultimatum to Czechoslovakia that required “une reponse non-equivoque,” and the Austrian demands on Serbia in 1914 for “an unconditional and favorable response.”<sup>8</sup>

Coupled with a demand for a reply, a power issuing an ultimatum may make two additional *types* of demands. For example, demands may require that an opponent *stop* what he is doing or *undo* and reverse what has already been accomplished. The British ultimatum of 1914 to Germany, for example, demanded that the German ground forces *stop* their forward progress short of an invasion of Belgian territory and thus prevent the violation of guaranteed neutrality. At the outset of World War II, Britain and France issued Nazi Germany an ultimatum, which demanded that all aggressive action against Poland *stop*, that territorial occupation be *undone*, and that all German forces be *withdrawn* from Polish territory.

This distinction of types of demands is, as Alexander George (1971: 22-25) observes, of considerable importance for the theory and practice of coercive diplomacy. The demand that requires an opponent to stop an activity may ask appreciably less than that which insists upon undoing whatever has already been accomplished. Thus, an opponent’s inclination to yield and comply may in fact be minimized by a demand which asks him to undo that which has been accomplished at the price, say, of resources, time, and lives. The motivation of the recipient to comply or not with the demands of an ultimatum can, therefore, be considered in part a function of what is demanded of him.

*Time limit.* The intimidating impact of an ultimatum in coercive diplomacy is further facilitated by the presence of a *time limit*, the element most frequently associated with ultimata. Although surrounding circumstances may lend equal urgency, a time limit provides explicit evidence of the urgent

8. In fact, the Serbian reply was a masterful example of an equivocal answer to a barrage of demands. One must carefully read the reply of the Serbs word by word to discover areas of disagreement with the original demands. Their answer, however, was considered by the Austrians “inadequate.”

and tense atmosphere that accompanies an ultimatum. Such limits have traditionally been located within a time-span of only a few short hours to several days. The American ultimatum to Germany in 1916, for example, demanded compliance “immediately”; the British communication to Hitler in 1939 demanded a reply within two hours; the Anglo-French time limit imposed upon Egypt and Israel in 1956 was 12 hours in length; the Italian expiration deadline in its 1911 ultimatum to Turkey was 24 hours; and the British threatened coercion in 1923 unless the Soviet Union complied with their demands within ten days.

Although the time limit is perhaps the best-known element of the ultimatum, its terms of reference heretofore have been virtually unexplored. The majority of limits imposed by ultimata have referred to the time of expiration for the *reply* rather than for the demands to stop or undo minatory activity. The South African ultimatum to Britain, for example, demanded “an immediate and affirmative *answer*” before or upon the set time limit, while the demands of Austria upon Serbia included that of a “reply of the Royal Government at the latest by 6 o’clock on Saturday evening, the 25 of July 1914.” Even the oral ultimatum of Robert Kennedy to the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 demanded “an *answer*” within “the next day.”

This particular feature suggests the existence of some means of actually regulating the urgency of ultimata and briefly delaying confrontation for crisis management purposes. For instance, although transactions of bad faith are not to be advocated, the fact that time limits generally refer to *replies* suggests that a government could conceivably respond to an ultimatum with an answer that unconditionally accepts all demands, yet then equivocate in actual compliance. As Jervis (1970: 21) observes, the costs of sending deceptive signals, if any, are deferred to the time when it is shown that the signals were misleading.

*Threats of coercive measures.* The final element of the classic ultimatum is the *threat*, which gives notice that rejection and

noncompliance with the demands will lead to coercive measures. Here it is useful to recognize with Schelling (1960: 5, 123) the distinction that threats do not involve the immediate and physical *application* of harmful measures, but rather the exploitation of *potential* violence and force. The distinctive feature of threats, therefore, is that the coercing power asserts that he will actually apply injurious measures *in the future*.

An ultimatum threat is further intended to portray the impression that the coercing power definitely *will* act (not that he may act, for this would only invite speculation by the opponent), but that his actions will be entirely conditional upon compliance with the demands. The intimidating impact of coercive diplomacy is thus increased by the very nature of the ultimata threats; for such threats are portrayed as definite commitments that implicitly surrender future options of alternative action. There is, however, a definite choice of what *type* of threat an ultimatum may initially contain; and it is precisely this issue of the deliberate selection of threats which will occupy a significant portion of the present study.

#### POSSIBLE ELEMENTS OF AN ULTIMATUM

*Introduction and conclusion.* Prior to, or following, the three elements in a classic ultimatum, a power may also present either an oral or written *introduction* or *conclusion*. Although the critical context and the urgency of time often require that the vast majority of ultimata texts be short, terse, and expressed in “termes péremptoires,” there may be a desire on the part of the sender deliberately to raise an issue to the fore, express a lengthy complaint, provide a justification for action, or explicitly explain intentions. The elements of an introduction and conclusion may fulfill such functions within an ultimatum, as well as provide strong indications of its original purpose.

In the 1921 “London Ultimatum” to Germany, for example, the three elements of the classic ultimatum were preceded by an introduction. Here the former Allied Powers noted their innumerable past concessions to the Weimar Republic and

complained that “in spite of the warnings and sanctions agreed upon . . . the German Government is still in default in the fulfillment of the obligations incumbent upon it” regarding disarmament, reparation payments, and the trial of war criminals (Great Britain, Foreign Office, 1967: 579). In a similar manner, the Soviet ultimatum to the Western Powers over the Berlin question in 1958 presented features of both a textual introduction and a conclusion. The Kremlin recounted the treacherous policies of Winston Churchill and the rise of militarism in West Germany, accused the West of subversive activity and of hampering the reunification of Germany, and further declared that, as a consequence, the Soviet Union would no longer consider itself bound by earlier agreements on the division of the city of Berlin. After presenting the three elements of an ultimatum, the Soviets concluded by reaffirming their respect for territorial integrity and noninterference, their desire for good relations with the West, and further cautioned that “only madmen can go the length of unleashing another world war” (U.S. Department of State, 1962: 691-696).

*Incentives.* In addition to the requisite elements of the classic ultimatum, a state may also include *incentives* or “carrots” as an integral feature of ultimata. Although diplomatic history affords a few examples of incentives included in ultimata, such deliberate inducements have seldom been employed in coercion. It is regrettable that primary concern with demands and punishments has resulted in a general neglect of the possibility of combining genuine compromise with negative threats. As Russett (1970: 439) observes, the emphasis has been placed on conflict rather than upon conflict resolution and cooperation.

There is, of course, an inherent incentive in nearly all coercive diplomacy in the sense that both the coercing and coerced parties would generally prefer to avoid the mutually unpleasant consequences of an enforced threat. This particular inducement may not always suffice, however, and the very feasibility of coercion may in fact depend upon the inclusion of incentives.<sup>9</sup> In any bargaining circumstance (as most conflict

9. De Callières long ago advised that “every Christian prince must take as his chief maxim not to employ arms to support or vindicate his rights until he has

situations are), the presence of concessions is an essential requirement for settlement and resolution. Positive incentives may significantly encourage a quid pro quo by reducing an opponent's disinclination to comply with what is demanded of him. Genuine concessions may also play in deescalation something of the same role that demands and threats play in escalation.

During the tense missile crisis of 1962, for example, the United States offered incentives to the Soviet Union in conjunction with an oral ultimatum. In a formal letter to Premier Khrushchev, President Kennedy offered a quid pro quo in the promise that compliance with demands for removing missile bases would be rewarded by terminating the naval quarantine then in effect and with assurances against an armed invasion of Cuba by American forces (Kennedy, 1969: 108). Somewhat earlier, in its ultimatum to Britain in 1899, the Republic of South Africa offered incentives for compliance with its demands regarding the build-up of British troops along its borders. An acceptable response, it promised, would result in "a mutual assurance and guarantee on the part of this Government that no attack upon or hostilities against any portion of the British Government shall be made . . . and on compliance therewith, be prepared to withdraw the armed burghers of this Republic from the borders" (U.S. Naval War College, 1914: 61). Fifteen years later, in issuing an ultimatum to Belgium, Germany offered numerous "concessions" if compliance with its demands to enter Belgian territory were forthcoming. If an attitude of friendly neutrality were maintained, Germany declared that all possessions and independence would be guaranteed in full, that evacuation would follow upon conclusion of peace, and that indemnity would be paid for damages (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 102). The presence of such incentives may provide an indication of the *purpose* for

---

employed and exhausted the way of reason and of persuasion. It is to his interest also to add to reason and persuasion the influence of benefits conferred, which indeed is one of the surest ways to make his own power secure, and to increase it" (more recently, see Schelling, 1960: 40; and George et al., 1971: 25).

which the ultimatum is issued,<sup>10</sup> but their mere existence hardly assures either *credibility* or *potency*.<sup>11</sup>

*Refining the Concept: Types of Ultimata as Distinguished by Their Threats*<sup>12</sup>

In an attempt to achieve objectives or defend their interests, powers engaging in coercive diplomacy may threaten to use a variety of instruments of persuasion. Coercion does not necessarily involve the use of armed force or violence. Diplomatic, economic, military, and psychological measures, for example, can be threatened in varying combinations and sequences with differing degrees of intensity to achieve the desired level of coercion. The nature of this strategy, in fact, requires that coercive measures be specifically tailored in a rather exacting manner to fit the unique configuration of each situation. Sophisticated theories of the use of ultimata will thus recognize that the type of threatened measures will largely be determined by the nature and scope of the demands, the magnitude of the opponent's disinclination to yield, the coercing power's own motivation, and the purposes for which an ultimatum is employed.

Unfortunately, when an ultimatum is issued, discrete and flexible selections of coercive measures are generally thought to

10. The presence of incentives, for example, may indicate that the power issuing the ultimatum strongly desires to reach a compromised settlement rather than being forced to carry out its threats of coercive measures.

11. The German incentives offered to Belgium in the context of the diplomatic situation of August 1914, to illustrate, were far from credible. Similarly, the incentives offered from small, colonial South Africa in 1899 were not regarded at the time as potent or sufficient enough by the British to induce them to stop their menacing policies.

12. The typology presented here is intended to encompass a wide variety of coercive threats, but does not presume to be all-inclusive. It is intended only that these various types be recognized, that they be regarded as having no fixed distinctions, and that each type is not necessarily equivalent to another. Depending upon one's research objectives, "types" of ultimata could also be derived from analyses of elements other than threats. Ultimata could conceivably be classified according to urgency (that is, based on considerations of time limits), the nature of the demands, or upon purposes of issuance.

be either inappropriate or impossible. In fact, the serious and urgent nature of ultimata has recently been associated in conventional wisdom almost exclusively with the most extreme and crude form of coercion—namely, threats of war.<sup>13</sup> For example, one recent author (Iklé, 1963: 104) maintains that ultimata “are, of course, the antithesis of flexibility,” and that they are usually meant “as a preliminary step in going to war.” The increased possibility of escalation and crisis mismanagement inherent in such attitudes make it imperative, therefore, to recognize that even with the resort to ultimata, numerous options for threats short of war were traditionally, and still remain, available to coercive diplomacy.

Perhaps the range of possible alternatives for ultimata can best be depicted on a continuum of threats involving coercive measures, extending from the mildest through an ascending scale of intensity to the most severe. The criteria for identifying and distinguishing these various options specifically for ultimata have long been implicitly provided by diplomatic custom and convention, political practice, and juristic principles of international law. They have, however, heretofore remained largely unexamined. It is through the discovery and utilization of these nuances that one can construct classifications or a typology of ultimata. To do so may provide a greater appreciation of the sophistication of past statecraft and assist in refining the concepts of ultimata and coercion. It will additionally suggest gradual and highly differentiated levels of coercive threats which can acquire considerable tactical significance in urgent international crises. Such distinctions become increasingly important, for as actual force becomes less and less usable for bargaining purposes, other kinds of threatened sanctions may become more crucial.

#### *THREATS OF THE NONVIOLENT BREAK IN NEGOTIATIONS*

It is essential to recognize that, even within the strongest variant of a strategy that employs ultimata, there exist many

13. Our memory of the British and French ultimata to Germany in 1939, the 1945 Allied ultimatum to Japan (the Potsdam Declaration), and the Anglo-French



possibilities of intimidation short of force or war. Perhaps the least amount of pressure that can be threatened in an ultimatum is to break off discussions in progress. From early eighteenth-century diplomacy<sup>14</sup> to contemporary collective bargaining (see Stevens, 1963), negotiating techniques have recognized that ultimata can be used to express the maximum amount of concession possible in bargaining situations. During negotiations, for example, they convey the "last word": that unless one's own proposed, irreducible minimum proposal is accepted by the opponent, discussions will automatically cease. This type of ultimatum states, in effect, that the coercing power would prefer nonagreement to a continued stalemate or acceptance of the opponent's conditions.

Evidence of such threats is provided by the Austrian ultimatum to Russia on the conclusion of the Crimean War. Upon discovering the existence of secret negotiations between Russia and France, Count Buol of Austria offered to act as mediator, and demanded that his terms of mediation be accepted. Austria then transmitted the conditions of negotiation to Russia "sous forme d'ultimatum." The Emperor Alexander proposed several modifications, which Buol refused to accept. He demanded instead an answer of "yes or no." After consulting his principal advisors, the Tsar complied, and expressed his willingness to "accept the Austrian ultimatum" as a basis for further negotiations (Satow, 1922: 167).

The ultimatum threatening the temporary withdrawal of diplomatic representatives may similarly be considered to contain the threat to break off negotiations. In 1915, for example, Russia issued such a threat to Bulgaria. Decrying

---

ultimatum to Egypt during the Suez crisis of 1956 has only reinforced this attitude. Also see the attitudes expressed in Scott (1921: 43), Oxford English Dictionary (1961: 12), Brownlie (1963: 84), Nicolson (1963: 123), and Gamboa (1966: 393).

14. An early example is provided in "Foreign Advices in January 1731," an article in *Gentleman's Magazine*: "There are privately handed about here Copies of the *Ultimatum* (or last Proposals) of the Allies of Seville, as transmitted hither from Paris." For other examples, see Satow (1922: 162-168); for additional discussions of this type of ultimata, see Nicolson (1963: 135), Dictionnaire de la Terminologie du Droit International (1960: 624), and Satow (1957: 107).

Bulgarian subordination to Germany, Russia demanded that the Bulgarian government openly break with the Central Powers and terminate the presence of enemy officers within the time limit of 24 hours. Upon noncompliance, the Russian government threatened that its minister would "leave Bulgaria with all staffs of legations and consulates." Withdrawal resulted, yet neither side considered such a measure as serious as a formal break in diplomatic relations, which occurred only later (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 208). Similarly, when the Soviets withdrew their Ambassador to Israel in 1956, they were careful to note that there was a difference between the withdrawal of a diplomatic representative and the more drastic breaking of relations (see Speier, 1957: 318).<sup>15</sup>

*THREATS OF THE NONVIOLENT BREACH OF  
AGREEMENTS IN FORCE*

Ascending the scale of coercive pressure are those threats that entail the provocative breach or termination of formal agreements already in force. For example, threats to rupture commercial, communication, and transportation agreements or to break diplomatic and consular relations are traditional indicators that normal relations are strained to such an extent that armed conflict may result. Forcible measures, however, do not necessarily follow, because differences may still be adjusted within a nonviolent context.

The threat to terminate a commercial agreement, for instance, was provided in the British ultimatum to the Soviet Union in 1923. Lord Curzon demanded the cessation of certain Communist propaganda, the acceptance of British terms for several disputed issues, and a reply within a time limit of ten days. Both of the disputants, however, realized that the ultimatum threatened only the termination of a 1921 trade agreement and not physical violence (Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, 1923: 5-13). Similarly, the Soviet Union's ultimatum to China in 1929 threatened to terminate previous

15. For additional examples of this type of ultimata, see the British ultimatum to Portugal in 1890 and Serbia to Turkey in 1912.

agreements in the form of a break in diplomatic relations. The Soviets dispatched a demand for a reply (within a specific time limit) that unconditionally accepted the restoration of the management of the Eastern Chinese Railway to its former status. When the Chinese reply proved unacceptable, the Kremlin severed formal relations. Each government recognized, however, that the threat involved no demonstration or use of armed force (Woodhead, 1930: 1225; Hill, 1948: 356).<sup>16</sup>

*THREATS INVOLVING THE DEMONSTRATION OF FORCE*

Although substantial degrees of coercion may be achieved by skilled utilization of diplomatic and economic threats, the attainment of greater intensities of coercion may require threats of demonstrating military capabilities. For example, attempts to provide credibility to previously disregarded, misunderstood, or misconstrued demands have often been facilitated by the threat value of weapons: namely, a nonviolent demonstration of military potential. The publicized movement of air units, provocative military exercises in sensitive areas, maneuvers of naval forces, and mobilization of reserves have all sought to bring pressure upon an opponent without resorting to actual violence. Such demonstrations have traditionally been limited to token character, in the hope that the appearance of a fraction of available power will inspire the perception that more force will follow if necessary. In this way, as several observe (George et al., 1971: 28; Kahn, 1968: 67; Speier, 1957: 307; Vagts, 1956: 231), the coercive effect of what little is actually done can be magnified substantially by linking it with a credible threat of additional action.

During the nineteenth century, states gradually learned that, in demonstrating force, naval rather than other military means lend themselves better to purposes of display, controllability, and crisis management. Mobilization measures, for instance,

16. For additional examples of the type of ultimata that threatens a rupture of diplomatic relations, see those from Spain to Chile in 1865, from Turkey to Greece in 1868, Russia to Turkey in 1876, Austria to Serbia in 1914, and the United States to Germany in 1916.

were found to be relatively more dangerous, expensive, and apt to arouse hostility that was not easy to terminate or revoke. For this reason, American naval demonstrations were often selected for coercive diplomatic tasks because, in the words of one contemporary (Paullin, 1912: 9), they could “best unite force with persuasion.” More recent evidence is provided by the vessels sent from the U.S. Seventh Fleet to anchor in the Beirut harbor in 1957 and by the American warships sent to patrol off the Dominican Republic in 1961.

Naval demonstrations thus often afford evidence of threats involving an exemplary show of force as punishment for noncompliance with ultimata demands. For example, during the years preceding the Young Turk Revolution, the Ottoman Empire was frequently coerced with displays of force. Charging that it was “trifling with his Majesty’s Government,” Great Britain issued an ultimatum to the Empire in 1906. The demands included the evacuation of Taba by Turkish troops and the acceptance of the Sinai boundary with Egypt within a time limit of ten days. The threat for noncompliance was “the immediate dispatch of a British ship of war” to the locality in question. Significant for our analysis, the British representative directed that foreign troops were not to be interfered with, and that the ship was sent “as a precautionary measure, and *without hostile intention*” (Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, 1906).

*THREATS OF COMPULSIVE SETTLEMENT BY FORCE  
SHORT OF LIMITED INVASION*

Should mere displays or demonstrations of force remain ineffective, the danger exists of escalating the type of threats in an ultimatum to those involving the actual use of force. The widely accepted French phrase of “persuasion en rade” gives expression to such threats as compulsive settlement by force as retorsion, reprisals (including embargo), and pacific blockade.

Nineteenth-century statesmen frequently realized that it was both possible and desirable to avoid the disruption and embarrassment of invasion or war while at the same time

employing the "desired amount of coercion." The recourse by states to restricted uses of force for limited objectives gradually gave rise to the body of legal doctrine of retorsion, reprisals, and pacific blockade—generically classed as "measures short of war" (see Brownlie, 1963; McDougal and Feliciano, 1961; and Hindmarsh, 1933). Threats of a hostile embargo, for example, suggest the sequestration or temporary seizure of property, and those of a pacific blockade threaten the closing of one or more ports of a country by force. As with all threats of force in coercive diplomacy, these measures are directed primarily at an opponent's will and his calculations of interest rather than his military capabilities. They are designed not to destroy but rather to frighten, demoralize, and persuade, and thus influence behavior.

In 1850, for example, Palmerston ordered the British minister at Athens to present the Greek government with an ultimatum which threatened "coercive measures" short of invasion or war in the form of a pacific blockade. Britain demanded settlement of the damage claims for property belonging to a British subject living in Athens within a time limit of 24 hours. The threat for noncompliance stated that "the Commander-in chief of Her Majesty's Naval Forces in the Mediterranean will have no other alternative (however painful the necessity may be to him) than to act at once" in the establishment of a blockade on the coasts of Greece. The intention behind this ultimatum was clearly indicated by the British minister, Mr. Wyse, who stated that "the adoption of some *mild measure*, such as that of preventing any Greek Government vessel leaving the Pireaus, might have the effect of convincing the Greek Government that his orders to resort to *active* measures are positive" (see Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, 1850: 3, 6, 9).<sup>17</sup>

#### *THREATS OF LIMITED ARMED INVASION*

In international bargaining situations, states issuing ultimatums have implicitly assumed that there can be a greater application

17. For the same type of threat, also see the French ultimatum to Siam in 1893.

of force than that required for embargoes or blockades, yet whose employment is still short of actual war. Such forcible measures traditionally involve the threat of limited armed invasion upon noncontiguous, nonnational, or even the opponent's own, territory. Depending upon the degree and credibility of commitment, this action (with its costs of destruction, casualties, and humiliation) may indeed be immediately perceived by the recipient of an ultimatum as a *casus belli*; yet it may not be so intended by the one who threatens. The original intention of a forcible entry into an opponent's territorial domain, for example, may be limited to the seizure of certain ports, control of police and communication centers, or the temporary and partial "belligerent occupation" of territory (see McDougal and Feliciano, 1961; Lauterpacht, 1952; Jones, 1924).<sup>18</sup>

This distinction between limited armed invasion and war has been employed in the practice of issuing ultimatums. In their 1921 ultimatum to Germany, the former Allied Powers demanded fulfillment of treaty provisions regarding reparations payments, disarmament, and a trial of war criminals. If a reply was not forthcoming within 24 hours, they threatened a limited armed "occupation of the Valley of the Ruhr and . . . military and naval measures that may be required" (Great Britain, Foreign Office, 1967: 579). Several years later, Poland issued a similar ultimatum to Czechoslovakia. Encouraged in 1938 by the successes of Hitler's foreign policy and the weakness of the Czechs, Poland demanded the evacuation of certain disputed territory around Teschen and the release of Polish political prisoners. Failure to comply within the specified time limit, they threatened, would lead to an armed invasion and occupation of only the territory in question (Great Britain, Foreign Office, 1950: 70).

There are also more recent examples of ultimatums initially threatening limited armed invasion rather than war. As events

18. For early examples of this type of ultimatum, see those from Russia to Turkey in 1853, the United States to Nicaragua in 1854, from Britain to Persia in 1910, from Italy to Turkey in 1911 over Tripoli and Cyrene, and from Italy to Greece over Corfu in 1923.

began to reach a frightening crescendo during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Robert Kennedy orally transmitted an ultimatum to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. According to his own account (Kennedy, 1969: 108-109), Kennedy noted the intolerable condition presented by the construction of missile sites only a few miles from American shores. The ultimatum then demanded the removal of the missile bases and a rapid reply within a time limit of "the next day," for "time was running out." The threat (made increasingly credible by mobilized forces in Florida) was not immediate war with the Soviet Union, but rather armed attacks initially restricted to the missile bases in Cuba. Similarly, the alleged Israeli ultimatum to Lebanon in March 1970 demanded that Beirut prevent Arab guerrillas from launching attacks from the Lebanese border. If compliance was not immediately forthcoming, Israel threatened to turn a six-mile stretch of southern Lebanon into a "scorched-earth desert" (New York Times, 1970). Both parties recognized that the use of force would be restricted to a particular border territory.

#### *THREATS OF WAR*

A theoretical distinction between the "state of peace" and the "state of war" is as ancient as Cicero's dictum that "there is no middle ground between war and peace." Coercion within the complexities of contemporary international politics, however, can seldom be accurately defined in the terms of this traditionally legalistic and simplistic dichotomy. As no universally accepted criteria can determine precisely at what point conflict becomes "war," it is perhaps more realistic to regard war as approaching the upper extremity of our whole scale of coercive measures in ascending scope and intensity (see McDougal et al., 1960; and Osgood, 1957).

This conception of the relative place of war in coercion levels has also been recognized in employing ultimata whose terms may extend so far as to threaten war if demands are not met. If there is no statement to localize the area of coercion or to limit the degree of violence in the event that demands are rejected, it

is generally understood from the context and surrounding circumstances that the ultimatum is an implicit threat of war. For example, previous statements and commitments, the tension of the occasion, reputations of decision makers, and the capabilities and intentions of the disputants are all factors that determine whether the measures threatened will be perceived as acts of war.

Immediately prior to the outbreak of World War I, the British became alarmed by German troop mobilizations and threats against Belgian neutrality. Considering such action to be in serious opposition to its traditional policies and vital interests, Britain issued an ultimatum to Germany demanding that satisfactory assurances respecting Belgium be provided within a specific time limit. A reply was to be forthcoming before 12 o'clock midnight on the same day, August 4. The threat stated that if noncompliance resulted, His Majesty's Government would "feel bound to *take all steps in their power* to uphold the neutrality of Belgium" (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 116). Similarly, after Colonel Nasser of Egypt seized the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain and France realized that their use of and safeguarded free passage in the Canal were endangered. Both governments, therefore, issued an ultimatum to Egypt and Israel with the demands to "stop all warlike action on land, sea, and air," to withdraw forces a distance of ten miles from the Canal, and to accept temporary occupation of key positions at Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez. A reply was demanded within twelve hours. In the event of a failure to comply, they threatened, Anglo-French forces "will intervene in *whatever strength may be necessary* to secure compliance" (Watt, 1957: 86).

Implicit threats, however, may be considered overly subject to varieties of interpretation and misperception. In this case, an ultimatum may be designed to state explicitly that unless compliance with demands is forthcoming within a fixed period of time, formal war will follow immediately. This procedure was recognized as early as 1907 in the Third Hague Convention. Intending to give prior notice to adversaries and to prevent "surprise" and "equivocation" in beginning war, Article I (Scott, 1921: 43) provides:



The Contracting Powers recognize that hostilities between them are not to commence without a previous unequivocal warning, which shall take the form either of a declaration of war, giving reasons, or of an *ultimatum with a conditional declaration of war*.

Such a conditional declaration of war needs no subsequent announcement (Hill, 1948: 357), for it is understood that a status of war will be the consequence ipso facto of the expiration of the time limit or the rejection of the demands.

Evidence of an ultimatum with this threat of a conditional declaration of war is provided by that issued to Great Britain by President Kruger of the Transvaal in 1899. After expressing fear over the concentration of British forces near its borders, the South African Republic demanded that all points of difference be regulated by amicable means and that troops on its borders be withdrawn. The ultimatum pressed for an affirmative reply within three days. In the event of noncompliance, the ultimatum threatened it would "with great regret be compelled to regard the *action* of Her Majesty's Government *as a formal declaration of war*" and would not hold itself responsible for the consequences (U.S. Naval War College, 1913: 60-61).<sup>19</sup>

Today, formal declarations of war may initially appear as only ceremonial baggage from an earlier era. The complexities of international politics and the speed of weapon delivery systems may seem to make such declarations much more difficult to produce. At first glance, subtle nuances in this context may similarly give the impression of being mere legalistic trivia. The experience of the past, however, does have considerable relevance for the theory and practice of coercion and bargaining techniques. The difference between an implicit threat of war and an explicit declaration of war in an ultimatum is not solely between what is verbalized in one case and not in the other. The failure to comply with demands coupled with an implicit threat of war does not automatically produce war (as with a conditional declaration), but is *followed* by another

19. Noncompliance in this case resulted in the outbreak of the Boer War. The British and French ultimata in 1939 similarly threatened a conditional declaration of war.

procedural step: a formal declaration of war.<sup>20</sup> This deliberate, additional procedure of declaring war should not be considered a mere legal formality, but rather as a built-in delay factor that may provide invaluable time during a conflict for further utility calculations and considerations of prudent crisis management.

#### *THREATS OF ESCALATING A WAR*

At the extreme end of the scale of intensifying violence are those threats in an ultimatum that involve escalating a war already in progress.<sup>21</sup> As Kahn (1968: 4-6) suggests, there are at least three ways that a power can increase his coercive pressure: by widening the area of conflict, compounding the escalation, or increasing intensity. Escalation, for example, could result by attacking an ally or client of the opponent, or by a quantitative increase in the intensity of the conflict with the use of more equipment or even of new weapons.

Perhaps the most critical escalation in war today is that involving the use of nuclear weapons. Their coercive potential was first communicated by means of an ultimatum. In a joint communication, the United States, Britain, and China issued the 1945 "Potsdam Declaration" to Japan, demanding the unconditional surrender of Japanese armed forces, the removal of "irresponsible" and "militaristic" leaders, and the destruction of Japanese war-making potential. The time limit was ambiguously phrased in the statement that the Allies "shall brook no delay." The threat (made increasingly credible by air and sea attacks upon the Japanese mainland and the dropping of thousands of leaflets over major cities) contained no explicit reference to the use of atomic weapons, but did refer to the employment of "immeasurably greater" might than was ever

20. Thus, upon noncompliance with the demands in their 1914 ultimatum, Britain *then* issued a formal declaration of war on the following day: "Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government . . . His Majesty's Government [has] declared . . . that a state of war exists" (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 117). In fact, all of the ultimatums submitted in 1914-1915 were followed by formal declarations.

21. One could, of course, argue that even this particular type of ultimatum threat could be further divided into "conventional" and more drastic "atomic" categories, or even different types of limited or nuclear wars. See, for example, Kahn (1968), Brodie (1966), Hoffmann (1965), and Halperin (1962).

utilized against Nazi Germany. Noncompliance, the ultimatum threatened, would be met by the "complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces" and the "utter devastation of the Japanese homeland" (U.S. Department of State, 1960: 1474-1476). The failure of Japan to comply with these demands was met with the atomic bombs unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

### *Purposes of Ultimata*

We have seen that the threats contained in ultimata may range from nonviolent measures through limited degrees of coercion to the escalation of war itself. Demands may similarly vary in their expansiveness, and even time limits may extend from a few short hours to several days in duration. The particular degree of violence, extensiveness, or urgency in each requisite element of an ultimatum, however, is highly dependent upon the *purposes* for which these forms of communication are employed. The significance of this feature warrants at least a brief attempt to appraise actual (as distinguished from publicly declared) purposes of ultimata.

#### *COMMON PURPOSE*

Just as certain elements recur in all ultimata, so there is the constant reappearance of a common purpose. That is, ultimata are issued for the purpose of conveying the impression of resolve and that the "last word" has been given. An ultimatum by its very nature can produce a sense of tension, urgency, and finality. We must recognize, therefore, that, unless these particular results are specifically desired—the serious risks involved in demands and threats—ultimata should not be utilized.

*VARIABLE PURPOSES*<sup>22</sup>

Within the general context of this common purpose for which they are employed, ultimata may also be used as a means for achieving purposes related to, yet distinctive from, that just described. Although our analysis has thus far emphasized that ultimata are most frequently utilized for general purposes of coercive diplomacy, it is important to observe that they may or may not be primarily or even necessarily intended for the immediate intimidation of an opponent. For example, an ultimatum may be employed to mobilize domestic opinion in order to improve one's own bargaining position. It may also be used ritualistically to set a war into motion, to bring an issue to the fore, or to express a maximum amount of concession.

Recognition of these variable purposes is as essential as awareness of the various gradations of threats; for actions are not always perceived as they are intended. A state, for instance, might issue an ultimatum merely to raise an issue, but the opponent (genuinely unaware of variable purposes) might read this message as a signal for war, and therefore be tempted to preempt. Interpretative skill and cognizance of variable purposes for which ultimata are employed may someday save a recipient of such a communication from disastrous consequences.

*To bring an issue to the fore.* In some cases, the purpose of an ultimatum includes a desire to bring an issue dramatically to the fore. To do so effectively could evince and focus an opponent's attention on a particular neglected problem. In effect, such an ultimatum says: "*This* is the issue that we want resolved, and we want it settled *now!*" By this means, a crucial

22. The varieties and interdependence of intentions, motivations, and objectives for which any power will issue an ultimatum may be impossible to fathom; yet recurring characteristics in historical cases can identify and distinguish at least several types of variable purposes. One could also consider variable purposes within the more general framework of whether or not the coercing power intended aggression or defense of the status quo, coerced in accordance with international law and community procedures or against them, and the like.

unresolved issue could be thrust from the confines of dusty chancellery files into the active political arena.

It is conceivable, for example, that the 1958 Soviet ultimatum to the West over Berlin was an effort in part of raising the larger issue of the division of Germany. The tremendous length of the ultimatum's introduction recounting the history of Germany since World War II, the Potsdam Agreements, and the abnormal situation of a divided Berlin indicate that such may have indeed been the case. Particularly striking is the statement in the text of the ultimatum which reads: "It is envisaged that the German Democratic Republic, *like any other independent state*, must fully deal with questions concerning its space, i.e., exercise its sovereignty" (U.S. Department of State, 1962: 591-596). In fact, Smith (1963: 194) maintains that the intention of the Soviets was not to unleash war, but rather to bring the issue of division to the fore in order to extract a de facto recognition from the West of the German Democratic Republic. The relatively lengthy time limit of the ultimatum also underscores this interpretation of purpose.

*To express the maximum amount of concession.* An ultimatum may also be used for the purpose of expressing the maximum amount of concession which will be made in order to arrive at an agreement. Cases exist in which ultimata have been employed to denote an irreducible minimum which would be accepted, a plan or scheme of arrangement to be imposed, or a maximum amount of what would be conceded. This maximum offer ultimatum is, as Iklé (1963: 212) and Stevens (1963: 34-37) observe, used as a technique to convert a would-be negotiation game into one of take-it-or-leave-it. This is currently known to collective bargaining as "Boulwareism" (after a chief proponent of the technique, Lemuel Boulware of the General Electric Company). Evidence of such a purpose has already been cited in the example of the Austrian ultimatum to Russia. Here Count Buol demanded that his terms of mediation be accepted as a basis for settlement. He refused to accept any modifications in his "maximum concessions," and demanded an answer of "yes or no" (Satow, 1957: 107).

*To fulfill obligatory warnings or customary procedure.* Ultimata that threaten war have also been utilized for the purpose of fulfilling either customary or legal obligations for warnings to opponents prior to the outbreak of hostilities, and thus setting into motion a certain sequence of events. The idea that war should not commence without notification or a declaration was ritualistic practice among the ancients, and was insisted upon by Grotius and other early writers of international law. Although the practice of such warnings partially lapsed into disregard, it was revived by recommendations of the Institute de Droit International which were adopted at the Hague Conference. Here it was agreed that hostilities between the contracting parties “must not commence without *previous* and *explicit warning*.” This warning was to be provided by either a separate declaration of war or a conditional declaration of war “of an ultimatum” (Scott, 1921: 43). As a signatory to the Convention, therefore, Germany issued an ultimatum to Belgium in 1914 which threatened that unless compliance with demands was forthcoming, Germany would be “compelled to consider Belgium as an enemy” and forced to adjust relations by “the decision of arms” (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 102).

*To manipulate opinion and mobilize resources.* One of the most frequently recurring purposes for which ultimata are employed is that of manipulating opinion and mobilizing resources. A power issuing an ultimatum, for example, may do so in an attempt to provide justification for its own offensive action. That is, an opponent’s failure to comply with the demands of an ultimatum may be used as an indication of the cause of a conflict or as an excuse for waging war. Such attempted justifications may be intended to manipulate perceptions for bargaining purposes, influence allies, neutrals, opinion within the opponent’s territory, or (particularly necessary in a democracy) elite and public opinion in one’s own country. Convincingly placing blame on the opponent, in turn, could be most useful for furnishing authority for legislative or executive acts that depend upon the existence of emergencies,

removing some inhibitions against the use of force and coercion, uniting and mobilizing countrymen, and for arousing support and favor at home and abroad. As Hilsman (1968: 13) observes, policy must be considered as facing inward as well as outward.

Thus Italy issued an ultimatum to Turkey in 1911, which declared that the Imperial government “has shown constant hostility toward all Italian activity in Tripoli and Cyrene” and rejected any proposals for new negotiations—“the uselessness of which has been demonstrated by past experience and which . . . would be themselves permanent causes of disagreement and conflict.” It soon declared that “the events which will follow can only be regarded as *the necessary consequences* of the conduct followed for so long by the Turkish authorities” (U.S. Naval War College, 1914: 64). The Austrian ultimatum of 1914 similarly accused Serbia of being a “perpetual menace to tranquility” and drew attention to the “painful events” of the recent past involving “acts of terrorism and a series of outrages and murders” (U.S. Naval War College, 1918: 38). In like manner, even after the Nanking government had accepted an emergency form of settlement, with the Japanese ultimatum of China in 1937, General Katsuki justified his offensive measures on the basis “that every means to reach a peaceful settlement has been exhausted, and that the peace of North China, which is of vital importance to both Japan and Manchoukuo, has been disrupted with consequent imminent danger to the lives and property of Japanese citizens” (Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, 1938: 181). To foreign audiences, such excuses and justifications have been far from convincing.

*To humiliate an opponent.* Ultimata are also issued for the purpose of humiliating or embarrassing an opponent.<sup>2 3</sup> A power may intend deliberately to embarrass an opponent in the eyes of domestic or foreign opinion in order to increase his own bargaining position or bolster self-esteem. Evidence of such intent is provided by the British ultimatum to Greece over the Don Pacifico Affair. Although the initial provocation had

23. For this suggestion, I am grateful to Robert Jervis.

occurred to a British subject three years before, Palmerston calculated that even a late ultimatum would not only humiliate the Greeks (and other Continental monarchies) before the authority of Pax Britannica, but also appeal to English national pride and chauvinism. It had to be determined, he said, “whether, as the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity when he could say *Civis Romanus sum*; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong” (Ridley, 1970: 387).

*To prepare prudently for self-defense.* A state may also issue an ultimatum for essentially defensive as well as aggressive purposes—for genuine self-defense in order to protect one’s objectives, values, or interests. A government, for example, might intend to prevent something worse from happening, to demonstrate resolve in order to deter additional threatening action by an opponent, or to prepare prudently for likely escalation on the other side. Faced with German aggression in Poland, Britain and France sought to halt this minacious activity and prevent the outbreak of yet another major war in the first half of the twentieth century. Their 1939 ultimatums, therefore, threatened that unless Germany suspended “all aggressive action in Poland” and “promptly withdrew their forces from Polish territory,” a state of war would result (Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, 1939: 175). The Anglo-French coercion was attempted far too late, however, and upon the expiration of the time limit, World War II began.

### *Conclusions*

When compared to traditional military strategies and other forms of communication, coercive diplomacy and ultimatums are understandably attractive. If successfully employed in a crisis, they achieve policy objectives with much greater economy and less risk than strategies that rely more directly and exclusively



on the actual use of force and only implicit communications. The direct and serious nature of ultimata, to illustrate, is very effective in conveying the impression of urgency and resolve. The explicit quality of ultimata is similarly attractive, for its deliberate form of communication is generally very successful in reducing misperception; that is, in minimizing the frequent discrepancy between the intended and perceived signals.

The beguiling character of coercion, however, should not be allowed to detract from its inherent limitations and very serious dangers. For example, the necessary preconditions for successful coercive diplomacy (such as the coercing power's motivation, clarity of objectives, domestic support, and usable military options) and the problems of "operationalizing" this strategy,<sup>24</sup> indicate that there will be few crises in which coercion will constitute a feasible and useful strategy. Particularly when employing ultimata, coercive diplomacy has seldom been successful (and even then almost exclusively by states with a very substantial power differential over their opponents). Blatant intimidation further tends to clash easily with the restraints imposed by domestic traditions and procedures, foreign opinion, moral principles, and (however frail and rudimentary) the legitimacy of international law.<sup>25</sup>

The extreme features of ultimata only amplify these dangers and limitations of coercive diplomacy. For example, an ultimatum is by its very nature escalatory; it threatens that more coercion than previously employed will result if compliance with demands is not forthcoming. Ultimata thus may easily catalyze a chain of consequences or a process of escalation that can neither be anticipated or effectively controlled. Contemporary nuclear weapons and near-instantaneous delivery vehicles make it even more dangerous than before to move very far up

24. This type of problem has been identified and illustrated in Chapter 5 of George et al. (1971).

25. Under the United Nations Charter, for example, coercive threats of war and force are now legal only if in self-defense or in collective defense of the Charter. This restraint perhaps had some influence on the Soviet's proposal during the Suez Crisis of 1956 that the U.N. itself issue an ultimatum to Britain, France, and Israel. See *New York Times* (1956).

our scale of coercion. The urgent and final character of ultimatata also often stand in flagrant contradiction with prudent crisis management, which requires that measures be slowed up and spaced out and that time be provided for reflection and ample communications between the contesting states. An ultimatum readily excites rather than inhibits tensions, and only decreases bargaining flexibility. As such, it only increases the possibility of exceeding an opponent's threshold of tolerance, provoking an imprudent and unfavorable response and precipitating the critical eruption of a crisis. Practical as well as ethical considerations, therefore, suggest only the very infrequent employment of ultimatata in the strategy of coercive diplomacy.

## REFERENCES

- Academie Diplomatique Internationale (1933) *Dictionnaire Diplomatique*. Paris.
- ARON, R. (1960) "Conflict and war from the viewpoint of historical sociology," in S. H. Hoffmann (ed.) *Contemporary Theory in International Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- ASBECK, H. (1933) *Das Ultimatum in Modernen Volkerrecht*.
- BARKER, A. J. (1964) *Suez: The Seven Day War*. London: Faber & Faber.
- BRAUN, W. (1930) *Demarche, Ultimatum, Sommatation*. Berlin: Georg Stilke.
- BRODIE, B. (1966) *Escalation and the Nuclear Option*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- BROWNLIE, I. (1963) *International Law and the Use of Force by States*. Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press.
- Dictionnaire de la Terminologie du Droit International* (1960) Paris: Sirey.
- EAGLETON, C. (1938) "The form and function of the declaration of war." *Amer. J. of International Law* 32, 1: 19-35.
- FEIS, H. (1966) *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Foreign Affairs Association of Japan (1938) *The Japan Year Book 1937*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha Press.
- GAMBOA, M. (1966) *Elements of Diplomatic and Consular Practice: A Glossary*. Quezon City: Phoenix Press.
- GEORGE, A. L., D. HALL, and W. SIMONS (1971) *The Limits of Coercive Democracy*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Great Britain, Foreign Office (1967) *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939; First Series, XV*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- (1950) *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939; Third Series, III*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons (1939) *Command Paper 6106. Sessional Papers, 1938-39; XXVII*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- (1923) *Command Paper 1858. Sessional Papers, 1923; XXV*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

[164] INTERNATIONAL STUDIES QUARTERLY

- (1906) Command Paper 3006. Sessional Papers, 1906; CXXXVII. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- (1850) "Further correspondence respecting the demands made upon the Greek government." Sessional Papers, 1850; LVI. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- HALLE, L. (1967) *The Cold War as History*. New York: Harper & Row.
- HALPERIN, M. (1962) *Limited War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Affairs.
- HILL, N. (1948) "Was there an ultimatum before Pearl Harbor?" *Amer. J. of International Law* 42, 2: 355-367.
- HILSMAN, R. (1968) *To Move a Nation*. New York: Dell.
- HINDMARSH, A. (1933) *Force in Peace: Force Short of War in International Relations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- HOFFMANN, S. (1965) *The State of War*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- HOLLAND, T. E. (1933) *Lectures in International Law*. London: Sweet & Maxwell.
- HOLSTI, K. (1967) *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- HYDE, C. (1922) *International Law Chiefly as Interpreted and Applied by the United States*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- IKLE, F. (1963) *How Nations Negotiate*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- JERVIS, R. (1970) *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- (1968) "Hypotheses on misperception." *World Politics* 20, 3: 454-479.
- JONES, F. (1924) "Military occupation of alien territory in time of peace." *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 9: 131-163.
- KAHN, H. (1968) *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*. Baltimore: Penguin.
- KENNEDY, R. (1969) *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Missile Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- LAUTERPACHT, H. [ed.] (1952) "Disputes, war and neutrality," in *Oppenheim's International Law: A Treatise*. London: Longman's Green.
- McDOUGAL, M. and F. FELICIANO (1961) *Law and Minimum World Public Order: Legal Regulations of International Coercion*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press.
- McDOUGAL, M. et al. (1960) *Studies in World Public Order*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press.
- New York Times (1970) "Threat of Beirut reported." (March 7): 1.
- (1956) "Russia warns of force to end Suez war." (November 6): 1.
- (1945) "Japan officially turns down allied surrender ultimatum." (July 30): 1.
- NICHOLSON, H. (1963) *Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- OSGOOD, R. (1957) *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary (1961) Volume 11 "U." Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon.
- PAULLIN, C. O. (1912) *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- PFALTZGRAFF, R. (1971) "International studies in the 1970s." *International Studies Q.* 15, 1: 104-128.
- RIDLEY, J. (1970) *Lord Palmerston*. London: Constable.
- ROSECRANCE, R. (1963) *Action and Reaction in World Politics: International Systems in Perspective*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- RUSSETT, B. (1970) "International behavior research: case studies and cumulation," in M. Haas and H. Kariel (eds.) *Approaches to the Study of Political Science*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- SATOW, E. (1957) *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*. London: Longman's, Green.
- (1922) *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*. London: Longman's, Green.

- SCHELLING, T. C. (1966) *Arms and Influence*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press.
- (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- SCOTT, J. B. [ed.] (1921) *Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conference of 1907*, III. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- SMITH, J. (1963) *The Defense of Berlin*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- SPEIER, H. (1957) "Soviet atomic blackmail and the North Atlantic alliance." *World Politics* 9, 3: 307-328.
- STEVENS, C. M. (1963) *Strategy and Collective Bargaining Negotiation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- U.S. Department of State (1962) *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1958*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- (1960) *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin, 1945*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Naval War College (1918) *International Law Documents: Neutrality, Breaking of Diplomatic Relations, War, 1917*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- (1914) *International Law Topics and Discussions, 1913*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- VAGTS, A. (1956) *Defense and Diplomacy: The Soldier and the Conduct of Foreign Relations*. New York: King's Crown.
- WATT, D. C. [ed.] (1957) *Documents on the Suez Crisis*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- WOHLSTETTER, R. (1962) *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press.
- WOODHEAD, H.G.W. [ed.] (1930) *The China Year Book, 1929-1930*. Tientsin: Tientsin Press.
- YOUNG, O. (1968) *The Politics of Force: Bargaining During International Crises*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.