

Crisis Diplomacy

Credible Commitments and Brinkmanship

January 29, 2015

Today's Agenda

- 1. Credibility: a cookbook.**
- 2. Resolve and brinkmanship.**

Credibility:

a cookbook

The Power to Hurt

(a quick review)

Threatening to make another party suffer if they don't yield to your demand.

The threat won't be successful unless it is *credible*—you would rather carry it out than live with the status quo.

How to Establish Credibility

- **Appearing "irrational"**
- **Trip wires**
- **Publicity**

Appearing "Irrational"¹

If a threat would be crazy to carry out, let the enemy think you're just crazy enough.

¹ Or, more accurately, "Having preferences that defy common sense."

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But Don't Appear *Too Crazy*

The enemy must think you're willing to carry out the crazy threat.

But what if you look so eager that you'd do it no matter what?

Trip Wires

Take the decision to follow through on the threat out of your hands.

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Problems with Trip Wires

- **Technology**
- **No trapdoors allowed**
- **Incentives to misrepresent**
- **Common knowledge and riskiness**

Publicity

Another way to commit is to just say you're committed.

- Domestic audience**
- International audience**

Reputation

Schelling claims that commitments are *interdependent*: our past behavior affects whether our threats are credible now.

Resolve and

Brinkmanship

Bargaining Power

(a quick review)

The less you have to lose from disagreement, the more bargaining power you have.

What if I have less to lose—but it's still a lot?

Bargaining in the Shadow of Disaster

We must figure out how to divide \$20.

You get to make a proposal to me.

If I accept, we get what we agreed on.

If I reject, I have to pay \$100 and you have to pay \$1000.

Risking Disaster

Let's change what happens when I reject the offer.

There's a 10% chance I have to pay \$100 and you have to pay \$1000.

There's a 90% chance we try again, but now I get to make the offer.

Brinkmanship

Convincing others to give you what you want by running the risk of mutually harmful outcomes.

Deterrence and Compellence

Deterrence: Stopping someone else from doing something you don't want.

Compellence: Convincing them to do something you do want.

Which purpose does brinkmanship serve better?

Two Questions about Brinkmanship

1. Is nuclear brinkmanship really possible?
2. If so, is *Arms and Influence* really a guide to keeping us safe from global nuclear war?

For Next Time

- Read Jervis 1976, "Deterrence, the Spiral Model, and Intentions of the Adversary" (on Blackboard)
- Keep reading *Essence of Decision*

Image Sources

— Shipwreck: Barbara Walsh, via **Flickr**