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Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy

Kenneth Schultz explores the effects of democratic politics on the use and success of coercive diplomacy. He argues that open political competition between the government and opposition parties influences the decision to use threats in international crises, how rival states interpret those threats, and whether or not crises can be settled short of war. The relative transparency of their political processes means that, while democratic governments cannot easily conceal domestic constraints against using force, they can credibly demonstrate resolve when their threats enjoy strong domestic support. As a result, compared to their nondemocratic counterparts, democracies are more selective about making threats, but those they do make are more likely to be successful – that is, to gain a favorable outcome without resort to war. Schultz develops his argument through a series of game-theoretic models and tests the resulting hypotheses using both statistical analyses and historical case studies.

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To Heather and Aaron

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Preface

In March 1999, as the first draft of this manuscript was being completed, the United States and its allies launched an air war against Yugoslavia over its treatment of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. While this conflict was fascinating for many reasons, one aspect that particularly struck me was President Clinton's decision to announce, both before and during the air campaign, that he had no intention of introducing ground troops into Kosovo. Why Clinton was reluctant to use ground forces is not very puzzling. Given the costs that were anticipated and the lack of strong public support, any such operation would have been politically and militarily quite risky. The decision to announce his intentions publicly, however, came under strong criticism, especially when the air campaign failed to produce immediate results. "How does it make sense," asked Republican Senator John McCain, "to tell your enemy before you go into a conflict that you will not exercise whatever options are necessary to achieve victory?" (US Senate 1999). Asked this very question in an April 19 *Newsweek* interview, Vice President Al Gore defended the president's strategy: "We have an obligation to candidly communicate with the American people about what we're doing and why, and what we're not doing and why. And if candor and clarity are costs of democracy, it's not the first time."

This book explores how the transparent political process within democracies influences the way these states use threats of force, how the targets of those threats respond, and whether or not crises are resolved short of war. While Gore's response reflects a common perception that the requirements of open deliberation and debate impose liabilities on democratic foreign policy, my findings suggest a more mixed and, on balance, more positive conclusion. The Kosovo episode reflects a class of cases in which the demands of domestic politics and the demands of

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international diplomacy clashed. President Clinton ruled out ground troops in large part to hold together fragile domestic support for the intervention, both in the United States and in Europe. He traded off some of his bargaining leverage against Yugoslavia in order to mute domestic oppositions that were leery of where the engagement would lead. I find that this is a common pattern, in which democratic governments are constrained in the threats they can make or find their threats rendered ineffective because of domestic opposition to the use of force.

This is not, however, the only pattern associated with democracy. In many other cases, democratic states have managed to use threats very effectively because open competition and debate reveal the *strength* of domestic support. In the strategic environment of an international crisis, convincing a rival state that one is willing and able to carry out a threat to use force is difficult. Thus, the ability to signal resolve in a credible manner bestows important advantages. I show that, when democratic states are strongly resolved to use force, they are better able to convince their opponents of that fact than are nondemocratic states. The support of domestic opposition parties, freely given, provides confirmation of the government's political incentives to carry out its threats. Nondemocratic governments, which routinely coerce support and suppress dissent, have no comparable mechanism for signaling unified resolve.

Thus, while democracies cannot readily conceal domestic constraints against waging war, the fact that they are consequently more selective about threatening force means that the threats they make tend to be particularly effective. Indeed, I show that democratic states are less likely to initiate crises by issuing threats, but, conditional on their doing so, those threats are less likely to be resisted. The danger of war is consequently lower.

Many friends and colleagues have contributed their time and insight to this project. I am particularly grateful to the following people who read and commented on the manuscript or its various components: Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Michael Doyle, James Fearon, Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, Hein Goemans, Joanne Gowa, Stephen Krasner, Jack Levy, Jeffrey Lewis, Edward Mansfield, James Morrow, and Alastair Smith. I would also like to thank Paul Huth both for his comments on the manuscript and for providing the data that serve as the basis for the empirical tests in Chapter 6. The Eisenhower World Affairs Institute and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs provided financial support.

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Parts of chapters 3, 4, and 5 are based on articles that were published in the *American Political Science Review* and *International Organization* (Schultz 1998, 1999).

This book is dedicated to my wife and son. Heather has been by my side through the entire process; indeed, the inspiration that would become the central thesis of this book came to me only a few weeks before our wedding. I am eternally grateful for her unconditional love and support. Aaron was born while the first draft of the manuscript was coming together. He is my proudest accomplishment and a source of immeasurable love and joy.