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# The Effectiveness of Gunboat Diplomacy

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In the 1980s occurrences of gunboat diplomacy—the demonstration, threat, or use of limited naval force for political objectives—have been particularly prominent and controversial. This study examines when this strategy is most (and least) effective in attaining its objectives. After placing gunboat diplomacy in its general theoretical context, 10 hypotheses emerge regarding the influence of (1) the nature of the incident, (2) the assailant–victim relationship, and (3) the nature of the assailant and victim. Using a database of 133 incidents of gunboat diplomacy ranging from 1946 to 1978, this article empirically tests the hypotheses and statistically evaluates them. The results indicate that the most effective gunboat diplomacy involves a definitive, deterrent display of force undertaken by an assailant who has engaged in war in the victim's region and who is militarily prepared and politically stable compared to the victim.

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During the early part of the 1980s the world has experienced a remilitarization of international relations. The emphasis has been on the use of physical coercion as a means of achieving objectives, as confrontations in the Falklands, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Grenada, and Iran and Iraq painfully illustrate. The pendulum seems to have swung away from détente and the dominance of the economic North–South split, back to the Cold War and the supremacy of the military East–West split.

Despite the presence of some full-scale wars during this period, states have exhibited a marked preference for applications of limited military force. The Reagan administration has led the way in this regard, and an excerpt from an April 1984 speech by Secretary of State George Shultz (1984: 18) explains the underlying rationale:

It is often said that the lesson of Vietnam is that the United States should not engage in military conflict without a clear and precise military mission, solid public backing, and enough resources to finish the job. This is undeniably true. But does it mean there are no situations where a discrete assertion of power is needed or appropriate for limited purposes? Unlikely. Whether it is crisis management or power projection or a show of force or peace-keeping or a localized military action, there will always be instances that fall short of an all-out national commitment on the scale of World War II. The need to avoid no-win situations cannot mean that we turn automatically away from hard-to-win

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situations that call for prudent involvement. These will always involve risks; we will not always have the luxury of being able to choose the most advantageous circumstances. And our adversaries can be expected to play rough.

Recent events demonstrate that the United States is by no means alone in espousing this bellicose logic.

Among the variety of applications of limited military force, 'gunboat diplomacy'—the demonstration, threat, or use of limited naval force for political objectives—stands out as being particularly pervasive and controversial. Although national governments often apply this strategy as a substitute for—or in combination with—negotiations, diverse sources (Losev, 1982; *Newsweek*, 1983) continue to express skepticism about both the legitimacy and effectiveness of gunboat diplomacy.

This study focuses on the conditions when gunboat diplomacy is most (and least) effective in achieving its objectives. Gunboat diplomacy incidents seem to comprise an appropriate topic because they are not only frequent and notorious but also relatively homogeneous, at least when compared to the full range of political uses of limited military force. The question of gunboat diplomacy's effectiveness appears to be urgent because neither conceptual nor empirical studies have provided answers (they often contain simply anecdotal descriptions), nor have policymakers developed a clear sense of when the strategy is most useful.

### **Theoretical Context of Gunboat Diplomacy**

Previous analyses of gunboat diplomacy have not adequately placed it within a broader theoretical context. Indeed, even discussions of the wider category of shows-of-force tend to reflect the underlying assumption that this military technique can or should be isolated from more general analytical frameworks. To remedy this omission, this study now briefly reviews this theoretical context, which Figure 1 conceptualizes as a set of concentric circles ranging from the most general to the most specific.

The broadest conceptual roots of gunboat diplomacy are theories of bargaining, signaling, and force. Gunboat diplomacy fits into Snyder and Diesing's spectrum (1977: 195) of bargaining dimensions—accommodative, coercive, and persuasive—and falls largely into the coercive category; into Allen's continuum (1980: 22–24) of political-military signaling—ranging in order of increasing commitment from show-of-interest to show-of-resolve to show-of-force—and falls mainly into the highest category; and into George, Hall, and Simons' typology (1971: 15–21) of strategies for the use of force—a quick and decisive strategy, a strategy of attrition, a strategy of coercive diplomacy, and a test of capabilities within restrictive ground rules—and falls principally into the coercive diplomacy category. These categorization systems are highly interrelated but capture different aspects of gunboat diplomacy.

Theories of coercive diplomacy and deterrence provide a more particularized backdrop for gunboat diplomacy. As George and Smoke (1974: 609) incisively explain, coercive diplomacy attempts to alter the status quo, while deterrence attempts to preserve it. More specifically, coercive diplomacy occurs when 'force is used in an exemplary, demonstrative manner, in discrete and controlled increments, to induce the opponent to revise his calculations and agree to a mutually acceptable termination of the conflict' (George, Hall, and Simons, 1971: 18); while deterrence is 'the use of threats of harm to prevent someone from doing something you do not want him to' (Morgan, 1977: 17). Coercive diplomacy 'seeks to erode an opponent's motivation by exploiting the capacity to inflict damage' (Lauren, 1972: 135) and, depending on the demands on

the opponent and its disinclination to comply, can range from the weak 'try-and-see' approach to the strong 'tactic ultimatum' (George, Hall, and Simons, 1971: 22, 27). Deterrence may rely on emotional fear, rational assessment of costs and benefits, and uncertainty and risk (Morgan, 1977: 22), and may involve either threat of punishment or threat of denial (George and Smoke, 1974: 48) as means of preventing the undesired action. Gunboat diplomacy may incorporate elements of both coercive diplomacy and deterrence in differing situations, though usually accompanied by a lower level of verbal communication than either of these more general approaches.

The most specific conceptual reference point for gunboat diplomacy is the theory of shows-of-force. Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 12) suggest that a show-of-force occurs 'when physical actions are undertaken by one or more components of the uniformed military services as part of a deliberate attempt by the national authorities to influence, or to be prepared to influence, specific behavior of individuals in another nation without engaging in a continuing contest of violence'. Shows-of-force include a wide variety of types of military activity, including the publicized movement of air units, military exercises in sensitive areas, maneuvers of naval forces, mobilization of reserves, or provocative testing of missiles (Kahn, 1965: 67). An equally large range of categorization schemes exist for shows of force (Kahn, 1965: 68; Young, 1968: 359; Luttwak, 1974: 5; Snyder and Diesing, 1977: 213, 232; Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 71): they may be deterrent or compellent, silent or noisy (in terms of publicity), active or latent, displaying intent or capability or increasing readiness to fight, multilateral or bilateral,

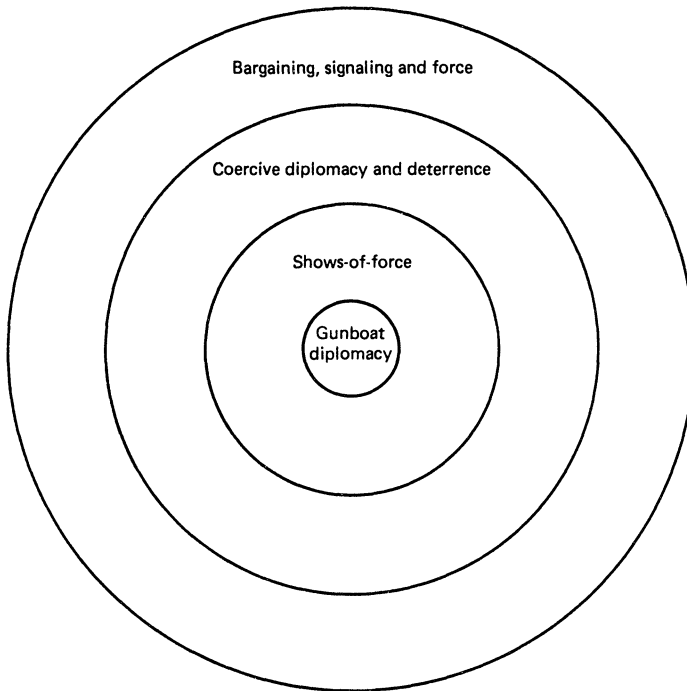


FIG. 1. Conceptualization of the theoretical context of gunboat diplomacy.

and displaying or threatening force or actually using force. The manifold purposes of shows-of-force include demonstrating one's own power and resolve to enemies, displaying alliance strength, communicating direct or indirect threats, changing or maintaining other states' behavior, avoiding war, achieving a resolution of tensions, raising internal morale, or gaining feedback about other states' reactions (George et al., 1971: 18; Lauren, 1972: 148–149; George and Smoke, 1974: 561; Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 8, 13). The general presumption here is that shows-of-force occur in order to emphasize and bolster these purposes in a more decisive manner than non-force-related strategies.

There are a few major disagreements regarding shows-of-force. First, some believe that the nuclear era has increased the likelihood of utilization of this strategy because it is less provocative and more legitimate due to the superpowers' 'need for a greater ensemble of coercive moves short of war' (Snyder and Diesing, 1977: 233–234); while others believe the technique has become outmoded and ineffective because the Soviets, at least, now 'refuse to be impressed by short-of-war moves and gestures' (Vagts, 1956: 257–258). Second, some assert that a main advantage of shows-of-force lies in their explicitness, providing 'the clearest and most threatening signal possible short of open conflict' with no ambiguity about goals, intentions, methods of force, or means of satisfying demands (Allen, 1980: 24–25); while others assert that these demonstrations' 'usefulness lies in the sense of menace they convey, combined with the ambiguity about what is being threatened in what contingency, which preserves flexibility' (Snyder and Diesing, 1977: 231). Finally, some believe that a key purpose of shows-of-force, at least when undertaken by Western nations, has become inward rather than outward and is principally directed at the initiating nation's own citizenry (Vagts, 1956: 257; Schelling, 1966: 239); while others view the domestic impact of shows-of-force as no more important than the impact on target nations' behavior (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 28).

Gunboat diplomacy is generally the most frequently used variety of shows-of-force (Vagts, 1956: 233; Lauren, 1972: 148–149; Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 38–39). Gunboat diplomacy specifically involves 'the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to cause advantage, or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or jurisdiction of their own state' (Cable, 1981: 39). This strategy subdivides into four categories (Cable, 1981: 41–83): 'definitive', designed to create a fait accompli; 'purposeful', designed to change the policy or character of a foreign government; 'catalytic', designed to use ongoing force to deal with an unforeseen and/or unspecified threat; and 'expressive', designed to emphasize attitudes, underscore policy statements, and provide an emotional outlet.

The fundamental underlying controversy surrounding gunboat diplomacy (and, indeed, most shows-of-force) concerns the acceptability and utility of coercive rather than noncoercive tactics as means of influence in international relations. Certainly there are some objections to classifying gunboat diplomacy as a coercive tactic: some analysts characterize acts of gunboat diplomacy as 'chiefly instruments of political and psychological leverage' and as intending invariably to avoid violence (Howe, 1971: 20; Booth, 1977a: 19), so much so that the actual application of physical force can signify failure; object to the use of the term 'gunboat diplomacy', with its historically bellicose connotations, to describe political uses of naval force (McGuire, Booth, and McDonnell, 1975: 371); and even find it difficult in practice to distinguish between coercive and non-coercive naval shows-of-force (Booth, 1977b: 459–460). Nonetheless, coercion does

seem to be at the core of gunboat diplomacy incidents, and Lockhart (1979: 117–118) summarizes why such coercive tactics are the subject of controversy:

Coercion is unquestionably a crucial strategy for international conflict. Through coercive actions some nations force other nations to relinquish values that would otherwise not be relinquished. Nevertheless, coercion carries concomitant dangers which place limitations on its effective use. One problem with coercive strategies is that they may engage additional values for an adversary and thus make concessions all the more costly for him. The primary consideration here is the target's perception of the coercer's goals. If the target perceives the adversary as using *limited coercion* in order to achieve *limited goals* that are clearly of *central importance* to him, then dysfunctional resistance to coercive pressure by the target is minimized . . . To the degree that coercion exceeds appropriate levels and needlessly humiliates the adversary, resistance is apt to increase. To the degree that the adversary's position seems open to whatever can be achieved through coercive measures rather than being clearly limited to specific issues, the target's resistance is apt to increase. And to the degree that the objectives for which this coercion is undertaken are perceived by the target to be peripheral, as opposed to central objectives of the coercing party, the target's resistance is apt to increase.

Coercive tactics have questionable legitimacy, since they frequently violate international law and norms of behavior, and questionable long-range effectiveness, since these tactics often quickly degenerate (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 87) and can damage long-term reputation. While there is a prevalent feeling regarding gunboat diplomacy that 'the utility of coercive force is increasingly in question' due to the recent higher economic and political costs of military intervention by sea, the claim persists that 'the threat of such force remains a powerful diplomatic weapon' (McGuire, 1977: 153).

A more specific debate about gunboat diplomacy revolves around whether this technique is generally more or less effective than land-based shows-of-force. Vagts (1956: 235) perhaps best explains the argument behind the superiority of gunboat diplomacy:

For technical no less than psycho-political reasons, naval forces lend themselves better than military forces to the purposes of demonstration. For one thing, they are practically always more ready for war than land forces and can set out at very short notice. Their movements can more readily be changed from a peaceful to a hostile character—by diverse announcements—and back again, from routine visits and 'showing the flag' as a sign of constant readiness to protect national interests abroad to active interference with guns and landing forces. Their movements can be stopped on short notice and their meaning can thus be quickly reinterpreted. Their actions can easily be disavowed as due to the initiative of local or subordinate commanders. As a rule, their action does not seem to engage the demonstrating Power quite as deeply or irrevocably as the similar use of military forces. Nor does their presence leave quite such a deep impression on the collective memory as military enterprises of similar intent. . . .

On the other hand, Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 529–530) explain their conclusion that, at least for the United States, gunboat diplomacy is less effective than land-based alternatives:

It is evident from the aggregate analyses that the firmer the commitment implied by the military operation, the more often the outcome of the situation

was favorable to the United States. The analyses showed that the forces actually employed on foreign soil were more frequently associated with positive outcomes than were naval forces, which can be withdrawn almost as easily as they can be moved toward the disturbed area. The movement of land-based forces, on the other hand, involves both real economic costs and a certain psychological commitment that are difficult to reverse, at least in the short term . . . Naval forces can be used more subtly to support foreign policy initiatives . . . than can land-based units, and they can do so without unalterably tying the President’s hand. But it is precisely this last fact that probably diminishes the effectiveness of naval forces in a political role. Foreign decisionmakers also recognize that warships can be withdrawn as easily as they can enter a region of tension and, hence, that the commitment they imply is not so firm as that implied by land-based units.

The underlying difference between these two positions revolves around whether gunboat diplomacy’s flexibility increases or decreases its effectiveness.

The distinctiveness of the intrinsic assets of gunboat diplomacy when compared to land-based shows-of-force seems sufficient to justify the conceptual isolation of gunboat diplomacy incidents for separate analysis. Moreover, a number of homogeneous characteristics reinforce the isolatability of these incidents: a relatively low level of accompanying verbal communication, widespread opposition from world public opinion (Cable, 1981: 102), an atmosphere of tension and opposing interests between

TABLE 1. Success profiles of show-of-force and gunboat diplomacy incidents.

Outcomes	Show-of-force <sup>a</sup>		Gunboat diplomacy <sup>b</sup>	
	Pre-1963 (%)	Post-1962 (%)	Pre-1963 (%)	Post-1962 (%)
Success				
US	44 (N = 16)	29 (N = 17)	68 (N = 28)	53 (N = 17)
USSR	Data unavailable		0 (N = 0)	40 (N = 10)
Global	Data unavailable		61 (N = 56)	47 (N = 77)
Mixed				
US	31 (N = 16)	47 (N = 17)	21 (N = 28)	12 (N = 17)
USSR	Data unavailable		0 (N = 0)	50 (N = 10)
Global	Data unavailable		18 (N = 56)	35 (N = 77)
Failure				
US	25 (N = 16)	24 (N = 17)	11 (N = 28)	35 (N = 17)
USSR	Data unavailable		0 (N = 0)	10 (N = 10)
Global	Data unavailable		21 (N = 56)	18 (N = 77)

<sup>a</sup> Data are from Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 87) and cover the period 1946–1975. Success profile reflects whether an outcome of an incident is ‘favorable’ in terms of foreign behavior desired by American policymakers (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 68, 87): *success* = favorable outcomes after both six months and three years; *mixed* = only one favorable or one unfavorable outcome after six months or three years; *failure* = unfavorable outcomes after both six months and three years.

<sup>b</sup> Data are from Cable (1981: 222–257) and cover the period 1946–1978. Success profile reflects whether an outcome of an incident corresponds with the intention of the assailant (Cable, 1981: 194): *success* = results correspond with assailant’s intentions; *mixed* = results are only partially or temporarily successful or are ambiguous or indeterminable; *failure* = results do not correspond with assailant’s intentions.

TABLE 2. Background profiles of show-of-force and gunboat diplomacy incidents.

<i>Initiator</i>	<i>Show-of-force</i> <sup>a</sup>		<i>Gunboat diplomacy</i> <sup>b</sup>	
	<i>US</i>	<i>USSR</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>USSR</i>
Cases between US and USSR	(34) 13 % ( <i>N</i> = 263)	(52) 23 % ( <i>N</i> = 222)	(10) 22 % ( <i>N</i> = 45)	(4) 40 % ( <i>N</i> = 10)
Cases using naval units	(177) 82 % ( <i>N</i> = 215)	(69) 36 % ( <i>N</i> = 190)	All cases use naval units by definition	
Cases involving at least one superpower	Data not available		(45) 34 % ( <i>N</i> = 133)	(10) 8 % ( <i>N</i> = 133)

<sup>a</sup> Show-of-force incidents are defined as military attempts to influence another nation without 'engaging in a continuing contest of violence' (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 12). Cases between US–USSR cover 1945–1981 and are drawn from Kidron and Smith (1983: 54–55). Cases using naval units by the US span 1946–1975 and derive from Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 40). Cases using naval units by USSR span 1944–1979 and are extracted from Kaplan (1981: 47). The *N*s are the total number of shows-of-force initiated by each superpower toward all nations.

<sup>b</sup> Gunboat diplomacy incidents are those involving 'the use of threat of limited naval force' in an international dispute or against one's own foreign nationals (Cable, 1981: 39). All cases are drawn from Cable (1981: 222–257) and cover 1946–1978. The *N*s are the totals initiated by each superpower (Row 1) and the total number of gunboat diplomacy incidents by all nations (Row 3).

assailant and victim, a focus on political-military rather than economic or cultural objectives, an impact that is heavily psychological rather than purely military, and a general pattern of interstate rather than intrastate application.

To illuminate further the relationship between shows-of-force in general and gunboat diplomacy in particular, Tables 1 and 2 provide a rough comparison of the two types of incidents initiated by the superpowers. Unfortunately, the success figures for shows-of-force are available only for the United States, and substantial differences exist between the two types of incidents in the procedures for determining cases selected and their success. Nonetheless, certain patterns seem evident: gunboat diplomacy does not appear to be less effective than shows-of-force for the United States, which has initiated these incidents in the postwar period more than any other nation; the proportion of show-of-force and gunboat diplomacy incidents involving superpower confrontations does not appear to be dramatically different (though the Soviet Union places less emphasis on gunboat diplomacy than does the United States); and the success rate seems to have slightly declined recently for both shows-of-force and gunboat diplomacy.

### Hypotheses about Gunboat Diplomacy

On the basis of two integrated, overarching assumptions, this study develops a number of hypotheses about the effectiveness of gunboat diplomacy. The first prerequisite for an effective application of gunboat diplomacy is restraint—quick action, limited objectives, and modest use of force (rather than grandiose, disruptive, or costly behavior)—because of the danger (previously cited by Lockhart) of unrestrained coercion increasing the target's resistance and provoking a counter-attack. The second prerequisite for effective use of gunboat diplomacy is credibility of the initiator's 'resolution to protect well-defined interests' and 'determination to use more force if



necessary' (George et al., 1971: 18) because of the danger that a lack of credibility leads to noncompliance. At first glance the assumptions of restraint and credibility might appear to be in a zero-sum relationship, particularly in the view of the target, but there are numerous situations where gunboat diplomacy is able to combine the two. Testing the validity of the twin prerequisites of restraint and credibility can help commence the exploration of the relative utility of gunboat diplomacy in comparison with other means of influence—does it have lower costs and higher payoffs in certain situations than these other strategies?

Ten hypotheses emerge and receive support from published propositions that reflect either accepted wisdom or heated controversy in the relevant literature. However, this evidence has limited usefulness because much of this literature deals with topics much broader than gunboat diplomacy, does not explicitly differentiate between coercive and noncoercive tactics, or contains fragmented and untested assumptions. These hypotheses logically fall into three categories: (1) the nature of the incident; (2) the assailant–victim relationship; and (3) the nature of the assailant and victim. 'Assailant' means simply the nation which first applies limited naval force in an incident, while 'victim' is the nation which suffers this application (Cable, 1981: 18). The first five hypotheses focus on the assumption that applications of gunboat diplomacy need restraint, and the last five on the assumption that such applications need credibility.

Success or failure of an incident reflects 'whether or not the results actually achieved corresponded with the intentions of the assailant' (Cable, 1981: 194), with full recognition of the difficulties of assessing intentions and direct results of action in such cases (George and Smoke, 1974: 516; Booth, 1977a: 39–40; Blechman and Kaplan, 1978: 69–70; Kaplan, 1981: 645–646). Thus an effective application of gunboat diplomacy entails a complex outcome, which need not reflect change in the victim's behavior/attitudes, vulnerability in the victim's security system, increases in the assailant's emotional satisfaction, or demonstration of the necessity/desirability/legitimacy of the assailant's action; but which must reflect compliance by the victim with the assailant's demands.

The initial group of hypotheses addresses the nature of the gunboat diplomacy incident. Each hypothesis examines a different style of coercion and reflects a different type of restraint.

1. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the action is definitive rather than purposeful, catalytic, or expressive.* This first hypothesis relates to the instrumental type of gunboat diplomacy. It reflects the previously explained classification scheme for gunboat diplomacy, with the definitive use of force—involving a *fait accompli*—being more limited and self-contained than the others. Cable (1981: 57, 96) claims that the definitive use of force 'has lost none of its ancient effectiveness in recent years as long as the assailant is able to support an informed resolution with appropriate naval force at the decisive point and the critical moment', because 'it exploits speed and surprise to create a momentary and local superiority'. Snyder and Diesing (1977: 227) add that an advantage of the *fait accompli* strategy is that it shifts the burden of initiating violence to the opponent—'the former challenger is now the defender of a new status quo with the bargaining advantage that usually comes with that role; the former defender is now the potential challenger, carrying the burden of having to initiate the risks of a further confrontation'. One of the best-known recent cases of the definitive use of force was the American rescue of the merchant ship *Mayaguez* from Cambodia in 1975.

2. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the action is deterrent rather than compellent.* This second hypothesis deals with the confrontational mode of gunboat diplomacy. Again,

the hypothesis relates back to an earlier distinction—a compellent use of force desires to modify the victim's (and/or other nations') behavior through the strategy of coercive diplomacy, while a deterrent use of force desires to reinforce an existing situation and prevent change in it through the strategy of deterrence. From their study of American shows-of-force, Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 523–524) conclude that 'discrete uses of the armed forces for political purposes were more often associated with favorable outcomes when the US objective was to reinforce, rather than modify, the behavior of a target state', due to greater awareness of risks of change than of dangers of continuing a prevailing course, and to the unavoidable national resistance to public demands for change. Similarly, Young (1968: 359) points out that compellence faces more difficulties than deterrence because of the demand for a positive response rather than simple abstinence, the problem of communicating the exact nature of the desired response, and the greater requirements for understanding and for conscious decisions to acquiesce. Deterrent goals for gunboat diplomacy, then, seem much more limited than compellent goals.

3. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the action involves multiple assailants or victims rather than a single assailant and victim.* This third hypothesis examines the impact of the number of parties involved in gunboat diplomacy. Jönsson (1978: 384) indicates that multilateral bargaining in general may facilitate concession-making without loss-of-face, and so in gunboat diplomacy the onus of coerciveness for the assailants or backing down for the victims could be sufficiently diffused to reduce the intrusion of pride and resentment. Mandel (1985) and Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 8) indicate that multilateral military demonstrations with sufficient commitment to demonstrate credibility can be particularly successful in strengthening alliance cohesion and displaying this to adversaries. Snyder and Diesing (1977: 438) point out that, in crises with multiple parties on both sides, peaceful resolution is likely when each set of allies can 'exercise restraint and urge conciliation upon their respective partners'. Multilateral applications of gunboat diplomacy thus can generally restrain accountability or hostility in terms of a focus on a particular assailant or victim, and can occasionally (with multiple assailants) increase credibility. However, a number of studies (for example, Midgaard and Underdal, 1977) disagree with the thrust of these contentions and indicate that multilateral bargaining may lead to less efficient negotiations and suboptimal settlements.

4. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the action involves simply a display of force rather than the actual use of force in a violent confrontation.* This fourth hypothesis focuses on the **intensity** of force in gunboat diplomacy. Schelling (1966: 7–8) contends that the direct use of force does not necessarily serve as an effective threat, and that brute force can accomplish only what requires no collaboration. For American shows-of-force, Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 102) find that while the use of force in a violent confrontation was effective in the short run, displays of force were more effective in the long run. Restrained applications of gunboat diplomacy seem likely to be most successful because of the aforementioned dependence on psychological intimidation rather than on the actual effectiveness of the force itself. However, an application of gunboat diplomacy intended only to display force can quickly develop into a violent confrontation if the victim responds with a serious countermove.

The next group of hypotheses examines the relationship between the assailant and the victim. The hypotheses explore whether the predisposition of the contending parties toward each other at the time of the gunboat diplomacy influenced the effectiveness of this strategy's use. The first of these hypotheses focuses on restraint, while the others focus on credibility.

5. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant and victim are from opposing Cold War blocs rather than from the same bloc.* This fifth hypothesis indicates how bloc membership affects gunboat diplomacy. Mandel (1980: 436) argues that 'a dispute between primary antagonists in opposing blocs produces a greater likelihood of third-party intervention than one between antagonists in the same bloc, because (1) within-bloc disputes seem less likely to involve issues of major concern to other nations—less likely to be proxies for bloc rivalries, and (2) within-bloc disputes seem less likely to have crucial destabilizing effects on the distribution of power in the international system'. Following the logic of the third hypothesis, the greater the chance of third-party involvement, the greater the chances of successful gunboat diplomacy.

Dealing specifically with across-bloc confrontations between the superpowers, Young (1968: 333) notes that there have been particularly striking restraints on the escalation of violence in these cases in the postwar period. Snyder and Diesing (1977: 441) explain that, in crises between the Cold War blocs, 'calculations can largely ignore the question of *who* will be in the opposition and concentrate on the probable *degree* of opposition', and so 'the chances of miscalculation are lower' than in other crises. Thus the restraint in cross-bloc confrontations derives jointly from the probabilities of third-party intervention, of the balance of power between the superpowers, and of lower miscalculation involved. However, one problem with cross-bloc efforts is that ideological differences between the sides might increase differences of interpretation of events and behavioral norms (Sawyer and Guetzkow, 1965: 501–503).

6. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant and victim are from the same region rather than from different regions.* This sixth hypothesis explains how geographical proximity influences gunboat diplomacy. Boulding (1962: 79) implies that geographical proximity creates a greater opportunity for interaction among states and for perceived threat among states. Cohen (1979: 91) shows that the selective attention involved in the perception of threat often draws decisionmakers to focus on regional issues 'because they concerned or involved areas of high priority for strategic or emotional reasons or of current and urgent relevance to the observer'. Regarding the political application of naval force, Booth (1977a: 32) asserts that seeing other states as 'relevant to the furtherance of its own interests' can cause a nation to open up to others' 'influence-building tactics'—'necessity is the mother of influenceability'. The high perceived threat or need in these cases presumably associates with the credibility of gunboat diplomacy (Luttwak, 1974: 39). Finally, Russett (1967: 205) contends that 'in situations where military coercion is not a primary centripetal force . . . belonging to the same 'all-purpose' region may well provide the capabilities for containing violence if not avoiding it'. However, a substantial body of literature (for example, Mandel, 1980: 430) disagrees with these assertions and suggests a positive relationship between geographical proximity and war.

7. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant has a history of engaging in violent conflict in the victim's region rather than of not doing so.* This seventh hypothesis pertains to the impact of a legacy of violence on gunboat diplomacy. Blechman and Kaplan (1978: 526) find that previous American involvement in military conflict in a region associates with the success of shows-of-force there because the willingness of the United States 'to engage in violence in the region may have made the threats or assurances implied by the subsequent military activity more credible'. Knorr (1976: 98) contends that being subjected 'to repeated attack and military pressure', especially in the case of a weak nation, may facilitate perception of threat. Mandel (1979: 51, 54) concurs, especially in the case where the outside attacks have been successful, and further argues that

perceptual inertia and rigidity may prevent the recognition of outside threat if there has been no experience of past coercion from the assailant. With respect to naval shows-of-force, Booth (1977a: 480) states that 'it is likely that smaller states that have suffered at the hands of the naval powers in the not-too-distant past will have a rather different attitude to the utility of force than those groups . . . who fashionably dismiss force as obsolete'. Once again, the interrelationship between high perceived threat and credibility of gunboat diplomacy is critical.

The final group of hypotheses concerns the nature of the assailant and victim. These hypotheses investigate the ratio of the attributes of the contending parties in order to determine if the assailant has the requisite capability and/or image to make the exercise of gunboat diplomacy effective through possession of a credible threat.

8. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant is more powerful than the victim.* Garnham (1976: 381) shows that power disparity between assailant and victim causes either quick capitulation or deterrence, while power equality causes conflict because each side believes it has a chance to win. Cohen (1979: 103–104) indicates that this favorable balance of power is particularly important in terms of a state's general confidence in its 'ability to confront and overcome a dangerous challenge'. Knorr (1976: 99) points out that threat perception is likely to be high when an assailant's military strength is either greater or growing relative to that of the victim, and Jervis (1976: 100) contends that threats and force are more likely to 'work' when the victim is weak or vulnerable. Dealing specifically with shows-of-force, Vagts (1956: 233) concludes that an armed demonstration against a weak state usually causes it to capitulate. There are, however, some studies (for example, Ferris, 1973) which suggest that power disparity is actually more likely than power equality to lead to war; and other studies (for example, Maoz, 1982: 201) which assert that there is no relationship between relative capabilities of participants and dispute outcomes.

9. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant is more militarily prepared than the victim.* Independent of the overall power level, the attention a nation gives to military readiness may influence the effectiveness of its gunboat diplomacy. Snyder and Diesing (1977: 360) explain that 'when the use of force is actually being considered, or when force is being used in the crisis in some way, the military typically becomes much more assertive and influential, and so the degree of emphasis on military preparation becomes more critical. George et al. (1971: 216) assert that the availability of readily usable military options seems important for the success of coercive diplomacy. Although there may be 'no direct relationship between naval capabilities and diplomatic effectiveness' (Booth, 1977a: 28), a successful application of gunboat diplomacy would seem to require that the assailant possess an appropriate level and type of force which can be sustained in the target area (McGuire, 1977: 53): 'the amount of localized pressure that can be brought to bear frequently is decisive' (Howe, 1971: 20). Lastly, Young (1968: 392–393) contends that 'deliberate and well-timed announcements concerning shifts or buildups in overall defense postures are occasionally usable as devices for structuring bargaining relationships during a crisis'.

The hypothesis compares the military preparedness of the assailant to that of the victim because this relative level of preparedness is critical—initiators seem more likely to succeed when they are 'better equipped to cope with dispute-related pressures than targets' (Maoz, 1982: 204). Gunboat diplomacy's effectiveness depends on the assailant's credibility of threat or reputation for resolve in the eyes of the victim, who usually judges this threat or resolve relative to its own capacity for military response.

10. *Gunboat diplomacy is more successful if the assailant possesses equal or higher political*

*stability than does the victim.* This tenth and final hypothesis focuses on the political stability of the assailant and victim. Morgan (1977: 161–165) argues that when a period of severe and prolonged domestic socioeconomic and political disorder serves to undermine the political system, deterrence is likely to be unsuccessful due to the breakdown of standard processes of recruitment, socialization, and conduct, and to the consequent emergence of atypical leaders. Snyder and Diesing (1977: 517–519) state that internal divisiveness can inhibit external bargaining, especially when parties are aware of each other's internal divisions: 'opposing factions within a state may carry out independent strategies that usually undercut each other', and 'dissident individuals may sabotage official policies in implementation'. Jönsson (1978: 386) notes that internal unity is a source of bargaining strength and leads to settlement because internal struggles can require more complicated images and reduce reputation for resolve. Turning to the victim, Steinberg (1966) indicates that a target nation characterized by political instability may exaggerate the threat from an assailant (and thus the credibility of the assailant's action). The assailant's political stability can, then, influence the credibility of its coercive image in the victim's eyes, and the victim's political stability can provide a comparative baseline for judging that of the assailant.

### Testing the Hypotheses

The database for testing the hypotheses on gunboat diplomacy involves some peculiarities and limitations. The incidents derive from Cable's 'illustrative chronology' (1981: 193–258) and span the period 1919–1979. The present study examines only the 133 incidents listed during the period 1946–1978 because: (a) the years after World War II seem conceptually distinct from those which preceded them, particularly with regard to the limited use of naval force in the nuclear era; and (b) Cable's treatment of 1979 is too preliminary to analyze the outcomes or to encompass incidents late in that year.

Cable (1981: 193) is appropriately cautious in describing his data set: he notes that it is neither a complete listing of all gunboat diplomacy incidents during the specified period, nor a historically or geographically representative cross-section reflecting the actual frequency of different kinds of incidents during the time period. Instead, it illustrates the range of gunboat diplomacy incidents, and avoids 'tedious repetition' of near-identical cases.

This selection decision restricts the analysis of the data set but by no means eliminates its value as a basis for systematic investigation. While there is no opportunity to examine the relative frequency over time and by nation of gunboat diplomacy incidents, one can expect (as Cable indeed claims) that the sample includes all of the differing varieties of this strategy. Comparison to other data sets on shows-of-force (for example, Blechman and Kaplan, 1979) confirms the inclusion in Cable's database of the major gunboat diplomacy incidents during the time period. Furthermore, a number of reviews of Cable's work (including Wilcox, 1982) have noted its extensive research and comprehensive coverage of incidents.

One example Cable himself cites of the kind of selectivity involved is the listing of only a few major confrontations when dealing with the scores of incidents between Britain and Iceland over fishing rights in 1958–1959 and 1972–1973. For purposes of the present study's aggregated analysis of gunboat diplomacy's effectiveness, this kind of exclusion may actually be somewhat helpful in avoiding the overrepresentation of frequently occurring, highly similar cases. Because Cable's selection procedure is in

effect a judgmental rather than probability sample, the findings would have limited generalizability (external validity) to the future or a larger universe of cases, although the results would still convey considerable meaning and import for the time period and incidents specifically covered in the sample (internal validity).

Thus, the following tests of hypotheses examining conditions associated with the success or failure of gunboat diplomacy's differing manifestations cannot apply far beyond the confines of this particular data set. The operationalization of independent variables is discussed fully in Appendix I. Throughout this study the dependent variable is the effectiveness involved in the outcome of each incident—the success or failure of gunboat diplomacy. This variable is coded on a three-point scale, in accordance with the outcomes identified in Cable's listing of incidents: (1) = failure (results do not correspond to intentions of assailant); (2) = mixed (temporary or partial success, or ambiguous, indeterminable, or unknown outcome); (3) = success (results correspond to the intentions of the assailant). Because of Cable's (1981: 194) own skepticism about his codings of success and failure, the link between these ratings and gunboat diplomacy's actual effectiveness might be questionable and inhibit integration of findings with other data sets not using Cable's evaluation system.

Therefore, in the present study Cable's outcome ratings were cross-checked and corroborated with the use of the following criteria: (1) whether behavior by victims/targets that was opposed by assailants continued or ceased after assailants' use of gunboat diplomacy; and (2) whether behavior by victims/targets that was supported by assailants continued or ceased after assailants' use of gunboat diplomacy. Successful incidents are those in which there was a continuation (or escalation) of supported behavior and/or a cessation of opposed behavior; mixed incidents are those in which there was a cessation of only a portion of opposed behavior (sometimes accompanied by an introduction of new forms of opposed behavior), continuation of only a portion of supported behavior, quick reversal of favorable outcomes, or indeterminate outcomes; and failed incidents are those in which there was neither significant cessation of opposed behavior nor significant continuation of supported behavior.

The dependent variable of this study is ordinal, but the independent variables in the ten hypotheses are dichotomies (see Appendix I). Thus, the Mann-Whitney U-score is computed to test the statistical significance of the differences specified in the hypotheses. Since this statistic is not standardized, the Z-score (which derives from the U-score) is computed as well. High Z-scores and low U-scores indicate greater statistical significance, and significance requirements are purposely set high due to the imprecision of the variable measurements. This analysis also provides mean ratings for each variable in order to clarify the magnitude and direction of differences, and percentages of cases in each conceptual category in order to depict the nature of the database. Though more sophisticated statistical techniques—such as regression—might be useful in future studies, existing theory and data on gunboat diplomacy are so thin that the more preliminary conclusions provided by the significance tests seem more appropriate.

Evaluation of the ten hypotheses on gunboat diplomacy through the database reveals mixed results. Table 3 summarizes the findings, showing that there is strong statistical confirmation of the first, second, fourth, seventh, ninth, and tenth hypotheses. In interpreting the mean ratings for each variable, the overall success rate of gunboat diplomacy seems relevant as a baseline: of the 133 incidents, 53 percent succeeded, 28 percent had mixed outcomes, and 20 percent failed.

Evaluating hypotheses on the nature of the incident, gunboat diplomacy of the definitive type is clearly more effective than the other types. A more specific breakdown

TABLE 3. Statistical summary of hypothesis evaluation on gunboat diplomacy.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Cases (%)</i>	<i>Mean success</i>	<i>U-score</i>	<i>Z-score</i>	<i>p</i>
Definitive type	22	2.86			
Nondefinitive types	78	2.18	762.0	4.19	$p < 0.001$
Deterrence mode	44	2.64			
Compellent mode	41	2.15	1071.0	3.38	$p < 0.001$
Multilateral confrontation	29	2.44			
Bilateral confrontation	71	2.27	1615.5	0.99	n.s.
Display of force	50	2.52			
Violent use of force	24	1.72	514.0	4.45	$p < 0.001$
Opposing blocs	35	2.50			
Within-bloc	17	2.09	371.5	2.00	n.s.
Same region	35	2.38			
Different regions	65	2.31	1904.0	0.61	n.s.
History of war	43	2.65			
No history of war	57	2.01	1229.0	4.82	$p < 0.001$
Assailant stronger	56	2.39			
Assailant weaker	20	2.22	895.0	0.88	n.s.
Assailant militarily prepared	32	2.48			
Assailant militarily unprepared	29	1.95	522.0	3.02	$p < 0.001$
Assailant politically stable	71	2.48			
Assailant politically unstable	20	1.88	739.0	3.40	$p < 0.001$

$p$  = significance; n.s. = not significant.

of the different types indicates that catalytic incidents (which constitute 15 percent of all incidents and have a mean of 2.25) are the next most effective, purposeful incidents (which constitute 44 percent of all incidents and have a mean of 2.18) come next, and expressive incidents (which constitute 19 percent of all incidents and have a mean of 2.12) are the least effective. Deterrent gunboat diplomacy is significantly more effective than compellent gunboat diplomacy, though when the goal is to reinforce existing behavior it is certainly hard to tell whether gunboat diplomacy had a substantial impact. There is no significant difference in effectiveness between bilateral and multilateral gunboat diplomacy, and virtually no difference in effectiveness between incidents with multilateral assailants and those with multilateral victims. Displays of force do prove to be much more effective than the use of force in a violent confrontation, though this pattern is much clearer before 1965 than afterwards—when displays of force begin to falter and violent uses of force begin to do better.

Moving to the evaluation of hypotheses on the assailant–victim relationship, gunboat diplomacy does not fare significantly better if the antagonists are from opposing Cold War blocs than if they are from the same bloc. However, some interesting patterns emerge with respect to bloc membership: across blocs, gunboat diplomacy is quite successful except when a satellite nation initiates such action against a superpower; within blocs, only attempts by a superpower toward its own satellite seem to function with consistent effectiveness; and incidents involving nonaligned assailants or victims

(which constitute about 48 percent of the incidents but which the hypothesis does not address) seem to be reasonably successful except when there is a non-aligned assailant and a satellite victim. There is also no pattern of significant difference between gunboat diplomacy incidents with antagonists in the same region and those with antagonists in different regions, even when focusing exclusively on the actions of lesser powers with only regional spheres of influence. The seventh hypothesis is the only one concerning the assailant–victim relationship that reveals a pattern of significant difference: assailants who have recently engaged in war in the victim’s region enjoy considerably greater success in their use of gunboat diplomacy, confirming the importance of concrete evidence about the negative consequences of noncompliance.

Finally, turning to hypotheses on the nature of the assailant and victim, whether the assailant is stronger or weaker than the victim does not significantly influence the success of gunboat diplomacy. Somewhat surprisingly, no pattern of consistent effectiveness emerges even when the assailant has a sizable power advantage over the victim or when the assailant is a superpower. However, when the focus narrows from overall power to emphasis on military preparedness, assailants with an advantage here are much more effective than assailants with a disadvantage. Up to 20 percent of the gross national product of the highest-ranking nations—principally located in East Asia and the Middle East—goes toward military expenditure, and apparently this emphasis pays off in communicating resolve. Lastly, one of the most intriguing findings is how ineffective politically unstable assailants are compared to stable ones. The support for this tenth hypothesis suggests that domestic considerations may exert more influence than previously assumed on the external success of gunboat diplomacy.

Thus the conditions associated with effective gunboat diplomacy (for this data set) are a definitive, deterrent display of force undertaken by an assailant who has engaged in war in the victim’s region and who is militarily prepared and politically stable compared with the victim. This study’s results support the need for both restraint and credibility in the application of gunboat diplomacy; but they show that having a confrontation be multilateral or between opposing blocs may not effectively communicate restraint, and that having one’s victim in the same region, or weaker in overall power, may not effectively communicate credibility. Indeed, it is noteworthy how central to success is the presence of an assailant that has once warred in the victim’s region, but that now chooses to use only a non-violent display of force. The recent decline in the effectiveness of gunboat diplomacy, combined with the finding that expressive, emotional applications are among the least effective, reinforces the desirability of selecting applications in a careful, discriminating, dispassionate manner tuned to existing circumstances. Within these limits, gunboat diplomacy may be one of the few viable options short of war for contending nations who have long since passed the point of meaningful dialogue.

### Appendix I: Operationalizing the Independent Variables

Each independent variable is dichotomized due to the lack of precision and confidence in its measurement. Examining variables dealing with the nature of the incident, in the first hypothesis Cable’s own coding of incidents as definitive, purposeful, catalytic, and expressive provided the basis for the analysis (if an incident involved more than one of these types, the coding reflected the first or dominant one).

For the second hypothesis, the author’s judgment of Cable’s verbal synopses of each incident (augmented on occasion by more detailed descriptions) revealed whether each is deterrent or compellent with respect to the existing status quo (incidents involving both deterrence and



compellence was minimized because Cable is usually quite explicit about whether an incident was deterrent or compellent, this study used the following coding criteria: (1) whether assailants expressed verbal support or opposition regarding victims'/targets' ongoing or intended behavior at the time of the incidents; (2) whether assailants' actions intrinsically expressed (in the context of the nature of the confrontation, assailant-victim relationship, historical patterns of the assailants' threatening naval signals, and long-standing sphere-of-influence claims) support or opposition regarding victims'/targets' ongoing or intended behavior; and (3) whether or not these words or actions expressed demands for new behavior on the part of victims/targets.

If the content of verbal statements or the intrinsic nature of actions communicated support for ongoing behavior and/or opposition to intended behavior, accompanied by no demands for new behavior, then an incident received a deterrent coding; if such statements or actions communicated opposition to ongoing behavior and/or demands for new behavior, then an incident received a compellent coding; and if such statements or actions combined support for some aspects of ongoing behavior with opposition to other aspects or with demands for new behavior, then an incident was left uncoded.

For the third hypothesis, Cable includes in his listing of incidents the identity of the assailants and victims in each case, permitting easy discrimination between bilateral and multilateral incidents. Of course, even these judgments can be controversial because of the need for an implicit threshold to distinguish between participants and onlookers.

For the fourth hypothesis, the author's judgment of the incident synposes (again sometimes augmented by more elaborate descriptions) indicated whether or not each case includes the actual use of force in a violent confrontation, and cases involving the use of force without violence were not coded. More specifically, the coding considerations (which again involved minimal subjectivity due to Cable's explicitness) were: (1) whether or not the assailants' forces involved in the incidents actually came in direct contact with the victims'/targets' soldiers, civilians, or property; (2) if there were contact, whether or not it involved the application of physical force, such as in the attempt to capture people or property; and (3) if there were an application of physical force, whether or not it involved violence—physical harm to either the people or the property. If there were no contact, or contact but no application of physical force, an incident was coded as a display of force; if there were an application of physical force but no violence (such as in a peaceful takeover), an incident was not coded; and if there were violence, an incident was coded as an actual use of force in a violent confrontation.

Concerning the variables covering the assailant-victim relationship, the data in Kidron and Smith (1983: 43–44) on Cold War alliances and in Butterworth (1976: 487) on bloc membership permitted historically valid and reliable ratings for the fifth hypothesis (incidents involving non-aligned sides were left uncoded). Butterworth provides a clear quantitative coding of bloc membership in international confrontations: (1) = parties to a confrontation are members of the same Cold War bloc; (2) = parties to a confrontation are members of opposing Cold War blocs. Kidron and Smith equally unambiguously identify each state 'central to the Western military system' and 'central to the Eastern military-economic system'.

To determine in the sixth hypothesis whether or not nations are in the same region, the principal basis was the State Department's division of the world into regions (*Atlas of United States Foreign Relations*, 1983: 7) reflecting 'political and cultural factors as well as geographical proximity'. The regions are Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Near East and South Asia, North America, and South America (the last two deviate from the State Department's scheme, as here North America includes Central America and the Caribbean).

For the seventh hypothesis, the comprehensive listing of conflicts in Butterworth (1976) and Kidron and Smith (1983: 12–17) was the basis for coding whether or not the assailant had waged war—not simply engaged in shows-of-force—in the five years preceding each gunboat diplomacy incident. If an assailant had participated in a conflict that was listed in either source during the specified time span in the victim's region (using the same regional divisions as in the sixth hypothesis), then the coding was that the assailant has a history of engaging in violent conflict there; otherwise, the coding indicated no such history.

Finally, moving to the hypotheses on the nature of the assailant and victim, the eighth

hypothesis used a power scale from Cox and Jacobson (1973: 437–443)—rating nations as ‘smallest’, ‘small’, ‘middle’, ‘large’, and ‘super’ for 1944–1955, 1956–1961, and post-1961—to determine when the assailant was stronger and weaker than the victim. Incidents in which both sides fell into the same power category were left uncoded.

In the ninth hypothesis, national averages of 1965 and 1978 figures on military expenditure as a percentage of gross national product (Taylor and Jodice, 1983: Vol. 1, 24–26) revealed whether the assailant was more or less militarily prepared than the victim. Data from these two years were averaged for each assailant and victim, and a comparison of the two indicated the relative military preparation. This database suggested sufficient stability in ranking on this item to permit use of the averages for the entire postwar period, and excluded incidents initiated exclusively by the superpowers because their overwhelming military superiority seems to eclipse the importance of their particular focus on military expenditure.

For the tenth hypothesis, Taylor and Jodice (1983, Vol. 2: 108–175) present time-series country profiles—scaled measures of political stability by year for each nation—and these were averaged for each assailant and victim at the time of each gunboat diplomacy incident in order to determine the relative political stability of the parties (only incidents from 1948 to 1977 were included due to the span of the political stability data). The measures used were government sanctions, political deaths, armed attacks, riots, and demonstrations, and the scaled rating on each measure was easy to aggregate into a single stability index for each nation.

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