Practitioners of international politics usually have a poor understanding of the concept of coercion. The lack of theoretical understanding of the coercive use of force as well as the underfunding of the missions, too few troops, the asymmetrical tactics of the opponent, numerous political caveats, the inability to cooperate effectively and misjudgement of the local dynamics explain why military missions fail. The failure to understand the dynamics of conflicts confirmed the conclusion of the first edition of this book (2006) that the West’s military superiority scarcely matters. Geopolitical change, operational lessons learned and new conceptual and doctrinal insights required an update of the first edition with new case studies and statistics.

The Art of Military Coercion: Why the West’s Military Superiority Scarcely Matters includes the lessons learned of the missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya as well as new insights on the future use of armed force by the West.

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The Art of Military Coercion

Why the West’s Military Superiority Scarcely Matters

Updated and Completely Revised Second Edition

Rob de Wijk

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About the author
Introduction (Second and Revised Edition)

The first edition of this book was published when the lessons learned from the stabilization missions in Afghanistan and Iraq were debated and codified in new doctrinal publications. The US publication, Field Manual 3-24 – the “Petraeus manual” – was published in 2006 and was widely read by the general public. This reflected broad public interest in the issue of the use of military power in complex contingencies. The new doctrine marked a US shift from enemy-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) to population-centric COIN.

The new doctrinal publications also introduced new concepts such as stabilization and reconstruction. Stabilization, guided by COIN, was the military part of the effort. Reconstruction was aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the population and was guided by ideas such as the Comprehensive Approach and the Whole of Government Approach.

Due to the underfunding of the missions, too few troops, the asymmetrical tactics of the opponent, numerous political caveats, the inability to cooperate effectively and misjudgment of the local dynamics of Afghanistan and Iraq, political objectives could not be achieved. As a matter of fact, failing stabilization and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan nullified the initial success of the regime change operation. The failures of Iraq and Afghanistan confirmed the conclusion of the first edition of this book, namely that the West’s military might scarcely matters.

With regard to conventional warfare, other important developments demonstrated the correctness of this conclusion. Technology allowed emerging countries and rogue states to develop anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities that could nullify the superiority of Western navies and air forces. Moreover, the West was affected by the financial and economic crisis, which accelerated its relative decline. This weakened the West’s shaping power and further eroded the effectiveness of its economic and military instruments.

Geopolitical changes, operational lessons learned, and conceptual and doctrinal shifts have inspired me to update the first edition of this book with new case studies, insights and conclusions.

With the support of my former PhD student and long-time staff member Rem Korteweg, I completely revised chapter 3 on coercive mechanisms to reinforce its core message that three coercive instruments define the
outcome of all coercive efforts. This chapter remains the theoretical core of my thinking about the usefulness of military power.

Finally, I would like to thank my personal assistant at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, Daniella Kranendonk, who spent much time putting my manuscript in order.

La Grande Verrière (France), January 2014
Introduction (First Edition)

The idea for this book emerged in 1999, during the war on Kosovo. I was struck by NATO’s prediction that the humanitarian tragedy would be over within days. Anyone with a little knowledge about the history of military interventions could have known that these predictions would be proven wrong. Day after day I reported on Operation Allied Force for Dutch television. It provided me with an opportunity to test my assumptions regarding the dynamics of coercion. During Operation Enduring Freedom, the intervention in Afghanistan (2001), Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the Second Gulf War (March through May 2003) I was again able to test those assumptions. Much to my surprise, I found that, almost unconsciously, I had developed a simple set of “rules” for explaining to the general public what had happened during those wars. I decided to make these rules explicit and explain them in my inaugural lecture as professor of strategic studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Subsequently, I decided to use my inaugural lecture as the basis for this book. The core of my thinking is still based on the coercive mechanisms as described in chapter 3.

During my television appearances, I also explained the broad context in which coercion took place. The scope of this book is just as broad. In fact, the strategist must have an extensive knowledge about the toolkit of military capabilities available. But he should also have some knowledge about the doctrine guiding the use of military force, as well as the political, cultural, and historical context in which force is used.

I would like to thank all those who gave me constructive criticism on the manuscript or otherwise contributed to this work: Colonel Charles Brantz, Dr. Isabelle Duyvesteyn, Colonel Frank van der Meijden, Dr. Wim Klinkert, Rem Korteweg, Colonel Frans Osinga, Professor dr. Jan Geert Siccama, Captain Jeroen Stad, and Julie Wagschal.

La Grande Verrière (France), October 2004
Introduction: Understanding Coercion

Since the end of the Cold War, liberal democracies have conducted military interventions on numerous occasions, and with mixed results. During the first half of the 1990s, the military intervention designed to drive out Iraq from Kuwait was an unparalleled success, but Mogadishu and Srebrenica have become symbols of failed attempts to bring peace to war-torn countries and to alleviate human suffering. During the second half of the 1990s, Operation Allied Force, NATO’s war on Kosovo in 1999, was unsuccessful. The first humanitarian war, as the British Prime Minister Tony Blair called it, took 78 days. During the air campaign, the Serbs killed more Albanians than in the preceding months. During the operation, the killing of Albanians continued and refugees were used as a weapon. In addition to this, Human Rights Watch confirmed 90 incidents in which between 489 and 528 Yugoslav civilians died as a result of NATO bombing.¹ These included attacks with cluster bombs.

After the horrendous al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States declared war on terrorism. President George W. Bush decided to remove aligned sponsors of international terrorism from power. As a first step, a US-facilitated coalition removed the Afghan Taliban regime, al-Qaeda’s main sponsor. Subsequently, another US-led coalition was remarkably successful in removing the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrated that limited objectives could be achieved quickly, with few friendly losses and with acceptable levels of collateral damage. However, it turned out to be difficult to stabilize both countries after the regime change. In Afghanistan, coalition forces were unable to destroy all Taliban forces and to stop them from controlling parts of Afghanistan. Years after the removal of the Taliban from power, coalition forces were still fighting battles in remote spots of Afghanistan. In 2013, President Hamid Karzai saw no other option but to start negotiations on a power sharing agreement with the Taliban.

In Iraq, after the removal of Saddam Hussein, urban guerrilla fighters loyal to the former regime and Muslim extremists stepped up their campaign against coalition forces. More American soldiers were killed during the stabilization phase than during the regime change operation. In 2012, Ned Parker concluded that “Nine years after US troops toppled Saddam

Hussein and just a few months after the last US soldier left Iraq, the country has become something close to a failed state.\(^2\)

Neither of these interventions destroyed al-Qaeda. After the intervention in Afghanistan, its leadership fled to Pakistan and franchises stepped up their activities in the Arab Peninsula and the Maghreb. Moreover, al-Qaeda evolved from a centrally led terrorist group to a scattered organization which was more difficult to fight.

Why is it that the results of liberal democracies’ use of force have so often fallen short? The main argument of this study is that to be successful, liberal democracies must use force decisively. “Decisiveness” is measured against the political and military objectives set. Objectives are those things that the actors aim to achieve. The decisive use of force requires the right balance between military means and political objectives, based on an understanding of the dynamics of coercion. But even if this is the case, asymmetrical reactions from a weak opponent could easily offset Western military might and prevent the coercer from reaching its objectives. This is why the West’s military superiority scarcely matters.

This study is about how liberal democracies coerce. Liberal democracies are mainly Western democracies with democratic institutions and democratic practices; democracy is the very fabric of society and a system of government with checks and balances. Democracy is a term that originated in ancient Greece. It literally means the rule of the people. Joseph Schumpeter defined democracy as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”\(^3\) The level of socioeconomic development, socioeconomic equality, and group polarization, as well as the prevalence of certain beliefs or cultural traits, define the level of “liberalness” of democracies.

Illiberal democracies are those democracies that appear to be democratic but lack some of the essential characteristics of liberal democracies. In a democratic society, the rule is exercised by elected representatives who are accountable to the electorate.\(^4\) This, for example, is not the case in Russia. The president is elected and there is a parliament or Duma. Once elected, however, the president has almost absolute power and can easily ignore the Duma.

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2 N. Parker, “The Iraq we left behind”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2012, p. 94.
The use of force is a common element in international relations. During the Cold War, both superpowers used interventions to sustain their spheres of influence. The major European powers intervened in their former colonies to protect their own interests and citizens. After the end of the Cold War, liberal democracies continued to protect interests and citizens abroad and to restore international peace and security. For example, the 1991 Gulf War occurred after Iraq had violated the integrity of Kuwait. A US-led coalition responded to this breach of international peace and security with Operation Desert Storm. More than ten years later, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom sought to protect the West’s interests by destroying hostile regimes.

Once the Cold War was over, the desire to intervene for normative reasons grew stronger. Interventions for humanitarian reasons and to promote democracy increased in frequency. In Somalia and the Balkans, military force was used to prevent humanitarian disasters.

The reasons for using force are deeply rooted in Western traditions. First, there is the legal tradition, with the principle of non-intervention as a logical complement to the doctrine of sovereignty. The principle of non-intervention dates back to legal scholars such as Hugo Grotius, whilst the doctrine of sovereignty became a cornerstone of international law after the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The Charter of the United Nations contains the main legal framework for states wishing to start an armed conflict.

Second, there is the religious or ethical tradition. Going back to St. Augustine’s just war theory, formulated approximately 1,600 years ago, the main concern is moral justification for intervening, and its restrictions. Modern humanitarian interventions and peace support operations clearly fit into this approach.

The third tradition deals with the effectiveness of interventions. Some 200 years ago, Carl von Clausewitz laid the foundations for modern thought concerning the manner in which military power is used most effectively.

This study fits in the Clausewitzian tradition. As will be seen, many interventions are failures despite the overwhelming power of liberal democracies, because decision makers intervening for legal or moral reasons are not aware of previous lessons learned or the theories of Von Clausewitz and other strategic thinkers. History shows that only very few military and civil strategists know how to use force optimally. Political decision makers deciding on the use of force leave it to the military strategists to carry out an intervention effectively. However, the strategists’ problem is that these decision makers confront them with very tight constraints
for the actual use of force, so that the operation cannot be planned for maximum efficacy. Most political decision makers and their staffs simply lack the knowledge of how to use the instruments of power at their disposal, whilst the military usually is unaware of the bigger picture and does not understand the mechanics of political decision making.

Military coercion, coercive diplomacy and political culture

Traditionally, states use force to protect territory and to conquer land. Today, liberal democracies use force mainly as a foreign policy instrument to influence the strategic choices of their opponent or target. The political objectives are limited, as are the military means used. This particular use of force, which is the subject of this study, is known as coercion. As Western governments no longer carry out wars of conquest, today the label of coercion covers most of the offensive actions states use against other states.

I define coercion as the deliberate and targeted use – or threat to use – of power instruments to manipulate and influence the politico-strategic choices of an actor, or player, defined as an entity that plays an identifiable role in international relations. The actor could be a state or a non-state actor. Thus, coercion entails offensive action against a state, or a non-state actor, such as a militia under the command of a warlord, or a terrorist organization that has removed itself from the jurisdiction of central authorities. However, if an actor is obscure or invulnerable, or if no diplomatic ties exist, traditional coercion will not be possible. In those cases, second order coercion is an option. The struggle with the Taliban serves as an example. From the end of the 1990s, attempts have been made to stop the support of the Afghan Taliban regime for Osama bin Laden. As the Taliban had no diplomatic ties with most countries around the world, the US had no other choice but to use second order coercion. As early as 1999, President Clinton hoped that Pervez Musharraf’s takeover in Pakistan might create an opening for action on Bin Laden. On March 25, 2000, Clinton visited Musharraf. One of the subjects of discussion was Bin Laden. After Clinton’s visit, Musharraf talked with Taliban leader Mullah Omar about expelling Bin Laden, but nothing happened. After 9/11, President George W. Bush again tried to coerce Musharraf to put pressure on the Taliban. In return, Pakistan would receive aid. The Taliban, however, refused to cooperate. After the failure of attempts to coerce the Taliban by putting pressure on Pakistan, the US embarked on a strategy of military coercion. The aim of
the military operation that was initiated in October 2001 was to force the Taliban to retract their support for Bin Laden and his terrorist network.

Traditionally, coercion is broken down into deterrence and compellence.\(^5\) Deterrence involves attempts to prevent something from happening. Compellence involves the use of force to revise an action that has occurred.

I find it useful to make a distinction between coercive diplomacy and military coercion. The difference is the balance between diplomacy and compellence in efforts to coerce others. Coercive diplomacy calls for economic measures and military force to add weight to diplomatic activities. Deterrence is more important than the actual use of force.

If both deterrence and diplomacy fail, the coancer may have no other choice but to choose a strategy of military coercion. This will lead to the introduction of the instrument of military power, possibly on a large scale. Diplomacy then moves to the background, or diplomatic channels are completely closed.

The distinction between coercive diplomacy and military coercion is important, because each requires a different strategy. I will argue that a sound strategy is a prerequisite for success. A strategy of coercive diplomacy should be built around deterrence or threat to use force, inducements, and compellence, based on political isolation, economic sanctions, and punishment. If the adversary does not comply, a strategy of military coercion should be the next step. Compellence could then involve punishment, albeit on a larger scale; denial aimed at reducing the target’s ability to carry out its undesired course of action; incapacitation aimed at weakening the state structures of the target; or decapitation aimed at removal of the hostile regime.

Libya in the 1980s serves as a good example. The Americans started with a strategy of coercive diplomacy against Libya. The objective was to stop Libyan-supported terrorism. As Libya’s leader Muammar Gadhafi did not comply with the demands, on April 15, 1986, the Americans bombed Tripoli and Benghazi, killing his adopted daughter. But the deadliness of Libyan terrorism did not decline. Especially the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 near Lockerbie skyrocketed the number of victims in 1988.\(^6\) It was 2004 before Gadhafi publicly condemned terrorism. This back down was the result of


years of political isolation, economic sanctions, the ongoing threat to use force, intensive secret diplomacy, and the prospect that Gadhafi would remain in power and that Libya would once more become a member of the international community. The removal of Libya from America’s shortlist of rogue states was thus a textbook case of successful coercive diplomacy.

If Libya had not complied, the Americans would have had no other choice but to coerce Gadhafi through military means. Probably an important factor that contributed to the success of coercive diplomacy was that, after the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan, it was quite conceivable that Libya would be the next target of America’s anti-terrorist campaign.

Most authors argue that compellence implies the limited use of force, as opposed to what Thomas Schelling termed “brute force.” According to Schelling “brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. It is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply.”7 This may be true for coercive diplomacy, but certainly not for military coercion. To achieve political and military objectives, the coercer has no other option but to use force on a massive scale. The threat or actual use of force on a massive scale could contribute to the success of both coercive diplomacy and military coercion. This use of “brute” force is clearly distinct from Schelling’s description.

The goal of the coercer is to achieve limited political objectives, not to occupy or destroy a country and its populace. The aim of “brute” force is to eliminate the adversary’s options. This can only be achieved if the coercer has escalation dominance. Moreover, “limited” says little about the actual use of force needed to coerce others. When NATO uses only a small percentage of its combined air power, as it did during Operation Allied Force, this indeed can be defined as the limited use of force. The Serbs, however, would not have considered the air campaign “limited.”

The factual coercive application of power instruments is referred to as intervention. I use a broad definition of the term intervention: a situation in which an actor, with or without the support of others, interferes in the affairs of another, with economics or military means.

In conclusion, military coercion begins where coercive diplomacy ends; military coercion ends where total destruction begins. Military coercion could follow coercive diplomacy and vice versa. Before the start of the Ko-

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In 1998, the West used coercive diplomacy to persuade the Serb leadership to put an end to the atrocities in Kosovo. After the failure of the Rambouillet talks, diplomatic channels were closed. Consequently, NATO used air power to persuade Serbia’s President Slobodan Milosevic to change his course. After two months, NATO concluded that the results of its strategy of military coercion were not very satisfactory, and that secret diplomacy was necessary to end the war.

Successful coercion will not necessarily end all problems; it may also create new ones. Operation Enduring Freedom succeeded in removing the Taliban from power and stopped al-Qaeda from using the entire country as a sanctuary. The regime change operation was clearly a victory for the coalition. Nineteen months after the defeat of the Taliban, the American Council of Foreign Relations published a paper entitled Afghanistan: Are We Losing the Peace? The Council observed that Afghanistan “remains a long way from achieving the US goal of a stable self-governing state that no longer serves as a haven for terrorism. Indeed, failure to stem deteriorating security conditions and to spur economic reconstruction could lead to a revision to warlord-dominated anarchy and mark a major defeat for the US war on terrorism.”

The same happened in Iraq. In the months preceding the regime change, urban guerrilla fighters loyal to the former regime and Muslim extremists stepped up their campaign against coalition forces. Fighters from Ansar al-Islam, a militant Islamic organization, and other Jihadists, together with the Sunni supporters of the former regime, saw the coalition as an occupying force that should be removed from Iraqi soil. In August 2003, the UN headquarters was bombed, killing dozens, including the Secretary General’s Special Envoy Sérgo Vieira de Mello. This, combined with ongoing attacks on Iraq’s critical infrastructure, including oil pipelines and public utilities, as well as attacks on coalition forces, aid workers, representatives of foreign companies, and hostage takings, forced the coalition onto the defensive.

The experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated that coercion should be part of a broad, long-term strategy. For example, if military coercion results in the decapitation of a regime, two options remain. The first is the immediate withdrawal of all troops after having achieved one’s political objectives. Establishing a new government is left to the population.

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but a warning is issued that if the new government shows hostile intent as well, it will also be removed. For a long time, Western public opinion did not tolerate this cynical form of coercion. Moreover, regime change could result in chaos, with important repercussions for the region and, consequently, the coercer’s interests. Nevertheless, intervention fatigue explained why the NATO coalition led by France did not contemplate a stabilization phase after the intervention in Libya in 2012.

The second option is coercion followed by stabilization and reconstruction. This requires the intervener to provide a secure environment to facilitate the nation-building process. Winning the hearts and minds of the population is a prerequisite for success. If the intervener lacks the support of the local police, the law enforcement authorities, the intelligence services, internal security forces, paramilitary units and the remaining armed forces, all successes achieved up until then could be nullified. The intervener becomes an occupying force, which will unleash political violence that poses a direct threat to the nation-building process. For former opponents of the regime, its removal could form an incentive to attack the coercer in an attempt to reach their goals, thus making stabilization and reconstruction even more difficult.

Consequently, it is important to understand that coercion is just a phase in an ongoing conflict. A stabilization phase could follow military coercion; a consolidation phase could follow a stabilization phase.

Since the end of the Cold War, although interest has grown in the more balanced use of the instruments of power, a credible theory of coercion or coercive diplomacy is still lacking. Although the use of force is justified under certain circumstances, this does not imply that the objectives are always attainable. In this study, I argue that the use of force not only requires the right balance between political objectives and the means required for achieving them, but that the right strategy has to be used, one that is based on a calculation of a mix of the actor’s motivation, interests, and expected risks. To be successful, the use of force demands a dynamic approach. An understanding of coercion is crucial because interventions are an essential part of liberal democracy’s political culture. Alastair Johnston views political culture as political codes, rules, recipes, and assumptions, which impose a rough order on conceptions of the political environment. Political culture encompasses assumptions about the orderliness of the political universe, principal goals in political life, the relative value of risk-acceptant versus risk-adverse strategies, who belongs to a political community, what type of events, actions, and institutions are political, and the political trustwor-
thickness of other political players. Thus, political culture is defined as a particular pattern of orientations towards political action. Power, interests, ideology, and values motivate political action.

The liberal democracy is the embodiment of Western political culture. The political culture of a state is not static, but changes over time. This is most visible in individual states such as Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain. During the second half of the 20th century, these states evolved from military dictatorships into democracies, in which the military no longer played a significant role. Germany and Japan especially are still struggling with the legacy of the past, and have great difficulties using their armed forces, even for peace support operations. Since the Second World War, both countries have developed anti-militarist cultures, which explains most of their military behavior.

Cultural analysis has gained an important position on the research agenda. However, it is not usually linked to the use of force in international relations. That is exactly what this study attempts to do. The attitude of the political leadership towards coercion is explained by concepts such as ideology and values. The objectives, proposals, stakes, and positions that are adopted steer the action. Politicians adopt positions, raise stakes, and make proposals in order to attain the objectives set. Interests, ideology or values, or a combination thereof, are strong motivators. They do not always lead to action but they provide “rationales and justifications for the use of force” and “influence the calculation of costs, risks, and benefits.” Therefore, what needs investigating are the motivations of the actors, the justifications or interests, and the risks that they are willing to run. This mix will determine the coercive action that will be undertaken.

The actual use of instruments of power is guided by strategic culture, defined analogous to political culture as traditions, values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior, habits, symbols, achievements, and solving problems with respect to the use of force. Furthermore, strategic culture derives from

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a nation’s history, geography, and political culture, and it represents the aggregation of the attitudes and patterns of behavior of the most influential voices; these may be, depending on the nation, the political elite, the military establishment, and/or public opinion.\textsuperscript{14}

Closely linked to political and strategic culture is military culture. Military culture is expressed through military organization and doctrine. The latter is defined as the formal expression of military thought valid for a certain period of time. The product of military organization is an armed force; doctrine guides the actual use of that force. Just as soldiers from different cultures do not fight in the same way, so too are there important differences in doctrine. However, military effectiveness requires the leadership to take the doctrine of others into account. As will be seen, this is an important weakness of liberal democracies.

To be successful in interventions, political decision makers should have a basic knowledge of military doctrine. If this is not the case, they are likely to have an exaggerated idea about what can be achieved with military power. Often, “irrational” behavior of an opponent can be explained by a different political and strategic culture and, consequently, a different military doctrine.

### Instruments of coercion

Under the state system established after 1648, interventionism had to be restricted and hedged about with legal restraints. Consequently, diplomacy became the most frequently used instrument of foreign policy. Diplomacy is concerned with negotiations and dialogue. It is not merely an instrument of the state; it is also an institution of the state system itself. Since the emergence of the state system, a system of permanent relations among states has developed. Diplomacy has become the principal means of communication.

If diplomacy fails, the state has military force and economic measures at its disposal. Four categories of interventions can be identified:

1. **Diplomatic interventions**, aimed at isolating or punishing a regime. Sport and cultural boycotts make clear that certain behavior cannot be tolerated.

2 Economic interventions such as sanctions, blockades and embargoes. Armed forces can be used to implement economic sanctions.

3 Purely military interventions to defend one’s interests. The threat to a country’s interests may occur through the spillover of a conflict in a neighboring country or region, or may be the result of deliberate aggression.

4 Third-party military interventions aimed at restoring international peace and security or promoting norms.

In most cases a mix of instruments has been used. During the first half of the 1990s, European liberal democracies tried to bring peace to the Balkans. They held the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic responsible for the instability in former Yugoslavia, and the atrocities then taking place in Bosnia and Kosovo. With a combination of peacekeeping, peace enforcing, and economic sanctions they tried to coerce the Serbian leadership and to bring peace to the war-torn region, using ideals like promoting democracy and protecting human rights to justify the interventions.

How this book is organized

This book is divided into two parts. Part one is devoted to political culture and coercion; Part two deals with strategic culture and coercion. In chapter 1, I argue that liberal democracies use force to defend interests and to champion non-materialistic issues, such as ideology and values. This can be explained by the political culture of liberal democracies, which is rooted in Christian civilization or Christian tradition. Furthermore, the Realist school of thought sheds more light on interventions to defend interests; the Liberal or Idealistic school of thought explains interventions for moral reasons. In general, most European political leaders and American Democrats are more willing to intervene on moral grounds than American Conservatives, who put more emphasis on the defense of interests. Nevertheless, Western governments frequently put forward normative “universal” principles such as humanity and democracy as reasons for intervention. The idea that values should be defended, together with worldwide materialistic interests, helps to explain the activist nature of liberal democracies’ foreign policy. Finally, I argue that Western political culture led to contradictory policies, not always appreciated by other, non-Western states. The pretense of universally Western thinking, however, constitutes a threat in the eyes of many non-Western countries, if accompanied by the setting aside of cornerstones of international law. However, the international legal order is a Western
construct as well, of which essential elements – such as sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs – are widely accepted by non-Western nations.

In chapter 2, I argue that liberal democracies are the most frequent interveners. They often use the argument of bringing democracy to explain or defend their interventions. Most decision makers strongly believe that democratization will lead to peaceful and stable relations among countries. I will explain that there is strong empirical support for the democratic peace thesis. Economic prosperity, integration, interdependence, and international institutions have created a situation in which the costs of conflict among liberal democracies outweigh the benefits.

Finally, conventional war against liberal democracies is unlikely because their sheer economic and military strength makes aggressive actions by others a highly risky undertaking. However, the democratic peace thesis only applies to the relationships between liberal democracies. Empirical evidence also shows that during the transition from autocracy to democracy, countries become more aggressive and war prone.

The idea that sovereignty should be set aside when regimes terrorize the population and deny them basic human rights and democracy became firmly rooted in the West during the 1990s. Due to the geopolitical changes of the 1990s, thinking on sovereignty and interference entered a new stage. In 1998 the emphasis shifted from multilateral, mandated interventions on moral grounds, to mostly unilateral, un-mandated interventions to defend vital interests. I therefore consider 1998 as the start of the “post-post Cold War period.” In this period the United States took advantage of its hegemonic power. But due to the limited success of the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and the rise of emerging economies, particularly China, this period was short lived. Nevertheless, the events of September 11, 2001, became a true watershed, because America's focus had now shifted toward rogue states, international terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The foundations of American thinking about coercion shifted from containment and deterrence to preemption and preventive interventions. I argue that this shift had important consequences for the perception that others have of the United States. Finally, I will argue that the European Union (EU) has developed into a modern Kantian “pacific union” with a unique political culture, which is different from the US.

Chapter 3 deals with theories of coercion. Most theories were developed during the Cold War. They provide a starting point for further research, but cannot guide today’s decision makers. I will argue that successful coercion
requires rational decision making. In practice, policymakers appear to be preoccupied, uncertain of their ability to judge, are hastened by time pressure, are directed by different – often conflicting – motives and personal considerations, and are influenced by their background and the processes that take place within the group and its followers. Moreover, the nature of the challenges is usually too complex for the average decision maker to fully comprehend. They usually lack sufficient knowledge and have an exaggerated view of what can be achieved with the instruments of power, i.e., economic sanctions and military force. I will argue that there is empirical evidence to show that combined economic and military interventions are most successful. My key argument is that coercion requires a dynamic approach. I will explain three basic mechanisms, which determine the strategic efficacy of power instruments. These mechanisms are applicable both to the latent and actual use of power instruments. Furthermore, the effective use of force requires a strategy, defined as the link between political objectives and the military means available. The above-mentioned mechanisms help define a strategy, which needs to be based upon the dynamic interaction between the intervener and the target. Finally, a strategy incorporating the actual use of force aimed at the military of the target has the greatest chance of success.

The second part deals with strategic culture. In Chapter 4, I explore the Western way of waging war. The history of active defense, AirLand Battle, FOFA and full-spectrum dominance demonstrates how American conceptual thinkers view warfare. First, the focus is on “peer competitors,” with comparable military endowments. Second, there is a tendency to ignore the adversary. Third, technology is assumed to be the key to success. Fourth, maneuver warfare is a key element of modern doctrine, which focuses on an armor-dominated battlefield. Fifth, a deep strike, preferably with stand-off weaponry and air power, is aimed at preventing reinforcements from joining the battlefront and enabling forward-deployed forces to gain victories. Sixth, tactical nuclear weapons are considered a form of firepower that should be integrated into the conventional battle. Finally, much emphasis is placed on achieving interoperability for coalition warfare with allies. Due to their political culture – and consequently their strategic culture – Europeans have contributed little to the doctrinal debate. As a result, the transatlantic gap in military capabilities is widening.

The history of doctrine also makes it clear that there is considerable controversy concerning the instruments of coercion. One school of thought argues that air power has become the dominant instrument. The central argument for relying on remote punishment is that low risk for the attacker
enhances credibility. I will argue that both Gulf Wars and Operation Allied Force demonstrated that air power largely plays a primary role in support of other activities. During the 1991 Gulf War, air power prepared the ground for ground forces; during Operation Allied Force, air power alone was unable to coerce Milosevic. Nevertheless, the diplomatic endgame, with air power in support of diplomatic efforts, led to the ceasefire. Air power is a crucial element in modern warfare because of its flexibility, range, speed and ability to make precision strikes. The real innovations concern land force doctrine. After a period of doctrinal confusion, in 1996 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff produced their Joint Vision 2010, which provided input for the 2000 FM 3.0, the army’s keystone manual for operations. In a way, the manual rediscovered strategy, because the “art of war” was again placed at the center of strategic thinking.

Chapter 5 deals with the security situation in the post-post Cold War era. I will argue that military operations are likely to be carried out:
– in complex emergencies, which are usually internal conflicts with large-scale displacement of people, mass famine, and fragile or failing economic, political, and social institutions;
– against non-state actors who use “black holes” in weak or failed states. These ungoverned territories are used as safe havens, hubs, or for criminal practices;
– to defend against terrorists; and
– to defend interests.

The present operational environment is characterized as unconventional warfare against irregular forces, carrying out nonlinear operations as part of asymmetric responses. Furthermore, future adversaries are likely to use weapons of mass destruction, notably biological and radiological weapons. This operational environment not only required a complete restructuring of Western armed forces, but a different mind-set as well. Regular soldiers however, believe that they exist to fight large-scale wars. Unconventional warfare was not considered “real war.” Due to this mind-set, the military neglected the fact that most wars have been fought in an unconventional manner. As a result, armed forces were ill-prepared for this kind of warfare – as numerous disastrous experiences have demonstrated.

In Chapter 6, I will argue that the new security risks, the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent Operation Enduring Freedom made clear that new concepts of waging war and restructured armed forces were indeed needed to be able to deal with these threats more efficiently. Battles became a series of small-scale, tactical engagements. If the adversary
dispersed, Western armies had to disperse, too. A swarming type of warfare was required, with an increased mobility of small units, and with greater firepower. Cordon operations and search-and-destroy operations, together with offensive operations to seize critical terrain and nodes, such as airfields, industrial complexes, and power plants, became crucial. Special Operations Forces and specialized forces, especially air maneuverable forces, became key elements of future ground forces. I consider network-centric warfare and effects-based operations as attempts to get to grips with the new challenge. However, at the same time I argue that, in contrast to conventional warfare, doctrine is less important when fighting in actual combat with irregular forces. Fighting insurgents, gangs, militias and terrorists requires combat skills and a different mind-set. It is only through the physical control of an area and the political isolation of the target that political military objectives can be met.

Nevertheless, Western nations and armies are doctrinally, organizationally, and psychologically ill-prepared for this kind of war. As a result, failing stabilization and reconstruction missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, together with the decline of America’s hegemonic power, marked the end of the post-post Cold War period.

In Chapter 7 I draw some conclusions, add some additional elements and argue that decision makers must have some knowledge of the principles of war (e.g., regardless of the brilliance of a strategy, political micromanagement and unrealistic preconditions could jeopardize an entire intervention), as these are the bedrock of every military operation.