

In *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (2017), Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann examine the coercive potential of nuclear weapons by means of quantitative analysis and historical case studies. Following Schelling's distinction between coercion ("compellence") and deterrence, they define coercion as an attempt to change current behavior, either by direct verbal threat or military action. They dub their theory "nuclear skepticism theory," and set it against what they call the conventional wisdom of nuclear coercion theory – that states possessing nuclear weapons will be able and willing to deploy them coercively to achieve state objectives. While the authors' regression analysis does identify several cases of successful compellent threats, these seem to be an implausible basis for a theory. Other than the Cuban Missile Crisis, the remaining cases (the 1999 Kosovo War, the US's 1994 intervention in Haiti and its 1961 intervention in the Dominican Republic) do not seem a suitable basis for a general theory because "the danger of nuclear war was exceedingly low" (125). Recognizing this, the authors embark on a qualitative analysis of cases in which states clearly attempted nuclear coercion. This paper will review their approach to the book's case study component (Part III), tracing the logic of their qualitative research design and appraising their conclusions. I conclude by tentatively suggesting an expansion of the scope of the authors' qualitative analysis.

Sechser and Fuhrmann analyze historical cases using Large-N Qualitative Analysis (LNQA). This approach examines either all or a large proportion of the relevant cases for concrete evidence of the causal mechanisms in the hypothesis (Goertz 2017). The basic approach is to select and evaluate a prominent theoretical statement that has received support in prior literature, which in this case is the theory of nuclear coercion. LNQA relies on within-case causal inference to trace causal processes, in an attempt to probe the generality of the causal mechanism. Sechser and Fuhrmann set out three conditions for including a particular crisis in the qualitative analysis component of their book. At least one participant must issue an explicit or implicit nuclear threat, the crisis must carry a nontrivial risk of escalation, and the nuclear threat must be linked to a coercive demand. They set a fairly high bar for nuclear threat, which allows them to limit the case study to those cases that provide a genuine test of

nuclear coercion theory. The authors ultimately identify thirteen cases that meet these criteria, and they include another six borderline cases that have received substantial attention from other scholars. I reproduce the case selection schema here, incorporating the useful categories proposed by Goertz (2017).

	X = 0 (no coercion)	X = 1 (nuclear coercion)
Y = 1 (behavioral change)	Equifinality (~)	Causal Mechanism (10 cases)
Y = 0 (no change)	Counterfactual (~)	Falsification-Scope (9 cases)

First, the authors consider the nine cases where nuclear coercion failed to achieve a state's goals. These failures of coercion constitute the falsification-scope cell (1,0), where the proposed causal mechanism (nuclear coercion) is present but the expected outcome does not occur. These cases (Ch. 5) include the Soviet threats over Berlin, the Vietnam War, the UK's conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, and two border clashes between India and Pakistan. Generally, the authors observe that clear nuclear signals are sometimes missed or ignored by the target state, and that coercive nuclear threats may be simply dismissed as incredible (129). These cases are important because leaders "followed the nuclear coercionist playbook to the letter" (132), meaning that these are cases where the proposed (coercionist) causal mechanism is clearly present and robust. Demonstrating that the expected result does not ensue (as the authors go on to do) is a powerful rebuttal to the proposed theory. The falsification-scope cell is useful for identifying limits to and establishing the scope of the proposed causal mechanism (Goertz 2017), and the authors also use it to buttress their own theory of nuclear skepticism by pointing out that the reasons that the mechanism failed in each of the nine cases were precisely the

premises of the skepticism theory: credibility problems in nuclear blackmail and the undermining of brinkmanship by signaling failures. This is powerful and convincing evidence for the authors' theory.

Next, the authors consider the ten cases where nuclear coercion was apparently successful. This is the causal mechanism cell (1,1), and is absolutely core to LNQA testing because such cases allow for the direct examination of the proposed mechanism (Goertz 2017). These cases (Ch. 6) include the Korean War, the Yom Kippur War, the Suez crisis, the Sino-Soviet border war and the Cuban missile crisis. The authors argue that none of these cases offers unequivocal evidence that nuclear coercion works. Importantly, because the authors selected politically important and unambiguous cases, these cases constitute the lowest threshold for the proposed causal mechanism. If it does not appear to work as advertised in these cases, nuclear coercion theory will be significantly undermined. Sechser and Fuhrmann remind us that heads of state have political and psychological incentives to claim success, particular in memoirs written years later, requiring a comprehensive study of the historical record rather than taking such claims at face value (173). After examining each of the ten cases, the authors conclude that none of them provides unequivocal evidence that nuclear coercion works. They find that factors other than nuclear weapons often played a substantial role in the decision to concede, and on closer inspection many crisis outcomes were not genuine victories for the coercing state (174). In addition, they find support for their own theory of nuclear skepticism in many of the cases examined. The authors point out that many of the cases providing the strongest ostensible support for nuclear coercion theory (including the Cuban missile crisis) occurred early in the cold war, before the deepening of the nuclear taboo.

As we have seen, the authors focused their attention on the $X = 1$ row. Goertz calls this the "X-centered approach", and argues that it is most appropriate if the researcher is interested in identifying cases where a proposed causal mechanism fails to function as advertised (199). The authors do not consider equifinality cases (the 0,1 cell). On its face, this is an appropriate choice, because although such

cases are very helpful in large-N cross-case analysis, they are not as useful in within-case inference (Goertz 2017). Similarly, the authors rightly ignore cases where both the causal mechanism and the predicted coercive outcome are absent. Finally, and consonant with Goertz's advice, the authors selected politically important cases, providing a serious test of the nuclear coercion theory.

I find this approach persuasive—indeed, it seems substantially more persuasive than the authors' quantitative analysis. I wonder, however, whether it might not have been useful to consider equifinality cases as well. The authors are doing two things simultaneously – testing the theory of nuclear coercion, and trying to find evidence for their “nuclear skepticism theory”. An X-centered approach seems perfectly appropriate for testing the theory of nuclear coercion. However, this approach seems inadequate to probe alternate explanations for the proposed theory of nuclear skepticism. Because the authors' theory is framed negatively, searching for alternate causal pathways was probably not foremost among the authors' priorities, and indeed the upshot of the theory is that coercion will not happen, and the particular reasons given seem of secondary importance. However, there can be many reasons why Holmes' dog does not bark. Equifinality explanations for negatively-framed theories allow us to ask *why* a phenomenon does not occur.

References

Gary Goertz, *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanism and Case Studies: An Integrated Approach* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)