

James Cable

DIplomacy

AT SEA

DIPLOMACY AT SEA

Also by James Cable

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY
THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE SIEGE OF BILBAO
GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY 1919–1979, Second Edition
BRITAIN'S NAVAL FUTURE

As Grant Hugo

BRITAIN IN TOMORROW'S WORLD
APPEARANCE AND REALITY IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

DIPLOMACY AT SEA

James Cable

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For Viveca as always

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Coercion, Compromise and Compliance	1
2 The Diffusion of Maritime Power	36
3 Interdependence: a Drug of Addiction?	55
4 Will Gibraltar be Next?	74
5 Diplomacy: a Case for Resuscitation	81
6 The Falklands Conflict	103
7 Surprise in the Falklands	113
8 Surprise and the Single Scenario	120
9 Cant in Foreign Policy	133
10 Hong Kong: a Base Without a Fleet	143
11 The Useful Art of International Relations	154
12 The Political Influence of the Thriller	169
<i>Notes and References</i>	176
<i>Index</i>	184

Preface

The dozen essays in this book are a selection from a range of similar productions over the last dozen years. Their common concern is with a particular aspect of international relations and naval affairs: disputes as a cause of conflict and the resolution of conflict by methods short of war.

The first and longest of these essays – ‘Coercion, Compromise and Compliance’ – states the theme and discusses the nature and prevalence of coercive diplomacy. Other essays offer illustrative variations, particularly in relation to the threat or use of naval force in support of diplomacy. The relationship between theory and practice is also explored, as is the regrettably declining role of traditional diplomacy. Cant and the thriller have been chosen as examples of the curious cultural basis of many political assumptions and of the surprising and only partly conscious roots of much political strife.

All but the first of these essays have appeared previously. The author is grateful to the following editors and publishers for permission to reprint them here: the Editor of *International Relations* for ‘The Diffusion of Maritime Power’ (1982) and ‘Diplomacy: a Case for Resuscitation’ (1983); the Editor of *International Affairs* for ‘The Useful Art of International Relations’ (1981) and ‘Interdependence: a Drug of Addiction?’ (1983); the Editor of *Navy International* for ‘Will Gibraltar be Next?’ (1982) and ‘Hong Kong: a Base without a Fleet’ (1983); the Editor of *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* for ‘The Falklands Conflict’ (1982); the Editor of *Encounter* for ‘Surprise in the Falklands’ (1982); the Editor of the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* for ‘Surprise and the Single Scenario’ (1983); Chatto and Windus Ltd for ‘Cant in Foreign Policy’ (originally published as Chapter 1 of *Appearance and Reality in International Relations*, by Grant Hugo, 1970); the Editor of *The Contemporary Review* for ‘The Political Influence of the Thriller’ (by Grant Hugo, 1972).

Some minor alterations have been made to earlier versions to

remove misprints, to restore the original text, or for stylistic reasons, but never to allow hindsight to correct any flaws in the author's prescience.

No systematic attempt has been made to reconcile, or to contrast, the views expressed in these pages with the received opinions of the academic community. Although reading has contributed as much as personal experience, the author has been more concerned to present his own ideas than to distil the wisdom of others. References have accordingly been kept to the necessary minimum.

1 Coercion, Compromise and Compliance

COERCION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Coercion is implicit in most aspects of international relations as it is in most human relationships. Between parents and children; employers and workers; trade unions and their members; officials (even the humblest) and citizens: wishes are normally expressed as orders or demands. The phrasing may be polite and the penalties of disobedience not even hinted at, but the assumption is clear: some people are entitled to expect compliance. An equal relationship, in which proposals are advanced for discussion on their merits, is the exception rather than the rule. Even in commercial transactions on the allegedly free market, it is a matter of everyday experience that anyone in a position to do so, from the tycoon to the shop assistant, will seek to impose his own conditions for buying and selling goods and services, whether or not these conditions are actually to his commercial advantage. 'Any colour you like, as long as it's black', is an attitude that the ordinary citizen encounters at every step he takes and irrespective of the level of the transaction. To anyone able to exercise it the power of coercion is intrinsically desirable.

Naturally such assumptions of divine right, even by insurance companies, do not always pass unchallenged. Obstinate individuals will occasionally put the implied power of coercion to the test. Sometimes they will expose it as a bluff; more often reach a compromise. But, if the relationship is genuinely unequal, they must usually fall back on a reluctant compliance. Individual victories over government departments, major commercial concerns or important trade unions are rare and often expensive.

In international relations the same principles apply, but with one important difference. The real possibilities of coercion are less symmetrically distributed among different states than they are within any particular state. In most states society is so organised as actually

to facilitate the exercise of coercion by those who are recognised as possessing power, whether this power is political, administrative, economic or the result of organised cooperation. 'In England', as it was once said on high legal authority, 'justice is open to all, like the Ritz hotel.' In Russia, or in many other countries, there may be no Ritz, but the principle is the same: those who enjoy power, however much they may compete among themselves, have a common interest in maintaining the effectiveness of power against those who lack it.

In the anarchy of international society this is not the case. Even the strongest are ready to risk exalting the humble and meek, if the process seems likely to damage their rivals. As for those governments who enjoy only a little power, a local power, they seldom regard their privileges as depending on the maintenance of respect for the wider claims of more potent governments. On the contrary, they often have cause to believe that even their limited power is significantly related to the degree of independence manifested in its exertion. They are less often content than their equivalents in domestic society to accept their proper station in any obvious hierarchy of power, not even ready to apply themselves seriously to the task of improving, step by small and patient step, their relative position in that hierarchy. Some of them prefer a distinctly protestant approach, assert the equality of sovereign states and claim no less validity for aspirations than for capacities.

They are fortified in these otherwise rather unrealistic notions by two awkward factors which distinguish international society from that of most (but by no means all) nation-states. The first is that, in contemporary international society, power lacks the legitimacy it usually enjoys nationally. At the beginning of the present century, for instance, the concept of European prestige produced a basic minimum of solidarity among the Great Powers and commanded a degree of respect from the weaker nations of other continents that has no equivalent today. Even against a Super Power a countervailing power is now available if not always effective. The second is the superior efficacy of violence as an equaliser. Violence is not, of course, unknown in the domestic society of most states, where its threat or use often proves to be the decisive instrument of social change. There, however, violence is usually marginal. It may tip an uncertain balance of power, but it seldom enables the weak to prevail against the strong, unless the latter are not merely disunited but actually demoralised. In the world at large this factor has a higher value in the general equation. In the absence of any organised system to maintain the illusion that

power commands intrinsic authority, the influence of power is critically dependent on its ability to exert appropriate force about a given point. As Chapter 2, admittedly concerned only with the use of power at or from the sea, demonstrates, capacity for the exercise of appropriate force is unevenly distributed and more closely related to the circumstances of particular disputes than to any comparison of aggregate resources.

Actual violence is naturally not a necessary feature of coercion. Force can be less crudely employed and there are many ways in which it can be threatened. Warships, for instance, can easily be deployed in international waters, can pose and maintain a threat without commitment and, if need be, can withdraw as quietly as they came. Economic, financial or administrative pressures are sometimes effective. Even threats are not essential. Much coercion is implicit. If a particular government is generally regarded as able and willing both to reward friends and to punish enemies, its wishes will at least receive more careful consideration. In a dependent relationship between two states, such as that discussed in Chapter 3, the client will be still more attentive to the views of the patron. Even weaker states often enjoy a limited and local leverage over the strong. And the most paradoxical form of coercion is that exercised by some governments with a reputation for irresponsibility or instability. They must be pandered to lest they change sides or collapse. When one government makes a proposal to another, the outcome is less often determined by the intrinsic merits of the proposal than by the answer to that essential question: Who? Whom?

Implicit coercion is the bread and butter of diplomacy. It is the business of diplomats, at home or abroad, to recognise the existence of this factor in international relations and to analyse its strength and direction. Where a coercive relationship favours their own government they may, with the necessary assistance of other agents of the state, be actively concerned in maintaining and fortifying it. They must often rely on it for the success of their representations. In a sophisticated relationship, of course, they try to do so indirectly. Between the United States and Britain, for instance, or the Soviet Union and Finland, it is usually British and Finnish officials who explain to their own governments the disadvantages of refusing some American or Russian request. Direct threats are as rare in implicit coercion as overt acts. Even a reference to feeling in Congress or a pseudonymous article in *Pravda* are the exception rather than the rule. Between any pair of states there is a potential relationship of implied coercion, of