

THE LIMITS OF  
COERCIVE DIPLOMACY  
*Laos, Cuba, Vietnam*

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## INTRODUCTION\*

## I. THE NEED FOR POLICY-RELEVANT THEORY

The distinguished historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt, once remarked that the true use of history is not to make men more clever for the next time but to make them wiser for ever. Following Burckhardt's advice in world politics has proven particularly difficult. Admittedly, it is not easy to learn from history, though almost every statesman and general has professed to have done so. In the first place, people often disagree on the lessons of a particular historical event. Second, even if they agree on the correct lessons, they often misapply these lessons to a new situation that differs from the past one in important respects. Clearly, attempting to draw lessons on an ad hoc basis from a single historical case is dangerous, and a more systematic way of stating lessons from a broad range of historical experience is needed. This is a challenging task for theory.

Developing a policy-relevant theory is one way in which scholarly research can contribute to better foreign policy making. But theory cannot absorb and transmit the "lessons" of history unless it employs a framework that identifies the many variables at play

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