**POLITICAL COERCION**

*Definition*

Use of coercive instruments to affect the political composition or decisionmaking within a state; the tools to achieve such outcomes can be licit or illicit.

**Examples of Gray Zone Threat vs. U.S. Interests**

- Adversaries’ use of political coercion to undermine liberal democratic institutions
- Russia seeking to block North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and EU expansion in the Balkans and meddling with political candidates in Serbia and Serbian Bosnia
- China’s use of the Belt and Road Initiative as a cover for development aid expansion via the Belt and Road Initiative to promote authoritarian practices at local level, encourage bribery and corruption

**U.S. Government Responses**

The Players: Department of State (DoS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Energy (DOE), the Intelligence Community (IC), and the Department of Treasury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deterrence &amp; Resilience</th>
<th>Intelligence &amp; Investigation</th>
<th>Cost Imposition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DoS and USAID provide development and stabilization programs to build resiliency of institutions</td>
<td>USAID has measures to investigate progress of adversarial coercion in the international system</td>
<td>DoS names and shames competitors’ coercive tactics</td>
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<td>DoJ via the Russian Influence Group (RIG) implements its rule of law and oversight toolkits in European countries</td>
<td>DoS uses diplomatic channels to understand adversary coercion</td>
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<td>Congress passed Asian Reassurance Initiative Act, Ukraine Freedom Support Act</td>
<td>IC aids DoS and USAID in investigations of political coercion</td>
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<td>U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) exposes and builds narratives of threat of adversary’s political coercion</td>
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**U.S. Government Assessment**

**Bureaucratic Structure**

- Few opportunities for interagency coordination on combating political coercion
- Lack of centralized interagency process to address challenge
- Lack of regulation and evaluation structures within U.S. agencies
- Lack of discretionary funding, which limits flexibility and innovation
Policy Positions
- Weakened international alliances and partnerships damage collective action, U.S. credibility, and effectiveness
- Lack of proactive measures
- Missed opportunities to leverage U.S. strengths vs. competitor vulnerabilities (e.g., transparency)

Operational Limitations
- Weakened alliances and partnerships limit intelligence sharing
- Over-classification and stove-piping within U.S. government limits information sharing with allies, partners, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society

Ineffective Tools and Tactics
- Few punitive measures to counter political coercion
- Few inducements for private sector to collaborate
- USAGM weak narrative source and fails to build international resiliency

Authorities
- Misalignment of foreign and domestic agencies and programs to counter coercion
- Underutilization of the private sector to expose and counter competitors

Recommendations

Authorities and Resourcing
- Authorize and appropriate resourcing for a U.S. government active measures working group to coordinate covert action
- Enable more discretionary funding to agencies to increase agility of gray zone responses
- Authorize USAGM to operate in media-competitive environments and restructure GEC to tackle state-based coercion rather than counterterrorism focus

Policies
- Align governance, development, and stabilization resourcing to vulnerable priority countries
- Harness U.S. asymmetric advantages of transparency, rule of law, private sector innovation, and alliances and partnerships to extend free and open spaces
- Emphasize collaboration and information sharing across the interagency, private sector, allies/partners, and civil society to create common approaches, reduce competitive space, and increase resiliency
- Develop and require civic education and media literacy curriculum for U.S., allied, and partner schools and community centers in collaboration with civil society

Read the full report here. For related CSIS gray zone analysis visit: csis.org/grayzone.