

FUNDAMENTAL CORRELATES OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

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***Abstract:** This paper examines the relationship between preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy in an international system marked by the proliferation of armed conflicts, great-power rivalry, and the expansion of hybrid instruments of pressure. Its central argument is that preventive diplomacy remains the instrument with the greatest potential to reduce the human, political, and economic costs of conflicts, yet its effectiveness depends on political will, functioning early-warning mechanisms, and the capacity of multilateral institutions to transform information into action. At the same time, coercive diplomacy continues to be used as an instrument of limited compellence through threats, sanctions, ultimatums, or calibrated demonstrations of force, but its success depends on realistic objectives, credible signaling, the availability of negotiated exit options, and compliance with international law. From a military perspective, the relationship between the two forms of diplomacy is inseparable from credible capabilities, resilience, allied interoperability, early warning, and the controlled use of military instruments in support of strategic dialogue. In a conflict-dominated world, prevention should remain the primary normative and strategic option, while coercion should be employed only in support of de-escalation and a viable political settlement.*

***Keywords:** preventive diplomacy, coercive diplomacy, conflict prevention, sanctions, international security, crisis management, defence diplomacy, integrated deterrence, Black Sea.*

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1. Introduction

The current international order is defined by a high density of crises and a visible degradation of the security environment¹.

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¹ SIPRI. 2025. „Armed Conflict and Conflict Management.” În SIPRI Yearbook 2025. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, available at <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2025/02>, accessed on 15.05.2026.

According to the SIPRI Yearbook 2025, in 2024 the estimated number of deaths associated with armed conflicts increased to approximately 239,000, the highest level in the period 2018-2024, and five major conflicts exceeded the threshold of 10,000 victims in a single year². This picture suggests not only the persistence of classical wars, but also the return of conventional interstate confrontation, combined with the expansion of economic, informational, cybernetic and symbolic pressures.³

In this context, the debate about preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy takes on special relevance. Thus, diplomacy and coercive diplomacy, with the modification of the behavior of an actor through threats or deliberate costs, without the immediate entry into an all-out war⁴. If preventive diplomacy operates in the register of risk mitigation and maintaining dialogue⁵, coercive diplomacy operates in the register of controlled pressure⁶. In practice, however, the separation between them is less rigid than the theoretical definition suggests.

From the perspective of the relationship between foreign policy, military strategy and defense planning, we can show that, in the Euro-Atlantic space, diplomacy can no longer be separated from resilience, military mobility, allied interoperability, forward presence and escalation control⁷. Thus, the relationship between prevention and coercion is also a relationship between power, strategic signaling, and the ability to retain the political initiative without losing military control of the crisis⁸.

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ Sweijs Tim, 2023, *The Use and Utility of Ultimata in Coercive Diplomacy*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-21303-8>, accessed on 15.05.2026, Mitton John Logan, 2022 „Lessons in Deterrence: Evaluating Coercive Diplomacy in Syria, 2012-2019, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 45 (3), pp. 411-438, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1692659>, accessed on 15.05.2026.

⁵ Ramcharan Bertrand G, 2020, *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge. available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 16.05.2025, Verbeke Johan, 2023, *Diplomacy in Practice: A Critical Approach*, London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Diplomacy-in-Practice-A-Critical-Approach/Verbeke/p/book/9781032287089>, accessed on 16.05.2026.

⁶ Sweijs Tim, 2023, *op.cit.*

⁷ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept>, accessed on 16.05.2026, Council of the European Union. 2022, „A Strategic Compass for a Stronger EU Security and Defence in the Next Decade“, 21 Martie 2022, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>, accessed on 16.05.2026.

⁸ Wirtz James, Jeffrey Larsen, 2023, „Who Does Deterrence? The Politics and Strategy of Integrated Deterrence“, *The RUSI Journal* 168 (6): pp. 14-20, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2023.2288133>, accessed on 17.05.2026.

We believe that, in a world dominated by conflicts, preventive diplomacy should remain the main strategic option, since the costs of failure are incomparably lower than the costs of managing a war that has already started. It is necessary to highlight the fact that, in the absence of a minimum of credible pressure, prevention risks becoming purely declarative. Symmetrically, coercive diplomacy can produce limited and useful effects only if it is subordinated to a realistic political objective and a logic of de-escalation, not a punitive or retaliatory logic.

2. Conceptual landmarks: between prevention and coercion

When referring to preventive diplomacy, it is more than just an early reaction to a crisis. It includes early warning, good offices, mediation, special political missions, confidence-building measures, the involvement of regional organizations, and maintaining open channels of communication between actors in tension. Some authors emphasize that contemporary preventive diplomacy must be thought of in relation to human security and SDG 16, and others even insist that prevention is not just an institutional formula, but a diplomatic practice that involves analysis, persuasion, and an understanding of the actors' own limitations.

Coercive diplomacy, by contrast, seeks to change an adversary's calculus through credible threats and controlled costs. It can take the form of sanctions, ultimatums, displays of force, diplomatic isolation, or limited actions designed to convey resolve without producing full-scale escalation. Indeed, it is shown that ultimatums can remain a core of interstate coercion and that their effects differ depending on the type of message and the strategic context, which refutes the idea that all ultimatums are necessarily irrational or counterproductive.⁹

From a methodological point of view, in the correlative action between the two types of diplomacy, three variables should be taken into account.

The first variable is the moment of intervention: thus, prevention acts before or in the early stages of the crisis¹⁰ while coercion usually occurs when belligerent action is already advanced¹¹.

⁹ Sweijts, Tim., 2023, op. cit.

¹⁰ Ramcharan Bertrand G, 2020, *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge. available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 16.05.2025, Myl, Malgorzata. 2021. "Special Political Missions and Their Role in a Preventive Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges." *Eastern European Journal of Transnational Relations* 4 (2): 9-25. <https://doi.org/10.15290/eejtr.2020.04.02.01>.

¹¹ Mitton, John Logan. 2022. "Lessons in Deterrence: Evaluating Coercive Diplomacy in Syria, 2012-2019." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 45 (3): 411-438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1692659>.

The second variable is the logic of the instrument: prevention reduces uncertainty and creates room for compromise, while coercion increases the costs of non-compliance¹².

The third option we bring to your attention is legitimacy. According to this, preventive diplomacy enjoys a stronger presumption of legitimacy, while coercive diplomacy must be justified much more strictly legally, politically and morally¹³.

2.1. Political-military correlates of prevention and coercion

Through an analysis specific to military sciences, we believe that preventive and coercive diplomacy must be related to the connection between the political level, the strategic level and the operational level¹⁴. In this context, preventive diplomacy is supported by early warning systems, situational awareness, political-military dialogue, military deconfliction channels, advanced presence with a reassurance role, and joint exercises aimed at reducing mistrust¹⁵. On the other hand, coercive diplomacy uses the same resources, but in a different logic: signaling intent, increasing costs for the adversary, demonstrating capability, and controlling escalation¹⁶.

In military terms, the major difference is not one of instruments, but of intensity, purpose and threshold of use. NATO reaffirmed in the 2022 Strategic Concept that Euro-Atlantic security is based on three core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security, confirming that prevention and strategic pressure are not separate worlds, but are parts of the same security architecture. In the same vein, the European Union's Strategic Compass argues that the more hostile security

¹² Chappell, Brian K. 2021. *State Responses to Nuclear Proliferation: The Differential Effects of Threat Perception*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59801-3>.

¹³ Verbeke, Johan. 2023. *Diplomacy in Practice: A Critical Approach*. London and New York: Routledge available at <https://www.routledge.com/Diplomacy-in-Practice-A-Critical-Approach/Verbeke/p/book/9781032287089>, accessed on 18.05.2026.

¹⁴ Wirtz, James, Jeffrey Larsen. 2023. "Who Does Deterrence? The Politics and Strategy of Integrated Deterrence." *The RUSI Journal* 168 (6): 14-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2023.2288133>.

¹⁵ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept>, accessed on 18.05.2026, Council of the European Union. 2022, „A Strategic Compass for a Stronger EU Security and Defence in the Next Decade“, 21 Martie 2022, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>, accessed on 18.05.2026.

¹⁶ Blankenship Brian, Erik Lin-Greenberg. 2022. "Trivial Tripwires? Military Capabilities and Alliance Reassurance." *Security Studies* 31 (1): 92-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2038662>.

environment requires a qualitative leap in the capacity to act, resilience and investment in defence¹⁷.

It follows that preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy should be seen as two ways of converting power into political effect. The former transforms capability into trust, stability, and diplomatic time, while the latter transforms capability into pressure, cost, and a signal of resolve¹⁸. In both cases, credibility depends on the coherence between political intent, military resources and alliance architecture¹⁹.

3. Advantages, tools and limits of preventive diplomacy

The main advantage of preventive diplomacy is that it intervenes before violence becomes systemic²⁰. The costs of preventive intervention are usually lower than the costs of post-conflict pacification, reconstruction or humanitarian management²¹. In addition, prevention keeps political institutions functioning, avoids the radicalization of actors and can preserve a minimum of trust necessary for subsequent negotiation. In the UN's vision, reactivating diplomacy and strengthening the capacity to monitor risks are indispensable in a fragmented world with multiple sources of instability²².

Special political missions play an important role²³ described as flexible instruments of preventive diplomacy, capable of combining political presence, field analysis and facilitation of dialogue, but whose effectiveness depends on the political and financial support of the organizations that mandate them. From this perspective, prevention does not mean passivity, but early presence, legitimacy and the ability to act before all parties consider violence as the only option²⁴.

The case of ASEAN and the Myanmar crisis illustrates both the potential and the limits of regional preventive diplomacy. Caballero-Anthony shows that, despite the Myanmar crisis, tensions in the South China Sea, and US-China rivalry, the "ASEAN way," based on informality

¹⁷ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept>, accessed on 19.05.2026.

¹⁸ Wirtz, James, Jeffrey Larsen, 2023, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Blankenship Brian, Erik Lin-Greenberg. 2022, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2020. *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 19.05.2026.

²¹ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9, A New Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015374>, accessed on 19.05.2026.

²² *Idem.*

²³ Myl, Małgorzata. 2021. "Special Political Missions and Their Role in a Preventive Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges." *Eastern European Journal of Transnational Relations* 4 (2): 9-25. <https://doi.org/10.15290/ejtr.2020.04.02.01>.

²⁴ *Idem.*

and consensus, remains the preferred mechanism for regional security governance²⁵. This informality provides access and reduces the rigidity of negotiation, but can weaken responsiveness when the consensus regime blocks firm measures²⁶. In the same logic, it can be shown that the negotiations supported by the UN and led by ASEAN represent one of the few realistic paths to relaunching a political solution, precisely because they combine regional legitimacy with international support²⁷.

Regarding the limits of preventive diplomacy, it can be observed that they become evident when early warning is not followed by political will. In many contemporary crises, international actors know the signals of risk but hesitate to intervene diplomatically due to geopolitical rivalries, reputational costs or fear of failure²⁸. In such situations, prevention fails not because it is conceptually weak, but because the political architecture that should support it is fragmented²⁹. In other words, preventive diplomacy is less a problem of conception and more of implementation³⁰.

3.1. Defense diplomacy and the role of military structures in crisis prevention

Defense diplomacy, by which we mean the use of military instruments for nonviolent purposes, to strengthen cooperation, trust and stability³¹. Direct contributors to preventing strategic misunderstandings include military attaches, dialogue between military chiefs, joint exercises, naval visits, officer exchanges, joint training, and regional think tanks. These mechanisms can provide transparency, predictability, and communication channels that reduce the likelihood of miscalculation.

However, defense diplomacy has an ambivalent character and presents a paradox: on the one hand, it aims to build strategic and moral trust between states, and on the other hand, it can include competition,

²⁵ Caballero-Anthony, Mely. 2022. "The ASEAN Way and the Changing Security Environment: Navigating Challenges to Informality and Centrality." *International Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-022-00400-0>.

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Barber, Rebecca. 2023. "The Case for UN-Supported, ASEAN-Led Negotiations on Myanmar." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 77 (3): 325-332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2023.2197283>.

²⁸ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2020. *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 19.05.2026.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Verbeke, Johan, 2023, op. cit..

³¹ Chang Jun Yan, Nicole Jenne. 2020. "Velvet Fists: The Paradox of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia." *European Journal of International Security* 5 (3): 332-349. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2020.16>.

secrets, demonstrations of power and messages that weaken exactly this trust³².

For strategically sensitive spaces, such as the Black Sea area, defense diplomacy must be correlated with transparency, strategic communication, and rules for avoiding incidents.

From a military perspective, the value of preventive diplomacy increases when its political components are doubled by credible presence, transparently planned exercises, and conflict resolution mechanisms³³. Prevention does not involve weakening the defensive profile, but using it to create conditions of stability and space for negotiation³⁴.

Artificial intelligence may accelerate warfare, but security architecture must also accelerate and deepen at the same pace, building a new generation of capabilities.

The real challenge in military artificial intelligence (AI) is to maintain human accountability and political wisdom while maintaining technological superiority. Therefore, every technical, legal, and ethical step taken today will shape not only the nature of warfare but also the future of the international order.

4. The strategic logic, utility and risks associated with coercive diplomacy

Coercive diplomacy starts from the idea that the adversary can be determined to change its behavior without reaching all-out war³⁵. To achieve this goal, several conditions are necessary: limited objectives, clear demands, credibility, coherent strategic communication and the existence of a negotiated exit³⁶. When coercion demands maximalist or humiliating concessions, it tends to turn the crisis into a zero-sum game and drastically reduce the likelihood of voluntary compliance³⁷. Thus, in an analysis of Syria, it is shown that the repeated failures of deterrence and coercion were linked to the perceived weakening of American commitment, which affected the credibility of the threats made³⁸. So, coercion depends not only

³² Idem.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ NATO. 2022. NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept>, accessed on 20.05.2026.

³⁵ Sweijjs, Tim, 2023, op. cit..

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Alim Eray. 2020. „Decentralize or Else": Russia's Use of Offensive Coercive Diplomacy against Ukraine. *World Affairs* 183 (2): 155-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820020919907>.

³⁸ Mitton John Logan, 2022, op. cit.

on capabilities but also on the reputation of political will, and not compliance but an incredible threat can accelerate the testing of limits³⁹.

The case of Ukraine is equally relevant. Russia's strategy in Donbass was one of offensive coercive diplomacy, backed by force but oriented towards political objectives that Ukraine could not accept without compromising its sovereignty; the result was the transformation of the crisis into a zero-sum conflict⁴⁰. The conclusion that can be drawn is essential: even when coercion is militarily strong, it can fail politically if it demands what the targeted party considers existentially unacceptable⁴¹.

Another risk of coercive diplomacy is the temptation of tactical ambiguity. In the context of the war in Ukraine, unclaimed coercive actions have less leverage than explicitly claimed actions, without necessarily producing a significant advantage in controlling escalation. This conclusion is important for the era of hybrid warfare: plausible deniability may complicate attribution, but it does not guarantee strategic effectiveness⁴².

Economic coercion is not without costs and repercussions either. States targeted by sanctions can respond with counter-sanctions, reducing the effectiveness of the instrument and amplifying the logic of conflictual reciprocity⁴³. Furthermore, in proliferation crises, the choice of coercion over direct force is influenced by threat perceptions, public support, and power projection capacity, which shows that coercive diplomacy is not an automatic mechanism, but one deeply dependent on the strategic psychology of decision-makers⁴⁴.

4.1. Integrated deterrence as a show of force and strategic signaling

In the current strategic environment, coercive diplomacy can no longer be separated from the concept of integrated deterrence. The authors we cite note that integrated deterrence reflects the current strategic reality, but it raises an essential question regarding the actor who articulates and coordinates such a complex strategy, a strategy that involves military forces,

³⁹ *Idem*.

⁴⁰ Alim Eray. 2020, *op.cit*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Pishedda Costantino, Andrew Cheon. 2023. "Does Plausible Deniability Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Unclaimed Coercive Acts in the Ukraine War." *Contemporary Security Policy* 44 (3): 345-371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2023.2212464>.

⁴³ Peksen Dursun, Jin Mun Jeong. 2022. "Coercive Diplomacy and Economic Sanctions Reciprocity: Explaining Targets' Counter-Sanctions." *Defence and Peace Economics* 33 (8): 895-911. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2021.1919831>.

⁴⁴ Chappell, Brian K. 2021. *State Responses to Nuclear Proliferation: The Differential Effects of Threat Perception*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59801-3>.

governmental institutions and alliances⁴⁵. For military analysis, this aspect is decisive: coercion is not credible only through political will, but through the concrete architecture of capabilities, logistics, mobility, command and control, and interoperability.

Blankenship and Lin-Greenberg show that deterministic signals cannot compensate for insufficiency of capabilities, which means that symbolic tripwire presences are limited if they are not supported by effective force and rapid reinforcement capacity⁴⁶. For this reason, for coercive diplomacy, the credibility of the threat depends on the relationship between will, capability and sustainability⁴⁷. Effective strategic signaling requires more than rhetoric: it requires available forces, infrastructure, political support, and doctrinal clarity⁴⁸.

Furthermore, coercion works better when accompanied by exit options and reassurance measures for allies⁴⁹. In a system of alliances like NATO, coercive diplomacy is not just about the adversary, but also about maintaining internal cohesion and mutual trust⁵⁰. This is why deterrence and reassurance must be thought of together, not separately⁵¹.

4.2. The Gray Zone, Cyberspace, and Escalation Control

Contemporary military analysis shows that many confrontations no longer take place on the verge of declared war, but in the gray area, through informational, economic, maritime, cyber pressures and below the threshold of direct conventional engagement⁵². Some authors define the gray area as the space in which the distinction between peace and war becomes blurred due to the ambiguity of the tactics used, and actors aim to modify the opponent's behavior without explicitly switching to conventional warfare⁵³.

But activity in the gray area may represent not only a failure of deterrence, but sometimes even an effect of it, when the adversary chooses limited forms of aggression due to the existence of a credible escalation

⁴⁵ Wirtz James, Jeffrey Larsen, 2023, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Blankenship Brian, Erik Lin-Greenberg. 2022. "Trivial Tripwires? Military Capabilities and Alliance Reassurance." *Security Studies* 31 (1): 92-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2038662>.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁹ Wirtz James, Jeffrey Larsen. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ Blankenship Brian, Erik Lin-Greenberg. 2022, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ NATO. 2022. NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, available at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept>, accessed on 21.05.2026.

⁵² Azad Tahir Mahmood, Muhammad Waqas Haider, Muhammad Sadiq. 2023. "Understanding Gray Zone Warfare from Multiple Perspectives." *World Affairs* 186 (1): 81-104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200221141101>.

⁵³ *Idem.*

threshold⁵⁴. This observation is important for military thinking, suggesting that deterrence does not always eliminate competition, but can push it towards more ambiguous and fragmented forms⁵⁵.

In cyberspace, cyber operations can be useful not only as classical coercive signals, but also as escalation management and accommodative signaling tools during crises. This shifts the focus from simply reacting to the attack to the broader architecture of attribution, resilience, and proportional response⁵⁶.

5. Complementarity between preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy

A common aspect in the analysis of international relations is the treatment of preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy as exclusively antagonistic options. In reality, the two can form a continuum of instruments⁵⁷. Thus, prevention without the ability to signal costs can be ignored⁵⁸ and coercion without diplomatic infrastructure can only produce resentment, adaptation and escalation⁵⁹. The analytical problem is not the dogmatic choice between the two, but their sequencing and proportionality⁶⁰.

An integrated strategy can be considered. In its optimal form, an integrated strategy should follow four stages. The first stage is early warning and opening channels of dialogue⁶¹. The second consists of concrete preventive measures: political missions, mediation, good offices, regional mechanisms and confidence-building measures⁶². The third involves limited and reversible pressure, especially diplomatic and economic, formulated with clear conditions and humanitarian exceptions⁶³. The fourth stage is political reintegration: negotiating an exit, monitoring

⁵⁴ Gannon, J. Andrés, Erik Gartzke, Jon R. Lindsay, and Peter Schram. 2024. "The Shadow of Deterrence: Why Capable Actors Engage in Contests Short of War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 68 (2-3): 230-268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027231166345>.

⁵⁵ *Idem*.

⁵⁶ Lonergan Erica D., Shawn W. Lonergan. 2022. "Cyber Operations, Accommodative Signaling, and the De-Escalation of International Crises." *Security Studies* 31 (1): 32-64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2040584>.

⁵⁷ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2020. *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 21.05.2026.

⁵⁸ Wirtz James, Jeffrey Larsen, 2023, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Mitton John Logan, 2022, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Verbeke Johan. 2023. *Diplomacy in Practice: A Critical Approach*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Diplomacy-in-Practice-A-Critical-Approach/Verbeke/p/book/9781032287089>, accessed on 21.05.2026.

⁶¹ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2020, *op. cit.*

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ Sweijs, Tim. 2023, *op. cit.*

implementation, and gradually reducing pressure in exchange for verifiable compliance⁶⁴. Such a logic is compatible with the UN call for the revitalization of diplomacy and multilateral capacities for prevention and mediation.

From this perspective, prevention and coercion are neither morally equivalent nor functionally identical⁶⁵. Preventive diplomacy is oriented towards avoiding violence and preserving political space⁶⁶ and coercive diplomacy is acceptable only as an auxiliary, limited tool aimed at restoring a negotiated solution⁶⁷. When coercion becomes an end in itself, it ceases to be diplomacy and becomes a form of conflict management through permanent pressure⁶⁸.

Therefore, in a world dominated by conflicts, the major challenge is not the lack of tools, but the lack of a coherent architecture for using them. Multilateral institutions, regional organizations and middle-sized states must restore the link between prevention, legal pressure and political solution⁶⁹. Otherwise, we will witness either the ineffective ritualization of the discourse on prevention, or the trivialization of coercion as a strategic reflex⁷⁰.

5.1. The Black Sea as a space of convergence between prevention and coercion

The Black Sea area offers one of the most relevant strategic laboratories for studying the relationship between preventive and coercive diplomacy. The Black Sea region is a focal point of the competition between Russia and the West for the future of Europe, and political, economic, informational and military instruments are used simultaneously here. It is highlighted that the security of the Pontic basin must be analyzed in an integrated manner, in relation to the strategic, military and economic objectives of the relevant actors, as well as to the role of NATO and the EU in stabilizing the region⁷¹.

For this reason, in the Black Sea, preventive diplomacy cannot be reduced to mediation and dialogue, but must be correlated with maritime

⁶⁴ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9, A New Agenda for Peace. New York: United Nations, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015374>, accessed on 22.05.2026.

⁶⁵ Verbeke Johan. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Ramcharan, Bertrand G. 2020, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Sweijs, Tim. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ Verbeke Johan. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Verbeke Johan. 2023, *op. cit.*, Sweijs, Tim. 2023, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Novac Valerian, Eugen Rusu. 2022. "The Actual Security Climate in the Black Sea Basin." International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization 28 (1): 83-93. <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2022-0013>.

surveillance, protection of energy infrastructure, security of trade routes, military mobility and credible allied presence⁷². At the same time, coercion is expressed here through blockades, energy pressure, coastal militarization, A2/AD and hybrid actions. For Romania, the Black Sea is the environment in which prevention and deterrence must be thought of together⁷³.

The maritime character of the region adds a specifically military dimension: freedom of navigation, port security, protection of offshore infrastructure, airspace control and coastal surveillance⁷⁴. Here preventive diplomacy needs constant operational support, and coercive diplomacy must be calibrated to avoid turning a maritime or energy crisis into a generalized conflict.

5.2. A possible comparative framing: Greenland, Venezuela, Iran, Persian Gulf, USA, NATO and Israel

From a comparative perspective, the cases of Greenland, Venezuela, Iran-Persian Gulf and Israel show that preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy do not operate in isolation, but on a continuum of crisis management. The main difference appears in the combination of instruments, legitimacy and intensity: some files are dominated by prevention and prudent signaling, others by sanctions, military mobilizations and political pressure. In this framework, the United States frequently appears as an actor of economic and military coercion, while NATO functions mainly as an architecture of deterrence, reassurance and stabilization of the Euro-Atlantic space⁷⁵.

In the case of Greenland, the dominant logic remains that of preventive diplomacy and the prudent management of strategic competition. The renewed geostrategic interest of the great powers in the Arctic has increased Greenland's diplomatic and security value, but has produced sovereignty games, political-strategic repositioning, and autonomy negotiations rather than classical coercion⁷⁶. From this perspective, Greenland illustrates a case in which external pressure is largely symbolic and securitizing, and the effective response lies in maintaining diplomatic channels, cooperation formulas, and political control over the militarization of the Arctic space⁷⁷.

Venezuela, on the other hand, represents a typical case of coercive diplomacy based on sanctions, legitimacy challenge and external pressure

⁷² *Idem.*

⁷³ *Idem.*

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁵ NATO, 2022, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Jacobsen, Marc. 2020. "Greenland's Arctic Advantage: Articulations, Acts and Appearances of Sovereignty Games." *Cooperation and Conflict* 55 (2): 170-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719882476>.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*

for political change. In recent analyses, the elements highlighted refer to the fact that the combined sanctions regime has been accompanied by intense disputes over the legitimacy of the actors imposing them, especially when the unilateral instrument is perceived as going beyond the logic of democratic protection and entering the logic of geopolitical pressure⁷⁸. Furthermore, the economic effects of coercion have produced informalization, adaptation, and high social costs, suggesting that coercive diplomacy can greatly erode the socio-economic base that a sustainable political solution should rebuild⁷⁹.

The Iranian file and the dynamics in the Persian Gulf most clearly express the hybrid nature of the relationship between prevention and coercion. The nuclear negotiations have demonstrated that coercive diplomacy can produce results when sanctions and pressure are accompanied by incentives, such as broad coalitions and negotiated exits, as was the case with the P5+1⁸⁰. At the same time, maritime crises and military signaling in the Persian Gulf show that the mobilization of forces and demonstrations of US presence increase the credibility of the threat only when they effectively modify the adversary's strategic calculation, and not when they remain simple symbolic gestures⁸¹. In this scenario, NATO was not the main coercive actor, but its integrated deterrence model remains relevant as a conceptual benchmark for coordination between signaling, defense, and escalation control⁸².

In the case of Israel, a mixed case emerges, in which preventive diplomacy, discreet diplomacy and public diplomacy coexist with intense recourse to military coercion. On the one hand, the literature on "back-channel diplomacy" shows that discreet diplomacy has remained an important tool in Israel's regional relations, including for maintaining sensitive political contacts and avoiding premature exposure of

⁷⁸ Palestini, Stefano, and Yancy Villarroel. 2024. "What Gives You the Right? Foreign Policymakers' Perceptions of the Legitimacy of Sanctions against Democratic Breakdown in Venezuela (2014-2019)." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 37 (5): 665-689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2024.2351847>.

⁷⁹ Bull Benedicte, Antulio Rosales. 2020. „Into the Shadows: Sanctions, Rentierism, and Economic Informalization in Venezuela." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 109: 107-133, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26936905>, available at 22.05.2026.

⁸⁰ Harris, Benjamin. 2021. "Coercive Diplomacy and the Iranian Nuclear Crisis." *International Negotiation* 26 (2): 218-244, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-BJA10008>.

⁸¹ Post Abigail S., Todd S. Sechser. 2024. "Hand-Tying through Military Signals in Crisis Bargaining." *International Studies Quarterly* 68 (2): sqae028. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae028>.

⁸² NATO. 2022, *op. cit.*

negotiations⁸³. On the other hand, the Gaza war showed that, with the intensification of military operations, the emphasis shifted towards strategic justification, war communication and narrative competition, actions that reduced the space for prevention and increased the weight of coercive logic⁸⁴. Thus, Israel shows how quickly preventive diplomacy can be absorbed by military logic when the crisis crosses the threshold of early de-escalation.

Taken together, these cases suggest a useful typology. The Greenland case approaches the model of competitive deterrence, in which strategic tension is managed through institutions, prudent signaling, and the negotiation of autonomy. The Venezuela case illustrates contested economic coercion, with limited political effectiveness and high social costs. As for Iran and the Persian Gulf, they illustrate the mixed model of negotiated coercion, where pressure and dialogue are calibrated simultaneously, while Israel shows the rapid transition from discreet diplomatic channels to the dominance of coercion and wartime communication.

Analyzing the role of the US and NATO, it can be concluded that Washington appears in these files mainly as an actor of obligation, while NATO acts mainly as a mechanism of deterrence and reassurance, which may explain why coercive diplomacy and preventive diplomacy should also be evaluated according to the institutional architecture that supports them⁸⁵.

6. Possible implications for regional security and for Romania

For Romania, located at the intersection of the Black Sea space, NATO's eastern flank and the European Union's security policy, the main lesson may be this: effective diplomacy cannot be separated from resilience⁸⁶. Preventive diplomacy should be supported by increased analytical capacity, early warning, inter-institutional coordination and solid partnerships with multilateral organizations⁸⁷. In the eastern vicinity,

⁸³ Jones Peter. 2024. „An Increasingly Corrosive Expedient? Israel's Evolving Relationship with Back-Channel Diplomacy." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 51 (4): 695-710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2022.2156846>.

⁸⁴ Hlihor Ecaterina. 2024. "Public Diplomacy in Time of War. Israel's War on Gaza Case Study." *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov. Series VII: Social Sciences • Law* 17 (66), no. 1: 71-84. <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2024.17.66.1.13>.

⁸⁵ NATO. 2022, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ Council of the European Union. 2022. „A Strategic Compass for a Stronger EU Security and Defence in the Next Decade." 21 March 2022, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>, accessed on 23.05.2026.

⁸⁷ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9, A New Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015374>, accessed on 23.05.2026

prevention also means anticipating hybrid escalations, energy pressures, information warfare, and incidents with military potential⁸⁸.

At the same time, Romania has a strategic interest in supporting forms of coercive diplomacy strictly anchored in international law, allied coordination and precise political objectives⁸⁹.

Sanctions, diplomatic isolation or collective pressure can only be useful when integrated into a broader strategy of deterrence, defense and negotiation⁹⁰. For the Romanian military environment, this conclusion has direct relevance: the study of coercion is an integral part of the study of strategic signaling, crisis communication and the limits of the use of force⁹¹.

Regarding strategic culture in a deteriorating security environment, states on the contact line of geopolitical competition must avoid two extremes: the illusion that dialogue alone can stop any aggression and the symmetrical illusion that pressure alone can produce peace⁹². Under these conditions, a mature position combines defensive firmness with diplomatic openness, legal legitimacy with strategic clarity, and solidarity allied with regional initiative⁹³.

Regarding the implications for Romania in the context of the eastern flank and the Bucharest 9 format, we can state that, from an institutional and strategic point of view, we can trace the relationship between the military instrument, diplomacy and defense planning in a strategic border space. Thus, within the B9, Bulgaria and Romania represent the Pontic dimension of the eastern flank, and the group's agenda was focused on resilience, solidarity, increased defense spending and the assessment of the Russian threat⁹⁴.

In the opinion of some authors, the Bucharest 9 format emerged as a response to the growing insecurity in Eastern Europe and as an attempt to transform the concerns of the states in the region into a stronger voice within NATO⁹⁵. In the same register, other authors treat B9 as a strategic

⁸⁸ NATO, 2022, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁰ Peksen Dursun, Jin Mun Jeong. 2022, „Coercive Diplomacy and Economic Sanctions Reciprocity: Explaining Targets' Counter-Sanctions." *Defence and Peace Economics* 33 (8): 895-911. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2021.1919831>.

⁹¹ Blankenship Brian, Erik Lin-Greenberg. 2022. "Trivial Tripwires? Military Capabilities and Alliance Reassurance." *Security Studies* 31 (1): 92-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2038662>.

⁹² Verbeke Johan, 2023, *op. cit.*

⁹³ NATO 2022. *op.cit.*

⁹⁴ Turchyn Yaryna, Olha Ivasechko. 2022. „Challenges for Cooperation of the Participating States in the Bucharest Nine Format in the Conditions of the Evolution of Security Threats on NATO's Eastern Borders." *SHV* 8 (1): 7-12. <https://doi.org/10.23939/shv2022.01.007>.

⁹⁵ Vaida Ovidiu. 2022. „The Bucharest 9 Format Between Rational Ambitious Goals and Real Influence." *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Studia Europaea* 67 (2): 183-197. <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbeuropaea.2022.2.07>.

deterrence mechanism on the eastern flank, relevant for strengthening the defense posture and for regional adaptation to the Russian threat.⁹⁶

The joint declaration of the B9 Summit and the Nordic Allies in Bucharest, of 13 May 2026, confirms the expansion of the strategic framework of the Eastern flank from the regional logic of deterrence towards an integrated vision, which explicitly links the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea and the Nordic and Arctic space. The document reaffirms that Russia remains the main direct and lasting threat to Allied security and supports the need to consolidate a robust advanced defense posture, by increasing defense investments, strengthening military mobility, developing air and missile defense, protecting critical infrastructures and expanding the transatlantic defense industrial base. For Romania, these conclusions are relevant because they reconfirm the strategic centrality of the Black Sea region and strengthen Bucharest's role as an actor articulating between the Pontic and North-Eastern dimensions of Euro-Atlantic security. At the same time, the reaffirmation of support for Ukraine and the deepening of NATO-EU cooperation indicate that the B9 is increasingly functioning as a platform for strategic convergence, even if the reservation formulated by Hungary shows that this convergence is not without political limits.

For Romania, the implications are clear: preventive diplomacy must be connected to early warning, maritime security, air defense, strategic infrastructure, military mobility and strategic communication; and coercive diplomacy must be thought of in terms of contributing to allied deterrence, not of isolated action⁹⁷.

7. Conclusions

Regarding preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy, they express two distinct logics of international action: the logic of anticipation and the logic of pressure⁹⁸. In a world marked by the increase in the number and intensity of conflicts, preventive diplomacy remains the most rational strategic option, and coercive diplomacy can only be justified as a limited, proportionate and de-escalation-oriented instrument⁹⁹. Recent experiences show that prevention is fragile without political will, but also that coercion

⁹⁶ Banasik Mirosław. 2021. „Bucharest Nine in the Process of Strategic Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank." *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies* 1: 27-53. <https://doi.org/10.12775/CJPS.2021.002>.

⁹⁷ Idem.

⁹⁸ Ramcharan Bertrand G. 2020. *Contemporary Preventive Diplomacy*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Preventive-Diplomacy/Ramcharan/p/book/9780367492342>, accessed on 24.05.2026.

⁹⁹ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9, A New Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015374>, accessed on 24.05.2026.

is ineffective when objectives are maximalist, signals are unreliable or a negotiated outcome is lacking¹⁰⁰.

In military terms, the fundamental correlation between preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy is that both depend on the same strategic power base, but use it differently¹⁰¹. The first transforms capability into trust, stability, and diplomatic time; the second transforms capability into pressure, cost, and a signal of resolve¹⁰². For this reason, for states like Romania, located at the intersection of the eastern flank, the Black Sea and the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, future diplomatic efficiency will depend on the ability to integrate strategic thinking, defense diplomacy and military training into a unitary framework¹⁰³.

Therefore, the real alternative is not between preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy, but between their intelligent use and their defective use.

We believe that, in the century of interconnected conflicts, success will not belong to actors who multiply threats, but to those who manage to combine prevention, legitimacy and limited pressure in a coherent security architecture¹⁰⁴. In this sense, we note that diplomacy is not the opposite of power, but its most responsible form¹⁰⁵.



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¹⁰⁰ Barber Rebecca. 2023. „The Case for UN-Supported, ASEAN-Led Negotiations on Myanmar." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 77 (3): 325-332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2023.2197283>.

¹⁰¹ NATO, 2022, *op. cit.*

¹⁰² Ramcharan, 2020, *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Chang Jun Yan, Nicole Jenne. 2020. „Velvet Fists: The Paradox of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia." *European Journal of International Security* 5 (3): 332-349. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2020.16>.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9, A New Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations, available at <https://-digitalibrary.un.org/-record/4015374>, accessed on 25.05.2026.

¹⁰⁵ Verbeke Johan. 2023, *Diplomacy in Practice: A Critical Approach*. London and New York: Routledge, available at <https://www.routledge.com/Diplomacy-in-Practice-A-Critical-Approach/Verbeke/p/book/9781032287089>, accessed on 25.05.2026.

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