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#### Backing away from NATO send a signal of abandonment to frontline states in other regions, sparking conflict in the Middle East and Asia

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Unaddressed anxiety among exposed NATO member states of North Central Europe is ultimately unhealthy for the United States, the Atlantic Alliance and European integration.

1. Insecurity in Central Europe fuels division in NATO and the EU. A perception emerged following the Bush Administration that enhanced U.S. security investments in Central Europe would exacerbate divisions in Europe by perpetuating special bilateralism within the Alliance. In fact, the opposite may be true: It is the absence of a convincing security guarantee in Central Europe that may act as the greatest stimulus to intra-European strategic divergence and political disunity. EU Member States whose basic security needs are satisfied possess the confidence to invest in the “normal” politics of integration. Members lacking this assurance are more likely to focus exclusively on the pursuit of hard power guarantees. The less these needs are met, the louder the vulnerable members will likely become, thereby highlighting their strategic dissimilarities with more secure members and reinforcing their sense of political exclusion.

2. Insecure allies are less likely to support U.S. and NATO military missions. On a per-capita basis, Poland, the Czech Republic and their Central European neighbors have been some of the most generous contributors to U.S. and NATO out-of-area operations. They were among the first to respond to the winter 2009 U.S. surge with pledges of reinforcements and currently have 5,900 troops in Afghanistan. These and other contributions have definitively refuted claims made during the 1990s NATO enlargement debates that these states would be net consumers of, and not contributors to, U.S. global security. With changes in the regional security landscape, the perceived need for territorial defense has increased. Unless this need is met preemptively, in an Alliance context, exposed states may be tempted to over-invest in traditional defense capabilities at the expense of out-of-area assets and training, thereby potentially depriving the United States and NATO of support in future crises.

3. Insecure allies are more likely to pursue assertive regional policies. In the absence of convincing security assurances, North Central European states could be tempted to pursue bolder foreign and defense policies – both as a form of strategic self-help and to attract attention to regional issues within the Alliance. Evidence of this tendency can arguably be seen in the 2008 Sikorski Doctrine as a Polish corrective and corollary to the Medvedev Doctrine. NATO member states should not feel compelled to invest in preventive self-help strategies, which may be viewed as provocative in Moscow, resulting in an assertive regional stance which in turn fuels deeper anxieties in Poland and the Baltic States.

4. Insecure allies are poor role models. Developments among the new EU Member States of Central Europe are closely monitored by former Communist states further east, politically, economically and in security. The robustness of U.S., NATO and EU security commitments to, and reciprocal trust from, the countries of Central Europe is widely viewed as a barometer for the health and credibility of the West in the post-Soviet space, irrespective of these countries’ aspirations for NATO membership. If security linkages are perceived as weak or fraying, political elites in the East are less likely to risk pro-democratic Western policy agendas.

5. Insecurity in Central Europe fuels insecurity among geopolitically-exposed U.S. allies in other regions. North Central Europe is not the only region where small and mid-sized U.S. allies sit atop a regional fault line in close proximity to a historical aggressor state or potential revisionist power center. Exposed states in global hinge points such as the Middle East and East Asia closely monitor Washington’s security relationships in Central and Eastern Europe for cues on the future reliability of the U.S. security link to their own neighborhood. Should these states perceive a trend toward U.S. global retrenchment, they could re-evaluate their own strategic options, creating conditions that with time could contribute to the gradual reactivation of old regional security dilemmas.

#### The radiating signal of allied retrenchment sparks conflict in every region that metastasizes to great power nuclear war

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America’s deprioritization of allies creates opportunities for revisionist powers. Such transition is recurrent in geopolitics; international relations are always characterized by uncertainty. Policy makers have to navigate a landscape that is often difficult to delineate, full of strategic actors whose purposes are often obscure and whose power is difficult to assess. Intentions are notoriously hard to divine, in part because rival states obfuscate them but in part because often the states themselves do not have a clear and consistent perception of what they want to achieve. Uncertainty arises also out of a more quantifiable source of knowledge, an assessment of hard power, which is imperfect and results in widely different estimates. It is sufficient to recall the challenges of assessing Soviet power throughout the Cold War.

Moments characterized by alleged large shifts in relative power present particularly acute problems of assessing power and intentions, adding an additional layer of ambiguity and uncertainty. Rumors of change put in doubt the relatively well- known, or at least familiar, geopolitical situation. All parties involved are unsure about their position relative to the others, the extent of their political sway, and the match between their commitments and their power. The established great powers may have a crisis of confidence, while emboldened rising states are uncertain how far their influence extends as well as how solid and credible is the power reach of their weakening rival. Revisionist powers now openly but cautiously question what was the grudgingly accepted geopolitical status quo.

Rising powers are thus curious but careful. They are interested in pushing the existing boundaries of their influence but do not know how far they can do so without meeting a firm opposition of the other power. In the current case, U.S. rivals— China, Russia, and Iran— appear keen to assert their influence and establish what they deem their rightful position in their respective regions and in the world but are also eager to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States. Uncertain about their own power relative to the United States, they test the hypothesis of a growing American economic and military fragility and decaying political reach. To figure out the new map of power, and possibly to redraw it at low cost, revisionist powers engage in probing.

In this chapter we examine this behavior— the probing by revisionist powers. We define probing as a low- intensity and low- risk test aimed at gauging the opposing state’s power and will to maintain security and influence over a region. It is a set of actions that studiously avoids a direct military confrontation with the leading power by targeting the outer limits of its commitments and interests. There, along the outer rim of its influence, the hegemon is at the furthest of its commitments and power projection. The perception, or rather the suspicion, of its decline is most consequential along these frontiers of power because the revisionist state senses opportunities in its own neighborhood and searches for confirmation of the rival’s weakness.

Probing is an opportunistic behavior. It occurs when the revisionist states detect a permissive international situation, namely, when they think that the existing great power is retreating. It is still a behavior that is characterized by self- doubt and uncertainty, although if unanswered it results in the confirmation of the belief in the rival’s decline and may lead to ever more assertive challenges to the international order and expansions of influence by the geopolitical challenger.

Over the past few years, and with greater frequency and brazenness, regional powers opposed to the United States have been engaging in probing. Russia, Iran, and China in their respective regions have been working under the hypothesis that the United States is retreating, out of choice, fatigue, or weakness, or all three combined. The American retrenchment is more pronounced in the Middle East, with the ending of U.S. combat presence in Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan as well as the unwillingness to intervene in Syria, leaving a vacuum for Iranian influence. But there is an equally pervasive perception of American withdrawal or decline in the other two key regions, Europe and Asia. In Europe, the perception is that Washington is redirecting its strategic focus and resources toward Asia and has limited willpower to back its extended deterrent, giving Moscow a window of opportunity to redraw the map in Europe’s eastern “borderlands. ” And in Asia, a rising and confident China looks at a United States hobbled by financial crises, fiscal imbalances, and a decade- long military overstretch in the Middle East. The reasons are different, but the broad perception is similar: the revisionist states sense an opening left by a distracted and weakening United States. And they probe along the periphery of American influence, from Ukraine to the South China Sea through the Persian Gulf.

ORIGINS OF PROBING BEHAVIOR

Probing stems out of a tentative belief that the existing geopolitical order is amenable to change, and it seeks to confirm this suspicion. A perceived geopolitical change remains only that, perceived, until facts on the ground confirm it. An assessment of a state’s power is merely an estimate of how that state may fare in a clash with others. As such, it informs a set of expectations for the future, and it may or may not reflect reality. Often there is little agreement among powers as well as within those powers as to which assessment of power is correct.1 Today, for instance, questions about the continued resilience of American power abound both abroad and in the United States, and there are analysts on both sides of the argument.2 Regardless of where one stands on the issue of American relative decline or retrenchment, the mere existence of such a debate is a source of concern because it points to an absence of clarity on the geopolitical scene. The various strategic actors no longer know where they stand on the international pecking order and are confused as to how far their own influence can reach and what the responses of their rivals may be.3 These are periods of a tense peace but also of great uncertainty about the nature of the security environment. As a scholar put it, it is the “fog of peace” that makes strategic planning more difficult because it is unclear who the enemy is, how much power a potential rival may have, and where the boundaries of political influence are.4 As history indicates, often such an uncertain strategic environment degenerates into war, which is a “dispute about the measurement of power. ”5

The outcome of a war is the violent clarification of such confusion. It settles the dispute about the assessment of power. A victory or defeat in war, followed by changes in boundaries, military bases, or political affiliations of governments, is one way to prove or disprove a perceived alteration in relative power. As British historian A.J.P. Taylor observed, the “test of a Great Power is . . . the test of strength for war. ”6 After its defeat in the 1853– 1856 Crimean War, Russia was clearly militarily inferior to European states (even though the victorious powers, Britain, France, Turkey, and later Austria, also encountered serious difficulties in projecting power to the Black Sea theater) and consciously chose to retreat, reform, and rebuild its foundations of power, known as a policy of recueillement, in order to maintain its status as a European great power.7 There is no clearer confirmation of a state’s decline than a loss in a direct confrontation with a rising power; there is equally no better proof that the perception of relative decline was incorrect when the aspirant revisionist state is soundly defeated. In the immediate aftermath of a war it is therefore easier to assess one’s own power relative to that of the other players. War lifts the “fog of peace. ”

But war is rarely pursued simply to clarify one’s own uncertain standing relative to the other strategic actors. To engage in war, the ultimate test of power, is exceedingly dangerous, and no leader wants to enter into a violent conflict simply as a way of assessing the power of its own state relative to the target. Wars are realms of luck and un knowns as much as of more calculable kinetic clashes, and consequently the outcomes do not always align with the expectations preceding them.8 In fact, the losing party in a conflict has often entered that war having overestimated its own capability relative to the rival. Many in Europe, for instance, expected in summer 1914 to be “home for Christmas, ” only to remain in the bloody trenches for several years. Given this inherent uncertainty, the risk of being proven wrong for both the perceived rising and declining powers is high, and great powers in history seem to stumble into wars rather than consciously pursue them as tests of strength. The risks of war are incalculable and thus extremely high.

A less risky way of assessing a changing equilibrium of power is through probing. This is a form of strategic behavior meant to test existing perceptions of power relations, seeking at the same time to draw the presumably new boundaries of influence. The rising or revisionist state, in particular, is strongly motivated to test the will of its seemingly declining rival power. It has the aspiration, mitigated by the fear of the rival great power, to alter the existing geopolitical map. Such states, unhappy with the existing international order, which they perceive perhaps as imposed on them and certainly as increasingly not reflective of their own rising aspirations and power, have the most to gain from probing. If this behavior confirms the perception that the existing great power is on the wane and that the map drawn by it is no longer supported by its strength and will, the revisionist state may be able to reassert lost influence over its neighborhood and revise a previous settlement. At the same time, such a state has also a strong incentive to avoid a direct clash with its main antagonist lest the perception of its relative weakening turns out not to match reality. A strategy of direct confrontation is risky because its success is predicated on the relative weakness of the targeted power, the existing hegemon, and this is exactly what is unknown. If the probing power becomes convinced that its hypothesis of its own superiority (and of the relative decline of the rival) is true, then a direct clash may occur. But until that confirmation, a safer, less risky course of action is to engage in a probing behavior, akin to testing the water before jumping in. Probes target the frontier of the rival power’s influence, where its interests are less pronounced, its power is at its farthest projection, and its political clout at its weakest. At these outer edges the response of the great power is expected to be most restrained, while the gains of the probing state are most likely to occur.

The purpose of probing, therefore, is to gauge the resolve of the targeted powers. We will return to this later, but here it is important to note that a probing action is also a way of showing the renewed or freshly acquired capabilities and aspirations that otherwise would remain latent and without tangible effects. One cannot revise an established order by keeping one’s own intentions and capabilities hidden.

Showing a new military platform, often in a carefully choreographed event, is one way of signaling growing power. The 1907– 1909 voyage of the American “Great White Fleet, ” meant to showcase the emergent global naval strength of the United States, was one such episode. The round- the- globe cruise was not targeted at a specific power and did not aim to extend American influence over a particular state or region. Rather, it was a broad assertion of American capabilities and global reach, and the other powers, Great Britain in particular, certainly received it as a sign that the United States was a power to be reckoned with.

But probing is more than showing off. It is not simply an action of strutting on the world stage with newly acquired military gadgets and political confidence but a precisely targeted action with clear objectives. Through probing, a revisionist state aims at changing the existing geopolitical order where it thinks it can, namely, at the farthest points of the ruling great power’s influence. Probing, therefore, is not just mere signaling of displeasure with the rules of the international order and the map of power; it aims to revise the order gradually and carefully, starting from the outer layers of the rival great power’s influence.

FEATURES OF PROBING

The purpose of probing is threefold. First, a probing state aims to check whether the rumors of its rival’s weakening are true. A probe is a test, meant to elicit a response from the targeted power. Second, the revisionist state that engages in probing behavior wants to avoid a direct military clash with the existing great power. The risks of being wrong about the rival’s resolve and capability are simply too big. Third, the state’s objective is to achieve, if possible, low- cost revision of the existing regional order.

These purposes can be seen in the features that characterize a probe and distinguish it from other types of behavior, ranging from fullout aggression to commercial pressures and diplomatic démarches. First, probes are low intensity, vigilantly avoiding a direct war with the main rival power. They are below the horizon of direct military confrontation. The revisionist state has no interest in starting an allout military conflict with the rival great power, perhaps declining but still more than a match. The level of violence used, therefore, is low, and probes are limited projections of power in areas of less pronounced interest to the rival. A probing power engages in a lot of selfrestraint; it intentionally elects to keep the use of force at a minimum. It can but chooses not to escalate. A probe is a calculated gamble, not a foolish thrashing around.

The desire to avoid a war with the existing hegemon often leads the revisionist to project power under cover of civilian or paramilitary forces, part of a larger trend of “civilianization” of conflict.9 By using unmarked units to harass a U.S. protégé, a state is able to de ny authorship of provocative actions and thereby avoid a more violent and direct war while at the same time chipping away at the rival’s influence and wealth. The possibility of denying that an aggression has occurred drives costs of revisionism lower. For instance, the sixteenth- century privateer Sir Francis Drake acted on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I, raiding Spanish shipping but never in an official capacity. The queen went so far as to tell a Spanish ambassador that “Drake was a private adventurer, and that she had nothing to object to his alleged execution. ” She was careful in not provoking Spain too much but eager to “singe the King of Spain’s beard. ”10

A similar approach can be seen around the world today. The initial Russian push into Crimea in 2014 was done anonymously with unmarked special forces, dubbed by Ukrainians as the “little green men, ” a clear example of a long- standing Russian practice of tactical deception and disguise (maksirovka).11 It was an indication that Moscow was unsure whether Ukrainian forces would react, and, in the event of a determined opposition, it maintained the option of either escalating with larger conventional forces or halting operations and denying. Moscow seemed to be more careful in masking the identity of its forces in eastern Ukraine, where the local opposition was more assertive and the Western displeasure with Russian aggression more pronounced. The greater the risk of a strong response from the actors targeted, the more carefully tailored, dissimulated, and low- intensity is the probe. The use of unmarked troops and paramilitary forces allows Russia to claim that no aggression has occurred, and thus no military response from Ukraine or from the West is warranted.

China has been testing the limits of the influence of the United States and its allies in the South China Sea using an array of civilianlooking vessels. Its fishing fleet, combined with a fishery- enforcement fleet, is integrated into its military institutions and plays an active role in expanding China’s maritime reach. As Lyle Goldstein observes, this is part of a “strategy of ‘defeating harshness with kindness’ (yi rou ke gang)” whereby China deploys “unarmed fishing vessels or fisheries enforcement vessels to confront foreign vessels operating in its EEZ and claimed waters. ”12 This low- intensity push tests the fron tier of American influence in a way that makes a U.S. response difficult.13 A foray by a Chinese naval vessel into contested waters can be countered with the might of the United States and its ally’s navy; a probe by fishing vessels manned by Chinese fishermen does not warrant the involvement of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. This is risky behavior, but it also indicates a desire by China to avoid a war with the other regional powers as well as with the United States.14

If it is openly a military attack, a probe is conducted with a strong and perhaps warranted belief that the rival power will not intervene because it is distracted elsewhere and because it deems the targeted region to be of little immediate interest. This was the case of the Russian war with Georgia in 2008, when Moscow felt emboldened by NATO ambivalence to extending its membership process to Tbilisi and by the American strategic distraction by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (where a small Georgian contingent was deployed). The Russian gamble was based on the expectation of no meaningful Western, and American in particular, response. The objective was to chip away at the unwelcome Western influence in Russia’s neighborhood but without spurring an equally unwelcome Western military reply— to “singe America’s beard, ” as it were.

Second, a revisionist state engages in probing because it sees it as a low- risk but high- reward behavior. The low risk stems in part from the first feature, the carefully tailored level of aggressiveness that is expected not to elicit a full- out military response by the rival. It is also related to the third feature, explained below, namely, the fact that the immediate target of probing is geographically and political peripheral to the interests of the rival great power, and consequently contributes to the low likelihood of a forceful military response. But on top of being pursued as a low- risk action, a probe can yield high strategic rewards. Most often the revisionist power seems to direct probing behavior to its immediate vicinity, hoping to expand its influence over neighboring and thus more controllable regions.15 It is there that it has the greatest chances of extending its own political shadow successfully. Probes are rarely long- distance projections of power because incursions deep into the rival’s sphere of influence are more liable to be met with more assertive responses as well as being less likely to establish durable control by the probing state. The farther the revisionist state engages in probing behavior, the more high risk and low reward it is, and vice versa. Hence the more likely locations for probing behavior are in the near neighborhood of the revisionist power.

Furthermore, probes focus on strategically important regions, either resource rich or located along lines of communication, or both. Elizabethan England, for example, conducted raiding probes of Spain’s vulnerable transatlantic arteries bringing gold from the New World— not its stronger positions in the Mediterranean. Imperial Germany’s probes of the Anglo- French alliance targeted Morocco, located near the strategically important choke point of Gibraltar but beyond easy reach of the main British fleet. Today China’s probes of U.S. allies in Asia often target oil and gas fields in the South China Sea. In all these cases, since the goal of probing is to test the power and commitment of a rival state, it has to be directed at regions where the rival’s influence is present but not preponderant. It is unlikely that regions of no geostrategic value or with few resources have much of a presence of the rival great power, and as such they are not prime material for probing. A state may still have imperial aspirations in such regions, but not every extension of power is a probe. Probing is not simply grabbing new areas of influence but first and foremost to test the will of the rival. There may be, of course, the bonus that if the probe is successful, it may result in the addition of strategically important regions.

The third feature of probing is that it is peripheral or indirect. The target of the probe is the periphery or the frontier of the tested power where the rival’s presence is at its farthest reach, its interests are less pronounced, and thus its response is expected to be muted. Fearful of a militarily assertive response, the state that is probing is careful not to target areas that are clearly considered of primary and existential interests, such as the rival’s homeland or its immediate neighbors. Hence the visits of Russian or Iranian naval vessels to Venezuelan ports are less a probe per se than an act of grandstanding, since all sides know that the United States could quickly bring overwhelming force to bear in the event of a crisis. These are temporary publicity stunts rather than a calculated attempt to test the hegemon’s commitment to maintaining the status quo.

Probes test for perceived weaknesses, not strengths, and it is on the outer boundaries of the existing great power that its influence is likely to appear the most fragile. The revisionist power is interested in probing the power and influence of its rival in places where that influence is at its weakest, overstretched, and uncertain. During the Peloponnesian War the Spartan general Brasidas adopted such a peripheral strategy, but only a decade into the conflict. The initial Spartan approach of annual invasion of Attica, Athens’s immediate neighborhood, failed to inflict sufficient damage to end the war. It was only with Brasidas, sent north with a small force of helots (minimizing thus the risk to Spartan manpower), that Sparta changed its strategy to one similar to probing, by persuading or forcing distant Athenian allies in Thrace to switch sides. And many did reconsider their allegiance to Athens, because, as Thucydides observes, there did not seem to be much risk given the distance from Athens and their belief that this empire was on the wane.16 Striking the rival’s periphery, and its allies, not only was cheaper than assaulting it directly but also forced it to devote a lot of resources to reasserting the lost influence.

Global powers in particular have a “periphery or frontier problem” that invites probing. A lengthy frontier, distant from the homeland and thus from key logistical bases, is difficult to protect. The sheer amount of power needed to outfit the distant outposts, combined with the uncertainty as to the location and timing of potential attacks, makes it impossible to have an impermeable frontier. When a power assesses threats, the key questions of “where, when, and by whom” are directly related to the length of the imperial frontier. A regional power has well- delimited borders and a clear idea of who the rival is. For instance, from the final decade of the nineteenth century on, Germany was burdened with the possibility of a two- front war, with France on one side and Russia on the other; a serious problem of military planning caused by poor diplomacy but not a source of strategic confusion. For a global power, it is that strategic clarity that is missing, resulting in the need to prepare for multiple contingencies and ultimately to stretch resources in several theaters of potential action.17 While imperial Germany could concentrate on its two- front problem, Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century had to consider threats from Russia (in Central Asia, pushing toward India), Japan (in the Asian littoral sphere), France (in Africa as well as the Mediterranean), and Germany (in Europe and the North Sea in particular). Through deft diplomacy, it managed to neutralize the first three, allowing it to focus on the German naval threat, thereby limiting its “frontier problem. ”

In practice, probing the periphery of a rival’s great power often translates into testing the strength of its alliances. Most great powers, or empires, expand their influence in informal ways, through political arrangements with local elites and formal alliances.18 The security of these great powers, in particular of ones with global reach, therefore resides not only in the safety of their borders but in their ability to hold rivals at a distance and thwart their challenges to faraway interests. They do so only in part through their own forces and rely heavily on the presence of allies that provide additional military strength and local deterrence (see chapter 5). Allies are at the periphery of influence and strength of great powers, and it is there that the powers’ commitment and influence are at their weakest. It is clear that a state will respond to an encroachment on its territorial possessions or to an attack against its forward deployed forces. It is less certain, however, that a state will respond in the same strong fashion to similar actions directed against its allies and their interests. The security guarantee extended to them, the foundation of the alliance, is a promissory note that carries a high degree of uncertainty. Placing bases with troops on the territory of an ally is a time- tested way of diminishing this uncertainty. As Thomas Schelling put it, the role of U.S. troops in South Korea was simply to die, buttressing the American security guarantee to its ally.19 The loss of American soldiers to an initial attack by the enemy would, so the argument goes, create powerful pressures for Washington to respond. French general Ferdinand Foch, when asked before World War I how many British troops would be needed for the security of France, replied, “One single private soldier . . . and we would take good care that he was killed. ”20

Probes by the revisionist power are not attacks against these bases and forces that underwrite the credibility of the extended deterrent. Rather, they target areas that may be of great importance to the ally but not necessarily to the security patron. That is the periphery of the periphery, so to speak, the tip of the great power’s commitment.

The United States has a particularly pronounced “periphery” problem. There are few direct threats to the continental United States, short of a large- scale assault with weapons of mass destruction or the tragic yet relatively small and isolated terrorist attack. While the absence of a contiguous threat is a geopolitical blessing, it also means that most of the menaces to U.S. interests and security are outside of the North American continent. Hence, in the competitive international environment, “the strategic position of the United States rests ultimately on its ability to project power over great distances. ”21 In practice this entails managing alliances that maintain stability and keep U.S. rivals on the defensive in key regions of the world, in particular along an arc from Europe to East Asia through the Middle East. And historically this has been, and continues to be, achieved by extending U.S. deterrence beyond the North American continent to the countries, some allied by treaty and some neutral. Such an extended deterrence is a “ ‘three- nation problem’ involving an aggressor nation, the United States, and some smaller nation which is the object of the aggressor’s designs and which Washington seeks to protect. ”22 Probing by an “aggressor nation” aims to test U.S. commitment to these “smaller nations, ” which constitute the periphery of American interests and power.

In the most successful case, probing could achieve a dual purpose: first, it tests the level and credibility of the commitment of the distant security patron, and second, it can weaken the rival alliance. It does so by targeting the foundation of the alliance, the belief that the alliance is beneficial to both parties and that it is effective. As Michael Mandelbaum has observed, alliances need to manage two concurrent fears: one of entrapment, namely, of being dragged into undesirable wars of limited significance and local interest, and one of abandonment, the apprehension of often the weaker ally of be ing abandoned by its security provider when the need comes. 23 Probing aims to increase the rival’s fear of entrapment while at the same time stoking worries of abandonment among its weaker and more dependent partners. By harassing the local interests of the rival’s peripheral allies, the revisionist power wants to drive up the risk of a local war, perceived by the rival as a distraction and a potential drain of resources. At the same time, it wants to indicate to the smaller allies that they may not rely on their security provider to defend their local, narrow interest, and that they may be abandoned. The goal is to drive a wedge in the opposing alliance by leveraging the fundamental dilemma of alliances— the fears of entrapment and abandonment.

This is where probing becomes more than a simple test of the rival’s strength. By targeting the outer edges of the existing hegemon, and thus harassing its alliance system, the revisionist is engaging in a much more significant endeavor. The contest for regional, or global, control is in the end a contest for allies. A.J.P. Taylor observed that when Germany “was bidding for the domination of Europe” in the decade before the outbreak of World War I, “her chosen method was to isolate the independent Powers one from another. ”24 As we point out in chapter 5, allies are, among other things, an extension of the distant patron’s power. Were they to peel away from the side of their security guarantor— or vice versa, were the security guarantor to decide that the risk of continued support of a distant ally pressured by a regional revisionist power is too big— it would in either case signify a retrenchment of power for that offshore patron. The loss of allies is both a confirmation of the waning sway of that rival great power as well as a further reduction in its reach. To be alone in inter national relations is to be vulnerable, inviting further aggressive behavior from the rival. Walter Lippmann observed in 1943, “No one knew, not Hitler, not Stalin, not Chamberlain or Daladier, the relative strength of the Axis and of the opposing combination. Only when Hitler succeeded at Munich in separating the Franco- British allies from Russia, had he so altered the balance of power in his favor that a war for the conquest of Europe was from his point of view a good risk. ”25 War is an extension of successful probing.

The benefits of targeting allies of a rival, rather than the rival itself, are well recognized in history. The astute observer of history and politics Niccolò Machiavelli noted in his Discourses that attacking a rival’s ally is always a preferred option: “For I know especially that if I assault his friend, either he will resent it and I will have my intention of making war with him, or by not resenting it he will uncover his weakness or faithlessness in not defending a client of his. Both the one and the other of these two things are able to take away his reputation and to make my plans easier . ”26 In the strategic behavior we describe, the probing power is not interested in “making war” with the rival, and therefore a probe is not a full- out attack on a rival’s ally or supported state. The risks of activating the security guarantees or assurances that ought to be at the foundation of that alliance are too big. But it is an offensive act of sorts, which threatens the interests of the rival’s ally. The security patron will either respond, thereby disproving the perception of its weakness, or will not, “taking away his reputation” and undermining its alliance.

China has been particularly astute in picking geographic objectives that are important to U.S. allies but only indirectly important to the United States, such as the shoals and reefs around the Spratly and Paracel Islands. By ratcheting up the pressure in these areas, China causes the targeted states to intensify their demands for American assurance while diminishing U.S. willingness to back allies over seemingly petty issues that could lead to a larger conflict. Americans do not want to risk their lives for insignificant and distant rocks. Russia achieves a similar effect by reigniting NATO’s eastern frontier through its attack on Ukraine and a series of threats against exposed NATO members around the Baltic Sea. Those are areas that until recently have not been prominent on the U.S. strategic radar screen but are naturally vital to those smaller states inhabiting the region, which in turn are driven to make increasingly vocal requests for security reassurances from Washington. As in the case of the South China Sea, however, the local and limited nature of the rival’s probes generates in Washington as much a perception of threat as fear of a larger conflict, raising doubts about the benefits of extending security guarantees to these allies and partners. In the end, these peripheral probes pursued by U.S. rivals can create a wedge between Washington and its regional friends and allies.

These three features— low intensity, low risk but high reward, peripheral— point also to the timing of the probing behavior. Probing is a strategic behavior that arises out of an uncertain assessment of power relations. It is the product of doubt, not confidence, in the resilience of the existing international order. As such it arises early on in the transition of power, when perceptions of rise and decline are not firm. The vagueness of the security environment creates among revisionist powers the perception of opportunities that a probing behavior aims to test. Hence probing should occur with less frequency in the immediate aftermath of a war, when, as we point out, an assessment of relative power carries the weight of the ultimate test, war. A defeated power may have all the incentives to upset the existing order, but unless it has no ability to evaluate its clearly weakened position, it has no capacity to do so. After a defeat probing may be tempting but is unfeasible. Such states are more likely to pursue a policy of recueillement (introspection, a moment of pause and strengthening), characterized by internal reforms, modernization, and very limited foreign engagements mostly aimed at dividing the opposing alliance.27

When, however, the perceived weakening of the founding power puts in doubt the existing international settlement, the desire to revise it is matched by the possibility of doing so. The perception of American weakening, or at least retrenchment, therefore opens up a window of opportunity for those powers that aspire to expand their own influence and resent the Western order and its institutions.

THE AUDIENCES OF PROBING

Another useful way of looking at the strategic behavior of probing is by considering the audiences involved. As we argued, a revisionist power pursues probing behavior to check whether new boundaries of influence are feasible given the perceived weakening of the rival. The main purpose is therefore to elicit a response from the targeted audiences. That response, or lack thereof, supplies information necessary to draw the new outline of the geopolitical map. Probing is first and foremost a violent and risky didactic exercise.

The most direct audience is the immediate target of the probing behavior, usually an ally, or an aspirant to be an ally, of the rival great power. Probing here seeks to gauge the willingness and capacity of the targeted state to withstand pressure, and ultimately it aims to push that state to sever itself from its security patron. As we examine in chapter 4, vulnerable frontier allies of a great power actively consider alternative strategic options, especially when they perceive themselves to be under threat from a neighboring revisionist pow er and to have a fraying security guarantee from a distant patron. A probe is meant to ratchet up the threat perception while also attempting to establish a sense of strategic isolation and separation from the security provider.

Hence as important as, if not more important than, the first audience is the second one: the distant but more powerful ally and security provider. Probing tests indirectly the regional staying power of the rival hegemon. While carefully avoiding direct confrontation, the revisionist power wants to assess the commitment of the opposing great power to its ally in the near neighborhood. What the revisionist is testing, therefore, is not the rival’s resolve to oppose other great powers, but the rival’s reliability to its own allies.28 Resolve is the willingness to risk war to achieve one’s own objectives: the more diffuse and distant the threatened interests, the less the resolve. Given that the target of probes is peripheral and not the rival’s homeland or troops and bases, the resolve is assumed to be small. Direct war between the revisionist probing state and the rival great power is unlike ly to erupt as a result. Moreover, the probing state is not interested in finding out whether the rival has the will to fight a direct war: the stakes would be simply too high and the outcome too uncertain. A direct challenge would test the resolve of the rival. Poking around the periphery, therefore, is a poor test of the rival’s willingness to fight a war. History seems to confirm this. For instance, as scholars have pointed out, Soviet leaders did not think that U.S. responses to peripheral threats (e.g., in the Third World) could serve as indicators of future American behavior when its core interests (NATO allies, Japan, or the U.S. homeland) were threatened.29 Whether the United States responded militarily or not to a Soviet foray in Angola or Ethiopia could not be easily translated into expectations of future American behavior in Europe. But it does affect the perception of whether the United States wants to fight in other peripheral areas. “If Soviet leaders were to gain the impression that the United States is firmly set upon a course of neo- isolationism and the absolute avoidance of intervention in local wars, they might become dangerously adventurous in the Middle East and elsewhere. ”30

Probing, however, tests the reliability of the rival great power— that is, its willingness to protect and stand by its ally or aspiring allies. The immediate target is not a test of the rival’s general credibility but only of its commitment to the security ties to the state. Probing wants to elicit a response (or lack thereof) from the rival great power regarding the seriousness of its commitment to the directly targeted state. To be perceived as a reliable ally means to instill the belief that promised security guarantees will hold even in cases of heightened tensions and, in final analysis, of conflict. Consequently a perception of low reliability results in the belief that the alliance is fragile and that it may be in the small state’s interest to seek accommodation with the nearby revisionist power. As delineated above, probes are care fully tailored to split the distant security patron from its regional allies, showing it to be unreliable.

Even if it achieves nothing else, probing can introduce doubts about the security guarantees, forcing the security patron to renew its promises. The less reliable the security patron is perceived by its allies, the more insistent are their demands for continued security guarantees. Probing thus imposes an immediate cost on the rival great power by reactivating a frontier region that until then was dormant and by pressing the rival to expend more resources and political capital to reassert its security guarantees.

Finally, the third audience is composed of the geopolitical onlookers, states that are watching the behavior and derive their own conclusions about the resilience of the existing great power. The strategic interaction spurred by a probe does not directly affect them, but they perceive it as a regionally circumscribed development with potentially more global repercussions. That is, a probe is limited to a specific region but has radiating effects as others also see it for what it really is: a test of the resilience and reliability of the great power that may be analogous in other regions.

Recent academic literature puts in doubt the idea that reputation for commitment is interdependent. Thomas Schelling, among others, articulated that idea in his classic work from 1966 where he argued that U.S. reputation was global, and a loss in one region would have negative impact in other areas. Reputation was not compartmentalized in different regions, in large measure because the rival, the Soviet Union, was one and the same across the world map. Hence “we tell the Soviets that we have to react here because, if we did not, they would not believe us when we say that we will react there. ”31 Academics have relentlessly questioned this argument, resulting in copious writings asserting that reputation is not interdependent and, according to some, does not even matter.32 Reputation is merely a cult and does not exist in international relations.33 Policy makers, however, disagree and continue to speak of reputation for resolve and reliability as something that not only matters and requires constant work but also is interdependent. They prefer to rely on time- tested authors, from Thucydides to Machiavelli, who consider reputation as indispensable to political power.34 In brief, there is a deep gap between academics and policy makers on the issue of reputation.

By observing recent events in the three frontier regions— Central Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia— we think that the truth is closer to Schelling’s view. It is clear that the effects of probing behavior do not remain confined to the immediate actors involved (the probing power, the direct target— usually a rival’s ally— and the rival great power). Other actors in the region are keenly aware of the revisionist state’s probing and of the responses of the United States. For instance, other states, from the Baltics to Poland and Ukraine, observed Russia’s war against Georgia in 2008 and its invasion of Crimea in 2014 with great trepidation.35 These wars were symptoms of a more assertive Russia; a source of worry in themselves. But they were also meant to elicit an answer from the United States. Any sign of American hesitation to respond quickly and firmly to Russian small wars in the two states was perceived as affecting directly these other states, not directly involved in the probing event. America’s reputation for reliability, in other words, was at stake, even though Georgia and Ukraine were not NATO members but only aspiring to closer security and political relations with the United States and the EU. Similarly, Pacific nations from Japan to Australia follow with great attention China’s probing behavior in the South China Sea that puts pressure on Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan. They too seek to figure out whether the United States has the will to remain as a security provider in this region and to the “global commons” in general. How the United States responds to a probe in a particular region therefore affects its regional image.

The question is whether there is also a wider, global audience to regional probes. Do Middle Eastern leaders watch American responses to Russia’s probing in Eastern Europe? Do Kremlin elites draw lessons from U.S. actions along the “first chain of islands” in East Asia? Or, do Chinese neo- Mahanian leaders think the United States is on the wane if it accommodates Putin’s imperial fantasies? According to the latest academic literature, the answer should be negative: how the United States is perceived to be doing in one region does not translate into a similar perception elsewhere. The practical implication of such a view is that the United States should not have fought in Vietnam to prove that it would stand its ground in Europe; similarly, it ought not to oppose Putin around the Black Sea basin simply to demonstrate that it will oppose China in the South China Sea. But we are not so confident that there are no connections between regional demonstrations of will and power. It is at least plausible, and perhaps safer, to argue that there are wider, global effects of probing. First, the world is indeed global, and regions are not hermetically separated from each other. As Nicholas Spykman observed, “Global war, as well as global peace, means that all fronts and all areas are interrelated. No matter how remote they are from each other, success or failure in one will have an immediate and determining effect on the others. It is necessary, therefore, to see the world as a whole and to weigh the measures taken to achieve victory in the light of conditions in all theaters. ”36 Leaders watch and learn from other regions, more than previously in history when conflicts were limited by technology and geographic knowledge to a contiguous region. Because of their domestic opacity, it is difficult to prove that America’s rivals learn from U.S. behavior in other regions, but the question whether they do so needs to be asked. Chinese military officials, for example, have commented publicly on lessons for China from the U.S. handling of the war in Ukraine.37 As one analyst noted, “It might be impossible to determine definitively whether the Ukraine Crisis has impacted China’s risk calculus in hotspots such as the South and East China Sea, but the evidence . . . certainly suggests that such eastern reverberations are quite plausible. ”38 At a minimum we have to recognize that some cross- regional analyses do occur, and it is safer to assume that the U.S. reputation does not stay limited to a region.

Second, the much stronger effect of probing appears to be on U.S. allies and friends, the key geopolitical spectators. They watch how the United States treats other allies and form an opinion regarding American reliability. The former director of Saudi intelligence summed up the view of many officials from U.S. allied states in the Persian Gulf when he said in reaction to the Russian seizure of Crimea, “While the wolf is eating the sheep, there is no shepherd to come to the rescue. ”39 Israel was interested in the war in Georgia; Japanese analysts followed the Obama administration’s decision to cancel the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) program in Central Europe; and Polish experts watch U.S. moves in East Asia.40 The probing by revisionist states is first and foremost an attempt to test the strength of their rival’s commitment to its allies and friends. In sum, probing behavior by revisionist states targets these specific audiences in order to elicit responses from them. The goal is to figure out whether and how to draw the new map of power. And it puts the burden on the targeted audiences: their responses determine whether the probe is successful.

EVALUATION OF PROBING: SUCCESS OR FAILURE

From the perspective of the revisionist power that engages in probing, whether a probe has achieved its objectives determines its success or failure. The minimum objective of the probing state is to measure the rival’s staying power in its neighboring region, an objective that is achieved whether the targeted powers respond or not, but it is difficult to interpret. The targeted rival may be tempted to ignore the probe not out of a sense of its own weakness but in the belief that ignoring the test will send a signal of strategic insouciance from its pedestal of power. Also, because of the local and limited nature of a probe, directly involving only the regional actors, it is tempting for the distant security provider to leave the response to its allies and friends. A direct and strong intervention by the offshore patron would escalate the interaction, raising the chances of a larger war, an outcome that neither party desires. But the shrewdness of a probing strategy is that it puts the targeted rival power in the position of having either to escalate the tensions in order to respond or to choose a less confrontational approach but one that risks weakening its alliances. The response to the probe, not the probe itself, is perceived as a potential cause of war. This creates strong disincentives for the tested great power to react by opposing the revisionist state’s probe in a direct and forceful way, or to respond at all. For instance, in the case of China’s probing actions in the South China Sea, the Obama administration’s approach seems to have been to accommodate Beijing, acknowledging a decline in U.S. naval capabilities and welcoming a greater Chinese role in providing security to the global commons.41 Similarly, after Russia’s takeover of Crimea, Washington’s first response was to turn the episode into a strictly regional affair. As President Obama put it in February 2014, “Any violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity would be deeply destabilizing, which is not in the interest of Ukraine, Russia, or Europe, ” tellingly not including the United States in the list of the affected parties.42

The problem is that the temptation of the existing great power to either ignore or regionalize the tension stemming from the revisionist state’s probes— an attempt to de- escalate the strategic interaction— also constitutes a response. It may, however, be one that serves for the revisionist power as a confirmation of its initial suspicion that the rival’s commitment to the region was on the wane. An unanswered— ignored or regionalized— probe is an indication that the existing map of power is open to revisions. Another way to put this is that a probe is a question of sorts: does the existing hegemon have the will and capacity to oppose the revisionist power? An attempt to dismiss the question or to let allies respond to it is a tacit admission by the tested great power that its interest in maintaining a strong foothold and influence in the region is in decline. Silence in response to a probe is telling. Probing, therefore, always elicits some sort of answer, and in this narrow sense it is a success.

The purpose of a probe is also to attain a secondary, albeit crucial, goal of beginning to redraw the map of influence without generating counterbalancing pressures from the tested great power and its allies. The most successful probe would be one that pushes the targeted small states and other regional spectators closer to the revisionist power (or at least convinces them to distance themselves from their existing security patron, the rival great power) while at the same time convincing the rival great power that it is too costly to maintain its political influence and provide security in the region. Hence the probe needs to be evaluated on what it achieves in the three audiences: the directly targeted neighboring small state, the distant security patron, and the geopolitical onlookers (in particular other states in the region). The success or failure of a revisionist state’s probe depends on the actions by these three groups, and, arguably, it can attain partial success by achieving a revision of the status quo in one audience but not the other.

For instance, a probe can succeed in extending the revisionist power’s influence over the immediate target, the ally or would- be ally of the rival, but at the same time it may generate more vigorous efforts by regional onlookers to counterbalance it through a variety of strategies, ranging from military modernization to tighter defense cooperation with the distant security patron. This seems to be the case for Russia’s takeover of Crimea. Moscow quickly conquered Crimea and destabilized Ukraine’s easternmost oblast, successfully demonstrating its ability and willingness to use force to achieve limited territorial adjustments. While Kiev maintains its political independence, it has also been shown to be weak and unable to oppose Russian pressures. The quasi– civil war in the eastern regions and Russia’s conquest of Crimea make Ukraine an unlikely candidate for a closer relationship with the EU and NATO, even if Ukrainian political elites and public opinion may continue to be in favor of it. Russia’s probe, in the form of its intervention in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, has thus been successful in neutering the westward drift of Kiev. The EU, and in particular states such as France and Germany, have now an even smaller desire to bring Ukraine closer, as it is deemed too dangerous and risky; Ukraine is not worth losing business deals with Russia, not to mention starting a war with Russia.

The Ukraine War has also damaged American credibility in the region. Washington after all had given assurances (not “guarantees, ” which are reserved for NATO members) to the Ukrainian government in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. This is undoubtedly a Russian success. But there are also other consequences of Russia’s probing, unintended and unwelcome by Moscow. Some states in the Central European region, in particular Poland and the Baltic states, have awakened from the geopolitical vacation of the past two decades. The 1990s and the 2000s were characterized by a widespread sense that threats to the territorial security of the region were minimal, and most of the strategic focus was on economic cooperation with the EU and on keeping in the good graces of the United States through participation in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is over, at least in part. While strengthening the EU continues to be a priority in Central European capitals, there is simply no more interest in “out- of- area” operations, which drain resources and time from territorial defense. From this perspective, Russian probes have altered the geostrategic outlook of some Central European states. The eastern frontier is what really matters to them now, as their threat assessment has changed. Russia, in other words, has reached an upper threshold in its probes, creating a backlash among some of the states in the region, which are pursuing diplomatic counterbalancing and defense modernization. They are also calling for more visible and permanent NATO (and in particular, U.S.) security presence on their territories to shore up the extended deterrent against Russia.

It appears therefore that Russia is less successful than the other revisionist power, China. Moscow is less subtle in its probes, choosing dramatic military interventions (Georgia and Crimea) that generate growing fear and opposition among some European states as well as the United States. In part Moscow’s more aggressive behavior is a result of a Russian assessment of the weakness and divisions of the West. But in part the seeming Russian rush to restore influence over its “near neighborhood” is due to internal demographic, economic, and political problems. The growing weakness of Russia, a great power more by courtesy and by nuclear weapons than by economic and political strength, gives little time to Putin to shore up his country’s position facing China’s rapid economic growth and Europe’s political appeal. It is a short- term approach of large probes, and it may be successful only by extending influence over its most immediate nearby target.43

China, on the other hand, may have a different time frame, allowing it to probe in a much more indirect and less violent way, though this could change in the months ahead. It is therefore more careful and guarded, pursuing a long- term strategy of small probes over, quite literally, small rocks in the South China Sea. The U.S. “pivot” or “rebalancing” to Asia makes American presence and resolve more pronounced, increasing the doubt of a U.S. retrenchment and thus, from China’s perspective, the need to be cautious in testing the limits of American influence and commitment. Moreover, the counterbalancing efforts of regional onlookers, from Japan to the Philippines and Vietnam, are increasing in intensity, in both the rhetoric used and the arms buildup. Similarly, unlike Russia in Crimea, Beijing has not succeeded in extending its direct control over a large piece of real estate. But in the end it may be more successful, because it is establishing a gradual change in the map of power, visible only after a decade- long period. Through its probes, China is pursuing a classic example of “salami tactics. ” As Thomas Schelling describes them, “If there is no sharp qualitative division between a minor transgression and a major affront, but a continuous gradation of activity, one can begin his intrusion on a scale too small to provoke a reaction, and increase it by imperceptible degrees, never quite presenting a sud den, dramatic challenge that would invoke the committed response. ”44 Many small probes into areas of contested influence do not individually invite a strong response, but they erode steadily the perception and in the end the reality of the opponent’s influence.

Moreover, a continuing sequence of gradual probes signals the seriousness of the revisionist’s intent to alter the status quo. In the mind of the hegemon, the steady drumbeat of low- intensity and peripheral incidents creates the impression that the revisionist both has special claims for and may someday be willing to fight over a particular piece of real estate. These claims are often backed up by legal, historical, or ethnic justifications and a creeping physical presence— in Ukraine, Russian forces and equipment; in the South China Sea, artificially created reefs. Over time, this places the onus of a response on the shoulders of the hegemon and its allies in the region for why the status quo should be maintained. For a weary hegemon like the United States today, probes communicate that the act of supporting the regional status quo is no longer cost free but will require a level of exertion that was not needed in the past, inevitably leading to questions of whether such effort and resulting escalation are worthwhile.

Nonetheless, it is certainly possible to see failed instances of probing, which achieve the opposite of the revisionist power’s intentions. The historic scorecard of probing states is mixed. A clear failure of probing would be if the targeted regional states and offshore security patron responded strongly, tightening their alliance and even initiating a direct war. This is an unintended consequence of a probe and can take several forms, from a tightening of alliances countering the revisionist power to increased military contingency planning and rearming. In the worst- case scenario, it results in a combination of actions that counterbalance the revisionist state more effectively and forcefully than before the probing behavior started. The revisionist state did not want nor expect this response before engaging in probing. It amounts to a disconfirmation of the initial hypothesis that the rival great power is in decline and retreat, and in the end it worsens the strategic position of the probing state.

The biggest loser may thus be the probing power, which puts in motion a series of strategic interactions that undermine its own strength. This was the case of Germany in the early twentieth century. Kaiser Wilhelm’s visit to Tangier in 1905 initiated the first Moroccan crisis, manufactured by Berlin to, among other objectives, probe the strength of the brand new and untested Franco- British Entente Cordiale. 45 By challenging French interests in Morocco in a nonviolent way, Berlin wanted to pressure Paris, “the weakest link in the surrounding chain” of states opposing Germany.46 But it desired to do that in an area and in a way that were expected not to draw Great Britain into a direct confrontation, so that Germany could demonstrate to Paris that the entente was in effect useless. Morocco was important to France but not to Great Britain, and the German Foreign Office expected that London would not back Paris. Great Britain after all was also seen as retrenching after a bloody war with the Boers and unable and unwilling to project power on land to guarantee the security of its French quasi- ally. As Friedrich von Holstein put it, the French would seek a rapprochement with Germany, in effect bandwagoning, “when they have seen that English friendship . . . is not enough to gain Germany’s agreement to the French seizure of Morocco, but rather that Germany wishes to be loved on its own account. ”47 Germany, however, greatly miscalculated the British need for a continental ally and resulting commitment to France. The Moroccan crisis was resolved in a multilateral conference in Algeciras where Berlin ended in a position that was considerably worse than before the crisis: its only support was from the weak Austro- Hungarian Empire, while London was firmly and actively on the side of Paris. Instead of weakening the nascent strategic friendship between Britain and France, “German bullying” strengthened it.48 From then on, the “European Balance of Power, which had been ignored for forty years, again dominated British foreign policy; and henceforth every German move was interpreted as a bid for continental hegemony. ”49 London reoriented its attention away from the empire and toward the European continent, gradually planning to ready an expeditionary force to come to France’s defense.50 Berlin’s probe in Morocco turned into a clear failure.51

Probing is low risk, insofar as it is tailored to minimize a strong reaction of the rival, but it is not danger free for the revisionist state. Despite the fact that it arises out of a desire to clarify an allegedly new map of power, the effects of probing are difficult to interpret. All parties involved— the revisionist power and the targeted states— can miscalculate their reactions. In a case of moral hazard, the smaller states, directly targeted by the revisionist power, may respond violently to the low- intensity probe, feeling secure thanks to the alliance with a more powerful patron. Or, sensing that their distant patron is no longer capable of maintaining its influence, they may decide the exact opposite and accept the hegemony of the rival. This was the case of Athenian allies in Thrace, switching sides under General Brasidas’s pressure and persuasion. They were mistaken because their “judg ment was based more upon blind wishing than upon any sound prediction. ”52 Athens rallied and sent large forces north to restore its sway.

The probing power can also be the one to miscalculate, either not seeing the success or ignoring the failure. The nature of probing is such that the effects are often not visible immediately and require time to alter the perceptions and realities of power. The episode of Spartan commander Brasidas is again telling. Sparta did not follow up on his successes, in part because Spartan kings were jealous of his military exploits, but in part because they thought the damage inflicted on Athens was sufficient to strike a deal and end the war.53 They were of course wrong, as the war continued for decades. Alternatively, despite being checked, the probing power may simply up the ante, seeking some gain. This may have been the case of Germany, which did not stop challenging France and Britain after 1905, despite its diplomatic isolation, the military conundrum of a two- front war, and a robust Franco- British entente. In brief, there is no easy single interpretation of a probe and its effects.

A related risk is that a probe may lead to an unintended and untimely escalation of the strategic rivalry. As we described, the purpose of probing is to see how permissive the geopolitical order is, and to that goal a probe is limited in geographic reach and means used. It targets an issue presumed peripheral to the rival great power, seeking, for instance, a small territorial adjustment that is costly to the weaker neighboring state but not deemed worthy of a direct conflict by the distant and more powerful security patron. But the limited nature of the probe is somewhat at odds with its ultimate purpose to check the limits of an allegedly declining rival great power. A probe is a low- intensity, local pinprick with wider repercussions; limited geographically yet potentially global in outcome. The probing state has a strong interest in keeping the crisis limited and circum scribed to the narrowly defined area, but it is also poking the rival great pow er to see what the reaction may be. It is banking on the fact that the probe is on the periphery of the rival’s influence and interests, and thus that the rival will not escalate the interaction. The probing challenger, in other words, is betting that its great power rival will fear entrapment, being involved in an undesirable conflict, more than loss of prestige, reputation, or influence. The revisionist power seeks to use the fact of alliances (which it lacks itself) as a source of competitive disadvantage for the hegemon. This is based on two reinforcing perceptions— first, that the commitment involved in their maintenance is an encumbrance depriving the hegemon of strategic flexibility; and second, that the hegemon’s temptation to devalue its own alliances suggests that it feels the weight of this encumbrance.

Probes therefore arise from a view that entrapment is the congenital flaw of alliances. They are the ultimate act of attempting to expose the dangers of entrapment to hegemon and ally alike. This is ultimately a gamble— an expectation, not a certainty. And the gamble can backfire, as there is always the possibility that a probe will result in a dramatic escalation since it is targeted at multiple audiences. There is thus a clear recognition that a probe has a much wider purpose than its immediate action may convey, and consequently the desire to keep it limited runs against the desire to have a much larger demonstrative effect. As a result, the interaction a probe initiates has an inherent risk of escalating into a much larger confrontation.54

The revisionist state neither desires nor expects the escalation, but its possibility and perhaps likelihood are a direct outcome of probing. A probe by definition crosses a limit, a tacit or an explicit line of influence, in the expectation that it no longer reflects the actual will and power of the rival state. The revisionist power tests limits that until then were accepted and unchallenged and takes the first step in an “escalatory ladder” of competitive behavior. For instance, Kaiser Wilhelm’s support of Boer independence in 1896 was a test of British strength in what Berlin wrongly thought was a peripher al area of the British Empire. Similarly, the Moroccan crisis in 1905 was a test of British commitment to France in a region that should have been of no importance to London. Both, however, were a “move in the European Balance of Power, ” and that, beyond the details of the individual probes, was becoming of paramount concern to Great Britain. 55 Both were met by a strong British response, intensifying the Anglo- British rivalry. Escalation here was a willful choice of the targeted power.

Finally, probing can be in many cases a violent act, raising even further the likelihood of escalation and war. Probing is a political act first and foremost, only at times pursued by military means, but it does involve a careful application of violence or threat of violence. This requires strict political control, which is easier to maintain if the probe is not militarized and violent. But the more violent it becomes, the more difficult it is to keep it under political control. The logic of war may overwhelm the political rationale. Bismarck was keenly aware that the limited wars he fought, such as the Franco- Prussian one in 1870, would result in political outcomes that were different from his objectives were other great powers to become involved. But his greatest obstacle was the German military, resentful of civilian interference in what they deemed to be affairs in their exclusive purview. Political control over a limited war is paramount, because otherwise operational war objectives can overwhelm the larger political goals.56 The fact that Russia and China probe through a variety of nontraditional means, such as fishing vessels in the South China Sea and specially formed battalions (Vostok) of Chechens, makes political control more difficult. There is an incentive to use such means in a more aggressive way than would be warranted by official state forces, because in case of defeat one can always deny control over them and claim that they are simply individual citizens. Moreover, the “civilian” paramilitary forces that the probing power uses (e.g., the “Russian separatists” in eastern Ukraine) may not be easily recalled if the conflict ceases to be useful. The civilianization of conflict has its own risks. This makes probing behavior inherently destabilizing to an international order, as it sets forces in motion that, once unleashed, can be hard to control.

Probing can, moreover, spiral into war, unexpected and perhaps unwanted by the revisionist power. For instance, in the third century BC, Rome started to probe Carthaginian power in Sicily. It extended protection to Messana (or, more precisely, to a band of mercenaries, the Mamertines, who controlled it), thereby asserting Roman influence in northern Sicily. The peaceful withdrawal of the Punic garrison from the area seemed to suggest that a war was avoidable and the probe successful in attaining a low- cost revision to the balance of power. But the Romans miscalculated and were emboldened by this small success. As Polybius put it, they “now cherished the hope that they could drive the Carthaginians out of Sicily altogether, and that once this goal was attained their own power would be greatly increased. ”57 Carthage sent a large force to Sicily and solidified its alliance with Syracuse against Rome and its new ally Messana. Rome then escalated and sent a large army to besiege Syracuse, starting the first Punic war, which lasted more than twenty years.58 What started as a low- cost, low- risk probe turned into a long and costly slugfest. To sum up, the risk of probing is that it may result in a slide toward a direct clash. Miscalculation and escalation by all parties involved can elevate what is a small, localized harassment into a wider, more violent war. Moreover, a pattern of probing may gradually lead all sides to accept war as necessary and perhaps inevitable, as each probe and reaction escalates the competitive interaction.

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#### CEE assurance is solid---concerns are only in Western Europe

Tom Howell 19 Jr., Politics and White House Reporter for The Washington Times, BA in Journalism from the University of Maryland College Park, “Eastern Europe Welcomes Trump's Embrace After Obama's Cold Shoulder”, Washington Times, 11/25/2019, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/nov/25/eastern-europe-welcomes-trumps-embrace-after-obama/

President Trump on Monday hosted the prime minister of Bulgaria, the latest in a string of Eastern European leaders who’ve found common ground with an unconventional American president looking to tap business opportunities and one-up his predecessor.

Seated close enough to whisper, Mr. Trump and Prime Minister Boyko Borissov discussed the purchase of eight F-16 fighter jets from the U.S. and efforts to ease travel between the nations through visa reform.

“We’re gonna work on that problem,” Mr. Trump said as news cameras clicked away in the Oval Office.

The president’s stances on climate, multinational agreements and defense spending have struck a discordant note with Western European powers like France and Germany, yet he’s singing in tune with leaders from Central and Eastern Europe, many of whose nations were under Russian-sponsored communist dictatorships within living memory.

Besides Bulgaria, he’s welcomed leaders from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to the White House this year, and he dispatched Vice President Mike Pence to Warsaw after hosting Polish President Andrzej Duda and his wife in June.

Analysts say Mr. Trump sees a business opportunity with European leaders who cherish America and felt ignored by President Barack Obama, yet risk falling under the influence of Russia or China. There’s also a natural kinship between these leaders’ styles and Mr. Trump’s own.

“They are nationalist — relative to Western Europe — and religious, and have a certain esprit de corps that springs from that,” said Peter Rough, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in D.C.

Once tucked behind the Iron Curtain, the people in these nations have fresh memories of the Cold War and relish their alliance with America. They view the U.S. as a protector, especially against Russia, in a way that bigger European powers might not.

#### U.S. is maintaining robust defense ties---shoring up assurance of Central Europe

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U.S. foreign policy is, by most accounts, in disarray. Headlines—including in these pages—proclaim the death of global American leadership. Famous columnists send regular dispatches from the frontlines of U.S. President Donald Trump’s supposed campaign against the postwar liberal order. The damage to Washington’s standing in the world, we are told, is irreparable.

But step back from the day-to-day commotion, and a different picture emerges. In truth, the United States is gearing up for a new era—one marked not by unchallenged U.S. dominance but by a rising China and a vindictive Russia seeking to undermine U.S. leadership and refashion global politics in their favor.

This shift in Washington’s focus has been some time coming. Elements of it emerged, mostly in a reactive form, under President Barack Obama. The Trump administration has gone one important step further, recognizing that great-power competition warrants rebuilding U.S. foreign policy from the ground up, and it has based its formal strategy documents on that recognition. When future historians look back at the actions of the United States in the early twenty-first century, by far the most consequential story will be the way Washington refocused its attention on great-power competition. Beneath today’s often ephemeral headlines, it is this shift, and the reordering of U.S. military, economic, and diplomatic behavior that it entails, that will stand out—and likely drive U.S. foreign policy under presidents from either party for a long time to come.

THE COSTS OF INACTION

For years, American policymakers and analysts have argued about what China’s rise and Russia’s resurgence mean for U.S. interests. Since their introduction in the most recent National Security and National Defense Strategies, the words “great-power competition” have circulated widely enough to become a faddish catch phrase. But by now, the nature of the challenge, as an empirical fact, should be clear: the United States today faces rivals stronger and far more ambitious than at any time in recent history. China—seeking hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region first and global preeminence thereafter—is likely to become the most powerful rival that the United States has ever faced in its history. Russia may fall short of being a peer competitor but has proved capable of projecting power in ways few anticipated at the close of the Cold War. Today, it is intent on resurrecting its ascendancy in parts of eastern Europe that once fell within its sphere of influence and hopes to speed up the end of Western preeminence in the world at large. Its disruptive potential lies in part in its ability, through self-interested moves, to bring about systemic crises that will benefit Chinese power in the long term.

Until recently, Washington was not giving much thought to how it could meet these challenges. Such was the extent of the United States’ economic and military dominance that, for a whole generation following the collapse of the Soviet Union, neither Democratic nor Republican administrations took seriously the possibility of facing another peer competitor. Great-power rivalries were, in those heady days, a thing of the past; the very language of geopolitics was an anachronism. Other major powers were instead partners in waiting in the fight to tackle problems of the “global commons,” from nuclear proliferation to terrorism to climate change.

China’s and Russia’s actions slowly gave the lie to this sanguine outlook. As China became pivotal to global commerce, it did not so much change its discriminatory economic practices—forced technology transfers, mandatory joint ventures, and outright intellectual property theft—as cement them. It complemented this with a military buildup of historic scale, aimed specifically at dominating Asia and, in the long run, at projecting power throughout the world, and with a massive effort to expand its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative and related projects. Russia, meanwhile, rebuilt its military, invaded Georgia, annexed Crimea, initiated a festering insurgency in eastern Ukraine, and began a systematic campaign to resurrect its military, economic, and diplomatic influence in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

And yet most people in Washington long refused to acknowledge the new reality. Instead, American leaders continued to herald an “era of engagement” with Moscow and talked up Beijing’s potential as a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system. The former found expression in the “reset” with Russia in 2009, just months after Moscow’s invasion of Georgia, and the latter took the form of repeated efforts to deepen relations with Beijing and even an aspiration among some to establish a U.S.-Chinese “G-2” to lead the international community. But China’s brazen militarization of islets in the South China Sea and its increasing assertiveness beyond eventually forced Washington to reevaluate its assumptions about Beijing, and Russia’s seizure of Crimea in 2014 put to rest what was left of the so-called reset. By the end of the Obama administration, it was clear that the United States’ course was seriously off.

The resulting policy changes were no exercise in American strategic foresight; they were reactive, ex post facto adjustments. Considerable damage had already been done. Prizing the appearance of stability over the pursuit of definable national interests, the United States had for years ignored China’s flagrant theft of U.S. intellectual property—not to mention government secrets—and Beijing’s slow-motion takeover attempt in the South China Sea. In the hopes of recruiting Russia as a partner in upholding an international status quo that Russian President Vladimir Putin manifestly disdained, Washington had courted and unwittingly emboldened the Kremlin on its path of territorial revision while unnerving frontline NATO allies in eastern Europe. The cost for the United States was steep, with allies in East Asia and Europe beginning to doubt that Washington was willing to stand up for itself, let alone for them.

COURSE CORRECTIONS

It was time to call a spade a spade. The Trump administration, more realistic and blunter than its predecessors, did just that. “Trump,” as Henry Kissinger pointed out in the Financial Times in 2018, “may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its old pretenses.” Dispensing with the paradigm of unipolarity, the new government created an opening to articulate a new grand strategy. In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the 2018 National Defense Strategy, and their ancillary regional strategies for the Indo-Pacific and European theaters, the United States made clear that it now saw relations with China and Russia as competitive and that it would focus on maintaining an edge over these rivals. As both then Secretary of Defense James Mattis and then National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster made clear, great-power competition would now be the primary focus of U.S. national security.

The idea behind this shift is not to be blindly confrontational but to preserve what has been the central objective of U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II: the freedom of states, particularly U.S. allies, to chart their own courses without interference from a domineering regional hegemon. As articulated in the Trump administration’s strategy statements, that vision is deliberately ecumenical: it applies both to the Asian nations that find themselves under growing economic and military pressure from Beijing and to the federating heart of the European continent and the more loosely affiliated states on its fringes. But faced with a rising and enormously powerful China and an opportunistically vengeful Russia, the United States will realize this vision of a free and open world only if it ensures its own strength and economic vitality, maintains an edge in regional balances of power, and communicates its interests and redlines clearly.

In many respects, the U.S. Department of Defense is the furthest along in putting that agenda into practice. In its National Defense Strategy, in its 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, and through its public statements, the U.S. military has made clear that its overriding concern today is how to effectively defend the likes of Taiwan and the Baltic states against a potential Chinese or Russian attack, especially one based on a fait accompli strategy, which involves seizing vulnerable territory, digging in, and making any counterattack too costly to envisage. In anticipation of such attacks, the Pentagon is shifting from the playbook it has used ever since Operation Desert Storm three decades ago—slowly and methodically surging forces to a threatened area and only counterattacking after total U.S. dominance is assured—to a force that can fend off Chinese and Russian attacks from the very beginning of hostilities, even if it never attains the kind of dominance the United States was once able to gain in such places as Serbia and Iraq. The Pentagon’s budget requests have slowly begun to shift accordingly. Short-range fighter jets and bulky amphibious vessels, both vulnerable to enemy attacks, are making way for stealthier long-range bombers and submarines, unmanned ships and aircraft, long-range ground-based missiles and artillery, and large stocks of precise, penetrating munitions. The military is also experimenting with how to use this new hardware—what the new force should look like, how it should operate, and where.

The shift in the economic arena has been just as dramatic. Until a few years ago, U.S. officials regularly argued that the United States could not afford turbulence in the U.S.-Chinese economic relationship. Stability with Beijing, it seemed, was too valuable to jeopardize by demanding that U.S. companies be treated fairly. Today, the Trump administration—acting with considerable bipartisan support—is levying tariffs on Chinese imports to induce Beijing to cease its market-distorting trade practices or, failing that, to at least have the prices of those imports reflect the costs of those unfair practices for U.S. companies and workers. Some have rightly pointed out that these penalties are causing the United States’ middle and working classes pain. But so, too, have China’s unfair trade practices, and further inaction would have only made things worse. U.S. economic pressure, by contrast, has helped put urgently needed trade policy adjustments on the agenda.

A similar process has played out in Europe. The United States long hesitated to confront the European Union about its one-sided tariff and nontariff barriers against U.S. products, even as trade deficits mounted. Unwilling to accept that status quo, the Trump administration has tried to achieve by shock therapy what earlier successive administrations failed to obtain with finesse and gradualism. But the collateral damage of this aggressive approach has been significant, with potential spillover effects for the transatlantic relationship that risk undermining the common push against China.

In parallel, the United States is sharpening the powerful commercial tools at its disposal. The Trump administration and Congress have overhauled the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to provide alternatives to Chinese financing among the vulnerable states of both Asia and Europe. The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development, or BUILD, Act, which passed in October 2018, offers countries financing alternatives to the golden handcuffs of Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative. More still may follow. The bipartisan EQUITABLE Act, introduced by leading members of Congress, would require Chinese companies to follow the same disclosure rules as U.S. firms do to be listed on U.S. stock exchanges. Powerful legislators of both parties have said they will revoke Hong Kong’s economic and trading privileges in the United States if Beijing violates its commitment to the region’s autonomy. And U.S. officials are, at long last, actively warning other countries about Chinese telecommunications investments that could offer Beijing access to, and leverage over, their sensitive technologies.

Priorities have changed in the diplomatic arena, too. After decades of a disproportionate focus on the Middle East, the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy came as long-overdue correctives. Asia and Europe are where the greatest threats to U.S. power today lie, the documents argue, and the United States’ central objective should be to keep large states in both regions from gaining so much influence as to shift the local balance of power in their favor. This is a welcome departure from every National Security Strategy since the end of the Cold War, each of which downplayed major-power competition in some way or another.

In practice, two diplomatic initiatives stand out. The first is the Trump administration’s effort to balance against powerful rivals with the help of larger and more capable coalitions. In Europe, this yielded $34 billion in increased European defense spending in the past year alone, even from a reluctant Germany. In Asia, the United States has made clear that it will defend Philippine aircraft and vessels in the South China Sea, has increased its diplomatic and military support for Taiwan, and has deepened its political and military relations with India and Vietnam—all counterparts that share Washington’s apprehension about Chinese aspirations to regional hegemony.

Second, the United States is leveraging its economic and political influence in regions that it neglected until recently, ramping up its engagement and aid in several places where China and Russia have been gaining ground. It has stepped up its diplomatic presence in central Europe, the western Balkans, and the eastern Mediterranean, where the vacuum left by an absent United States allowed China and Russia to exploit local political fissures and promote authoritarian politics. In several of the countries in these regions, the United States has increased its support for good governance and the fight against corruption, introduced initiatives to counter Russian propaganda, expanded youth and cultural exchanges, and warned allies and partners about the long-term risks of aligning with Beijing and Moscow. In Asia, Washington has upped its development capacities to compete with Beijing’s by founding the International Development Finance Corporation and making new financing available through the BUILD Act. The United States is also promoting good governance and anticorruption efforts in the region, particularly through the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative, and is publicly challenging China’s treatment of its Tibetan and Uighur minorities. It is also paying more attention to Pacific states such as Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, which are particularly susceptible to Chinese pressure.

None of this is to diminish the importance of the day-to-day turmoil in Washington or to defend the administration’s every policy. Engaging in a war with Iran, sustaining a large military presence in Afghanistan, or intervening in Venezuela, as some in the administration want to do, is antithetical to success in a world of great-power competition. And if it pushes its allies too far, Washington will risk undermining the single greatest comparative advantage it has over its rivals. Nor is the United States on course yet to compete successfully—on the contrary, the progress thus far has been uneven and halting. Nonetheless, the country now has a template for reorienting its foreign policy that enjoys bipartisan support and is likely to endure, at least in its fundamental tenets, in future administrations.

### U---Yes NATO Cohesion

#### NATO’s strong and growing---disputes over burden sharing and Trump’s criticisms are being resolved

Dan Runde 19, Senior Vice President and William A. Schreyer Chair in Global Analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, MPP from Harvard University, BA from Dartmouth College, “The State of NATO Is Better Than You Think”, The Hill, 3/29/2019, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/436422-the-state-of-nato-is-better-than-you-think

Foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will gather in Washington on April 3 and 4 to celebrate the organization’s 70th anniversary. We should celebrate that NATO has been the most successful alliance of all time, preventing a major great-power war such as World War I and World War II, during which 15 to 20 million and 62 to 78 million people died, respectively.

In the context of NATO’s success, we should review the criticisms of the organization — particularly burden-sharing.

It has been said that the United States is not “merely an Atlas to carry the load on its shoulder” in the context of NATO burden-sharing and that the United States “cannot continue to pay for the military protection of Europe while the NATO states are not paying their fair share and living off the ‘fat of the land.’” It has also been stated that “America believes if Europeans invest in their own defense, they will also be stronger and more capable when we deploy together” and that “everybody’s got to chip in” to NATO. These quotes were spoken by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, President John F. Kennedy, President George W. Bush, and President Barack Obama, respectively.

Clearly, the criticisms of burden-sharing are not new and must be taken in a historical context. As U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison recently stated, “in my 20 years in the Senate, every President with whom I worked also asked our allies to step up, and our allies have been very forthcoming.”

President Trump has made some vocal criticisms of NATO during the campaign and as president. He even discussed the terrifying possibility of a U.S. withdrawal from the alliance. But he reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to NATO’s mutual defense article, and his administration is clearly in favor of remaining in the organization. This is reflected in the administration’s National Security Strategy, which states that the “NATO alliance will become stronger when all members assume greater responsibility for and pay their fair share to protect our mutual interests, sovereignty, and values” and reiterates the United States’ expectation that European allies spend 2 percent of GDP on defense by 2024.

The 2 percent target is imperfect and has received some legitimate criticisms, but it is a simple metric to measure burden-sharing. President Carter first introduced the idea of a non-binding burden-sharing measurement in 1977, when he suggested that member states increase defense-related expenditure by 3 percent annually. The 2 percent threshold idea arose as a “gentlemen’s agreement” during the 2002 Prague Summit. Member states reiterated their commitment to try to meet the 2 percent target in the 2006 Riga Summit, and they officially endorsed the target at the 2014 Wales Summit.

Within the alliance, burden-sharing concerns have not gone unheard, and member states are doing more. While only a minority of countries currently meet the 2 percent target, seven countries (United States, Greece, United Kingdom, Estonia, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania) met the goal in 2018 — a considerable increase from just three countries four years earlier.

Defense expenditure reached a six-year high of $919 billion in 2018 — boosted by a considerable increase in defense spending by European countries and Canada to a total of $313 billion. Moreover, while some countries do not reach the 2 percent goal, they spend their defense budgets wisely. For example, France spent an estimated $51 billion — around 1.82 percent of GDP — on defense in 2018. And yet, France has the third-highest number of military personnel within NATO and the third-highest number of forces deployed abroad in the world, both after the United States and Turkey. This exemplifies that NATO allies are actively increasing their defense spending, investing it wisely, and working to maintain a credible conventional deterrent, even if they do not reach the 2 percent target.

The United States remains strongly committed to NATO. President Trump recently said that “we’re going to be with NATO 100 percent.” Even if there were a change in administration in 2020, the United States will continue to support NATO, as the 2016 Democratic Party Platform reaffirmed the Party’s commitment to NATO and also called for other member states to contribute their fair share. Among top Democrats, Joe Biden strongly supports NATO and Elizabeth Warren has also expressed support.

One must ask: has NATO been successful? The answer can be measured by what has not happened. There has been no great power war since World War II. No NATO member states have developed nuclear weapons (other than the United States, the United Kingdom, and France). NATO is also active on the ground, leading operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and the Mediterranean and supporting the African Union and a training mission in Iraq.

Moreover, a large number of countries still seek NATO membership, with the last country to join being Montenegro in 2017. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia currently participate in the Membership Action Plan, an assistance program for countries who wish to join. Georgia and Ukraine also aspire to join. These actions signal that NATO is still strong and relevant.

Trump’s tough and persistent stance on increased burden-sharing is consistent with past administrations. This administration’s criticisms have been heard by NATO members, who are actively seeking to increase their defense spending even if they do not reach the 2 percent benchmark. Major wars have been avoided thanks to NATO, and the United States remains committed to the alliance. NATO is strong and growing.

#### NATO’s strong with robust contributions by the U.S. and allies

Lt. Col. Tony Shaffer 19, Retired Senior Intelligence Operations Officer and Acting President of the London Center for Policy Research, “NATO Is Now Stronger Than Ever”, The Epoch Times, 2/6/2019, https://www.theepochtimes.com/nato-is-now-stronger-than-ever\_2789914.html

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is now stronger than ever. What was a Cold War relic is now returned to service with renewed vigor and teeth.

Take it from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg himself, who said that President Trump’s pressure on European allies to meet their military funding commitments has had “real results.”

“President Donald Trump is having an impact,” Stoltenberg told Fox News in a Sunday morning interview. In all, Stoltenberg continued, “by the end of next year, NATO allies will add $100 billion extra toward defense. So we see some real money and some real results. And we see that the clear message from President Donald Trump is having an impact.”

When asked if he was concerned that President Trump’s tough rhetoric might be “helping Putin splinter NATO,” Stoltenberg said the exact opposite is happening.

“What I see is that actually NATO is united because we are able to adapt to deliver,” he explained. “North America and Europe are doing more together now than before.”

For context, U.S. defense spending amounted to just under $686 billion in 2017, equating to 3.6 percent of GDP. By comparison, Germany spent around $45 billion on its armed forces last year, or 1.2 percent of GDP.

For years, our NATO allies in Europe have shortchanged the system and relied on the United States to foot most of the bill for our mutual defense, but President Trump shocked the elites of Washington and Brussels by demanding that those countries actually meet their pledges to spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defense.

President Trump declared during the 2018 NATO summit that the United States will no longer tolerate other member states spending only a little more than 1 percent of their GDP on defense while the United States “in actual numbers is paying 4.2 percent of a much larger GDP,” saying this is not fair to U.S. taxpayers and “we’re not going to put up with it.”

While some European diplomats initially reacted to the President’s pronouncement with outrage, it’s now clear that his strategy is bearing fruit.

The biggest loser in all this is Russia—a country that spent just $66.3 billion on defense in 2017, a 17 percent decline from the previous year and the first year-over-year drop since 1998.

That means the $100 billion in new defense spending promised by our NATO allies in Europe is nearly double that of Russia’s entire 2017 budget.

President Trump is an effective negotiator—proof’s in the pudding so to speak. Despite political criticism (most of it free of facts) both at home and abroad, his insistence that our allies meet their spending commitments has made NATO stronger than it’s been for years.

#### Their ev is about non-defense disputes---those are irrelevant for Russia, the critical issue

Tomáš Valášek 18, Director of Think Tank Carnegie Europe and Former Ambassador of Slovakia to NATO, “How Trump and Putin Could Kill NATO”, Politico, 7/11/2018, https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-nato-defense-make-nato-obsolete/

Spare a thought for NATO officials and diplomats. They have spent the last six months preparing a summit that could be rendered irrelevant in a matter of days. It’s not that the meeting — focused on new measures to reinforce Europe in a crisis — is unimportant. The fear is that U.S. President Donald Trump will undo any progress NATO leaders achieve in Brussels this week when he meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin just four days later.

So far, the defense-centered core of the Western alliance has proven strikingly sturdy, even as U.S.-European collaboration has collapsed on other issues, such as climate change, trade and Iran. The Trump administration pleasantly surprised many across the Atlantic by nearly doubling the Obama-era program to fund U.S. military presence in Europe. Almost 1,000 Americans in uniform are now deployed in Poland. By most accounts, the alliance’s ability to discourage Moscow from testing NATO’s resolve has never been better.

### Link---2NC

#### The plan ruins assurances globally by backing away from defense of Central and Eastern European allies that are a test case for U.S. reliability. They’re a barometer for the credibility of every security commitment and closely watched by frontline states in the Middle East and Asia. Any weakening of commitment causes arms races and proxy conflicts that spiral---that’s Mitchell

#### Scaling back Article 5 is perceived as an intentional move to undermine NATO---that ripples globally, creating cascading alliance collapse in other domains

Dr. Mark S. Bell 18, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, and Dr. Joshua D. Kertzer, Assistant Professor of Government at Harvard University, “Trump, Psychology, and the Future of U.S. Alliances”, in Assessing the U.S. Commitment to Allies in Asia and Beyond, Ed. Stirling, German Marshall Fund of the United States Report, Number 11, p. 10-13

These biases have important implications for alliance politics. Allies are likely to see U.S. actions as the willful choices of the U.S. government, rather than attributing them to domestic or international constraints. For example, foreign observers will tend to see policymaking volatility as evidence of Trump administration deliberately cultivating uncertainty rather than as the result of bureaucratic infighting or incompetence. Similarly, allies may tend toward interpreting any omission of efforts to reinforce an alliance as a deliberate strategic choice to undermine an alliance such as with Trump’s reluctance to publicly commit to NATO’s Article 5. These dynamics only serve to decrease trust, and increase the damage that can be caused to alliances, even by “cheap” talk.

Redefining the Norms of Exchange

Since the campaign trail, Trump has frequently indicated a desire to recast the U.S. relationship with its historical partners. He has threatened to withdraw U.S. forces from Japan unless Japan started paying for all of the costs, has alleged that Germany owed NATO “vast sums of money,” and so on. Although it is not unusual for U.S. officials to complain about free riding (which, as discussed above, is a perennial concern within alliance relationships), American alliances seem to currently be understood in a more transactional fashion than under previous administrations.

This shift matters because it suggests a shift in how the White House understands the norms governing its relationships with allies. Alan Fiske, an anthropologist who studies the structure of social relationships, argues that there are four ideal-typical forms of relationships, each of which is based on a different norm of exchange.14 Robust alliances are often governed by what Fiske calls “communal sharing” norms: NATO’s Article 5, for example, enshrines the norm of collective defense, in which an attack on one member of the alliance is understood as an attack on all members because of their common membership within a group. Allies are one and the same; part of a broader community. Trump’s recent comments, however, imply a shift away from communal sharing toward a different norm: “market pricing.” This form of relationship is dictated by cost-benefit calculations. Countries must contribute proportional to what they have in order to receive the benefits. Allies are business partners, rather than close friends.

Why does this shift matter? Psychological research tells us that applying market-pricing frameworks to relationships previously characterized by communal sharing leads to conflict and contention.15 Actors subjected to these “taboo tradeoffs” often experience negative reactions: when we have family over for Thanksgiving dinner, we rarely present them with the bill afterwards because it violates the norm of exchange around which the relationship is based. The very act of monetizing the exchange seems taboo, just as it seems taboo to offer to buy someone’s kidney.16 Reframing alliances in purely transactional terms may inherently undermine cohesion and generate distrust. It also undermines their deterrent power, because communal sharing relationships are built around moral motives of unity: outgroup members know that members of the ingroup are committed to unite automatically against outsiders who pose threats.17 In contrast, if an alliance is based solely on market pricing, outsiders know that with the proper incentives alliance members can be bought off or wedged apart from one another.

Motivated Images: From Friend to Foe

Both leaders and mass publics in international politics often have images or stereotypes of other countries, cognitive schema that actors rely on to make sense of international relationships.18 Images tend to have common structures: the “enemy image,” popular during the Cold War, for example, was of another actor of similar relative capabilities and cultural status, but with threatening intentions; the “colony image” was of actors with weaker relative capabilities and of lower cultural status, who posed an opportunity rather than a threat. Because of this schematic structure, images lead to routinized interaction: knowing what image a decision-maker has of their relationship with another country tells us a great deal about the policy preferences that follow.

A decision-maker who has an enemy image of another country, for example, will tend to see that country as being driven by malign and unlimited motives, led by a unified regime that nonetheless can be contained by a sufficient use of force. A decision-maker who has a colony image of another country often tends to perceive it as being internally divided, between good forces (led by a progressive, modernizing leader, but who needs external support) and bad ones (led by radical fanatics or local puppets of foreign enemies), thereby legitimating intervention to prop up the former and quash the latter. Once images are embedded, they shape both the kind of information we seek out, and how that information is interpreted.

Importantly, images are motivated; what we want affects the image we see. The ally image is undergirded by perceived opportunities for mutual gain, while an enemy image presents itself when we see others as posing a threat. As the international relations scholar Richard Herrmann notes, “as the feeling that another country has goals that threaten one’s own increases, so does the inclination to construct a cognitive picture of that other country that features negative items.”19 In other words, even though we often think of images as being deeply embedded and thus resistant to change, they can flip quickly based on the presence or absence of conflicts of interest. This means that the ally image that other countries have of the United States can be overridden when facing American policy choices that violate allies’ interests in stability or a liberal, rule-based international order. It matters even if these negative images of the United States are only held by foreign publics rather than more pragmatic governing elites, since foreign leaders will find it harder to make concessions in negotiations with the United States when doing so is deeply unpopular with their publics or domestic audiences.

Furthermore, the images we form of countries are not only built around narrow bilateral interactions. Washington’s interactions with others will also shape its image with allies. For example, German decision makers may draw inferences about the Trump administration’s commitment to a liberal world order not only from their direct interactions with the administration but from what they read and observe about his domestic rhetoric and policies, his appointees, his interactions with other leaders and countries, and so on. As a result, U.S. actions in one domain may well influence the judgments of statesmen on wholly distinct matters, amplifying their effect and increasing the speed with which shifts in alliance credibility can occur.

Motivated Reasoning: Impressions Stick

Whether citizens or diplomats, psychologists tell us that humans are “goal-directed information processors” who tend to evaluate information in a way that reinforces their pre-existing views.20 We tend to seek out information consistent with what we already believe (what psychologists call a confirmation bias), and heavily discount information that challenges our priors (a disconfirmation bias). Trump’s unpredictability and incendiary rhetoric during the campaign, transition, and first months of the administration has created an image that will be hard to reverse. Even if Trump seeks to backtrack from his prior rhetoric and positions, the salience of his original views risks a self-reinforcing spiral, in which information that fits that image will be more easily believed than information that contradicts it. Foreign allies will seek out and place more weight on information that confirms their initial impressions, and place a lower weight on disconfirming evidence.

Motivated reasoning thus offers yet another mechanism through which alliances can erode once negative impressions have been established. This reinforcing spiral, when combined with the other mechanisms listed above, also shows how the effects we describe here have the potential to persist even if the Trump administration should be succeeded by a more conventional presidential administration. The greater the stressors the current administration places on the alliance system — sending out mixed messages that undermine the credibility of U.S. commitments, or carrying out actions that prompt allies to hedge and seek out alternate arrangements — the harder it will be for future administrations to repair the damage.

Policy Implications

What does all of this mean for policymakers? We conclude by briefly summarizing some key implications and recommendations:

U.S. policymakers seeking to manage and maintain alliances should not place faith in their longevity being probable or automatic. Tension and fragmentation is the historical norm in alliance relationships, and even U.S. alliances have the potential to quickly weaken.

U.S. alliances rest both on the credibility of threats made to adversaries, and the credibility of promises made to allies. The Trump administration has focused on the former, but neglected the latter. Because credibility is ultimately a belief held in the mind of policymakers, it can change even in the absence of shifts in the military balance, or in the legal terms of U.S. treaty commitments. Both allies’ and adversaries’ minds can be changed: if allies and adversaries doubt U.S. commitments, they may dramatically alter their behavior even in the absence of material changes on the ground. U.S. policymakers seeking to uphold U.S. alliances should therefore not believe that material changes are the only ones that matter.

Psychological factors are likely to mean that allies do not treat statements or rhetoric by the Trump administration as merely “cheap talk.” On the contrary, even rhetorical statements can rapidly change the way in which allies understand the nature of their relationship with the United States. In general, these mechanisms are likely to exacerbate rather than lessen the impact of any shifts that occur. Given the “bully pulpit” that the President enjoys, and President Trump’s willingness to make policy pronouncements via Twitter, the President significant leverage to change the nature of the U.S. alliance system even if other cabinet members, parts of the U.S. bureaucracy, or Congress seek to mitigate those effects.

Many of these mechanisms are self-reinforcing and interactive: they strengthen rather than counteract each other. Furthermore, states~~men~~ draw inferences about the administration from the totality of its domestic and international behavior, not simply from their own direct experiences of it. U.S. policymakers should expect to find it difficult to prevent U.S. actions in one domain from influencing the judgments of statesmen on other matters. Collectively, this has the potential to lead to downward spirals of confidence in U.S. commitments, and to tipping points that lead to sudden and dramatic shifts in alliance stability, instead of slow and steady degradations in ally confidence in U.S. commitments. U.S. policymakers should therefore make preparations for contingencies that may have previously seemed highly improbable or only plausible in the distant future such as a sudden collapse in NATO’s credibility, or South Korean or Japanese willingness to pursue independent nuclear weapons, both of which seem much more plausible today than would have been the case a year ago.

#### It’s the final straw, ruining assurance to the most strategically vital place in the world---that creates ripple effects, escalating every other region

Dr. A. Wess Mitchell 15, President of the Center for European Policy Analysis, Doctorate in Political Science from the Otto Suhr Institut für Politikwissenschaft at Freie Universität, Master’s Degree from the Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, “Against U.S. Retrenchment from Europe and NATO”, Defense Matters, 4/9/2015, defencematters.org/news/against-u-s-retrenchment-from-europe-and-nato/311/

Who knows, maybe he is right. Maybe a U.S. withdrawal from NATO would spur Europe to develop an army, provide for their own defense and take geopolitics seriously. If this happened, it would indeed probably have a salutary effect on the international system. But far more likely, our backing out of NATO would not bring the Europeans together. The problem is that this argument overlooks the possibility that European disunity is itself rooted in structure – that the very external forces he believes will unite Europe in an America-less NATO would in fact plunge them into deeper disunity, incentivizing greater Russian predation on Europe’s periphery. A NATO without America would be a NATO in which the Alliance’s most exposed members, Poland and the Baltic States, would immediately seek serious guarantees from the Alliance’s largest insulated members, particularly Germany. And this is not something Germany is likely to provide.

An Alliance with a more vulnerable shoulder is an Alliance that would present Russia with stronger, not weaker, incentives for revisionism. This might not lead to a war, but at a minimum it would mean a heightened regional security dilemma that regional powers would seek to address by whatever means were at their disposal – increased regional self-help, defense spending, more skittish regional foreign policies, etc. – leading to heightened East-West friction and perennial crisis. This would make for a less stable Central and Eastern Europe and, potentially, a reactivated strategic frontier along NATO’s formerly-quiescent Eastern rim.

In other words, there would be costs. The question is whether those costs are greater than the costs that Bacevich and others describe as existing under the present NATO status quo – political ennui, lack of military focus, American taxpayer money, etc.

I think the answer to that question is “yes”: The costs of leaving NATO would be higher for the United States than the costs of continuing with the status quo. The answer would be “no” if the region in question – Central and Eastern Europe – were of negligible interest to the United States. But this is perhaps one of the most strategically-vital pieces of real estate on the globe – the flashpoint of all three of the Twentieth Century’s great global conflicts. Only when it is unambiguously in the Western ambit can Europe and the United States possess the secure global base from which to collectively sortie into broader global geopolitics and deal with the “rise of the rest.” Were this region to fall into renewed instability because of a U.S. withdrawal from NATO, the United States would, within a few years’ time, face a compelling need to re-intervene – only this time it would do so on terms less favorable to itself than if it had maintained its original position in NATO to begin with.

So in the end, Bacevich’s argument can be rejected on grounds of strategic cost-effectiveness. And this leaves aside many other reasons rooted in the instrumental value of NATO: that Article V, for all its apparent hollowness, does continue to hold the line against Russian revisionism; that withdrawing from the global geopolitical line here could create a costly geopolitical ripple effects in other pivotal global regions.

This last point is perhaps the most critical, as it undermines the whole purpose of what the “tough love” school is trying to achieve by experimenting with retrenchment: managing the transition to a more multipolar international system. Already, in just a few months’ time, the Obama Administration has called into question sixty years’ worth of U.S. regional commitments and foreign-policy operating principles. This has arguably emboldened would-be U.S. global rivals like China into taking a more aggressive geopolitical course than they otherwise would be countenancing. Walking away from NATO now would be the final straw, accelerating the destabilization of various strategically-vital hinge points around the globe. Perhaps these things would have eventually come anyways, regardless of what the United States does. But we should seek to manage them on our own terms – not on an artificial timetable. If we are exiting unipolarity, the timing and nature of the “dismount” is everything. Why unnecessarily provoke geopolitical change on terms unfavorable to us through bad timing and a desire for experimentation?

#### The result is either acquiesce to revisionist probing or destabilizing arms races---both snowball into a multi-regional escalatory crisis

Dr. A. Wess Mitchell 17, President of the Center for European Policy Analysis, Doctorate in Political Science from the Otto Suhr Institut für Politikwissenschaft at Freie Universität, Master’s Degree from the Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, and Jakub J. Grygiel, Associate Professor at the Catholic University of America and Fellow at The Institute for Human Ecology, The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and The Crisis of American Power, p. 157-162

The Hidden Costs of Offshore Balancing

The option of withdrawing into North America and conducting a strategy of offshore balancing is also likely to become more tempting to the United States over time as a means of alleviating the pressures of geopolitical competition abroad and financial retrenchment at home. Offshore balancing differs from big-power bargaining in that, where the latter acknowledges the general benefit of continued engagement abroad but seeks to shift the focus of that engagement from allies to rivals, the former is inherently skeptical of the strategic value of forward engagement and seeks to shift the burden of managing regional problems to allies. The attractiveness of offshore balancing has grown in recent years as an apparently straightforward means of lessening the direct costs of U.S. regional management by reducing the physical size of our military presence and range of political commitment there. While such an approach might offer temporary advantages, it would come with its own significant, often undercounted strategic costs to the United States in the long term.

First, recent evidence suggests that a policy of U.S. military retrenchment would make major regions less rather than more stable. For decades advocates of offshore balancing have asserted as an unproven dogma that a reduction in American alliance commitments would lead regional states to automatically balance against threatening powers, replacing the function of containment normally provided by U.S. extended deterrence, and that this would make regions more stable— all at lower expense to the United States. Recent experience provides a laboratory for testing the validity of these claims. As discussed in chapter 4, the behavior of U.S. allies over the past few years has shown that small states do not only balance against threats as offshore balancing advocates would predict; some also acquiesce in revisionist behavior through various forms of accommodation. More over, while many U.S. allies are investing in greater local military capabilities, it is not just taking the form of defensive postures; many are considering offensive or even nuclear capabilities that could contribute to regional destabilization unless accompanied by a U.S. security presence. The deterrent value of defensive alliances and the benefits of combined U.S. and allied balancing against rivals, once lost, may not be so easy to replace.

Second, it is not clear that jettisoning alliances would result in the financial windfall to the United States that many offshore balancing advocates expect. Losing the advantage of forward positions provided by allies would impose two new kinds of cost on the United States. One is the need to increase air and naval power: to achieve a level of power projection capability similar to what it possesses through overseas basing, much of which is on the territory of allied states, the United States would have to develop a significantly larger air force cap able of conducting offensive and lift operations mainly from North America and U.S. territories. It would also have to design and build large numbers of airplanes capable of crossing large distances into hostile air zones, a technological feat that is costly and unlikely to be achieved anytime soon. Similarly, relying on the oceanic moat would call for a much larger navy capable of maintaining a continuous presence across multiple oceans. Developing such a force would cost the United States a lot of money— perhaps as much if not more than it currently spends on overseas installations.5 A second, longer-term problem would be strategic in nature: the high costs of achieving reentry into the global rimlands once the United States has lost a forward presence there. The wars of the twentieth century are a reminder of the degree of national economic, military, and human exertion required of a power in America’s geographic position to achieve landfall in the Eurasian littorals and mainland once regional balances have been upset. Fortunately, in those eras, U.S. enemies did not develop the capability to deny the United States access to these regions. In the era of rapidly accelerating A2AD warfare technology, it cannot be assumed that America’s technological edge would allow it to do so again without enduring prohibitively high costs in U.S. blood and treasure— costs that are likely to be higher than any temporary savings from an ad hoc retrenchment.

A Strategy To Strengthen Alliances

Alliances remain the best-known instrument at America’s disposal for guaranteeing its national security and competing effectively against rivals in the new conditions of the twenty-first century. No other current or foreseeable strategic alternative is likely to provide cost-effective replacements to built-in advantages that alliances offer to the United States at as low a cost. And contrary to claims of many critics on both left and right, they are likely to continue to offer a strategic value to the United States under conditions of economic austerity and contested primacy; indeed, they may be even more important to the United States under such conditions than in the immediate post– Cold War period, when America’s power was less constrained and its rivals less numerous. In a more competitive landscape, alliances may represent the crucial margin of advantage when our edge in other traditional areas of strength is, at least for a time, less decisive. The costs of losing even a portion of these relationships, whether through defection or through continued slippage due to rival probes and U.S. devaluation, could be high. It could mean a weaker barrier against great-power war, a more permissive environment for the territorial growth of Eurasian competitors, and perhaps someday the need for a larger U.S. military to reproject power in and restabilize the system once its balance has been lost— all on the iffy proposition that the United States can achieve similar benefits by bargaining with large rivals or by withdrawing from the complicated affairs of the world’s regions entirely.

It is therefore in the strategic interests of the United States to strengthen its alliances. Doing so should be an urgent policy priority at a moment of intensifying probes by U.S. rivals and widespread doubts about American intentions and capabilities in the international system. Already these patterns represent a significant global challenge for the United States; allowed to persist unchecked, they could lead to a general and potentially militarized crisis in the U.S.-led international order, with multiple vulnerable allied frontiers in various stages of advanced geopolitical competition, alliance fragmentation, or even local war. Given the strategic similarities of probing efforts in such hotspots as eastern Ukraine and the South China Sea and the fungible nature of frontline allies’ concerns in these regions, the prospects for a multiregional crisis involving American power are higher today than at other any point in the modern era. However, such a crisis has not yet occurred, giving the United States an important and perishable window of opportunity to shore up its alliances as a preventive to further destabilization. A strategy to do so would focus on restoring American strategic credibility and raising the visible costs that aggressive powers would have to pay to revise the system to their favor. It would prioritize those alliances most in need of attention while working systematically to reinforce the central pillars of U.S. extended deterrence that are most in danger of collapse.

### Link---Cyber---1NC

#### The plan breaks with a key NATO policy driven by Eastern European allies

Sydney J. Freedberg 14 Jr., MA in Security Studies from Georgetown University, MPhil in European Studies from Cambridge University, AB from Harvard University, Deputy Editor at Breaking Defense, “NATO Hews To Strategic Ambiguity On Cyber Deterrence”, Breaking Defense, 11/7/2014, https://breakingdefense.com/2014/11/natos-hews-to-strategic-ambiguity-on-cyber-deterrence/

NATO is now taking cyber threats as seriously as the Russian tanks and nuclear weapons it was created to deter. But the alliance has a long way to go just to shore up its own network defenses, and it explicitly eschews any role on the offense. NATO has not even written a formal policy on how it would deter a cyber attack. The net result is a certain degree of strategic ambiguity — but then NATO has survived and even thrived on ambiguity for decades.

The crucial development: September’s NATO summit declaration that the alliance’s hallowed Article 5 — which says an attack on one member is an attack against all — applies equally to virtual attacks as to physical ones.

“[In] linking cyber defense to collective defense and Article 5, the declaration says that cyber attacks…could be as harmful to modern society as conventional attack,” said Amb. Sorin Ducaru, NATO’s assistant secretary general for “emerging security challenges.”

That said, the Romanian diplomat emphasized at an Atlantic Council panel this week, “there’s no predetermined threshold,” no defined “red line” beyond which a cyber attack counts as an act of war. But then NATO never defined an automatic trigger for conventional or nuclear conflict either, even during the height of the Cold War. Article 5 only commits a NATO member to “assist” allies under attack by “such actions as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force” — which leaves vast amounts of wiggle room.

There was always doubt whether the United States would really risk nuclear escalation against its homeland to defend West Germany, and, for that matter, whether West Germany would stick with the alliance once wartime commanders started using tactical nuclear weapons on its soil to slow the Soviet horde. Yet despite these uncertainties, the Soviets were ultimately still deterred.

So when it came to cyber, Ducaru said, “there was a conscious decision by the allies in this policy that there is benefit in keeping flexibility and ambiguity.”

Despite that one area of (arguably inevitable) strategic ambiguity, the NATO summit made the situation in cyberspace much clearer, argued Christopher Painter, the State Department’s cyber coordinator. Beyond Article 5, “the NATO leaders’ declaration [stated] that international law including the UN Charter, the Law of Armed Conflict, international humanitarian law, etc. applies in cyberspace just like it does in the physical world,” Painter said at the Atlantic Council event. “This is a clear statement that this is not a lawless space — [and] there was some doubt before. There was some thought you had different rules entirely for the cyber world than the physical world, which made no sense and in fact would be very destabilizing.”

“Cyber seems so weird and different [that] it’s really inhibited seeing which of the old laws and ways of thinking about it might apply,” said Jason Healey, the Atlantic Council’s in-house cyber strategist. In fact, he argued, “the more strategically significant the conflict, the more similar it is to conflict in the air, land, and sea.”

Notably, the Russians — widely considered capable of out-hacking even the Chinese — have not launched a purely online offensive since Estonia in 2007, when technical success in shutting down websites not only failed to intimidate Tallinn but outright backfired on a strategic level, scaring NATO into taking cyber seriously. Ever since, in Georgia, Crimea, and now eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin has subordinated cyber to propaganda and good old-fashioned men with guns.

“I’m actually quite hopeful,” Healey said. NATO has been willing to brush aside Russia’s flimsy denials and hold the Kremlin accountable for both the actions of its insignia-less “little green men” in Crimea and its “patriotic hackers” in Estonia. “We will not be tricked,” he said.

Cyber nests within a wider “NATO discussion and analysis on the hybrid warfare concept,” said Amb. Ducaru. “The cyber dimension fits very well into this concept that brings together the conventional with the nonconventional, the low and high-tech elements, the regular and irregular, [and] also this element of deniability of responsibility.”

The hard part, Ducaru admitted, is figuring out how to respond. “NATO’s mandate in cyber is about cyber defense,” he said. “It’s not about cyber warfare or cyber attack or cyber offensive weapons.”

### Link---Cyber---2NC

#### The plan breaks with a key NATO policy driven by Eastern European allies:

#### Strategic ambiguity is a deliberate policy, chosen by Estonia and Romania because they think it’s an effective deterrent. It’s enshrined in current policy, built on decades of similar postures in other domains

#### Cyber is key because it’s linked to hybrid war, the most relevant threat from Russia---that’s Freedberg

Justin Lynch 18, Associate Editor at Fifth Domain, Writer for New Yorker, the Associated Press, Foreign Policy, the Atlantic, “Cyber Ambiguity: NATO’s Digital Defense In Doubt Amid Unstable Alliances”, Fifth Domain, 7/10/2018, https://www.fifthdomain.com/international/2018/07/09/cyber-ambiguity-natos-digital-defense-in-doubt-amid-unstable-alliances/

Email inboxes of Estonian journalists were flooded with spam. The Ministry of Defence’s website went down. The Estonian government blamed Russia for the digital blitz. The crippling cyberattack lasted for three weeks and at the time was known as perhaps the most brazen act of cyber aggression by one state on another. But more than a decade later, the alleged Russian cyberattack on Estonia is seen as a rallying cry for NATO to bolster its cyber prowess.

Today, the alliance counts cybersecurity as one of its core missions. It has placed a new cyber research center in the heart of the Baltic nation.

But amid what is viewed as a sustained campaign of Russian digital warfare on the West and the trans-Atlantic alliance ― whose foundations are being questioned through a surge of populism ― the very future of NATO’s cyber strategy is left intentionally murky.

During a May speech, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he is often asked under what circumstances the organization would trigger Article 5 in the case for a cyberattack.

Article 5 is the alliance’s principle of collective self-defense; an attack on one member nation is considered an attack on all member nations.

U.S. President Donald Trump, right, meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in the Oval Office of the White House on May 17, 2018, in Washington. (Evan Vucci/AP)

Trump rips NATO members ahead of summit

It's "not fair" that America spends more on NATO than allies, the president tweeted ahead of the Brussels summit.

“My answer is: We will see. The level of cyberattack that would provoke a response must remain purposefully vague, as will the nature of our response,” Stoltenberg said. “It could include diplomatic and economic sanctions, cyber responses, or even conventional forces, depending on the nature and consequences of the attack.”

Questions over how NATO will respond to a cyberattack come as the alliance takes steps to bolster its digital protocols. In its joint air power strategy, unveiled in late June, NATO added cyberwarfare to its joint operations programs. The document boasts of the historic threat the organization faces: “For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the Alliance has to be able to conduct operations.”

In 2014, the alliance said for the first time that a cyberattack could trigger the organization’s collective-defense mechanism. It has proven a successful deterrent to combat large-scale digital attacks like the reported Russian cyber assault on Estonia in 2007, said Sorin Ducaru, a former assistant secretary general of NATO. But he added that the alliance has to be more creative in deterring medium- and low-grade cyberattacks “because that is the world we are living in.”

For Estonia, an aggressive NATO cyber policy could be the difference between the smooth withdrawal of cash or a disturbing “error” sign flashing on an ATM screen. An Estonian intelligence report from earlier this year predicts Russia will continue its campaign of aggression in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states through a combination of cyberattacks and information warfare.

#### Aggressive NATO cyber defense is the top priority of the Baltics

Derek E. Mix 20, Analyst in European Affairs at the Congressional Research Service, “Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Background and U.S.-Baltic Relations”, CRS Report, 1/2/2020, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R46139.pdf

Regional Security Concerns

U.S., NATO, and Baltic leaders have viewed Russian military activity in the region with concern; such activity includes large-scale exercises, incursions into Baltic states’ airspace, and a layered build-up of anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities. Experts have concluded that defense of the Baltic states in a conventional military conflict with Russia likely would be difficult and problematic. The Baltic states fulfill NATO’s target of spending 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, although as countries with relatively small populations, their armed forces remain relatively small and their military capabilities limited. Consequently, the Baltic states’ defense planning relies heavily on their NATO membership.

Defense Cooperation and Security Assistance

The United States and the Baltic states cooperate closely on defense and security issues. New bilateral defense agreements signed in spring 2019 focus security cooperation on improving capabilities in areas such as maritime domain awareness, intelligence sharing, surveillance, and cybersecurity. The United States provides significant security assistance to the Baltic states; the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (P.L. 116-92) increased and extended U.S. assistance for building interoperability and capacity to deter and resist aggression. Under the U.S. European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), launched in 2014, the United States has bolstered its military presence in Central and Eastern Europe. As part of the associated Operation Atlantic Resolve, rotational U.S. forces have conducted various training activities and exercises in the Baltic states.

NATO has also helped to bolster the Baltic states’ security. At the 2016 NATO summit, the allies agreed to deploy multinational battalions to each of the Baltic states and Poland. The United Kingdom leads the battalion deployed in Estonia, Canada leads in Latvia, and Germany leads in Lithuania. Rotational deployments of aircraft from NATO member countries have patrolled the Baltic states’ airspace since 2004; deployments have increased in size since 2014.

Potential Hybrid Threats

Since 2014, when the EU adopted sanctions targeting Russia due to the Ukraine conflict, tensions between Russia and the Baltic states have grown. These conditions have generated heightened concerns about possible hybrid threats and Russian tactics, such as disinformation campaigns and propaganda, to pressure the Baltic states and promote anti-U.S. or anti-NATO narratives. A large minority of the Estonian and Latvian populations consists of ethnic Russians; Russia frequently accuses Baltic state governments of violating the rights of Russian speakers. Many ethnic Russians in the Baltic states receive their news and information from Russian media sources, potentially making those communities a leading target for disinformation and propaganda. Some observers have expressed concerns that Russia could use the Baltic states’ ethnic Russian minorities as a pretext to manufacture a crisis. Cyberattacks are another potential hybrid threat; addressing potential vulnerabilities with regard to cybersecurity is a top priority of the Baltic states.

#### Cyber is the heart of the alliance---backing away from joint defense guts NATO

Christopher Porter 19, Chief Intelligence Strategist of Cybersecurity Company FireEye and Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, and Klara Jordan, Director of the Cyber Statecraft Initiative at the Atlantic Council’s Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, “Don’t Let Cyber Attribution Debates Tear Apart the NATO Alliance”, Lawfare, 2/14/2019, https://www.lawfareblog.com/dont-let-cyber-attribution-debates-tear-apart-nato-alliance

NATO’s cyber-defense mandate has evolved over time to update its collective defense commitment under Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty for the era of cyberattacks. In the latest effort to collectively impose costs on adversaries, the 2018 NATO Summit saw a commitment from heads of state and government “to integrate sovereign cyber effects, provided voluntarily by Allies, into Alliance operations and missions, in the framework of strong political oversight.” The newly updated White House National Cyber Strategy likewise envisions working together with a “coalition of like-minded states” to “ensure adversaries understand the consequences of their malicious cyber behavior.”

Therein lies the rub. Both formal alliances, such as NATO, and more ad hoc arrangements, such as what the Cyber Deterrence Initiative imagines, will require members to share intelligence and eventually, to the best of their ability and perhaps in different domains, contribute to joint action against a presumably well-armed foreign aggressor. States including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Estonia, and Denmark have publicly declared their willingness to lend sovereign offensive cyber effects to deter, defend against and counter the full spectrum of threats.

Sharing intelligence and information is a key element of NATO’s core decision-making process enshrined in Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. Political consultations are part of the preventive diplomacy between member states, but they are also an avenue to discuss concerns related to the security threats member states face. These consultations can be a catalyst for reaching a consensus on policies to be adopted or actions to be taken—including those on the use of sovereign cyber effects to support a NATO operation.

The alliance has a track record of collective action and cooperative security measures. For example, Operation Active Endeavour helped to deter, disrupt and protect against terrorist activity in the Mediterranean in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in solidarity with the United States. For the seventh time, the Atlantic Council’s Cyber Statecraft Initiative will be among the organizations privileged to organize an event on the sidelines of the Feb. 15–17 Munich Security Conference. This year in particular, the Atlantic Council’s event, “Defending Human Dignity: Limiting Malicious Cyber Activity Through Diplomacy,” will complement the topics high on the agenda of the main conference, such as transatlantic collaboration, the consequences of a resurgence of great power competition and the future of arms control.

In the United States, the greatest failures of response and deterrence to foreign aggression in cyberspace have not been caused by a lack of intelligence, capability or imagination. Rather, U.S. policy has been serviceable in theory but impotent in practice because of an inability to translate technical findings and intelligence into public support for sufficiently tough responses ordered by elected political leaders. North Korea’s repeated operations targeting U.S. companies and critical infrastructure have been met with public skepticism over their culpability, limiting the strength of retaliatory options needed to deter further events. Chinese cyber economic espionage continued for years despite widespread knowledge of China’s activities because political leaders found it difficult to confront Beijing without undermining U.S. companies in return. Russian information operations did not sow enough doubt to mislead experts, but they succeeded in exacerbating the partisan polarization of an already-divided electorate and its leaders.

That inability to translate the findings of cyber experts into public sentiment and therefore political action has sidelined America’s cyberwarriors, by far the most technologically advanced and well-resourced in the world. Imagine the political response of an ally that is asked to burden-share in response to cyber aggression but is probably much closer to any resulting kinetic fight than the United States.

Now imagine the response of that ally when it’s being asked to take causus belli on faith: The United States is presenting attribution for a cyberattack elsewhere in the world, but perhaps is depending on the ally lacking critical details due to classification, and is presenting that information alongside a request for help that might well put the ally in the crosshairs of its own cyberattack or lethal action. How can allies with different capabilities to collect, analyze and understand intelligence be part of a consensus on using sovereign cyber effects to support a NATO operation? How can a commander achieve a common operational picture to authorize the use of sovereign effects in a NATO operation if all the allies are not on the same page with respect to critical attribution and other technical information needed for a use of effect in an operation? We all know what a tank looks like on a shared satellite image, but if you ask three cyber experts to interpret the attribution for a set of indicators, you are likely to get at least four answers.

For most U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere, there is simply a dearth of technical know-how within the government when it comes to cyber attribution and operations. This is already a challenge for the United States, with a massive defense budget, Silicon Valley innovation and an educated workforce to pull into government service. But for many U.S. allies, tech-savvy public servants will have long fled for the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academia before reaching ministerial positions.

To its credit, the U.S. National Cyber Strategy does propose capacity-building measures to support allies. This means building up law enforcement, intelligence, and military operational and investigative capability. But even with successful capacity-building programs, many nations could, in a crisis, end up in the same place the United States is—with good options stuck on the shelf while political leaders and their electorates lack a critical mass of informed voters to trust, understand and act on expert findings.

For countries weighing whether to risk their own blood and treasure in support of an ally’s cyber attribution findings, this hurdle could well prove insurmountable if not addressed well before a crisis emerges. Many such countries will no doubt recall being burned when placing too much confidence in U.S. technical and human sources without an ability to evaluate the evidence for themselves, as with the Iraq weapons of mass destruction findings.

The private sector will probably play a crucial role in providing intelligence to support alliance responses to cyberattacks, especially as a stopgap over the next few years. FireEye and its peer competitors and partners regularly produce analyses of major world cyber events—many that fly below the radar of Western leadership, in fact—sometimes at a near-government quality and often covering much of the same “classified” evidence.

More important, private-sector analysts are accustomed to writing for impact with both their technical counterparts, like chief information security officers (CISOs) and threat hunters, and nontechnical stakeholders such as boards of directors, CEOs and other persons controlling the purse strings. In this sense, unclassified, private-sector and NGO-driven cyber threat intelligence can become the lingua franca of discussions. Relying on commercial reporting generated by international teams, rather than declassified government-generated reports, both broadens the audience enough to make alliance discussions feasible and mitigates against disparities in terminology across national lines—the tendency of even closely integrated allies to describe cyber “attack,” “information operations,” and attribution findings with different implicit assumptions or implications.

Long-Term Thinking

In the long run, though, the U.S. and its more technologically advanced allies—such as its fellow Five Eyes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.K.), France and Japan—will have to make important policy changes in the interests of furthering alliance cooperation in cyberspace: a willingness to sometimes risk sensitive sources and methods in order to get cyber threat intelligence into the hands of other countries better positioned to take policy action, an end to classifying public information like IP addresses solely because of their acquisition via classified means, and greater transparency on their own decision-making.

Government cyber leaders within the alliance should consider taking another page out of the private-sector playbook as well: running cyber-crisis exercises that involve more than the IT department. In the commercial world, the more successful practice runs involve leaders at both the CISO level and some presence from nontechnical teams that would weigh in during a crisis, such as communications and legal. The best exercises involve executives, too, who despite their busy schedules must see for themselves how their companies would survive and respond during a potentially ruinous cyberattack, and work through the minutiae of leading a response themselves. The experience and confidence is invaluable if ever called on during a real-life crisis, and the organizational introspection by involving decision-makers at all levels is irreplaceable.

Military-to-military cyber training as part of cross-country force standardization and joint operational planning could pull in more senior national leadership, beyond battlefield commanders, and be coupled with increased funding for foreign affairs-led training for nontechnical leaders.

The private sector could also meaningfully contribute during NATO consultations when developing Allied Joint Publications to make sure that definitions and requirements for threat intelligence incorporate the best practices of NATO member countries’ private sectors. If a U.S. diplomat reaches out to his or her counterpart in an allied country to ask for assistance responding to malware that’s damaging critical infrastructure, and that counterpart has to ask what malware is, the response isn’t going to happen.

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NATO’s essential and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means. Tolerating cyberattacks, especially those deliberately targeting civilians and the political legitimacy of governments—without the alliance having the capability to jointly discuss attribution and have the confidence to act and assist one another—undermines this core purpose of the alliance. Likewise, pursuing only deterrence and response without an active role for the alliance in reaching peaceful diplomatic agreements with potential adversaries abrogates member responsibilities to their citizens but is impossible without a common language and operational picture to discuss enforcement of such agreements. The U.S. is stronger with allies, and with attention to these issues its cybersecurity can be too.

### Link---Hybrid War

#### The Baltics have explicitly demanded the retention of Article 5 as a possible response to hybrid war---the plan’s devastates U.S. credibility

Lukas Milevski 16, Baltic Sea Fellow in the Eurasia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, “Little Green Men in the Baltic States are an Article 5 Event”, Foreign Policy Research Institute Baltic Bulletin, 1/5/2016, https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/01/little-green-men-in-the-baltic-states-are-an-article-5-event/

The ongoing debate about whether or not Russia’s little green men and so-called hybrid warfare are sufficient to invoke NATO’s Article 5 has caused much concern in the Baltic States about how the rest of NATO would respond to such an invocation. Analysts identify hybrid warfare by its blend of non-military instruments of state power, such as media penetration or ownership and economic sanctions, with semi-ambiguous use of military power. The term ‘little green men’ stems from Russia’s annexation of Crimea, during which unidentified but clearly professional soldiers masquerading as local self-defense militia became a focal point for international media. NATO’s Article 5 is the alliance’s collective defense clause, stipulating that an attack upon one is an attack upon all. Little green men are—or at least, should be—an Article 5 concern. Two related but distinct tacks support this point: politically, the utility of little green men has already culminated, while strategically, they constitute an unambiguous armed attack.

Politically, little green men are effectively a one-shot strategy. They rely on the political ambiguity over their identity and allegiance to stay a response, particularly an armed response, until the situation on the ground moves irreversibly in their favor. This is what occurred in Crimea. As the crisis went on, everyone knew that the little green men were Russian soldiers but the situation afforded just enough ambiguity to allow the West to assume a wait-and-see political posture as if their true identify had not been confirmed. Putin himself did admit afterward that they were in fact Russian forces. Ukraine of course learned from its mistake of inaction in Crimea and responded to the Russian presence in the Donbas, a response which forced similarly ambiguous Russian escalation of support to its proxies. Now that Russia is heavily involved in Syria—allegedly also including more “hybrid warfare”—the Donbas enclaves are feeling the pinch of reduced Russian support.

Little green men have proven themselves in Ukraine to be just another form of Russian military power. Where the little green men have succeeded, the Russian state apparatus has followed. Where they have not succeeded, they remain, if not politically deniable, then at least politically disposable.

The ambiguity of the little green men is calculated to increase the political difficulty of a second, or third, party response. In every case, however, political ambiguity worked best when political interest, political will, and/or media attention were lacking. In Crimea, both Ukraine and the West lacked sufficient political interest and will for a strong response, although media attention abounded. In the Donbas, Ukraine found the interest and will to fight, and persisted in doing so even as international media attention waned. In Syria, should the allegations of Russian hybrid warfare prove to be true, none of these three factors exists—the West does not have the interest, will, or attention span to respond to an independent Russian role in the Syrian civil war.

These same conditions would not be replicated if little green men should appear in the countries many have speculated may be next—the Baltic States. The Balts have learned from Crimea and Donbas, and understand the appropriate response to a hypothetical appearance of little green men. As Minister of Defense, current President Raimonds Vējonis stated bluntly several times on the record that if little green men appear in Latvia, military force will be employed: “we will shoot them.” Nor would the Baltic States be a media backwater should serious Russian-themed trouble occur. The topic would force itself onto the world’s—and especially NATO’s—immediate political agenda. An invocation would oblige NATO to confront the reality that the little green men directly represent Russian military and state power and that a NATO constituent country is under direct military attack. Ultimately NATO remains an alliance committed to the mutual defense of its member states. If Article 5 is not upheld, the alliance loses not only its credibility, but also its desirability. On 1-2 December 2015 in Brussels NATO recognized as much by adopting a policy which allows invocation of Article 5 not just in response to overt invasion, but also in case of hybrid warfare, as one choice among others (such as Article 4, consultation) open to member countries.

### Link---AT: Resiliency---2NC

#### ‘Resiliency’ doesn’t apply:

#### The impact isn’t NATO collapse. It can be totally unbreakable and individual allies will still become less certain of U.S. reliability. That cascades, as frontline states in other regions read the tea leaves and are on the brink to due revisionist probing.

#### CEE alliances are fragile---without constant maintenance, they’ll distance

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The fear of abandonment

The clearest outcome of this posture that seeks great- power accommodation and puts a premium on technological solution has been that U.S. allies are nervous while rivals are emboldened. Alliances are fragile associations, and their existence is contingent on multiple factors, ranging from the political will of the parties that makes the alliance possible to the larger geopolitical environment that makes it necessary. They therefore require constant maintenance, mitigating the fear that the alliance will not increase the security of its signatories.

Historically, the greatest fear of the weaker allies is that of abandonment, which in its broadest connotation means that not all involved actors consider credible the security guarantees offered to a state. The clearest form of abandonment is when one side reneges on the security commitments to the other party, like in the case of France and Great Britain negotiating with Nazi Germany in 1938 over their ally Czechoslovakia. But abandonment can take other, less conspicuous forms, driven in part by the fear of entrapment that the less dependent and more powerful ally may have. The stronger ally, in fact, wants to avoid being dragged into a local conflict instigated by its smaller ally, a conflict in which it has few immediate interests at stake.73 To do so, it is tempting to ignore, or even undermine, the most immediate security concerns of the weaker, more dependent ally. The goal is to sidestep a war or tensions deemed unnecessary and distracting from more important objectives. The weak fear abandonment; the strong fear entrapment.74

A distant maritime power, such as the United States, is particularly susceptible to this entrapment anxiety. Geographic distance removes the perception of immediacy of the threat and puts a premium on global stability, often at the expense of local allies’ interests. Such an approach was visible in U.S. foreign policy toward East Asia in the early Cold War, when the objective was not just to contain China but also to restrain U.S. allies from engaging in “little wars” that had the potential of escalating into great- power confrontation with China and the Soviet Union.75 It is also possible to observe similar U.S. behavior in the Middle East, East Asia, and Central Europe in recent years. Washington seems preoccupied more with the possibility that some of its frontline, small, and exposed allies would engage in an overly aggressive foreign policy than with the persistent rhetorical aggressiveness and geopolitical expansion of the rival powers. In the Middle East, Washington often seems more worried about a potential Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities than about Tehran’s policies.76 Israel, on the other hand, fears a nuclear Iran and frets at any sign of U.S. neglect. Similarly, in East Asia, the United States is always preoccupied with an overly assertive ally, such as Japan in the South China Sea disputes that could draw American forces into a local conflict, insignificant to Washington while vital to Tokyo. And in Central Europe, states such as Poland express their disappointment in the uselessness of the United States as an ally, while Washington worries about an anti- Russian Poland spoiling Moscow’s promises of geopolitical cooperation.

The challenge is that the answer to entrapment fears often is a reluctance to support firmly the smaller ally and a posture of accommodation toward the common rival. This generates ally nervousness. As Glenn Snyder puts it, “The most undesirable side effect of conciliating the adversary is that it entails the risk of abandonment by the ally. His fear that one is contemplating realignment may induce him, not to try to discourage this by becoming more accommodative, as suggested above, but to realign preemptively or at least move closer to the opponent. ”77 An attitude that deprioritizes allies forces those states to reconsider their foreign policy preferences. As we will discuss in the next chapter, such behavior on the part of the United States also emboldens our rivals.

### Link---AT: Resiliency---Ext---CEE Fragile

#### There’s huge latent fear of U.S. abandonment---external policy shifts can flip assurance

Łukasz Kulesa 10, Analyst of International Security and Acting Head of the Research Office at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, “Extended Deterrence and Assurance in Central Europe”, in Perspectives on Extended Deterrence, Ed. Tertrais, p. 117

For the region of Central Europe, including for the purposes of this essay the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the “Baltic 3” – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, geography and history have dictated the need to pay special attention to the issue of security and survival of the state. The nation-states which emerged from the collapse of the Soviet empire nurtured the feelings of victimization and distrust for both its potent neighbour to the East, and the “West”, frequently accused of ignoring or betraying the interests of the region.

Despite their legacy of successful political, societal and economic transformation, and membership in NATO and the European Union, security cultures of the countries in the region are still characterized by the fear of abandonment and a high degree of caution regarding political declarations not backed by actions. Especially with regards to the three Baltic states and Poland, their quest for external guarantees did not stop at securing formal commitments from NATO. The credibility of both conventional and nuclear deterrence is constantly assessed against the background of outside developments and internal state of the affairs within the Alliance.

The starting point of this analysis in the description of the limitations of the shape of the deterrence posture in the countries of the region during the process of NATO enlargement. A political agreement reached with Russia precluded the stationing of nuclear weapons or substantial combat forces at the territory of the countries admitted to the Alliance. In practice, the credibility of the NATO’s commitments depended mostly on the perception of the strength and unity of the Alliance itself. Whereas such a solution was fully acceptable in the 1990s, the second part of the essay describes the factors which in the last years contributed to the diminishing of the credibility of deterrence pledges: the change of the situation in Russia, the policy of the new US administration, and doubts over NATO’s cohesion. The third chapter describes the actions taken at the initiative of the countries of the region to influence the policies of NATO and the US towards increased reassurance of the Eastern allies. The possibilities of the emergence of the alternative sources of security guarantees (EU, European states) are also discussed. Finally, the article turns to the unsuccessful attempts to establish a form of extended deterrence for the benefit of Georgia and Ukraine.

#### Assurance depends upon the psychological certainty of U.S. backing---failure causes arms buildup and regional war

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Together, U.S. military strength and political commitments have made up the backbone of American extended deterrent. This is as much a psychological construct as a physical reality, consisting in the belief that the United States is willing and able to take retaliatory action— if necessary, using nuclear weapons— to guarantee the territorial integrity of its allies. This produced a sense of strategic certainty that is an anomaly in frontier regions and has enabled allies to focus on economic development and growth and virtually ignore traditional geopolitics, under the assurance that an active U.S. security presence would underwrite their national security. In exchange for this protection, allies have aligned their diplomacy with U.S. interests, oriented their military doctrines toward American habits of war, maintained generally open economic policies, and provided support for U.S. initiatives outside their own regions. Significantly, frontline states have done so while forgoing the typical behaviors that threatened states have traditionally used to ensure their safety, such as building large armies or engaging in friendly diplomacy with big rivals, on the calculation that the benefits of the U.S.- led order were greater than any conceivable alternative. The result, from America’s standpoint, has been a durably stable and favorable configuration in the world’s major regions that has promoted its core interest of preventing hostile coalitions in Eurasia.

### Link---AT: Resiliency---NATO

#### Resiliency is eroding---NATO needs to be actively robust or demographic trends will eat it away

Mike Sweeney 20, Retired Colonel from the U.S. Marine Corps, Former Staff Member at the World Housing Solution, “What Is NATO Good For?”, Real Clear Defense, 1/6/2020, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/01/06/what\_is\_nato\_good\_for\_114961.html

Stabilizing the Present

NATO’s advocates are also prone to hyperbole, but one word that is not an overstatement is irreplaceable. It would be difficult—if not impossible—to recreate NATO or something like it from scratch. Still, even irreplaceable doesn’t imply permanence if the alliance’s value cannot readily be established and sold to the populations of its constituent members, especially Americans.

Demography is not on the alliance’s side. Should NATO survive to celebrate its centennial, the generation being born at that time will be as far removed from the end of the Second World War as someone born in 1969 was from the conclusion of the American Civil War. Even the September 11th attacks—and NATO’s ensuing invocation of Article 5—will be a half century in the past. In short, shared historical experience or even simple nostalgia will not be enough to sustain the alliance through the twenty-first century. NATO needs to show that it is not just relevant, but crucial to continued security in Europe and, to be blunt, the broader interests of its essential member, the United States.

The most effective way of doing that is reinforcing the image of NATO as a vehicle for stability, something which has been recently diminished. There are legitimate arguments to be made that NATO now endangers American security by having antagonized Russia through enlargement and increased the likelihood of confrontation, possibly a nuclear one, rather than decreasing it.[15] That relations between America and Russia—and overall stability in Eastern Europe—might be far worse without the alliance is also true, but is a difficult sell in trying to promote the alliance’s relevance. NATO needs to be an active participant in visibly promoting stability, beyond the important day-to-day but low-key role it plays in this regard.

### Impact---CEE---2NC

#### Disad outweighs:

#### Magnitude---Central Europe is the canary in the coal mine. It’s watched globally by frontline states, who’ll hedge and rearm or cede to hostile powers. That causes a multi-regional crisis of confidence that snowballs into great power nuclear war.

#### There are flashpoints in Ukraine and Asia. Each rapidly goes nuclear.

Dr. Michael T. Klare 19, Professor Emeritus of Peace and World Security Studies at Hampshire College and Senior Visiting Fellow at the Arms Control Association, Ph.D. from the Graduate School of the Union Institute, BA and MA from Columbia University, “Cyber Battles, Nuclear Outcomes? Dangerous New Pathways to Escalation”, Arms Control Today, November 2019, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-11/features/cyber-battles-nuclear-outcomes-dangerous-new-pathways-escalation

The first and possibly most dangerous path to escalation would arise from the early use of cyberweapons in a great power crisis to paralyze the vital command, control, and communications capabilities of an adversary, many of which serve nuclear and conventional forces. In the “fog of war” that would naturally ensue from such an encounter, the recipient of such an attack might fear more punishing follow-up kinetic attacks, possibly including the use of nuclear weapons, and, fearing the loss of its own arsenal, launch its weapons immediately. This might occur, for example, in a confrontation between NATO and Russian forces in east and central Europe or between U.S. and Chinese forces in the Asia-Pacific region.

Speaking of a possible confrontation in Europe, for example, James N. Miller Jr. and Richard Fontaine wrote that “both sides would have overwhelming incentives to go early with offensive cyber and counter-space capabilities to negate the other side’s military capabilities or advantages.” If these early attacks succeeded, “it could result in huge military and coercive advantage for the attacker.” This might induce the recipient of such attacks to back down, affording its rival a major victory at very low cost. Alternatively, however, the recipient might view the attacks on its critical command, control, and communications infrastructure as the prelude to a full-scale attack aimed at neutralizing its nuclear capabilities and choose to strike first. “It is worth considering,” Miller and Fontaine concluded, “how even a very limited attack or incident could set both sides on a slippery slope to rapid escalation.”10

What makes the insertion of latent malware in an adversary’s NC3 systems so dangerous is that it may not even need to be activated to increase the risk of nuclear escalation. If a nuclear-armed state comes to believe that its critical systems are infested with enemy malware, its leaders might not trust the information provided by its early-warning systems in a crisis and might misconstrue the nature of an enemy attack, leading them to overreact and possibly launch their nuclear weapons out of fear they are at risk of a preemptive strike.

“The uncertainty caused by the unique character of a cyber threat could jeopardize the credibility of the nuclear deterrent and undermine strategic stability in ways that advances in nuclear and conventional weapons do not,” Page O. Stoutland and Samantha Pitts-Kiefer wrote in 2018 paper for the Nuclear Threat Initiative. “[T]he introduction of a flaw or malicious code into nuclear weapons through the supply chain that compromises the effectiveness of those weapons could lead to a lack of confidence in the nuclear deterrent,” undermining strategic stability.11 Without confidence in the reliability of its nuclear weapons infrastructure, a nuclear-armed state may misinterpret confusing signals from its early-warning systems and, fearing the worst, launch its own nuclear weapons rather than lose them to an enemy’s first strike. This makes the scenario proffered in the 2018 NPR report, of a nuclear response to an enemy cyberattack, that much more alarming.

Yet another pathway to escalation could arise from a cascading series of cyberstrikes and counterstrikes against vital national infrastructure rather than on military targets. All major powers, along with Iran and North Korea, have developed and deployed cyberweapons designed to disrupt and destroy major elements of an adversary’s key economic systems, such as power grids, financial systems, and transportation networks. As noted, Russia has infiltrated the U.S. electrical grid, and it is widely believed that the United States has done the same in Russia.12 The Pentagon has also devised a plan known as “Nitro Zeus,” intended to immobilize the entire Iranian economy and so force it to capitulate to U.S. demands or, if that approach failed, to pave the way for a crippling air and missile attack.13

The danger here is that economic attacks of this sort, if undertaken during a period of tension and crisis, could lead to an escalating series of tit-for-tat attacks against ever more vital elements of an adversary’s critical infrastructure, producing widespread chaos and harm and eventually leading one side to initiate kinetic attacks on critical military targets, risking the slippery slope to nuclear conflict. For example, a Russian cyberattack on the U.S. power grid could trigger U.S. attacks on Russian energy and financial systems, causing widespread disorder in both countries and generating an impulse for even more devastating attacks. At some point, such attacks “could lead to major conflict and possibly nuclear war.”14

#### Israel and Taiwan are watching. They’ll lash-out.

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Second, insecure allies are less likely to support out-of-area U.S. and NATO military missions. On a per-capita basis, Central European states have been some of the most generous contributors to U.S. and NATO operations, most recently in Afghanistan. With changes in the regional security landscape, the perceived need for territorial defense has increased. Unless this need is met proactively, exposed states may begin to consider augmenting their own indigenous defense capabilities at the expense of out-of-area assets and training, potentially depriving the United States and NATO of support in future crises.

Third, insecurity in Central Europe could fuel uncertainty among geopolitically-exposed U.S. allies in other parts of the globe. North Central Europe is not the only region where small and mid-sized U.S. allies straddle strategic fault lines near potentially hostile neighbors. Powers such as Israel and Taiwan both depend on the United States as an off-shore security benefactor and closely monitor Washington's relationships in Central and Eastern Europe for cues on the reliability of the U.S. security link. Should these powers perceive a trend toward U.S. global retrenchment, they might re-evaluate their own strategic options, creating conditions that could contribute to the gradual reactivation of old regional security dilemmas best left dormant.

It is this wider strategic context through which Washington should view regional insecurity in Central Europe. The United States has begun taking steps to counter regional uncertainty in the form of contingency planning for the Baltic States, heightened regional security exercises (the upcoming U.S.-Baltic ‘Sabre Strike' 2010 maneuvers), a Patriot missile battery in Morag, Poland and pursuing next generation BMD with planned components in Romania and Bulgaria. These steps, however, are not sufficient. Strategic reassurance can take many forms; the emphasis should be on developing a package of instruments, including but not limited to military reassurance, which strengthen the embeddedness of regional states in Western institutions.

The United States would do well to approach strategic reassurance through the lens of NATO. In the 2010 Strategic Concept, the Allies should reinforce their commitment to territorial defense to complement the current emphasis on out-of-area operations, which will alleviate concerns of a rising Russian threat.

#### Each explodes into World War III

Dr. Robert Farley 12-28, Professor at Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky, PhD from the University of Washington, BA from the University of Oregon, Frequent Contributor to The National Interest, Founder and Senior Editor of Lawyers, Guns and Money, “5 Places World War III Could Start in 2020”, The National Interest, 12/28/2019, https://nationalinterest.org/print/blog/buzz/5-places-world-war-iii-could-start-2020-109011

Here are the five most likely flashpoints for world war in 2020 (See my World War III lists from back in 2017, 2018 and 2019).

None are particularly likely, but only one needs to catch fire. Let the wars begin!

Iran-Israel:

Iran and Israel are already waging low-intensity war across the Middle East. Iran supports anti-Israel proxies in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere, while Israel feels comfortable in striking Iranian forces across the region. Israel has taken steps to quietly build a broad anti-Iran coalition at the diplomatic level, while Iran has invested deeply in cultivating ties with militias and other non-state actors.

It is hardly difficult to imagine scenarios that might bring on a wider, more intense war. If Iran determines to re-embark on its nuclear program, or decides to discipline Saudi Arabia more thoroughly, Israel might feel the temptation to engage in broader strikes, or in strikes directly against the Iranian homeland. Such a conflict could easily have wider implications, threatening global oil supplies and potentially tempting the United States or Russia to intervene.

Turkey:

Strains between Turkey and the United States have only grown over the past year. Tensions increased dramatically when the United States unexpectedly gave Turkey a green light to clear Syrian border areas of U.S.-supported Kurds, then immediately issued an about-face and threatened Ankara with sanctions. All the while, an arsenal of US nuclear weapons, by all accounts, remains at Incirlik Air Force base. Certain statements by President Erdogan suggested that he has immense aspirations for Turkey, aspirations which might include nuclear ambitions.

The state of the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey has decayed to the extent that some fear for the future of the NATO alliance. No one expects Erdogan to really go through with an attempted seizure of the weapons, and even if he did it’s unlikely Turkey could break the safeguards on the warheads in any kind of reasonable time. But Erdogan is not known to compartmentalize issues well, and it’s possible that linkages with other problems could push Washington and Ankara to the very edge. And of course, Russia hovers on the edge of the problem,

Kashmir:

Over the past decade, the gap in conventional power between India and Pakistan has only grown, even as Pakistan has tried to heal that gap with nuclear weapons. Despite (or perhaps because) of this, tensions between the rivals remained at a low simmer until steps taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reduce the autonomy of Kashmir and to change citizenship policies within the rest of India. These steps have caused some unrest within India, and have highlighted the long-standing tensions between Delhi and Islamabad.

Further domestic disturbances within India could give Pakistan (or extremist groups within Pakistan) the idea that it has the opportunity, or perhaps even the responsibility, to intervene in some fashion. While this is unlikely to begin with conventional military action, it could consist of terrorist attacks internationally, in Kashmir, or internationally. If this happened, Modi might feel forced to respond in some fashion, leading to a ladder of escalation that could bring the two countries to the brink of a more serious conflict. Given China’s looming position and the growing relationship between Delhi and Washington, this kind of conflict could have remarkably disastrous international ripple effects.

Korean Peninsula:

A year ago, hope remained that negotiations between the United States and North Korea could succeed in permanently reducing tensions of the peninsula. Unfortunately, core problems in the domestic situations of both countries, along with a puzzling strategic conundrum, have prevented any agreement from taking hold. Tensions between the two countries now stand as high as at any time since 2017, and the impending U.S. election could imperil relations further.

The Trump administration continues to seem to hold out hope that a deal with North Korea could improve its electoral prospects in November. But North Korea has no interest in the terms Trump is offering, and has become increasingly emphatic about making its disinterest clear. Recently, North Korea promised a “Christmas present” that many in the United States worried would be a nuclear or ballistic missile test. It turned out to be nothing of the sort, but if North Korea decides to undertake an ICBM or (worse) nuclear test, the Trump administration might feel the need to intervene forcefully. In particular, President Trump has a reputation for pursuing a deeply personalistic foreign policy style, and might feel betrayed by Supreme Leader Kim, producing an even more uncertain situation.

South China Sea:

U.S.-China relations stand at a precarious point. A trade deal between the two countries would seem to alleviate some tensions, but implementation remains in question. Economic difficulties in China have curtailed some of its naval construction program, just as a flattening of the defense budget in the United States has moderated shipbuilding ambitions. At the same time, China has worked assiduously to assure its relations with Russia, while the United States has sparked controversies with both South Korea and Japan, its two closest allies in the region.

Under such circumstances, it seems unlikely that either country would risk conflict. But President Trump has staked much of his Presidency on confrontation with China, and may feel tempted to escalate the situation in the coming year. For his part, President Xi faces the continuous prospect of turmoil at home, both in the Han heartland and in Xinjiang. Both sides, thus, have incentives for diplomatic and economic escalation, which always could lead to military confrontation in areas such as the South or East China Seas.

What Does the Future Hold for 2020?

The prospect of global conflagration in 2020 is low. Everyone awaits the result of the U.S. election, and a better understanding of the direction of US policy for the next four years. Still, every crisis proceeds by its own logic, and any of Pakistan, India, China, Israel, Iran, Turkey, or Russia might feel compelled by events to act. Focus on the election should not obscure the frictions between nations that could provide the spark for the next war.

### Impact---CEE---2NC---Turns Case---OAOs

#### It wrecks NATO OAOs

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Second, insecure allies are less likely to support out-of-area U.S. and NATO military missions. On a per-capita basis, Central European states have been some of the most generous contributors to U.S. and NATO operations, most recently in Afghanistan. With changes in the regional security landscape, the perceived need for territorial defense has increased. Unless this need is met proactively, exposed states may begin to consider augmenting their own indigenous defense capabilities at the expense of out-of-area assets and training, potentially depriving the United States and NATO of support in future crises.

### Impact---CEE---Yes Global Spillover

#### Frontline allies are globally interconnected---they watch Central Europe for cues about overall U.S. reliability

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Up and down the frontier of American global power, from the South China Sea to the Middle East, from the Caucasus to the north Central European plain, U.S. allies are increasingly nervous. Along the littoral rim of East Asia, South Koreans, Japanese, Taiwanese and others in the region watched anxiously throughout 2010 as China ratcheted up efforts to assert control over strategic waterways and challenge the U.S. position in Asia. In the Middle East, too, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States ended the year less confident than ever that the United States would somehow bestir itself to contain an aspiring nuclear-armed Iran. And on Europe’s eastern fringe, despite efforts at détente with Moscow, Poland and the Baltic States entered 2011 with deep uncertainties about America’s long-term regional commitment in the face of a decrepit but atavistically revisionist Russia.

Viewed separately, these are unrelated regional silos, each with its own geopolitical rhythm, security logic and ranking in the hierarchy of American strategic and political priorities. But seen together, a different picture emerges. In all three regions, small, geopolitically exposed states with formal or informal U.S. security commitments straddle age-old strategic fault lines in close proximity to rising or resurgent power centers. In all three, assertiveness on the part of these larger powers has led American allies to reassess U.S. assurances. And in all three, American allies have been at best temporarily reassured, and at times unsettled, by Washington’s response. This has led them all, to one degree or another, to invest in new strategic options to hedge against the possibility of eventual American retrenchment.

Amid the now globally accepted thesis of American decline, America’s global rivals are doing what aspirant powers have done at moments of transition for millennia: hypothesis-testing. They are probing the top state on the outer limits of its power commitments, where its strategic appendages are most vulnerable and its strength is most thinly spread. If history is any guide at all, they are reading America’s responses to gauge how much latitude they have to make low-cost revisions to the system in their favor. But both they and American allies are watching not just how America responds to probes in their own neck of the woods but also to the probes of powers—and to the needs of similarly situated allies—in other regions. Lacking the geopolitical equivalent of a stock market, they are gathering valuable cues about America’s intentions in their own neighborhood by tracking how it handles revisionists at other points on the U.S. strategic perimeter.

If accurate, this assessment holds profound implications for American statecraft in the early decades of the 21st century. It suggests a degree of global interconnectedness that has been largely absent from contemporary policy thinking. If America’s rivals are indeed testing the hypothesis of its decline through probes on the strategic periphery, and if they and our allies are making strategic calculations based on how Washington reacts to these tests, then this raises serious questions about the wisdom of the recent U.S. emphasis on great power relationships and the occasional, de facto downgrading of traditional alliances in search of successful engagement gambits. It also calls into question the deeper assumptions underlying our current strategic thinking. While a relative attenuation of the U.S. position due to the “rise of the rest” is a reality, an American power free-fall of the kind envisioned by some foreign and even U.S. commentators is not inevitable; how the United States responds to its competitors’ probes will be an important ingredient in determining the scale and pace of the change that does occur. In short, the hypothesis of precipitous American decline needs to be disproven before its growing momentum transforms it into a self-fulfilling juggernaut. And only America can disprove it.

#### The plan creates a demonstration effect that ruins perceptions of unconditional reliability---especially in the Middle East and Asia

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It is a demonstration effect that will create ripples of insecurity in Central and Eastern Europe but also in other global regions in which small and mid-sized U.S. allies sit in close proximity to large historically predatory powers. Jakub Grygiel and I first warned about a trend in this direction in 2010, and we are now seeing this concern is validated on a grand scale. Crimea offers a template for low-cost revisionism—a dangerous precedent for other revisionist-minded powers in the international system who may draw the conclusion that the use of force will be rewarded with geopolitical faits accomplis and territorial gains at little cost to themselves. It sends the message that the rules are flexible for those who are willing to act boldly and use military force to revise the status quo.

The parallel danger, which Jakub and I have catalogued extensively, is that U.S. allies in other regions may draw the lesson that the United States is only a conditional guarantor at best of their security. Crimea sends a signal to small and mid-sized American allies in Central Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific that we may be entering an era of self-permissiveness on the part of revisionists, and that the chief guardian of the status quo, the United States, may or may not be willing to underwrite the stability of the system as a whole. The undermining of the Budapest Memorandum is especially significant because this treaty solemnized Ukraine’s decision to give up its nuclear arsenal in exchange for territorial guarantees from major powers. The fate of Ukraine may suggest to other states in similar positions that their best bet is to develop a nuclear deterrent rather than count on outside protection.

### Impact---CEE---Yes Global Spillover---A2: Cred Theory False

#### Credibility defense is about adversaries, not allies---the audience effect is empirically proven and robust

Iain Henry 14, PhD Candidate at the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, MA in Strategic Studies from Australian National University, Fulbright Scholar, “The Alliance Audience Effect in America’s Asian Alliances”, 11-16, p. 3-4

Recent scholarship has questioned aspects of deterrence theory and instead suggests that backing down in one confrontation does not lead an adversary to regard a state as irresolute, or increase the likelihood of further challenges. Authors such as Daryl Press and Jonathan Mercer have argued that in assessing a state's level of resolve, an adversary is more likely to consider that state's current interests and capabilities, rather than its past actions.2 For interactions with adversaries, recent scholarship concludes that credible threats require significant interests and the capabilities necessary to pursue or protect them. However, there has been less academic focus on another aspect of international relations - how a state might assess the security reliability of an ally.

Some authors have argued that states should not worry about whether allies consider them reliable. Mercer suggests that because 'Decision-makers do not consistently use another state's past behaviour...to predict that state's behavior', the United States should not be concerned about its allies viewing it as irresolute, as these allies will simply assume that America's 'interests and capabilities determine [its] resolve'.3 Although Press largely supports Mercer's conclusions about adversaries and resolve, he is more reserved on how allies might assess a state's actions. Press notes that although 'it is critical to know how countries assess the credibility of their allies,' this remains a research gap.4

The issue of reliability within alliances is not a completely unexplored field, but most of the scholarly work focussing on alliance reliability has examined its connection to alliance formation and termination. Douglas Gibler looks primarily at the issue of alliance foimation, but also finds that states with reliable allies are less likely to be targeted in disputes.5 Gregory Miller finds that unreliable states will be more constrained by the design of their alliances—allies will impose tighter alliance controls to compensate for any unreliability—but it is less clear how this finding assists in understanding alliance management in situations where the simple rewriting of an alliance treaty might not be practical.6 For example, it is hard to conceive how Japan, if it began to doubt American reliability today, could simply rewrite its alliance with the United States in order to mitigate the risk of abandonment Brett Leeds has considered the reliability of alliance commitments in times of war, but the subject of reliability perceptions within non-wartime alliance management is relatively unexamined.7

This article constructs and tests a theory of the "alliance audience effect", which addresses how states might observe their ally's behaviour in order to fonn assessments about its security reliability. Drawing on neo-realist alliance theory, this article argues that a state should monitor how their ally behaves within other alliance relationships in order to form accurate assessments of the ally1 s reliability. Based on these assessments, states should adopt balancing behaviour in order to mitigate the risks of abandonment or entrapment After discussing the deductive basis for these ideas. I test them against America's conduct in Asia between 1949-1951.

I do not claim that a state's observations of allied behaviour will be the only influence on that state's beliefs about the reliability of the ally. However, this article shows that states do monitor the conduct of their ally and that these observations can influence that state to adopt balancing behaviour intended to mitigate the risks posed by the ally's unreliability. I argue that the "alliance audience" exists, and that demonstrating unreliability on the global stage can have significant effects. The article then concludes by outlining the current policy relevance of these concepts and suggesting further areas of research.

#### Credibility theory is definitely correct, proven by empirics, studies, and interviews with officials

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A later generation of scholars, however, departed from Schelling’s analysis. Few scholars question the importance of credibility per se, if credibility is defined as the perception that the United States will act to defend its key interests. What they have critiqued, rather, is the idea that establishing credibility requires regular demonstrations of American resolve, particularly through the use of force. Some scholars have noted, for instance, that concerns with resolve and credibility led the United States to undertake policies—such as escalation in Vietnam—that incurred losses far out of proportion to the reputational gains.

16 Others claimed to find little evidence that past demonstrations of resolve actually mattered in affecting opponents’ calculations of credibility. In one widely read study, Daryl Press contended that Western appeasement of Hitler at Munich had little or nothing to do with his subsequent aggression, and that Nikita Khrushchev’s repeated climb-downs on Berlin and other issues in the late 1950s had scant impact on Western perceptions of his resolve.17 Press and other scholars argued that other variables—the balance of capabilities and the perceived importance of the interests at stake—were paramount in determining perceptions of credibility.18 Other scholars have made similar arguments, claiming that “politicians’ persistent belief in the value of reputation for resolve is merely a cult of reputation,” or even, in an extreme form, that “credibility is an illusion—and an exceptionally dangerous illusion at that.”19

Such doubts may be most prevalent within the ivory tower, and relatively few policymakers would share academics’ skepticism about the importance of credibility and demonstrations of resolve.20 Yet it is worth nothing that a similar skepticism has emerged in some surprising quarters of the policymaking community of late. As Jeffrey Goldberg wrote in 2016, then-President Obama believed that the U.S. foreign policy community “makes a fetish of ‘credibility’—particularly the sort of credibility purchased with force.” As the president acidly remarked, “Dropping bombs on someone to prove that you’re willing to drop bombs on someone is just about the worst reason to use force.”21

It would require an extended essay to adjudicate these debates regarding credibility and its constituent parts. Yet three key points can briefly be made here. First, and most important, the more extreme critiques of credibility and U.S. policymakers’ preoccupation therewith are badly overstated. For one thing, accepting that credibility is an illusion, or that past behavior has no impact on perceptions of an actor’s subsequent credibility, requires accepting that normal rules of human interaction—in which past behavior is crucial to expectations about future behavior—are simply suspended in the international arena. If a person reneges on a commitment, his peers and interlocutors will likely doubt his sincerity with respect to other commitments; there is no logical reason to suspect that similar patterns do not prevail in international politics. For another thing, deeming credibility an illusion requires accepting that virtually all U.S. officials who think otherwise—in part because they know, from experience, that U.S. allies as well as adversaries are constantly assessing recent American behavior in hopes of divining what Washington will do in the next crisis—are simply mistaken. Not least, there is now considerable historical analysis and evidence illustrating that credibility does matter and past actions do indeed affect reputations. Scholars have convincingly argued that:

• Ronald Reagan’s decision not to retaliate meaningfully for Hezbollah’s attacks on the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 had a corrosive effect on how other terrorists and state sponsors perceived U.S. intentions. When U.S. officials threatened Syrian president Hafez al-Assad with retribution if he did not cease supporting Hezbollah, for instance, Assad replied that he did not credit American threats.22

• Conversely, the U.S. willingness to defend South Korea in 1950 influenced Soviet perceptions of American resolve to resist further East bloc military advances. As William Stueck writes in his definitive history of the Korean War, “Stalin’s immediate successors learned the lesson that to arouse the United States from a slumber through blatant military action could prove a costly mistake. It would take more than a generation and a new group of leaders before the Soviet Union would run a repeat performance.”23

• The U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam did encourage additional East bloc challenges in the Third World—in Angola, for instance—by signaling a declining U.S. willingness to act decisively to head off Soviet and Cuban advances in peripheral areas.24

• John F. Kennedy’s perceived irresolution in handling the Bay of Pigs invasion encouraged Khrushchev to bully him at the Vienna Summit in 1961. His actions there and in response to the construction of the Berlin Wall also influenced the Soviet decision to place missiles in Cuba a year later.25

• Early U.S. irresolution and failure to make good on coercive threats in dealing with the Balkan crisis in the early 1990s led actors in that crisis to doubt subsequent U.S. promises and threats. Later shows of resolve, by contrast, had a constructive impact on the subsequent behavior of those actors. “Whenever US officials failed to respond to probes and challenges, violence escalated. When resolve was demonstrated through mobilizing military forces or airstrikes, escalation was controlled.”26

• Tepid U.S. responses to al-Qaeda attacks during the 1990s, along with the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia following the deaths of less than 20 American servicemen in 1993, encouraged Osama bin Laden to escalate his strikes in the belief that the United States would react to a shocking attack on the homeland by withdrawing from the greater Middle East.27

Moreover, and notwithstanding the academic skepticism discussed above, there has also emerged a growing body of social science literature in recent years indicating that the extreme critiques of credibility are unpersuasive, because past actions and demonstrations of resolve do influence subsequent expectations. Studies have shown that:

• “States that have honored their commitments in the past are more likely to find alliance partners in the future. Conversely, alliance violations decrease the likelihood of future alliance formation.”28

• Backing down in a dispute with a given challenger increases the likelihood that the challenger “will escalate the current dispute,” whereas an effective response that forces the challenger to back down decreases the likelihood that the challenger will subsequently escalate. In other words, retreating now encourages more severe challenges later; resisting now can have the opposite effect.29

• “A defender that enjoys superiority in military resources but does not use force in some manner in a current conflict is at a higher risk of experiencing a re-challenge than is a defender that enjoys military superiority and uses it in some.” In essence, demonstrations of resolve through the use of force are important in shaping the future behavior of adversaries.

30

• “Behavior in earlier conflicts . . . becomes the basis for inferring likely behavior in response to subsequent challenges. . . . A country that yielded in a dispute in the previous year is more than two and one-half times as likely to be challenged than is a country that has not yielded in the previous ten years.”31

In short, there is good reason to think that credibility and resolve are more than mere figments of policymakers’ imaginations.

### Impact---CEE---Alliances Stop Regional War

#### Declining alliances creates a multi-regional crisis of confidence, revisionist probes, and great power war---allies will distance from the U.S., aligning with Russia and China and rearm, triggering security dilemmas and war---that’s Mitchell

#### It’s unique---the global network of small allies is successfully containing challenges---economics effects and multinational legitimacy of responses will coalesce peace through gradual internal change

Dr. Michael Mandelbaum 19, Christian A. Herter Professor Emeritus of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Author of The Rise and Fall of Peace on Earth, “The New Containment: Handling Russia, China, and Iran”, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-02-12/new-containment

But today’s circumstances differ from those of the past in several important ways. During most of the Cold War, Washington confronted a single powerful opponent, the Soviet Union—the leader of the international communist movement. Now it must cope with three separate adversaries, each largely independent of the other two. Russia and China cooperate, but they also compete with each other. And while both have good relations with Iran, both also have large and potentially restive Muslim populations, giving them reason to worry about the growth of Iranian power and influence. Cold War containment was a single global undertaking, implemented regionally. Contemporary containment will involve three separate regional initiatives, implemented in coordination.

The Soviet Union, moreover, presented a strong ideological challenge, devoted as it was to advancing not just Moscow’s geopolitical interests but also its communist principles. Neither Russia nor China has such a crusading ideology today. Russia has abandoned communism completely, and China has done so partially, retaining the notion of party supremacy but shedding most of the economics and the messianic zeal. And although the Islamic Republic represents a cause and not just a stretch of territory, the potential appeal of its ideology is largely limited to the Muslim world and, primarily, its Shiite minority.

None of today’s revisionist powers possesses the Soviet Union’s fearsome military capabilities. Russia is a shrunken version of its older self militarily, and Iran lacks formidable modern military forces. China’s economic growth may ultimately allow it to match the United States in all strategic dimensions and pose a true peer threat, but to date, Beijing is concentrating on developing forces to exclude the United States from the western Pacific, not to project power globally. Moreover, the initiatives each has launched so far—Russia’s seizure of Crimea and Middle East meddling, China’s island building, Iran’s regional subversion—have been limited probes rather than all-out assaults on the existing order.

Lastly, the Soviet Union was largely detached from the U.S.-centered global economy during the Cold War, whereas today’s revisionist powers are very much a part of it. Russia and Iran have relatively small economies and export mostly energy, but China has the world’s second-largest economy, with deep, wide, and growing connections to countries everywhere.

Economic interdependence will complicate containment. China, for example, may be a political and military rival, but it is also a crucial economic partner. The United States depends on China to finance its deficits. China depends on the United States to buy its exports. Containment in Asia will thus require other policies as well, because although a Chinese military collapse would enhance Asian security, a Chinese economic collapse would bring economic disaster.

Together, these differences make today’s containment a less urgent challenge than its Cold War predecessor. The United States does not have to deal with a single mortal threat from a country committed to remaking the entire world in its own image. It must address three serious but lesser challenges, mounted by countries seeking not heaven on earth but greater regional power and autonomy. But if today’s challenges are less epic, they are far more complicated. The old containment was simple, if not easy. The new containment will have to blend a variety of policies, carefully coordinated with one another in design and execution. This will tax the ingenuity and flexibility of the United States and its allies.

STRONGER TOGETHER

As during the Cold War, containment today requires American military deployments abroad. In Europe, ground troops are needed to deter Russian aggression. The Putin regime has already sent forces into Georgia and Ukraine. The United States is committed to protecting its NATO allies. These include the Baltic states, tiny countries on Russia’s border. By defending them, the United States could encounter some of the same difficulties it did defending West Berlin, including, in the worst case, having to decide whether to bring nuclear weapons into play rather than accept military defeat.

East Asia requires a robust U.S. naval presence to fend off China’s campaign to dominate the western Pacific. The United States is committed to protecting allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan and maintaining open sea-lanes, and it conducts what it calls “freedom-of-navigation operations” in international waters newly claimed by China to make clear that the rest of the world does not accept Chinese claims and Chinese dominance there.

And in the Middle East, American naval and air forces are needed to safeguard shipments of Persian Gulf oil to Europe and Asia and to support a successful rollback of the Iranian nuclear program, should that become necessary. American troops on the ground are not required; it is local forces that must check Iranian efforts at regional subversion (which are carried out by local militias).

Diplomatically, Washington needs to maintain or assemble broad coalitions of local powers to oppose each revisionist challenge. In Europe, NATO was created to carry out this very mission and so should be the pillar of the United States’ strategy there. In Asia and the Middle East, the “hub and spoke” pattern of American Cold War alliances still exists, even as regional powers have begun to collaborate among themselves.

Working with partners exploits Washington’s greatest strength: its ability to attract allies and create powerful coalitions against isolated opponents. Coordinating with other countries also endows American foreign policy with a legitimacy it would otherwise lack, showing that the United States is not simply acting for itself but defending broad principles of international order that many others support.

The dependence of the revisionists on access to the global economy gives the United States and its coalition partners a potential source of leverage. Washington and its allies have tried to exploit this through sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, tariffs on China for its trade practices, and sanctions on Iran for its nuclear weapons program. But interdependence cuts both ways. Russia has tried to pressure Ukraine by restricting Ukrainian access to Russian energy. China has placed targeted embargoes on Japan and Norway to express displeasure with specific Japanese and Norwegian policies. Moreover, economic instruments have at best a mixed record in achieving political goals; the broader the sanctioning coalition is, the greater its impact will be.

MAKING IT OFFICIAL

The prospect of a twenty-first-century triple containment strategy raises several questions. Since the United States is already doing much of what is required, how much change in American foreign policy is needed? Is it necessary or feasible to confront all three revisionist powers at once? And how does all this end?

As for the first, explicitly committing the United States to containment would build on many existing policies while reframing them as part of a coherent national strategy rather than the products of inertia or inattention. A public commitment to containment would enhance the credibility of American deterrence and lower the chance of opportunistic attacks by opponents hoping for easy gains (as happened in Korea in 1950 and Iraq in 1990). That, in turn, would reassure actual and potential allies and increase their willingness to join the effort. Adopting containment as a strategic frame would also help restrain Washington’s occasional impulses to do more (try to transform other societies) or less (retreat from global engagement altogether).

As for confronting all three at once, geopolitical logic and historical experience suggest that reducing the number of threats is the best course, as the United States did by joining with the Soviet Union to defeat the Nazis and then aligning with Mao Zedong’s China to defeat the Soviet Union. Post-Soviet Russia would have been a natural partner for the West. But Moscow was needlessly alienated from its logical geopolitical partnership by NATO expansion, which brought foreign armies to its doorstep over its objections. At this point, all three revisionist regimes rely for domestic support on nationalist hostility to the United States specifically and Western democracies more generally and reject being part of a U.S.-led coalition. Fortunately, Russia is much weaker than the Soviet Union, China is restrained by both deterrence and the knowledge that military conflict would damage its economy, and Iran is a regional power. So the United States can afford to pursue the containment of all three simultaneously (so long as it does so as part of robust coalitions).

Cold War containment was an open-ended policy with a hoped-for eventual outcome. The same will be true for the new version: the policy should continue as long as the threats it is intended to counter continue, and ideally it will end similarly. Constructive regime change, for example, especially the advent of democracy, would alter the foreign policy orientations of the revisionist powers. Such a change would have to come about through internal processes and is unlikely to happen anytime soon. Still, none of the regimes can be confident of its longevity; repeated outbreaks of political turbulence over the years have shown that each faces significant domestic opposition, maintains itself in power through coercion, and fears its people rather than trusts them. Situations like that can shift rapidly. A well-executed policy of containment could increase the chances of disruption by creating an external context that would encourage it. But when or, indeed, if it would bear fruit is impossible to predict.

#### Frontline allies sustain global peace, deter revisionism and keep open strategic chokepoints---but perceived distancing crashes the network, causing war

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What is the value of allies at the outer frontier of American power? Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has maintained a network of alliances with vulnerable states situated near the strategic crossroads, choke points, and arteries of the world’s major regions. In East Asia, Washington has built formal and informal security relationships with island and coastal states dotting the Asian mainland: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, as well as midsized offshore powers Japan and Australia. In the Middle East, it has maintained a special relationship with democratic ally Israel and security links with moderate Arab states Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). And in East- Central Europe, in the period since the Cold War, the United States has formed alliances with the group of mostly small, post- communist states— Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria— that line the Baltic- to- Black- Sea corridor between Germany and Russia.

Despite their obvious geographic and political dissimilarities, these three regional clusters of U.S. allies share a number of important strategic characteristics (see figure 1.1). All are composed of small and midsized powers (most have between five and fifty million inhabitants and small landmass). Most are democracies and free market economies deeply invested in the Bretton Woods global economic and institutional framework. All, to a greater extent than other U.S. allies, occupy strategically important global real estate along three of the world’s most contested geopolitical fault lines. Most sit near a maritime choke point or critical land corridor: the Asian littoral routes (South China Sea, North China Sea, Sea of Japan, Straits of Taiwan, Straits of Malacca); the Persian Gulf and eastern Mediterranean; and the Baltic and Black Seas and space connecting them that underpins the stability of the western Eurasian littoral.

Perhaps most important from a twenty- first- century U.S. strategic perspective, all these allies are located in close proximity to larger, historically predatory powers— China, Iran, and Russia, respectively— that are international competitors to the United States and within whose respective spheres of influence they would likely fall, should they lose some or all of their strategic independence. None of these states is militarily powerful; with the important exceptions of Japan and Israel, they lack a realistic prospect for military self- sufficiency in any protracted crisis. As a result, all look to the United States, either explicitly or implicitly, to act as the ultimate guarantor of their national independence and security provider of last resort.

The view has begun to take root in the United States that these sprawling alliances are a liability— either because of the costs that they impose through the necessity of maintaining a large military and overseas bases or because of the perils of entrapment in conflicts involving faraway disputes. Maintaining extensive, expensive, and binding relationships with exposed and militarily weak states located near large rivals, we are told, will cause more problems than they are worth in the geopolitics of the twenty- first century. Citing nineteenth- century Britain’s alleged aloofness to foreign states, domestic critics of alliances counsel Washington to spurn continental commitments to small and needy allies. Echoing Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck, these critics warn that the United States must avoid intervening in conflicts that aren’t “worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier, ” whether that conflict be in Estonia or in the South China Sea.

But these views are wrong— and dangerous. For the past sixty years U.S. foreign policy has pursued exactly the opposite course, and for good reason. The United States has deliberately cultivated bilateral security linkages with small, otherwise defenseless states strewn across the world’s most hotly contested regions, militarily building them up and even providing overt guarantees to them. In fact, it has often seemed to value these states precisely because of their dangerous locations. During the Cold War America’s overriding imperative of containing the Soviet Union lent geopolitical value to relationships with even the weakest allies, which in turn utilized U.S. support to strengthen regional bulwarks against the spread of communist influence. In the unipolar landscape that followed, the United States surprised many foreign policy analysts by not only not dismantling this globe- circling alliance network (as would be expected of a great power after winning a major war) but actually expanding it through the recruitment of new allies from among the former communist zone of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In both structural environments, allies have been the “glue” of the U.S.- led global order: in the Cold War by containing the Soviet Union and in the post– Cold War period by sustaining the benefits of stability and prosperity that the Cold War victory helped to create.

These alliances have not been cheap for America to maintain, in either financial or strategic terms. To a greater extent than in relationships with large, wealthy, insulated states like Britain, Germany, or Australia, American patronage of frontier states like Poland, Israel, and Taiwan entails potential strategic costs, insofar as such states lie at the outer reaches of American power and require recurrent demonstrations of physical support vis- à- vis would- be aggressors. To underwrite the independence and security of these states, the United States has for decades made available a wide array of support that includes both “normal” alliance mechanisms— formal or informal security guarantees, military basing, coverage under the U.S. nuclear umbrella— as well as other special forms of support targeted to the needs of these states, such as military funding, troop exercises, forward naval deployments, technology transfers, access to special U.S. weapons, and various forms of economic, political, and military aid. In the diplomatic realm, Washington has paid a kind of “sponsorship premium” for these states, providing backing and support in the regional disputes in which many inevitably find themselves embroiled. The more exposed the ally, the higher this sponsorship premium is.

Not surprisingly, critics of an active U.S. foreign policy have often complained about the expense and risk required for maintaining these alliances.1 But despite this criticism, America’s commitment to these states has remained steady for the better part of seventy years, making it one of the most consistent tenets of modern U.S. foreign policy. And in both strategic and economic terms, it would be hard to argue that the United States has not gotten a good return on this investment. By exerting a strong, benign presence in formerly unstable regions, U.S. patronage of alliances in East Asia, the Middle East, and East- Central Europe has helped to contain and deter the ambitions of large rivals, suppress regional conflicts, keep crucial trade routes open, and promote democracy and rule of law in historic conflict zones. In East Asia, the U.S. presence facilitated pathways of financial investment that contributed to the creation of some of the world’s most dynamic economies and major engines of global growth while guarding the sea- lanes through which the majority of U.S.- bound energy supplies and consumer goods pass. In East- Central Europe, U.S. efforts to propel NATO and European Union (EU) expansion effectively eliminated the geopolitical vacuum that had helped to generate the conditions for three global wars in the twentieth century— two hot and one cold. And in the Middle East, U.S. engagement has helped to contain regional cycles of instability and prevent their spillover into global energy markets and the American homeland. In both the bipolar and unipolar international settings, allies have been indispensable to maintaining the global order that has allowed for the peace and prosperity of the “American” century.

Part of the reason U.S. patronage of states in these regions has been so successful is that U.S. allies and potential challengers have understood that it is unlikely to change suddenly, in large part because of how deeply encoded in contemporary American strategic thinking has been the support of small allies. Since the turn of the twentieth century the United States has invested its strategic resources in a combination of naval power and, after two world wars, “defense in depth” through a presence in the Eurasian littorals— what the midtwentieth- century American strategist Nicholas Spykman called the global “rimland” (see figure 1.2). This pattern of forward engagement is not only the basis for American investment in allies located in the three hinge- point regions, it is a central tenet of U.S. foreign policy. Building on this foundation, America, though primarily a maritime power like Britain, has avoided the island dilemma of being perceived as fickle, retiring, and unreliable— in short, of becoming a second “perfidious Albion.”

But there are signs that America may be beginning to rethink its approach to alliances. In recent years U.S. policy makers’ view of the relative costs and benefits of maintaining far- flung small- ally networks has begun to shift. The change is partly fueled by adjustments in global geopolitics and the “rise” or resurgence of revisionist states, many of which claim to have historic spheres of influence that overlap with the regions where America’s alliance obligations are highest and its strategic reach most constrained. Another driver has been the changing U.S. economic landscape and constraints on the U.S. defense budget, which call into question whether the United States will continue to maintain the force structures that have made its geographically widespread alliances possible to begin with. Finally, and perhaps most important, Washington appears to be deprioritizing many of its longest- standing relationships with traditional allies in pursuit of grand bargains with large- power rivals, if necessary over the heads of its allies.

### Impact---CEE---A2: Impact Defense---2NC

#### Escalation is guaranteed. Defense doesn’t assume a simultaneous multi-regional crisis that overstretches response capability or loss of credibility that decimates circuit-breakers like deterrence and allied cooperation. The combination of great powers like Russia, China, and Iran and new proliferants ensures nuclear war---that’s Mitchell.

#### Arms races, proxy wars, cyber and hybrid conflicts combine with A2/AD and escalatory doctrine to spiral into nuclear war

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Seeds of Disorder

The combination of intensifying probes and fragmenting alliances threatens to unravel important components of the stability of major regions and the wider international order. Allowed to continue on their current path, security dynamics in Eastern Europe and the Western Pacific could lead to negative or even catastrophic outcomes for U.S. national security. One increasingly likely near-term scenario is a simmering, simultaneous security competition in major regions. In such a scenario, rivals continue probing allies and grabbing middle-zone territory while steering clear of war with the United States or its proxies; allies continue making half-measure preparations without becoming fully capable of managing their own security; and the United States continues feeding greater and greater resources into frontline regions without achieving reassurance, doggedly tested and put in doubt by the revisionists. Through a continued series of probes, the revisionist powers maintain the initiative while the United States and its allies play catch up. The result might be a gradual hardening of the U.S. security perimeter that never culminates in a Great Power war but generates many of the negative features of sustained security competition—arms races, proxy wars, and cyber and hybrid conflicts—that erode the bases of global economic growth.

A second, graver possibility is war. Historically, a lengthy series of successful probes has often culminated in a military confrontation. One dangerous characteristic of today’s international landscape is that not one but two revisionists have now completed protracted sequences of probes that, from their perspective, have been successful. If the purpose of probing is to assess the top power’s strength, today’s probes could eventually convince either Russia, China, or both that the time is ripe for a more definitive contest. It is uncertain what the outcome would be. Force ratios in today’s two hotspots, the Baltic Sea and South China Sea, do not favor the United States. Both Russia and China possess significant anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities, with a ten-to-one Russian troop advantage in the Baltic and massive Chinese preponderance of coastal short-range missiles in the South China Sea. Moreover, both powers possess nuclear weapons and, in Russia’s case, a doctrine favoring their escalatory use for strategic effect. And even if the United States can maintain overwhelming military superiority in a dyadic contest, war is always the realm of chance and a source of destruction that threatens the stability of the existing international order. Having failed a series of probes, the United States could face the prospect of either a short, sharp war that culminates in nuclear attack or an economically costly protracted two-front conflict. Either outcome would definitely alter the U.S.-led international system as we know it.

### Impact---CEE---A2: Impact Defense---Asia War

#### Defense doesn’t assume security dilemmas, which escalate through miscalc and misperception---nothing checks

Dr. Andrew T. H. Tan 15, Associate Professor in the Department of Security Studies at the University of New South Wales, Security and Conflict in East Asia, May 2015, https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850344-3

Conclusion: implications of the arms race in East Asia

East Asia’s arms race leads to the classic problem of the security dilemma, in which a state that is perceived as becoming too powerful leads to counter-acquisitions by other states. This results in misperceptions, conflict spirals, heightened tensions and ultimately open conflict, thereby destroying the very security that arms are supposed to guarantee (Jervis 1976). East Asia’s sustained economic rise since the end of the Korean War in 1953 and the lack of any major conflict since has lulled many into believing that growing economic interdependence will make war unlikely in that region (Khoo 2013: 47–48). However, this is a false premise as significant historical antagonisms have remained. Japan’s imperialism prior to 1945 and its failure adequately to account for its past continues to stir up strong nationalist emotions in China and South Korea. In addition, the divisions between North Korea and South Korea are as strong and intractable as ever, leading to an arms race on the Korean peninsula.

The situation is compounded by the weakness or absence of regional institutions, regimes and laws that could regulate interstate relations, build trust and confidence, and otherwise put a stop to the arms race. None of the distinctive confidence- and security-building measures which were in place in Europe during the Cold War and helped to calm tensions as well as contain the arms race exist in Asia. Within East Asia itself, the Six-Party Talks have focused only on the Korean issue and have not managed to stem North Korea’s open brinkmanship that in early 2013 almost brought the Korean peninsula to war again.

The arms race in East Asia is dangerous owing to the increased risk of miscalculation as a result of misperception. Chinese policymakers appear to be convinced that Japan is dominated by right-wing conservatives bent on reviving militarism (Glosserman 2012). At the same time, there is also a perception within China that given its growing strength, it should now aggressively assert what it perceives to be its legitimate claims in the East and South China Seas. Thus, China’s nationalist discourse perceives that the problems about disputed territory emanate from other powers, not China (Sutter 2012). The consequences of conflict between China and Japan, on the Korean peninsula or over Taiwan, however, will not stay regional. As a key player in East Asia, the USA, which has security commitments to Japan and South Korea, residual commitments to Taiwan, and troops on the ground in East Asia and in the Western Pacific, will be drawn in. The problem is that any conflict in East Asia is not likely to remain conventional for long. In fact, it is likely that it would rapidly escalate into a nuclear war because three of the key players, namely China, North Korea and the USA, possess nuclear weapons.

#### There are no brakes on escalation---global nuclear war

Shar Adams 14, Reporter for the Epoch Times, Citing Desmond Ball, Professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, “Asian Cold War: Escalating Conflict in North-East Asia Bigger Threat Than War on Terror”, Epoch Times, 10-13, http://m.theepochtimes.com/n3/1014683-asian-cold-war-escalating-conflict-in-north-east-asia-bigger-threat-than-war-on-terror/

The world may be focused on the “war on terror”, but the arms build up in North-East Asia poses a far greater threat to global stability, says Professor Desmond Ball, a senior defence and security expert at the Australian National University (ANU).

A former head of ANU’s Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Professor Ball is no lightweight when it comes to security concerns. It is Professor Ball’s expertise in command and control systems, particularly in relation to nuclear war, that underlies his concerns about North-East Asia.

“North-East Asia has now become the most disturbing part of the globe,” Prof Ball told Epoch Times in an exclusive interview.

China, Japan and South Korea – countries that are “economic engines of the global economy” – are embroiled in an arms race of unprecedented proportions, punctuated by “very dangerous military activities”, he says.

Unlike the arms race seen during the Cold War, however, there are no mechanisms in place to constrain the military escalation in Asia.

“Indeed, the escalation dynamic could move very rapidly and strongly to large scale conflict, including nuclear conflict,” said Prof Ball. “It is happening as we watch.”

Arms Race

Military spending in Asia has grown steadily over the last decade. According to a 2013 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute report, China is now the world’s second largest military spender behind the United States, spending an estimated $188 billion in 2013.

Japan and South Korea are also among the world’s top 10 military spenders. When North Korea and Taiwan are included, North-East Asian countries constitute around 85 per cent of military spending in Asia.

But what is more disturbing, Prof Ball says, is the motivation for the acquisitions.

“The primary reason now for the acquisitions, whether they are air warfare destroyers, missiles or defense submarines, is simply to match what the other [countries] are getting,” he said.

While he believes it is likely that Japan would have embarked on military modernisation, he says it is China’s military provocation of countries across Asia that is fuelling the build-up.

Since China lay claim to all of the South China Sea, it has escalated territorial disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia.

What started with skirmishes between locals and Chinese fishing boats or navy vessels has now become territorial grabs – island building on contested rocky outcrops.

In a sign of things to come, the South China Morning Post reported in June: “China is looking to expand its biggest installation in the Spratly Islands into a fully formed artificial island, complete with airstrip and sea port, to better project its military strength in the South China Sea.”

According to Filipino media, the artificial island falls within the Philippines’ 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone.

Prof Ball says China’s behaviour in the South China Sea is provocative, but “in the scale of what we are talking about, that is nothing” compared with conflicts in North-East Asia, where China and Japan are contesting claims over the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku Islands (claimed as the Diaoyus by China).

Of the Senkakus conflict, Prof Ball says: “We are talking about actual footsteps towards nuclear war – submarines and missiles.”

Chinese and Japanese activity in the Senkakus region has escalated to the point where sometimes there are “at least 40 aircraft jostling” over the contested area, he said.

Alarm bells were set off near the Senkakus in January last year when a Chinese military vessel trained its fire-control radar on a Japanese naval destroyer. The incident spurred the Japanese Defense Ministry to go public about that event and reveal another incident from a few days prior, when a Chinese frigate directed fire-control radar at a Japanese military helicopter.

Fire-control radars are not like surveillance or early warning radars – they have one purpose and that is to lock onto a target in order to fire a missile. “Someone does that to us, we fire back,” Prof Ball said.

Counter Measures Needed

Prof Ball is recognised for encouraging openness and transparency, and for his advocacy of multilateral institutions. He has been called one of the region’s “most energetic and activist leaders in establishing forums for security dialogue and measures for building confidence”.

In his experience visiting China over the years, however, Prof Ball says gaining open dialogue and transparency with Chinese military leaders is difficult. He recounted a private meeting with a Chinese admiral shortly after the fire-control radar incident. Prof Ball had seen direct evidence of the encounter – “tapes of the radar frequencies, the pulse rates and the pulse repetition frequencies” – and wanted to know what had happened on the Chinese side and why it took place.

“In a private meeting, I asked the admiral why … and he denied it to my face,” Prof Ball said. The Chinese admiral would not even concede that an incident had happened.

“I don’t see the point of this sort of dialogue,” he added.

With so many players in the region and few barriers against conflict escalation, the North-East Asian nuclear arms race is now far more complex and dangerous than the Cold War, he says.

In the Cold War, there were mechanisms at each level of potential confrontation, including a direct hotline between the US and Soviet leaders.

“Once things get serious here, [there is] nothing to slow things down. On the contrary, you have all the incentives to go first,” he said.

### Impact---CEE---A2: Impact Defense---Russia War

#### Regional conflicts escalate. Risk is especially high now AND deterrence doesn’t check.

George Beebe 19, Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for the National Interest, Former Head of Russia Analysis at the CIA, and Author of The Russia Trap: How Our Shadow War with Russia Could Spiral into Nuclear Catastrophe, “We’re More at Risk of Nuclear War With Russia Than We Think”, Politico, 10/7/2019, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/07/were-more-at-risk-of-nuclear-war-with-russia-than-we-think-229436

Today, that old dread of disaster has all but disappeared, as have the systems that helped preclude it. But the actual threat of nuclear catastrophe is much greater than we realize. Diplomacy and a desire for global peace have given way to complacency and a false sense of security that nuclear escalation is outside the realm of possibility. That leaves us unprepared for—and highly vulnerable to—a nuclear attack from Russia.

The most recent sign of American complacency was the death, a few weeks ago, of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty—a pivotal 1987 agreement that introduced intrusive on-site inspection provisions, destroyed an entire class of dangerous weaponry, and convinced both Washington and Moscow that the other wanted strategic stability more than strategic advantage. The New START treaty, put in place during the Obama administration, appears headed for a similar fate in 2021. In fact, nearly all the key U.S.-Russian arms control and confidence-building provisions of the Cold War era are dead or on life support, with little effort underway to update or replace them.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials from both parties are focused not on how we might avoid nuclear catastrophe but on showing how tough they can look against a revanchist Russia and its leader, Vladimir Putin. Summit meetings between White House and Kremlin leaders, once viewed as opportunities for peace, are now seen as dangerous temptations to indulge in Munich-style appeasement, the cardinal sin of statecraft. American policymakers worry more about “going wobbly,” as Margaret Thatcher once put it, than about a march of folly into inadvertent war. President Donald Trump’s suggestion that the United States and Russia might explore ways to manage their differences diplomatically has produced mostly head-scratching and condemnation.

In my more than 25 years of government experience working on Russia matters, I’ve seen that three misguided assumptions underlie how the United States got to this point.

The first is that American policymakers think that because neither side wants nuclear war, then such a war is very unlikely to occur. Russia would be foolish, we reason, to cross swords with the powerful U.S. military and risk its own self-destruction, and many Americans find it hard to imagine that modern cyber duels, proxy battles, information operations and economic warfare might somehow erupt into direct nuclear attacks. If the Cold War ended peacefully, the thinking goes, why should America worry that a new shadow war with a much less formidable Russia will end any differently?

But wars do not always begin by design. Just as they did in 1914, a vicious circle of clashing geopolitical ambitions, distorted perceptions of each other’s intent, new and poorly understood technologies, and disappearing rules of the game could combine to produce a disaster that neither side wants nor expects.

In fact, cyber technologies, artificial intelligence, advanced hypersonic weapons delivery systems and antisatellite weaponry are making the U.S.-Russian shadow war much more complex and dangerous than the old Cold War competition. They are blurring traditional lines between espionage and warfare, entangling nuclear and conventional weaponry, and erasing old distinctions between offensive and defensive operations. Whereas the development of nuclear weaponry in the Cold War produced the concept of mutually assured destruction and had a restraining effect, in the cyber arena, playing offense is increasingly seen as the best defense. And in a highly connected world in which financial networks, commercial operations, media platforms, and nuclear command and control systems are all linked in some way, escalation from the cyber world into the physical domain is a serious danger.

Cyber technology is also magnifying fears of our adversaries’ strategic intentions while prompting questions about whether warning systems can detect incoming attacks and whether weapons will fire when buttons are pushed. This makes containing a crisis that might arise between U.S. and Russian forces over Ukraine, Iran or anything else much more difficult. It is not hard to imagine a crisis scenario in which Russia cyber operators gain access to a satellite system that controls both U.S. conventional and nuclear weapons systems, leaving the American side uncertain about whether the intrusion is meant to gather information about U.S. war preparations or to disable our ability to conduct nuclear strikes. This could cause the U.S. president to wonder whether he faces an urgent “use it or lose it” nuclear launch decision. It doesn’t help that the lines of communication between the United States and Russia necessary for managing such situations are all but severed.

#### Strategic escalation is likely and, if not, tactical use---plus even conventional war in the Baltics goes global and triggers nuclear war in other regions

Yoel Sano 15, Head of Global Political and Security Risk, Business Monitor International Research, M.Sc. International Relations, London School of Economics, B.Sc. Oxford University, “Guest post: will Russia make a play for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania?” Beyond BRICS Blog, Financial Times, 3/23/2015, http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2015/03/23/guest-post-will-russia-make-a-play-for-estonia-latvia-and-lithuania/

Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, a military confrontation between Russia and the West over the Baltic states is no longer unthinkable. Under what circumstances could this happen? How would such a conflict play out, and what might happen once such a war ended? The notion of large-scale warfare in Europe – even without the nuclear dimension – would send shockwaves around the world, threatening to overturn the entire post-Cold War order. If the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) failed to defend the Baltics or were to lose against Russia, then Asia and the Middle East would also be destabilised, as doubts grew over the reliability of the US as an ally. This would usher in a much more unstable geopolitical climate, akin to the 1930s. It is highly doubtful that Russia seeks armed conflict with the West, so any move against the Baltics would be the result of miscalculation on its part. The Ukraine conflict showed that Russia increasingly views the plight (whether real or perceived) of ethnic Russians abroad as a possible pretext for intervention in neighbouring states. Ethnic Russians comprise a quarter of the populations of Estonia and Latvia. Scores of thousands of ethnic Russians there have not been granted citizenship. There is thus considerable angst in the Baltic states about future Russian military intervention. Russia Feels Threatened By NATO Source: BMI Research How Might Conflict Begin? Potential triggers for Russian intervention include violent clashes between Baltic nationals and ethnic Russians, new laws that downgrade the status of ethnic Russians, a shoot-out between border troops or a confrontation between Russian and NATO aircraft over the Baltic Sea. It is not known whether a potential Russian move against the Baltics would target all three states, or just one or two. Overall, Russian intervention in the Baltics could assume two main forms: 1) Deniable destabilisation efforts: The Kremlin is accused of instigating unrest between pro-Russian separatists and non-Russians in eastern Ukraine, dispatching experienced military and intelligence personnel to direct pro-Russian forces and providing arms and training to separatists. These processes are thought to have deployed several thousand troops into the area. Russia could conceivably seek to repeat this formula in the Baltics, and after weeks or months of violence, could demand a settlement that would give ethnic Russians more power over the domestic and foreign policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; or it could deploy a small ‘peace-keeping’ force to restore order. However, I believe that any Kremlin attempt to galvanise ethnic Russians in the Baltics would be much more difficult than in eastern Ukraine, because the Baltic states have far higher standards of living and governance. Russia’s seizure of Crimea has not triggered any mobilisation of Baltic Russians for closer ties with Russia. Baltics’ Relative Prosperity Positive For Stability. (Per capital GDP) Source: National governments/BMI 2) Swift occupation: Alternatively, Russia could occupy the Baltic states in a swift operation that met little resistance, due to the small size of the latter’s armed forces. However, a purely ‘out of the blue’ occupation is unlikely, as the Kremlin would be hard pressed to justify this. A less dramatic version of this scenario would involve Russian troop deployments into parts of Estonia and Latvia close to the Russian border that have significant ethnic Russian populations, or the seizure of key infrastructure such as ports, airports, and railways. How Would The West Respond? Russian actions against the Baltics would present the US and European countries with their biggest foreign policy crisis in decades, because they are committed to the defence of NATO members. According to Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.” However, Russia’s deniable destabilisation might not automatically or universally be viewed as an ‘armed attack’. In addition, the term ‘action as it deems necessary’ does not guarantee a military response. Thus, NATO’s top decision makers could first resort to sanctions and diplomacy. Nevertheless, given that most NATO members understand Article 5 as providing a robust security guarantee, any backtracking by the alliance from its expected commitments would cripple its credibility. From NATO’s point of view, it would make more sense to deploy troops to the Baltic states at the first sign of inter-ethnic unrest, to deter Russia from escalating any trouble-making or from sending its own troops. Source: BMI Research Although a Russian move into the Baltics would be a clear act of aggression, I would anticipate significant opposition in many Western countries to military action, due to the risks of a nuclear exchange, or at the very least, a large-scale conventional war. NATO might thus have to assemble a ‘coalition of the willing’, which would need to include the US, despite its war-weariness after fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. How Would The War Play Out? I believe that NATO’s leading members would ultimately go to war to end Russian military activities in the Baltic states. However, a major question is whether Russia and NATO would be able to contain the fighting to the Baltic states. Russia could attack Poland or seize the Swedish land of Gotland in the Baltic Sea (see map), and NATO could strike targets in Russia. The biggest danger would be the use of nuclear weapons. Of course, the trigger for this is not known, but any such action would likely involve tactical (i.e. battlefield) nuclear weapons, rather than strategic ones (which are designed to be used against cities). Even if ‘only’ tactical weapons were used, this would lead to public alarm across the northern hemisphere, as fears mounted over escalation towards a strategic nuclear exchange. A shooting war between Russia and the West would send shockwaves through the global economy, as the post-Cold War order in Europe was torn up. Two-way imposition of sanctions and the disruption of air and maritime transportation in northern Europe would severely disrupt international trade. Oil prices would surge, on assumptions that Russia’s hydrocarbon exports would be taken off the market or disrupted. The European economy would be very hard hit by disruptions to gas imports from Russia, especially if this were to happen in winter. A move by Moscow to cut Europe’s energy supplies would also severely damage the Russian government’s income. What Would Happen After a War? Implications of a Russian victory: Russia’s triumph over the most powerful military alliance in the world could prompt several Eastern European countries in the EU to reach some sort of accommodation with Moscow. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan would probably accept Moscow’s hegemony in Eurasia. A victorious Kremlin could then press the US and EU for some sort of formal division of Europe into rival spheres of influence. Europe would be set for a multi-decade new Cold War, although this would not be global in scope, because Europe’s economic importance has declined substantially since the 1980s. Also, there would be no ideological dimension to the new struggle. In Russia, the president would bask in the success of re-establishing control of the Baltic republics, and patriotic fervour would surge, but the economy would be devastated by major Western sanctions. Given rising economic pressures, the president could steer Russia towards formal authoritarianism. Elsewhere, the unreliability of collective security treaties would encourage Japan and South Korea to bolster their defences against China and North Korea respectively, probably by developing their own nuclear arsenals. Similar trends would play out in the Middle East, where Saudi Arabia and several of its neighbours fear the consequences of a nuclear Iran.

## AFF

### Assurance DA---2AC

#### Russian hybrid tactics threatens the unity and credibility of the alliance

Ivana Stradner and Max Frost 20, Jeane Kirkpatrick fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, senior research associate at the American Enterprise Institute, NATO Has a New Weak Link for Russia to Exploit, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/22/north-macedonia-nato-russia/

In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made it possible for Adolf Hitler to march into Czechoslovakia despite the overwhelming military superiority of Prague’s Western allies because Chamberlain had decided the issue was “a quarrel in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing.” Today, it is similarly difficult to believe that NATO would go to war over its far-flung commitments in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, on March 27, the Western alliance admitted North Macedonia as its newest—and weakest—member. In so doing, it has given Russian President Vladimir Putin a terrific opportunity to expand his influence, further erode NATO’s unity, and test the bloc’s commitment to defend a member of the alliance.

North Macedonia is the definition of a weak link and easy pickings for an adversary. A landlocked country of 2 million inhabitants, it has weak political institutions and only a short history of independence. As of 2018, it spent only 1 percent of its GDP on defense—short of the 2 percent NATO guideline—and had just 8,000 active-duty soldiers. There is simmering communal tension between a Slavic Orthodox majority and a sizable ethnic Albanian, mainly Muslim minority, making it vulnerable to interference. Within NATO, only neighboring Albania has a lower per capita GDP and a higher level of corruption. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index ranks North Macedonia as having Europe’s least developed political culture.Russia has held massive war games that were only thinly disguised simulations of attacks on NATO members such as Poland and the Baltic States.

Moscow has viewed NATO’s expansion in Eastern Europe with suspicion since the 1990s. Yet it wasn’t until the 2000s, after Russia’s military and economy rebounded from the chaos of the post-Soviet era, that Putin declared NATO’s eastward expansion a “direct threat” and openly confronted the alliance. Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008—not coincidentally, the year that NATO declared an interest in Georgia’s eventual accession to the alliance—stopped the bloc’s expansion into former Soviet-controlled areas in its tracks. Putin’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine and subsequent annexation of Crimea, while not a direct assault on a NATO member, further demonstrated Western impotence in the face of Russian aggression. Further north, Russia has held massive war games that military experts say were thinly disguised simulations of attacks on NATO members such as Poland and the Baltic States.

Now that North Macedonia has joined NATO, Putin appears to be relishing his first chance to prove that the alliance is little more than a paper tiger. In 2018, Russia’s ambassador to North Macedonia declared the country a “legitimate target” if tensions between NATO and Russia were to increase. But there was no “if” about it: Even before North Macedonia became a member, Russia had already been working assiduously to ratchet up tensions in the region. Moscow has shipped S-400 anti-aircraft missiles to neighboring Serbia for joint Russian-Serbian military drills, facilitated an attempted coup in Montenegro, and tried to destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina by stoking sectarian tensions. And in North Macedonia itself, Russia has funded troll factories that, among other things, were used to target the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign with disinformation. Moscow also tried to influence North Macedonia’s September 2018 referendum on NATO membership, is using its embassy and consulates there as bases for intelligence-gathering operations, and has spread propaganda detailing alleged Western plots to break up the country.

That Russia would threaten NATO’s members in Eastern Europe is nothing new, of course. Russia has long attempted to undermine the Baltic countries—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—which joined NATO and the European Union after gaining their independence from the Soviet Union. But today, the Baltic States are well integrated into alliance structures and the European economy and are home to thousands of NATO troops. Whereas the Baltics have become part of NATO’s well-armored front, the Balkans are its soft underbelly.

Whereas the Baltics have become part of NATO’s well-armored front, the Balkans are its soft underbelly.

 NATO’s posture in North Macedonia and its neighborhood is very limited. The Balkan countries are also poorer, more ethnically divided, and less economically integrated with Europe. Their potential instability and the much lower likelihood of a robust response by the West make North Macedonia and its neighbors ripe and easy targets for Russian meddling.

Taking a page from history’s playbook, Putin rightly assumes that most decision-makers in NATO capitals would consider North Macedonia a “faraway country” of “people of whom we know nothing.” U.S. President Donald Trump, whose relationship with Putin continues to attract attention, confirmed a similar suspicion with regard to neighboring Montenegro when he appeared to question NATO’s commitment to defend the Balkan nation during an interview aired on Fox News. And while some may have taken offense at Trump’s statement, the truth is he speaks for many.

According to a February poll by the Pew Research Center, less than half the populations of France, Spain, Turkey, and Greece hold a favorable view of NATO. Pandering to the alliance’s critics, French President Emmanuel Macron last year declared that NATO had “brain death.” The citizens of only three European countries—Britain, the Netherlands, and Lithuania—say their country should respond with military force if Russia were to attack a NATO member in Eastern Europe.

No surprise then that NATO’s posture toward its newest member remains unclear. Though NATO broadened the definition of its joint defense commitment—Article 5 of the alliance’s charter—to include cyberattacks in 2014, it has failed to clarify just what that means. When asked what level of cyberattack on one of its members would trigger a response, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said only, “We will see.” The 2018 Brussels Declaration reaffirmed NATO’s intent to defend member states from nonconventional attacks—but only meekly asserted that in “cases of hybrid warfare, the Council could decide to invoke Article 5.” These Western weasel words will have been duly noted in the Kremlin.

These Western weasel words will have been duly noted in the Kremlin.

The type of meddling Russia has specialized in includes election interference, inflaming ethnic tensions, and provoking violent conflict. These three real possibilities could trigger a NATO response under Article 5. The most pressing issue is securing North Macedonia’s upcoming elections, now postponed until further notice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Polls last showed VMRO-DPMNE, a pro-Russian nationalist party, in a dead heat with the pro-Western Social Democrats. Russian interference in the election process or outcome not only threatens Macedonian sovereignty but, if successful, could result in a government that tilts North Macedonia toward Moscow.

Russia may also seek to pressure and destabilize North Macedonia in other ways, including through Moscow’s regional client, Serbia. Russian propaganda aimed at North Macedonia includes conspiracy theories about the country’s sizable Albanian minority supposedly colluding with NATO and Albania to fold North Macedonia into a “greater Albania” amid great bloodshed. As any student of Balkan history knows, such rhetoric has led to ethnic violence in the region before. Alternatively, Russia may stoke simmering conflicts in Serbia, whose unstable Presevo region directly borders North Macedonia, or the unresolved Kosovo dispute. Either conflict could easily spill into North Macedonia.

NATO’s next steps to secure its new member could include adapting the successful tactics used when Montenegro joined the alliance in 2017. A NATO-sponsored cyberteam provided the Montenegrin government with technical support to learn to identify and counter hybrid warfare. NATO raised awareness of the benefits of NATO membership by working with officials, civil society, local governments, and media organizations. It also worked to improve governance in Montenegro’s defense sector. Similarly, the European Union, which has just opened accession talks with North Macedonia, could move quickly to signal to the world that the Balkan nations are an integral part of Europe.

More broadly, however, NATO needs a mechanism to respond to Russian aggression in the event that the alliance’s members can’t unanimously agree to do so. Article 5 requires unanimity before invoking collective defense, but NATO’s members differ in their attitudes to Russia.

Article 5 requires unanimity before invoking collective defense, but NATO’s members differ in their attitudes to Russia.

 One solution would be to form, as a backstop in case it is needed, a coalition of the willing comprising NATO members with credible defense capabilities that are willing to confront Russia and prepare a collective response to any attack.

Despite NATO’s overall military superiority, it has a weak hand in the Balkans, and Russia continues to outmaneuver it there. NATO must quickly signal that it remains steadfast and, having decided to admit it, that North Macedonia is an integral member of the alliance. If NATO fails in its support of new members like North Macedonia, the chances have just risen that it will be met with Russian aggression—hybrid or conventional—that may just mean the end of NATO as a credible alliance.

#### The Chinese hybrid crisis makes the link inevitable

Lindsey W. Ford and James Goldgeier 21, David M. Rubenstein Fellow - Foreign Policy, Center for East Asia Policy Studies, Robert Bosch Senior Visiting Fellow - Foreign Policy, Center on the United States and Europe, 1/25/21, Retooling America’s alliances to manage the China challenge, https://www.brookings.edu/research/retooling-americas-alliances-to-manage-the-china-challenge/#cancel

Edited ableist language

China has now been added to the alliance’s ever-expanding agenda, providing a surprising point of agreement in an otherwise contentious December 2019 NATO summit, at which NATO members committed the alliance for the first time to deal with China’s “growing influence and international policies.” In April 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg charged an independent “Reflection Group” with preparing a report eyeing the future; released in November, the “NATO 2030” document put the challenge in stark terms: “China is… best understood as a full-spectrum systemic rival, rather than a purely economic player or an only Asia-focused security actor.”

Obvious questions remain about the precise role NATO should play vis-à-vis China. There are certainly a host of global security concerns — ranging from China’s presence in Africa and South Asia to its influence in space and cyberspace — where NATO coordination would be valuable. It is unclear, however, what role NATO could, or would, play in an Asian military crisis with Beijing. NATO allies have limited military capabilities they could bring to bear in the Pacific, and few European partners would be eager to be pulled into a conflict in places like Taiwan or the South China Sea. Given that Article V of the 1949 Washington Treaty refers to “an armed attack against one or more [NATO members] in Europe or North America,” a Pacific conflict, even involving U.S. forces, would technically fall outside NATO’s scope. But in a spiralling crisis that would implicate Europe’s strategic and economic interests, could NATO afford to remain on the sidelines? At a minimum, Europe could play a valuable role in the political, economic, or even cyberspace arenas. As European allies seek a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. needs to engage them in more frank discussions about these types of scenarios, creating clearer expectations about how different parties might respond before any such conflict appears on the horizon, rather than after one has erupted.

Beyond the question of NATO’s role in Asia, there are also tradeoffs associated with European partners seeking a more prominent role in the Indo-Pacific. Encouraging more regular European military deployments to the Indo-Pacific, while they would be welcomed in Asia, could detract from NATO’s focus on Eastern Europe to deter Russian aggression or in the Middle East to engage in counterterrorism missions. These are areas where Europeans will need to shoulder more of the burden in the coming years as the U.S. continues to rebalance its foreign policy to Asia.

Do the United States and its allies have the right operational capabilities to address a new type of threat?

Whereas NATO has always aspired to multilateral operational effectiveness, America’s Asian alliances lack NATO-like structures to generate closer interoperability, particularly in a multilateral context. Despite the closeness of the U.S.-Japan alliance — a relationship that officials refer to as the “cornerstone” of Asian security, the relationship lacks the integrated command and control structures that NATO enjoys. In fact, the U.S.-South Korea alliance is the only one of America’s Asian treaty alliances that has such a mechanism. Beyond command and control, America’s Indo-Pacific alliances in some cases lack the types of integrated planning mechanisms that NATO has in place, constraining the ability of allies to better align doctrine and force structure with the United States.

These challenges stretch across the operational realm. NATO’s intelligence directorate and fusion center facilitates real-time information sharing among the 30 member states. Indo-Pacific countries have struggled to build similar multilateral information-sharing capabilities even at the unclassified level. Meanwhile, key Indo-Pacific allies such as Japan and South Korea remain outside of arrangements such as the Five Eyes, through which the U.S. shares its most sensitive intelligence with close allies. And while the U.S. and its Indo-Pacific allies engage in frequent bilateral exercises with each other, they are only just beginning to experiment with the types of realistic, multinational training exercises that will be needed to deal with Chinese military aggression.

In addition to enhancing their operational effectiveness, the U.S. and its allies are contending with the question of how to tackle Chinese security threats that are often unconventional and non-kinetic in nature. As Tom Wright has eloquently argued, China is more focused on competing with “all measures short of war” than it is on initiating a major conventional conflict. This reality will force U.S. alliances to adapt to a new set of requirements that stretch far beyond the task of conventional military deterrence for which these relationships were designed. In Asia, the U.S. and its allies are wrestling with how best to address maritime aggression that involves not only the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), but also a vast armed fishing fleet that operates under military control. In the economic realm, they are struggling to devise coordinated responses that will deter, or at least blunt the impact of, China’s use of boycotts and embargos to achieve its security aims. And in outer space and cyberspace, U.S. alliances will have to devise coordinated responses to contend with Chinese offensive capabilities that could ~~blind~~ [block] U.S. satellites or ~~cripple~~ [damage] banking systems and power grids. Addressing these problems will require new types of combined planning, new bureaucratic structures, and a more expansive operational toolkit.

NATO, too, will need to adapt to address the non-kinetic nature of China’s security threats. To serve effectively as a forum for a trans-Atlantic response, NATO needs to more fully consider the impact of China’s investments in Europe on alliance interoperability. Technological lags among European allies over the past three decades have decreased their abilities to work seamlessly with the U.S. in a military operation, and Chinese investments in Europe could exacerbate the problem by putting the security of telecommunications infrastructure at risk.

#### Eliminating unsustainable and unenforceable alliance commitments doesn’t signal unreliability

Brad L. LeVeck and Neil Narang 16, associate professor of political science at the University of California Merced, associate professor in the Department of Political Science and director of the Security Hub at the University of California Santa Barbara 2016, How International Reputation Matters: Revisiting Alliance Violations in Context, https://faculty.ucmerced.edu/bleveck/assets/pdfs/how\_international\_reputation\_matters.pdf

In this context, a particularly good indicator of future alliance behavior may be past behavior. If a state violated its agreements in the past, it seems intuitive that it may be more likely to do so in the future. However, Spence (1973) famously showed that past behavior is not always equally informative and that whether past behavior distinguishes one type from another depends crucially on the behavior’s cost. If, for instance, honoring an alliance becomes so difficult that all states are forced to violate their commitments together, then a violation conveys little information about how reliable one state is relative to another. Beyond this extreme example, the general insight is that alliance violations do more to signal that a state is relatively unreliable when many other states appear to be willing and able to honor the same agreement. Of course, whether other states would honor a particular agreement under similar conditions is often difficult to observe (Narang 2014; Narang and Mehta 2015), as each alliance has elements that are somewhat unique. However, there may be times and regions where system-level shocks cause a large number of countries to simultaneously violate alliance commitments together. This may provide relatively clear evidence to a potential partner that the costs of honoring a previous alliance were so great that even reliable states that would normally honor their commitment were unable to do so. This discussion has important implications for empirically studying how violating an alliance affects a state’s reputation. It is likely that the cost of maintaining an alliance varies significantly by region and time and that one can identify shocks across these dimensions. Figure 1, which plots the percentage of states violating their bilateral security alliance in each region and year based on Leeds et al. (2009), supports this supposition.

#### Collective OCOs solve assurance best

Trey Herr and Jacquelyn Schneider 18, Trey Herr is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. Jacquelyn Schneider is an assistant professor and affiliate faculty at the Center for Cyber Conflict Studies at the U.S. Naval War College, “Sharing is Caring: The United States’ New Cyber Commitment for NATO,” CFR, 10/10/18, https://www.cfr.org/blog/sharing-caring-united-states-new-cyber-commitment-nato

Sharing offensive cyber capabilities raises the question of whether cyber operations can extend effective deterrence to NATO partners. There seems to be little focus on using these operations to deter conventional or nuclear attacks on NATO countries, but this may evolve. The United States seems to want NATO to use cyber operations to deter other cyber operations, particularly those falling under the threshold of armed conflict. Cyber operations have all sorts of problems for deterrence: signaling is difficult, they can be perceived as a cheap threat, and their effects are largely uncertain. By contrast, moving new military forces in Eastern Europe or conducting ground exercises are credible signals of extended deterrence, but are costly and time consuming. Cyber capabilities aren’t free, nor are they necessarily cheap, but the promise to use them can add new credibility to a deterrent threat without the same investment and delay as conventional alternatives. Sharing cyber capabilities may be a cheaper way to signal alliance commitment than other options and might signal a further maturation, and acceptance, of cybersecurity into geopolitics.

#### No spillover

Brad Stapleton 16, Former visiting fellow in defense and foreign policy at the Cato Institute and former adjunct researcher at the RAND Corporation, "Trump and NATO—Redefining the US Role,” CATO, 11/11/16 https://www.cato.org/blog/trump-nato-redefining-us-role

Some would argue, however, that although Article V does not legally obligate the United States to deploy military forces in defense of its NATO allies, such a response would be essential to preserve American credibility. In other words, if the United States failed to defend its NATO allies against Russian aggression, all of the United States’ other allies around the globe would begin to doubt whether they could really depend upon the United States. Yet U.S. credibility would only suffer if Washington were to maintain an expectation of U.S. intervention and subsequently failed to fulfill that expectation.

If the incoming Trump administration is serious about reducing its commitment to NATO, its first priority should therefore be to eliminate the expectation that the United States would automatically intervene militarily in defense of its NATO allies. For that expectation is the root of the inequitable distribution of the defense burden within NATO. Why should the European allies invest significantly in defense if they can count on the United States to guarantee their security? Rather than maintaining an implicit commitment to spearhead any defense of NATO territory (particularly in Eastern Europe), the Trump administration could make it clear to the allies that the United States will serve as a balancer of last resort in Europe. In other words, the European allies will bear primary responsibility for the defense of Europe; the United States will only intervene in dire circumstances if they are unable to defend themselves (much like during the two world wars).

### Assurance DA---AT: Baltics

#### Deterrence fails in the inevitable hybrid crisis in the Baltics

Illimar Ploom 18, Estonian National Defence College, and Viljar Veebel Baltic Defence College, Nov. 2018, The Deterrence Credibility of NATO and the Readiness of the Baltic States to Employ the Deterrence Instruments, Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review, Vol. 16, Is. 1 p. 195-198

The preceding analysis demonstrates the weaknesses of the Alliance’s deterrence strategy. The overall idea of nuclear capabilities as a supreme guarantee of NATO’s credible deterrence does not help to scale down Russia’s regional ambitions. This is due to both morality arguments as well as practical reasons, such as territorial proximity of Russia and the Baltic counties, difference in opinions and priorities within the Alliance, potential for the escalation of conflict aspects, etc. Russia is justifiably considered to have conventional supremacy in the Baltic region. The conventional balance in the Baltic area is not achievable either for the Baltic countries in total nor with the FPF battalions, and the defense models of the Baltic countries are, by their nature, fully nonaggressive, without any room for pre-emptive initiatives, extra territoriality, or hybrid tools. What is more, as far as the Baltic countries are concerned, some signs of “self-deterrence” are also visible, referring to unsubstantiated, if not somewhat naïve, views of the political and military elite of the Baltic countries, as well as relying on so-called deterrence by imagination. The credibility of deterrence is at risk, depending on different visions of the Alliance’s member states about what should be the values, the focus and the threat perceptions of the organisation, whether Russia should be treated as a potential adversary, or a somewhat vague response of the Alliance to Russia’s political rhetoric. Similarly, the ethnic component – a relatively big Russian-speaking community, particularly in Estonia and Latvia – speaks mostly in favour of Russia in a potential regional conflict. It must be acknowledged that this could, to some extent, also have a deterring effect. Last but not least, as Russia is not suffering from a feeling of stigmatisation and reciprocity, the Alliance lacks tools that would have an entangling or disciplining effect. To answer the question of what should be done in the future to actually deter Russia and to avoid aggression from the Russian side, the essence of the potential conflict should first be discussed. It is argued by this paper that the more precise the aim against whom, what, and when the deterrence is needed, the more cost-efficient the deterrence is. Russia’s past strategy against the Baltic countries can be judged as having been definitely well-thought, covering most of the escape routes for potential “victims”. First, Russia has used the approach based on the Gerasimov doctrine which attempts to find a hybrid conflict model with a very low-intensity. Among other things, that would devalue the Alliance’s credibility and allow an increase in Russia’s negative “bargaining power” in the international arena by occupying part of the opponent’s territory. Since the costs of this type of confrontation are low, Russia’s destabilising attempts will most probably continue, i.e., at least as long as NATO will decide not to “punish” Russia. Second, Russia is simultaneously determined to respond to any regional initiatives of the Alliance with its own respective activities and interventions which have already led to a regional arms race. The reason why something like this has happened is the fact that Russia is strongly prioritizing national and emotional categories, whereas the current overall costs for the Alliance are low enough, giving no reason to worry yet. Also, even if the West contradicts the logic of the sphere of interests, the Baltic states, being situated in such proximity to Russia, are de facto considered as a zone where Russia needs to be allowed to retain high conventional advantage. Thus, any additional conventional defence measure applied on the Eastern flank of NATO could trigger an out-of-proportion arms-race or escalation from Russia. This dynamic is bound to work in Russia’s favour, also in terms of providing ever more justification for its worries and possibly a pre-emptive attack. Based on the past experience of Georgia and Ukraine, as well as Russia’s past strategy against the Baltic countries, one hypothetical scenario why, when, and how would Russia attack the Baltic countries could be constructed. The most likely political aim of the potential aggression against the Baltic countries would be to restore control over the territory of the former Soviet Union, or at least to break off their relations with the Western countries. According to this logic, most of the energy will be invested into delegitimizing of local national political authorities by using the tools of hybrid warfare. Ultimately, this would lead to a situation where, disappointedly, the forces of the Alliance will decide to leave the Baltics. Russia’s aim during such a takeover in the Baltic region would most likely be to maintain as many physical assets and legitimization as possible. This means it will need to avoid aggressive military activities. Also, since the Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia are relatively large, the takeover will have to take place without destroying much of the local infrastructure. However, the initiation of protests of “local women and children” against the “imperialists”, including NATO, is highly likely. This draws on Russia’s previous strategies used in Ukraine in 2014 and in Estonia in 2007. With a “little help” from Russia, this should not be too difficult, considering the public opinion of the local Russian-speaking community, at least in Estonia and Latvia. And, by the same token, the falling out of the Russian-speaking population will be exacerbated by the suspicious attitude towards the latter still prevalent among the Estonian and Latvian speaking communities. Here, the most effective deterrence key would be building a coherent and mutually respectful society. This presumes dealing rationally and systematically with the demographic outcomes of the occupation. Alas, the difficulty is the animosity from the different ethnic sides in these two countries. Returning to the hypothetical scenario, in recent years the Kremlin has tried its best to keep up the ill-feelings among the Baltic people and minorities. Due to the relatively messy political and social situations, the key element of Russia’s strategy is focussed on the Baltic countries not even being able to recognise the beginning of the attack. This means that the latter will omit the opportunity to mobilize, both as far as the Baltic countries or the Alliance is concerned. Should the Baltic countries/Alliance still decide to mobilise themselves, Russia would describe it as an example of the opponent’s aggressive behaviour, as well as a justification to interfere with the aim to protect the “peaceful local people”.

### Assurance DA---Link Turn

#### Lack of cooperative tech relations makes alliance collapse inevitable

Aaron Bazin and, Dominika Kunertova 18, Aaron Bazin, Lieutenant Colonel, Dominika Kunertova, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Center for War Studies in Denmark, An Alliance Divided? Five Factors That Could Fracture NATO, Army University Press, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/January-February-2018/An-Alliance-Divided-Five-Factors-That-Could-Fracture-NATO/

Technology advances. The participants agreed that technology advances are important for NATO’s continued cohesion. Technology will constitute a significant intervening factor in how NATO nations maintain their cohesion in the future for three reasons. First, ever-evolving communication technology can facilitate the spread of risks coming from outside of the Alliance and exacerbate their negative effect. The examples that resonated the most during focus group sessions are information warfare and targeted propaganda against NATO nations. Internet communications technology creates infinite room for alternative media that distort reality, contribute to the emergence of populist and radical movements, and increase the danger of miscommunication among nations. Second, NATO risks losing the innovation game to the commercial defense industrial sector. In the future, private companies will continue to stay ahead of NATO in designing specifications and setting standards for platforms. This can have a major impact on readiness and interoperability among NATO nations if their innovation efforts (e.g., the U.S. Third Offset Strategy) do not materialize.31 Third, some nations may become reluctant to share their latest technology acquisitions, especially if they put private gains above the collective endeavor. This would pose a challenge “for anyone to share information they own without gaining any profit for themselves.” The political unwillingness may feed distrust, which can result in a deepening interoperability gap between allies on the battlefield, and ultimately, a less cohesive Alliance.

#### Hybrid threats are the most pressing issue to allies---clarifying Article 5 alleviates abandonment fears

Giulio Pugliese 18, PhD, University of Cambridge, Post-doctoral Fellow, the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, Oxford, 2/28/18, "Japan-EU Views on the US and Russia in an Age of Hybrid Threats", IAI Commentaries, Istituto Affari Internazionali, https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/japan-eu-views-us-and-russia-age-hybrid-threats

Hybrid threats and warfare represent one of the most pressing security issues in contemporary world politics. Seldom noticed and appreciated, the unravelling of the international order may slowly come about through repeated hybrid blows to US military credibility and its alliance system. In fact, the unconventional nature of coercion, and the confusion and ambiguity central to hybrid warfare have kindled fears of abandonment by security partners. Because such operations fall short of a direct and conventional “armed attack” by one state against another, the stipulated condition for self-defence and retaliation, allies may fear that in such circumstances security commitments will not be upheld.

Japan, for instance, was uncomfortable with the Obama administration’s weak-kneed response to China’s steady encroachment in the South and East China Seas, which began with China’s seizure of the Scarborough Shoal in 2012. In 2015, Abe eventually secured a redefinition of the guidelines governing the US-Japan security alliance to deter China in so-called “grey zone” scenarios also through intelligence sharing, deeper coordination and bilateral planning.[7] Somewhat similar dynamics and reassurances have been at play among NATO partners following Russia’s encroachment in Ukraine, but fears of abandonment persist.

Concerns of potential entrapments, or slippery slopes towards a full-blown military entanglement due to US security commitments, combined with the very nature of hybrid/grey-zone scenarios, is likely to cloud US decision-making in such instances. This will potentially slow retaliatory measures and circumstantial political factors will have more weight than ever on such decisions. For these reasons, Russian and Chinese activities are currently at the centre of NATO summits and security consultations between Japan and the United States.

### Assurance DA---Resolve Wrong

#### ‘Credibility’ is wrong.

Miranda Priebe 21, Director of the Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy and Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, PhD in Political Science from MIT, MPA in International Relations from Princeton University, et al., “Implementing Restraint: Changes in U.S. Regional Security Policies to Operationalize a Realist Grand Strategy of Restraint”, RAND Corporation Research Report, January 2021, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\_reports/RRA739-1.html

Lastly, some argue that if the United States draws down its forces or reduces its commitments in one region, this would make it more difficult to deter adversaries and reassure allies and partners in other regions. Advocates of restraint accept that allies might be rattled. But they argue that U.S. credibility with adversaries is not easily damaged. U.S. adversaries are more likely to consider the U.S. ability to bring capabilities to bear and the issues at stake on a case-by-case basis. As a result, advocates of restraint argue that alliances can be terminated or reshaped with little impact on other extant commitments.76

#### ‘Cred’ theory is nonsense.

Max Fisher 16, MA in International Relations and Affairs from Johns Hopkins University, BA from William & Mary, International Reporter and Columnist for The New York Times, Former Reporter for Vox, “The Credibility Trap”, Vox, 4/29/2016, https://www.vox.com/2016/4/29/11431808/credibility-foreign-policy-war

If you have experienced even a few minutes of cable news coverage or handful of newspaper op-eds on American foreign policy, there is a word you will have encountered over and over again: credibility.

The United States, according to this theory, has to follow through on every threat and confront every adversary in order to maintain America's global credibility. If it fails to stand up to challengers in one place, then they will rise up everywhere, and America will see its global standing, and thus its power in the world, crumble.

This argument has dominated Washington especially in the three years since President Barack Obama declined to bomb Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad as punishment for using chemical weapons. Proponents of "credibility" say this matters for more than just Syria.

American allies came to distrust and drift away from US leadership, they argued. And American adversaries grew emboldened — including Russia's Vladimir Putin, whose subsequent invasion of Ukraine was said to be a direct result of weakened American credibility.

"Putin believes Obama does not have the intestinal fortitude to stand up to him in Ukraine. He thinks Obama will talk tough and then look for a way out — just like he did with Assad," wrote Washington Post columnist Marc Thiessen.

"Syria has become the graveyard of U.S. credibility," columnist Michael Gerson wrote in the same paper.

This theory is not exclusive to overheated op-eds. It is pervasive, almost to the point of consensus, in much of Washington's foreign policy community, including among many policy-makers — and has been that way longer than perhaps even proponents realize.

In 1950, as the United States considered whether or not to intervene in the Korean War, a CIA report urged the US to intervene so as to uphold its credibility far away in Europe:

A failure to draw the line would have seriously discredited the whole US policy of containment, gravely handicapping US efforts to maintain alliances and build political influence with the Western European powers and with other nations closely aligned with the US.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson agreed, fearing that European leaders would be in a "near-panic, as they watched to see whether the United States would act." If the US did not invade Korea, Acheson worried, Europe's frail post-war order could be at risk.

And this is not just an American belief. As former National Security Council official Philip Gordon recounted recently, France kept fighting in Algeria, long after the costly war appeared lost, partly out of fear of losing credibility.

"The credibility issue—if you pull out of Algeria, boy, you lose face, right? And so the argument was, stay in and keep a lid on it," Gordon told the Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg.

But there is a problem with this theory of credibility: It does not appear to be real. Political scientists have investigated this theory over and over, and have repeatedly disproven it.

Yet the belief in credibility persists, dominating America's foreign policy debate, steering the United States toward military action abroad in pursuit of a strategic asset — the credibility of America's reputation — that turns out not to exist.

How did this idea become so entrenched in Washington, and why does it persist despite being repeatedly debunked? What does it mean to have so many of America's foreign policy discussions turn around an idea that is demonstrably false — and what can this tell us about how and why America intervenes abroad?

The credibility myth

When Americans talk about "credibility" in foreign policy, what they are usually describing is something that political scientists instead call reputational or reputation-based credibility.

In political science, "credibility" usually refers to specific promises or threats, and in this case the research does say that credibility is real. For example, if the US pledges to defend South Korea from a North Korean invasion, then it matters that the US convince both Koreas that this pledge is credible, for example by stationing US troops in South Korea.

"REPUTATIONAL CONCERNS CAN DRIVE STATES INTO WARS OVER TRIVIAL INTERESTS IN PERIPHERAL PLACES"

That is the formal definition of credibility in foreign policy, it's real, and it matters. But when "credibility" is used colloquially, it typically refers to a very different kind of credibility, one based entirely in a country's or leader's reputation from its actions in other disputes or conflicts. (This article uses the colloquial definition of credibility, except where noted otherwise.)

Under this line of thinking, if the US fails to follow through on a threat or stand up to a challenger in one part of the world, then its allies and enemies globally will be more likely to conclude that all American threats are empty, and that America can be pushed around. If the US backed down once, it will back down again.

It's easy to see how people could be attracted to this idea, which puts complicated geo-politics in simple and familiar human terms. It encourages us to think of states as just like people.

But states are not people, and this theory, for all its appealing simplicity, is not correct. There is no evidence that America's allies or enemies change their behavior based on conclusions about America's reputation for credibility, or that such a form of reputation even exists in foreign policy.

"Do leaders assume that other leaders who have been irresolute in the past will be irresolute in the future and that, therefore, their threats are not credible?" the University of Washington's Jonathan Mercer wrote, in introducing his research on this question.

"No; broad and deep evidence dispels that notion," Mercer concluded. "As the record shows, reputations do not matter."

A 1984 Yale University study, for example, examined dozens of cases from 1900 to 1980 to look for signs that, if a country stood down in one confrontation, it would face more challengers elsewhere. The answer was no: "deterrence success is not systematically associated … with the defender's firmness or lack of it in previous crises."

Historians have also looked at specific incidents where the US thought its credibility was on the line and determined that we were simply mistaken.

Acheson's warning that the US had to invade Korea to reassure its European allies, for example, turned out to be wrong: British and French officials in fact worried the Americans were going to pull them into a far-away war.

During the Vietnam War, American officials could see that they were losing, but for years worried that withdrawing would communicate weakness to the Soviet Union, emboldening Moscow to test American commitments elsewhere. Even if Vietnam was lost, American credibility had to be defended.

As historian Ted Hopf has shown, the Americans could not have had it more wrong: Soviet leaders never reached any such conclusion, and in fact were puzzled as to why the US sacrificed so many lives for a war that was clearly lost.

If that's not enough evidence for you, try considering reputational credibility from the opposite point of view, and it starts to look more obviously ridiculous. Dartmouth's Daryl Press once pointed out to my colleague Dylan Matthews that Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev repeatedly threatened to eject the American-led forces occupying West Berlin, but he backed down. The US didn't consider him one iota less "credible" for this, and during the following year's Cuban Missile Crisis took his threats very seriously.

The idea of reputational credibility has also been debunked in the most well-known recent case: the notion that America's failure to bomb Syria in 2013 emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Proponents of reputational credibility took Putin's 2014 Ukraine invasions as vindication. Surely Putin only invaded because America had damaged its credibility in Syria, they argued. In their view, it showed why it is so crucial for the US to maintain its reputational credibility by never backing down from military interventions.

Julia Ioffe recently investigated this theory for the Atlantic, asking foreign policy officials and experts in Moscow whether there was merit to it. She seemed to reach the same conclusion as have many Russia analysts: that Putin invaded Ukraine for reasons specific to Ukraine. America's supposed reputation loss in Syria appeared to play no role. Some of Ioffe's sources seemed to not even understand the argument of how Syria and Ukraine would connect.

The credibility trap

You will notice something these incidents have in common. In every case, a belief in "credibility" pulls the United States toward fighting a war for the wrong reasons, or toward staying in a war longer than is worthwhile.

This mistaken belief has repeatedly helped to drive American military action abroad, Dartmouth's Jennifer Lind demonstrates in a new article in International Security Studies Forum.

"Indeed, from Korea, to Vietnam, to Bosnia, to Libya, to President Barack Obama’s 'red line’ in Syria, debates about U.S. intervention are thick with admonitions that ‘Our Credibility Is On The Line,'" Lind writes.

"CREDIBILITY HAS MIGRATED FROM FOREIGN POLICY INTO THE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF WAR POWERS"

The logic of reputational credibility can only ever lead to the same conclusion: toward the use of American military force abroad, even in cases where there is no clear reason to intervene and where the downsides of intervention would seem to outweigh the upsides. It is a compass that only points in one direction.

In this theory, the use of force is inherently good, regardless of how or where the bombs fall, because it strengthens American leadership globally. And an absence of American military action is almost always bad, because it is said to invite new problems and greater threats.

"Every time analysts and leaders call for war, they warn that inaction will jeopardize America’s credibility," Lind and Press, her husband, have previously written in Foreign Policy.

Alarmingly, despite the mounting evidence against reputation theory, it continues to drive US foreign policy discourse — and has recently even been integrated into the formal legal basis of American foreign policy.

"Credibility has migrated from foreign policy into the constitutional law of war powers," Vanderbilt's Ganesh Sitaraman found in a 2014 Harvard Law Review article:

In a series of opinions, including on Somalia (1992), Haiti (2004), and Libya (2011), the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) has argued that the credibility of the United Nations Security Council is a "national interest" that can justify presidential authority to use military force without prior congressional authorization.

The 2011 case is particularly striking, given that it occurred under President Obama, who has personally denounced reputational credibility as "so easily disposed of that I’m always puzzled by how people make the argument."

Yet reputation theory is so prevalent in American thinking that even a president who specifically opposes that theory — and is himself a constitutional lawyer — has allowed it to be formally integrating into his government's legal case for war.

Are America's allies to blame? Or are we?

If reputational credibility has been so repeatedly debunked, both in specific instances and as a theory, why does it continue to loom so large in America's foreign policy discourse?

Tufts University's Michael Beckley hinted at one possible explanation in a much-discussed article last year in International Security: Could it have something to do with America's uniquely broad network of alliances?

Beckley's article was actually asking a different question — whether those alliances lead the US to war, by allowing allies to "entangle" it in foreign conflict. (Beckley concludes the answer is no; other scholars have disputed his findings.)

But, in reviewing so-called "entanglement theory," Beckley points out that reputational credibility, even if it doesn't exist in the world, is something that definitely exists in the minds of foreign leaders and foreign policy decision-makers.

"The alliance comes to be perceived as an end in itself, transcending the more concrete national security interests for which it was initially conceived," political scientist Jack Levy wrote in a well-known 1981 paper (which Beckley cites). Here's the key quote:

Political decision makers come to believe that support for one's allies, regardless of its consequences, is essential for their national prestige, and that the failure to provide support would ultimately result in their diplomatic isolation in a hostile and threatening world.

So it's not that reputation is a real thing that compels states to act in a certain way, but rather that individual decision-makers are driven by their own mistaken belief in reputation. As a result, Beckley writes, "reputational concerns can drive states into wars over trivial interests in peripheral places."

Some scholars, including Levy, argue that America's allies promote the idea of reputation, as a means to convince the United States to commit more resources to serve their own interests.

Foreign leaders do seem to become awfully preoccupied with American credibility when they want the US to take military action on their behalf. When the US failed to bomb Syria in 2013, for example, Syria's enemies in the region — Arab leaders who are also allied with the US — declared that American credibility was at stake.

"I think I believe in American power more than Obama does," Jordan's King Abdullah II said of Obama's decision to not bomb Syria.

This comes at a time when the US has grown unusually indulgent of its allies, as Jeremy Shapiro and Richard Sokolsky argue in a recent article. This has made American policymakers more likely to heed allies' demands and take their claims at face value.

"THE CREDIBILITY ARGUMENT IS SIMPLY AN EASY (AND HARD TO DISPROVE) WAY FOR ELITES TO SELL THE FOREIGN POLICY THEY'RE MOST INTERESTED IN TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE"

But Dartmouth's Jennifer Lind finds evidence that allies make this argument only opportunistically, and almost always about conflicts in which they are directly involved. They might speak in the language of reputation theory, but their behavior suggests that they do not really believe in it.

Reputation theory, after all, says that America's allies would want the US to intervene as much as possible in other conflicts, when in fact the opposite is usually true.

In fact, so-called reputation is actually driven almost entirely by internal American dynamics. Consider America's belief that it had to intervene in Korea to reassure European allies, who in fact wanted no such thing.

Lind makes this point well by citing America's pledge to defend Taiwan from a possible Chinese invasion. According to reputation theory, Asian leaders who also fear Chinese aggression would want the US to make and uphold this pledge. American policymakers indeed believe this, and it is one reason (albeit far from the only reason) why the US has pledged to fight in such a war.

"Many U.S. leaders and foreign policy elites today argue that, in the event of a war in the Taiwan strait, the United States must defend Taiwan or see its credibility collapse," Lind writes.

In reality, the opposite is true. American allies in Asia, Lind writes, "make it clear that they under no circumstances want war in the Taiwan strait, and fear that the Americans will someday fight one with China."

The Taiwan example is instructive, if alarming: America's foreign policy community believes something that is flatly untrue. And while a Sino-American war over Taiwan is extremely unlikely, it looked substantially less unlikely in the 1990s. It is concerning that American policymakers were committing the US to fight such a war in part because they believed something that was 180-degrees the opposite of reality.

The point is not just that America's mistaken belief in credibility is dangerous, but also that it does not come from allies. It comes from us.

#### No link---alliance cred doesn’t spill over broadly because states view reliability through their stakes and interests in each issue

Iain D. Henry 20, Lecturer at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Spring 2020, “What Allies Want: Reconsidering Loyalty, Reliability, and Alliance Interdependence,” International Security, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 45-83

Third, the reliability idea allows for alliance commitments to be interdependent, but in a broader sense than usually expected. Mercer defines interdependence as “using past behavior to predict or explain future behavior,” and interdependence is often examined in terms of iterative crises: the state backed down in the first crisis, so it is expected to back down in a second crisis.40 Interdependence could also operate on a much quicker schedule, however, in nonconflict situations, and with reference to revelations of interests rather than character. If a state observes something indicating allied unreliability, then it should try to mitigate this risk. A state fearing abandonment could increase its defense budget, seek new allies, peacefully settle old scores, or discuss these fears with the ally. A state fearing entrapment could employ distancing strategies, threaten to withhold support, launch peace initiatives, or even abrogate the alliance. Alternatively, because the state is not judging character, interdependence could be weak: if a state has no real stake in an issue, and its ally’s actions will not affect reliability, then the state may not care how its ally behaves.41

Importantly, this concept of interdependence allows for the ally’s actions to be important now, not just in future crises. Considering how interdependence operates simultaneously across discrete alliance commitments allows for the idea of reliability to be tested within a single crisis. Further, it is more representative of the real world: a state might not need to worry significantly about an adversary’s resolve until the next crisis, but Brett Ashley Leeds finds that when “conditions change, [alliance] violation becomes more likely.”42 Thus, I expect states to be sensitive to variations in their ally’s reliability.

However, because reliability is contingent upon interests—not character judgments—the effects of alliance interdependence might not be as severe as those predicted by other theories. If states do not assess character, then an [End Page 55] ally’s unreliability on one particular issue will not result in the ally being unreliable on all matters. A U.S. backdown and withdrawal in one region may not damage the United States’ reliability in another: it may, instead, improve it. Alternatively, the United States’ unwillingness to support a reckless ally may mean nothing for its determination to defend that same ally against an unprovoked attack.