

# Promises under Pressure: Reassurance in Asymmetric Alliances

Brian Blankenship\*  
Dartmouth College

## Abstract

Great powers frequently reassure allies of their protection by stationing troops abroad, visiting allied countries, and making public statements. Yet the causes of alliance reassurance are understudied in the academic literature. Indeed, reassurance is puzzling because it invites allies to free-ride or provoke their adversaries, knowing that they have their patron's support. Despite the drawbacks, I argue that patrons use reassurance to discourage their allies from seeking outside options and reducing their dependence on the alliance. Patrons thus face a dilemma wherein they trade off between withholding reassurance for short-term leverage and using reassurance to preserve their long-term influence. I test the theory using a new cross-national dataset of U.S. reassurance from 1950-2010, as well as qualitative evidence from U.S. reassurance toward West Germany. The findings have implications for understanding alliance bargaining and design, and suggest a new pathway through which weaker states can shape great powers' foreign commitments.

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\*US Foreign Policy and International Security Postdoctoral Fellow, John S. Dickey Center for International Understanding, Dartmouth College, brdblank@gmail.com. I am very grateful for feedback I received from Richard Betts, Jon Brown, Allison Carnegie, Han Dorussen, Joel Hillison, Robert Jervis, Raymond Kuo, Alexander Lanoszka, Erik Lin-Greenberg, Shawn Lonergan, Roseanne McManus, Renanah Miles, Jack Snyder, Johannes Urpelainen, and Keren Yarhi-Milo, as well as participants at the 74th and 75th annual meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association, the 112th and 113th annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, and the Columbia Security Studies Working Group. I would also like to thank Ned Brose and Alex Campbell for their research assistance. Additionally, I am grateful for funding I received from the Smith Richardson Foundation (SRF grant #2016-1050), the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, and the Columbia University Political Science Department.

## Introduction

In a May 2017 visit to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters, U.S. President Donald Trump declined to affirm his support of NATO's Article 5, which establishes mutual defense among the alliance's members.<sup>1</sup> This was no accident; in his speech, Trump deliberately removed a passage expressing his support for Article 5.<sup>2</sup> U.S. allies – as well as members of Trump's own administration – were taken aback, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel arguing that it was time for Europeans to “really take our fate into our own hands.”<sup>3</sup>

In the wake of the uproar surrounding Trump's speech – and his treatment of allies more generally – one question that has largely been neglected is why one should even expect the United States to reassure its allies in the first place. Indeed, reassurance is fundamentally puzzling because it surrenders a key source of bargaining power: the threat of abandonment. Bargaining leverage within an alliance depends on the credibility of states' threats to abandon their partners, and thus great power patrons should limit the extent to which they are perceived as committed to their allies (Snyder, 1997; Crawford, 2003). Reassurance measures, however, are intended to have exactly the opposite effect. Other strands of literature similarly suggest that reassuring allies can have undesirable consequences, with allies being more willing to provoke their adversaries (Fearon, 1997; Benson, 2012; Posen, 2014) or free-ride (Olson and Zeckhauser, 1966; Sandler, 1993). Why, then, would a patron deliberately weaken its bargaining position?

Yet Trump's treatment of allies comes as such a surprise because reassuring allies has, in fact, been historically ubiquitous in U.S. foreign policy. In many other cases, U.S. officials have gone to great length to reassure allies. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, for one, argued that “both the size and the specific elements of [American] forces are driven more by the need to reassure those that we protect under the nuclear umbrella than by U.S. requirements alone”

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<sup>1</sup>Michael D. Shear, Mark Landler, and James Kanter, “In NATO Speech, Trump Is Vague About Mutual Defense Pledge,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>Susan B. Glasser, “Trump National Security Team Blindsided by NATO Speech,” *Politico*, June 5, 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Alison Smale and Steven Erlanger, “Merkel, After Discordant G7 Meeting, Is Looking Past Trump,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2017.

(Murdock, 2009: 9). Since 1945, the United States has stationed hundreds of thousands of troops on allied soil, and U.S. officials make countless foreign visits and public statements to demonstrate support for American partners (Lebovic and Saunders, 2016). Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, for example, made such an effort to signal U.S. commitment during overseas trips that the *New York Times* dubbed him the “secretary of reassurance” in the summer of 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Reassurance remains understudied in the scholarly literature, and policy prescriptions tend to assume rather than scrutinize the importance of reassurance. Academic studies, for their part, often treat great power patrons’ use of reassurance as a byproduct of deterrence, where the primary intended audiences are adversaries (e.g., Schelling, 1966; Morgan, 1983; Benson, Meirowitz, and Ramsay, 2014). But reassurance is often an end in itself; the evidence is clear that patrons often take care to reassure allies even when they perceive little-to-no deterrence benefit. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, U.S. President John F. Kennedy made a secret arrangement to withdraw U.S. nuclear missiles from Turkey in exchange for the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. In doing so, Kennedy sought to save face as a credible protector among allies – but notably not in the eyes of the United States’ primary adversary, thus deliberately reassuring allies without any corresponding deterrence purpose (Jervis, 2015: esp. p. 26).

In this study, I explore variation in reassurance in asymmetric alliances – those involving a disproportionately powerful great power patron that provides security for its weaker partners. Here, I define reassurance as acts made by a patron which are intended to convince an ally that its assistance will be forthcoming in the event of an attack on the ally from another state. In other words, reassurance is intended to reduce allies’ fears of abandonment.<sup>5</sup> The theory I present here is intended to be generalizable; however, for reasons discussed below I focus on American alliances. Thus I use the terms “patron” and “United States” interchangeably.

I argue that although reassurance can have adverse consequences, it also enables the patron

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<sup>4</sup>Helene Cooper, “Pentagon Chief Ashton Carter Adds ‘Secretary of Reassurance’ to His Portfolio,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2015.

<sup>5</sup>Notably, this definition excludes measures taken to support allies who are already under attack.

to maintain control over its alliances and preserve its bargaining leverage in the long-term. In particular, patrons use reassurance to dissuade allies from seeking outside options that can allow them to become more independent. The more credible an ally's outside options, the more the patron will reassure it. I focus on two factors to explain variation in reassurance both across allies and over time. First, the availability of outside options – whether in the form of self-reliance or alternative security partners – determines how easily allies can meet their security needs without the alliance. Second, when the patron faces constraints on the resources it can devote to its foreign commitments, allies are likely to question its reliability and consider pursuing outside options.

I test the theory by studying the behavior of the United States toward its allies, using data on U.S. reassurance that includes original coding of public statements, diplomatic visits, foreign troop deployments, and military exercises from 1950-2010. The results support my theory; the United States makes greater effort to reassure allies with more credible outside options – even after including a number of controls to account for the level of threat.

This study makes a number of contributions. First, whereas most of the existing scholarship on alliances neglects the study of reassurance after an alliance is formed, instead focusing on the causes and consequences of alliance treaties, I present a theory that explains variation in reassurance and test it using both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Second, while existing scholars acknowledge the importance of alliance exit as a source of leverage (e.g., Snyder, 1997; Cha, 1999; Crawford, 2003), unlike this study they generally do not identify the *conditions* under which exit is more or less credible.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, existing work on the subject is often descriptive, while empirical testing is limited and almost entirely qualitative (e.g., Rothstein, 1968; Park, 1975; Bar-Siman-Tov, 1980). Finally, this study bridges the gap between work on alliance bargaining and that on alliance management and design. The literature on alliance management, for its part, has long focused on the determinants of alliance cohesion, including the policies states can use to keep their alliances together (e.g., Weitsman, 2004; Crawford, 2011; Izumikawa, 2018). I show that strategies to main-

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<sup>6</sup>One exception is Kim (2016), which I discuss below.

tain alliance cohesion such as reassurance are both an outcome of bargaining themselves as well as an influence on future bargaining. On the one hand, allies can use the threat of seeking independence from the alliance to extract assurances. On the other hand, patrons can use reassurance to preserve their future bargaining leverage. Similarly, although the literature on alliance design is sparse, recent research assumes that in asymmetric alliances, great powers can effectively dictate their commitments, with allies having little choice but to accept the level of commitment they are offered (Kim, 2011; Benson, 2012; Mattes, 2012; Beckley, 2015). My findings, by contrast, suggest that allies can shape great powers' security commitments through their outside options.

In the next two sections, I discuss the sparse literature on reassurance, and then present my theory. I then proceed to the quantitative analysis, followed by a case study on U.S.-West German relations during the 1960s and 1970s to illustrate causal mechanisms. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of theoretical and policy implications.

## **Existing Literature on Reassurance**

Reassurance is largely absent from the literature on alliances (cf. Knopf, 2012). Instead, most research studies the causes and consequences of alliance formation. Here, the alliance itself is treated as the assurance (Morrow, 1994, 2000), with scholars then seeking to identify whether the existence and design of an alliance affect a number of outcomes of interest, including conflict initiation (Leeds, 2003*b*; Benson, 2012), nuclear proliferation (Jo and Gartzke, 2007; Reiter, 2014), trade between allies (Long and Leeds, 2006), and alliance reliability (Leeds and Anac, 2005). To the extent that existing studies consider reassurance, they largely focus on its effect on outcomes such as nuclear proliferation (Knopf, 2012; Lanoszka, 2018) or alliance free-riding (Lake, 2009; Machain and Morgan, 2013). McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017), for their part, focus more on how states reassure their allies than on why, arguing that autocratic states tend to receive private signals of support while democratic states receive public ones.

But research explaining the causes of reassurance is sparse. Some scholars see it as essentially

suboptimal. Posen (2014), for example, claims that reassurance encourages allies to free-ride and engage in risky behavior such as provoking their adversaries. Fearon (1997) similarly argues that states may elect not to tie their hands in extended deterrence crises because doing so can lead to moral hazard problems in their alliances. In U.S. foreign policy, many scholars skeptical of reassurance see it as being partly a function of American domestic political pathologies – whether due to domestic lobbying (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007) or elite habit (Porter, 2018).

While there is a vast academic literature on deterrence, it pays limited attention to reassurance except to note that the two are likely to overlap (Morgan, 1983; Yost, 2009; Murdock, 2009; Benson, Meirowitz, and Ramsay, 2014). A few authors suggest that reassuring allies may be more difficult than deterring adversaries, whether due to psychological biases (Mercer, 1996) or because allies care not only about whether deterrence works, but also about the consequences of deterrence failure (Howard, 1982). But this literature does not investigate the conditions under which great powers reassure allies apart from what is required for deterrence.

The literature on alliance bargaining, for its part, sheds some light onto the subject insofar as allies seek reassurance by threatening to exit the alliance and pursue outside options. Nevertheless, existing studies do not focus on reassurance, and provide limited insight into the conditions under which outside options are credible. Snyder (1997), for his part, focuses solely on symmetric alliances in multipolar systems, while Kim (2016) treats polarity – the number of great powers – as the main determinant of outside options, thus omitting variation both across allies and within a given distribution of power. For other authors, allies' bargaining leverage derives from their strategic value, which they can exploit to extract benefits such as military base rents (Lake, 1999; Cooley and Spruyt, 2009). Yet strategically valuable allies should need reassurance the least, as their patron has intrinsic motivations to protect them (Danilovic, 2002). Moreover, in many cases patrons reassure their allies even when the latter do not explicitly bargain for it. Indeed, reassurance is often not just a bargaining outcome, but rather, as I argue below, a means for the patron to preserve its *future* bargaining leverage by encouraging allies to remain dependent upon it. In this way,

patrons not only react to allies' demands, but also proactively discourage them from considering outside options in the first place in order to maintain control over them.

Thus, little research has systematically explored the causes of reassurance in asymmetric alliances. This study fills the gap by presenting a strategic theory of reassurance which both explains why allies need reassurance as well as identifies the conditions under which a patron is likely to reassure them. In the following section I address each of these questions in turn.

## **Theory: Reassurance and Alliance Control**

My theory on the causes of reassurance in asymmetric alliances is built on four assumptions. First, the weaker party (the ally) seeks protection from its stronger partner (the patron). Second, the patron prefers that its allies remain loyal to it and pursue policies consistent with its interests. Third, neither the patron nor its allies know each other's intentions with certainty, and those intentions can change. Fourth, an ally's willingness to defer to the patron's preferences is largely a function of its dependence on the patron. Based on these assumptions, I argue that patrons use reassurance both proactively and reactively to offset allies' fears of abandonment, in order to discourage them from pursuing outside options that could allow them to reduce their dependence and distance themselves from the alliance. A patron thus faces a dilemma. On the one hand, reassuring allies encourages them to remain dependent on its protection and thus subject to its influence. By doing so, however, a patron increases the risk of moral hazard and foregoes the opportunity to shed burdens and cut costs. The theory I present in the following pages explores the conditions under which this dilemma is more severe, and derives testable hypotheses to explain variation in reassurance.

### **The Need for Reassurance in Alliances**

The international politics literature largely treats alliances as means for states to bolster their security or gain influence over partners. In terms of security, alliances represent a means of "capability-aggregation" with which states maximize their relative power vis-à-vis third parties (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987; Snyder, 1997). Alternatively, alliances can provide states with other benefits, including

side payments or opportunities to restrain their partners (Schroeder, 1976; Weitsman, 2004). This is most common in asymmetric alliances between great powers and non-great powers. Weak states need security but can do little to improve the security of a great power. As a result, great powers provide them with protection, and in exchange allies give up some of their autonomy. This often entails policy concessions such as supporting the patron's foreign wars, striking trade agreements with it, granting it military bases, and refusing to cooperate with its adversaries (Morrow, 1991).

Alliances, in these views, form when they are needed and dissolve when they are not. Others contest this point, arguing that alliances can adapt and change functions over time (Wallander, 2000). In either case, it is unlikely that all members will ever be fully confident in the alliance. In an anarchic international system, no higher authority can force partners to cooperate, and parties to an alliance are likely to be concerned about both whether their partners will actually support them and the amount of support they will bring to bear.

In principle, alliance treaties bind their signatories to support each other, and are often considered the strongest means by which partners can assure each other of their commitments to do so (Morrow, 1994, 2000). In practice, however, alliance treaties are an imperfect means of assurance. First, the terms of an alliance are rarely, if ever, so unambiguous as to remove all doubt about whether a partner would be obligated to act, or whether it could instead justify non-intervention by appealing to the situation's extenuating or unique circumstances (Leeds et al., 2002; Benson, 2012; Mattes, 2012). Even if partners do follow through, the timing and amount of their support is subject to their own discretion (Beckley, 2015). Second, not only are alliances' terms quite static, but alliances can also be abrogated, and partners' interests, capabilities, and intentions can change over time and may be difficult to observe (Leeds, 2003*a*; Leeds and Savun, 2007; McManus, 2018). Indeed, Siverson and King (1980) find that alliances are less likely to be honored the longer they last. Finally, the primary obligation of an alliance – support during wartime – is not an ongoing process where compliance can be verified. A patron's willingness to carry out its promise can only be determined once it has been tested, at which point it is too late.



Allies are thus likely to need frequent reaffirmation of their patron's commitment. U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, for example, described France as having "an almost hysterical fear that we and the British will one day pull out of Western Europe" (Sloan, 2016: 39). More recently, a 2017 poll showed that 20-40% of the populations of NATO countries doubted U.S. willingness to defend NATO.<sup>7</sup> Reassurance thus serves a similar function as verification mechanisms do for other kinds of international treaties – namely, for a state to convince its partners that it will honor its obligations. This can take the form of public promises, military forces deployed on allied territory, or high-profile diplomatic visits, to name just a few. These serve to bolster allies' confidence by demonstrating the patron's willingness to incur costs on their behalf or by putting its reputation among international and domestic observers on the line (Schelling, 1966; Fearon, 1997).

At the same time, patrons also face uncertainty about their allies' intentions. Allies' willingness to pursue policies in line with the patron's preferences are subject to doubt over time, as they may change course by downgrading their reliance upon the alliance and going their own way. This, in turn, renders them less dependent on the patron's protection, and thus less susceptible to its influence (Snyder, 1997). American policymakers as far back as the 1950s, for example, feared that Japan might position itself as a neutral actor that kept both the United States and the Soviet Union at arm's length, and they sought to discourage it from pursuing a more independent foreign policy by convincing the Japanese that the United States would sufficiently meet Japan's security needs (Komine, 2014; Izumikawa, 2018). Similarly, U.S. officials at various points, particularly during the 1970s and again in the 1990s, worried that a united Europe could develop into a political and even military rival of the United States (Posen, 2006: 182-183; Robb, 2014: ch. 2).

Fundamentally, then, reassurance is an instrument of control. Protection is the patron's *quid pro quo* in the alliance (Morrow, 1991), and if allies doubt this protection, they are likely to seek other options for meeting their security needs. In the short-term, these may threaten the patron's interests by, for example, tempting adversaries to drive a wedge in the alliance. In the long-

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<sup>7</sup>Pew Research Center, "NATO's Image Improves on Both Sides of Atlantic," May 2017.

term, the pursuit and acquisition of outside options can have downstream effects in the form of greater allied autonomy. Independent allies, in turn, have less incentive to uphold their end of the bargain by supporting the patron's foreign policy initiatives – joining it in military conflict, hosting its bases, striking favorable trade agreements – and refusing to do the same for its adversaries (Snyder, 1997; Lake, 2009). In the remainder of this section, I unpack the concepts of alliance exit and outside options, describe the patron's motivations for discouraging allies from seeking outside options, and discuss the conditions under which these options are more credible.

### **Outside Options and Reassurance**

Reassurance occurs in the shadow of alliance “exit,” which consists of a spectrum. In the most extreme cases, allies can abrogate or violate the alliance treaty. Far more commonly, however, patrons fear their allies will attempt any number of independent policies – such as pursuing rapprochement with adversaries, seeking partnerships with third parties, or striving for neutrality – and distancing themselves from the patron while still remaining in the alliance. The allies most capable of pursuing independent policies and distancing themselves from the patron – and thus more likely to receive reassurance – are those which have more attractive outside options.

Two types of outside options offer allies a route to autonomy from their patron: self-reliance and alternative partners. The allies most able to reduce their dependence on the alliance are those with both friendly relations with third parties and a degree of self-sufficiency. First, allies can attempt to provide for their own security, in effect “going it alone.” If allies are sufficiently powerful or are capable of obtaining nuclear weapons, they may be able to meet their security needs without relying on another country's protection or striking deals with adversaries. Second, they can move closer to third party states – including but not limited to their (or the patron's) adversaries. For one, allies can pursue détente with adversaries, whether through compromise or by making concessions to them in order to reduce tensions and the risk of war – or even in exchange for direct pledges of nonaggression. Alternatively, they can seek support from other third parties, whether by seeking a

security guarantee from another great power or by forming coalitions with non-great powers.

Each of these outside options carries potentially adverse short-term consequences for the patron in both the short- and long-term. Allies' arms buildups, for one, can exacerbate their neighbors' insecurity, sparking regional arms races which can produce spirals of hostility that draw allies – and potentially the patron – into war (Monteiro, 2014). These consequences are magnified in the case of allied nuclear weapons development, which can more rapidly shift the balance of power. Nuclear proliferation may beget further proliferation, and may raise the risk of war – whether accidental or intentional – by emboldening allies to behave more aggressively and by giving neighbors incentive to conduct a preventive strike (Bell, 2015; Monteiro and Debs, 2017). Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence showing that the United States put considerable pressure on its allies to refrain from seeking independent nuclear capabilities (e.g., Miller, 2018).

A patron similarly has incentive to prevent allies from moving too close to third parties. In the case of mutual adversaries, any seeming discrepancy in the alliance's posture can give the appearance of weakened alliance cohesion, and thus diminish the alliance's deterrent power and tempt adversaries to drive a wedge through it (Crawford, 2011). Additionally, the patron will likely be concerned about the concessions its ally might make as part of a compromise with an adversary which could undercut the alliance's ability to pose a united front, weaken the patron, or strengthen the adversary – such as evicting the patron from bases on the ally's territory (Lake, 1999: 140-141; Izumikawa, 2018). Similarly, if allies align with non-adversary third parties, the patron faces the possibility of “commitment creep,” wherein it may be entangled in the affairs of its allies' partners.

Additionally, in the long-term, outside options reduce allies' need for the patron's protection, whether by providing a substitute for it or by mitigating their threat environments. This reduces allies' dependence on the patron and enables them to reclaim some autonomy, which is detrimental to the patron first of all because the more independent allies are, the less control it has over them. The patron can thus expect that such allies will be less cooperative with it and less likely to spurn cooperation with adversaries out of deference to it (Morrow, 1991; Lake, 2009). Indeed, Kroenig

(2010) argues that U.S. opposition to allied nuclear proliferation stems from its desire to retain influence over them. Moreover, acts that reduce allies' dependence on the patron can make the path to actually leaving the alliance more plausible in the future. France, for example, withdrew from NATO's military command in 1966 after obtaining nuclear weapons earlier that decade.

Importantly, the patron may be suspicious of allies' attempts to exercise autonomy even if they have no intention to abandon or reduce their commitment to the partnership. As I discuss in the case study, for example, American policymakers regarded West Germany's rapprochement with the Communist bloc during the 1970s with apprehension. Yet their fears did not reflect a genuine West German desire to leave NATO. Nevertheless, they anticipated that incremental steps toward a more independent foreign policy and improvements in relations with the Soviet Union could eventually tempt Western German leaders to conclude that their need for NATO had diminished.

A patron thus has incentive to reassure its allies to discourage them from meeting their security needs through outside options. It can use reassurance proactively to encourage allies to remain dependent, or reactively if allies are already considering outside options. Allies may even deliberately use their outside options as bargaining chips to extract assurances. South Korea, for example, pursued nuclear weapons in the 1970s both to hedge against U.S. abandonment and to deter the United States from withdrawing troops from the Korean Peninsula (Gul Hong, 2011).

I would therefore expect reassurance to vary in response to the credibility of allies' threats to pursue outside options and distance themselves from the alliance. The allies best positioned to become more independent of their patron, in turn, are those which can more easily pursue self-reliance or seek alternative partners. Specifically, allies with significant *latent military power*, a *latent nuclear capability*, and a greater number of *alternative security partners* have stronger outside options, and will receive more reassurance. Each of these facilitates allies' path to greater independence from the alliance, and functions as a latent capability for alliance exit. The allies with the most credible outside options are those which have a combination of all three.

First, allies with greater conventional military potential can more easily pursue a nonaligned,

autonomous foreign policy, whether by relying on their own military power or by aligning with other states. While they may not be able to defeat a great power by themselves, powerful allies can more credibly threaten to impose significant costs on an invader (Mearsheimer, 1983). Moreover, stronger allies are better equipped to engage with adversaries on more semi-equal terms, and are not as vulnerable to the bullying or coercion which might otherwise make them reluctant to negotiate bilaterally. They can thus more easily pursue neutrality rather than bandwagon with adversaries.

Allies with larger economies and more latent military power also have more to offer adversaries and alternative partners. The patron's adversaries will be tempted to improve relations with powerful allies because peeling them away from the patron does more to undermine it. Indeed, Izumikawa (2018) argues that this explains the Soviet Union's attempt to entice Japan away from the United States in the 1950s, which the United States countered with its own assurances and rewards. Similarly, larger allies are more valuable to other potential partners because they can bring more resources to bear on those partners' behalf (Kim, 2016). China's economic and military clout made it a valuable partner to the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, which allowed it to further distance itself from the Soviet Union.

Second, the credibility of allies' threats to pursue nuclear weapons is a function of both their conventional military strength and whether they have the latent capacity to build nuclear weapons. Conventionally powerful allies have a more credible threat of obtaining nuclear weapons for two reasons. For one, they have greater resources with which they can attempt to develop nuclear weapons. Second, their greater conventional strength renders them more able to deter preventive attacks on their nuclear programs (Monteiro and Debs, 2017; Ludvik, 2018). States with a latent nuclear capacity, in turn, can more quickly obtain nuclear weapons. Fuhrmann and Tkach (2015) even find that nuclear latency itself may deter attacks.

Finally, allies with more partners to choose from can more easily meet their security needs by relying on third parties or seeking neutrality. Specifying which allies have more viable alternative security partners is difficult *a priori*, as states can choose new partners based on expedient cir-

cumstances. However, for one, as discussed previously I expect allies with larger economies and conventional military potential to be more able to attract alternative partners. Additionally, Kim (2016) argues that system polarity dictates allies' outside options; the more great powers there are, the more choices allies have. Yet this is a coarse measure, one that is not only quite slow-moving and entirely country-invariant, but which rules out alliances between non-great powers. As such, I follow Lake (2009) in defining alternative security partners as the number of allies a state has that are not shared with the patron.

To be sure, in many cases there is no simply no equivalent state that could provide the same degree of security as the patron. Nevertheless, having other partners – even if they are not great powers – can afford allies a degree of autonomy. When Greece and Turkey formed the Balkan Pact with Yugoslavia in 1953, for example, U.S. officials reacted with some trepidation, fearing that the new partnership might embolden its members to behave more recklessly or potentially draw the United States into conflict (Stone, 1994). Similarly, allies may pursue rapprochement and strike deals with adversaries, as France did when it signed a consultation pact with the Soviet Union in 1970, to seek a more neutral course.<sup>8</sup> This leads to the following set of hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** Allies with stronger outside options will receive more reassurance from their patron.

**Hypothesis 1a.** Allies with greater latent military power will receive more reassurance.

**Hypothesis 1b.** Allies with a latent nuclear weapons capability will receive more reassurance.

**Hypothesis 1c.** Allies with more alternative partners will receive more reassurance.

### **When Do Allies Pursue Outside Options?**

Allies are more likely to chart an independent course, in turn, when they doubt the patron's reliability. This reduces the security benefits allies can expect from relying on the patron, which gives them incentive to consider outside options. In particular, allies are likely to question the alliance's value when the patron faces constraints on its ability to sustain its foreign commitments and pressure to retrench from those commitments. Such constraints shape allies' incentives for pursuing

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<sup>8</sup>*France-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: Protocol on Political Cooperation* (1970).

outside options through three mechanisms: first, by making the patron more reluctant to intervene in disputes on allies' behalf; second, by reducing the resources that are available to the patron for defending allies; and third, by encouraging the patron to seek détente with its adversaries.

When a patron faces pressure to retrench, allies may fear that it will abandon them in an hour of need, whether owing to a lack of political will or to limits on the resources it can devote to their defense. In the case of South Korea, for example, the United States proved reluctant to respond to a series of North Korean provocations during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including an assassination attempt on the South Korean President and the shooting down of a U.S. aircraft. This was in large part because the Vietnam War constrained both U.S. ability and willingness to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula – much to the chagrin of the South Korean government (Simmons, 1978: 6-13; Cha, 1999: 63-65; Yong Lee, 2011: 420-421).

Additionally, constraints create incentives for the patron to pursue détente with or accommodate its adversaries in order to avoid over-extension. This was part of the logic behind Mikhail Gorbachev's pursuit of détente with the West during the 1980s (Schweller and Wohlforth, 2000), as well as Richard Nixon's rapprochement with China and the Soviet Union in the 1970s. However, patron-adversary détente is also likely to stoke allies' fears of being "sold out" as part of a grand bargain between the patron and its adversary (Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, 2016). During the late 1960s and 1970s many U.S. allies, despite seeing merits in the relaxation of tensions between the Eastern and Western blocs, feared that if dictated by the United States, détente could be the precursor to the United States striking a deal with the Soviet Union or China at the expense of their own interests.

When allies perceive that the patron is unwilling or unable to defend them, they are likely to seek outside options. This, in turn, gives the patron incentive to reassure them. Lanoszka (2018) finds that U.S. allies are more likely to pursue nuclear weapons in the wake of doubts about the credibility of U.S. protection – and, in particular, after a major withdrawal of American troops. Indeed, South Korea and Taiwan began pursuing nuclear weapons in response to concerns about

U.S. reliability during the 1970s and ceased pursuit only in response to strong American pressure coupled with reassurance.

Both *material* (or resource) and *political* constraints can put pressure on the patron's ability to sustain its foreign commitments. Costly foreign wars and economic downturns, for example, can sap the patron's resources. The costs of maintaining foreign commitments at their present level may thus become less tenable due to budgetary constraints brought on by economic hardship or the loss of blood and treasure in foreign wars (MacDonald and Parent, 2011; Haynes, 2015). During the 1950s, for example, the Eisenhower Administration sought to reassure U.S. allies that its "New Look" policy, in which the United States would rein in its defense spending in the aftermath of the Korean War and look to allies to provide more for their own defense, did not imply a weakening of the U.S. commitment to defend them (Sloan, 2016: 38-39). This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** A patron will reassure its allies more when it faces resource constraints.

In terms of political constraints, domestic isolationist sentiment raises the possibility that domestic actors will force policymakers to renege on their commitments (cf. Putnam, 1988). When policymakers face domestic pressure to retrench by reducing either defense spending or their country's overseas military presence, exit becomes more attractive for allies. Richard Nixon, for one, feared that Congressional and public pressure for retrenchment during the 1970s – most notably in the form of a series of amendments and resolutions sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, which called for withdrawing significant numbers of U.S. troops from abroad – might lead allies to move closer to the Soviet Union or to pursue nuclear weapons (Williams, 1985). U.S. officials thus used considerable reassurance measures to counteract the voices of domestic actors.

Political constraints are likely to be partly, though not wholly, influenced by material constraints. That is, I would expect domestic pressure for retrenchment to be stronger in the aftermath of a costly foreign war, or in the wake of an economic crisis, as resource constraints are likely to sap the public's appetite for foreign entanglements. A long line of research suggests that protracted,



costly wars sap domestic political support for foreign entanglements (e.g., Mueller, 1973; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, 2009). Similarly, economic hardship constrains the patron's ability to collect revenue, which forces more painful guns-butter trade-offs in which domestic audiences may prioritize internal spending over spending on foreign commitments (Chapman, McDonald, and Moser, 2015). Nevertheless, material constraints are unlikely to be fully determinate of political constraints. Indeed, domestic audiences may even see spending on the military as a means of injecting money into the economy, per Keynesian economic logic (Whitten and Williams, 2011). Moreover, Flores-Macias and Kreps (2017) show that policymakers can insulate themselves from domestic accountability by financing war through borrowing and deficit spending rather than taxation.

**Hypothesis 3.** A patron will reassure its allies more when it faces domestic pressure to retrench from its foreign commitments.

Thus, I argue that in addition to the strength of their outside options, what also shapes allies' willingness to pursue outside options is their perception of the patron's reliability. This perception, in turn, is driven by the degree to which the patron faces material and political constraints that hinder its ability to sustain its foreign commitments. A summary of the causal pathway behind H2 and H3 can be found in Figure 1. In terms of the mechanisms beyond these hypotheses, I would expect to see evidence that resource constraints and political constraints are associated with: 1) a reluctance to intervene on allies' behalf; 2) a decline in the resources a patron devotes to its military readiness; and 3) the pursuit of *détente* with adversaries.

## Research Design

I test the hypotheses using a cross-national dataset of U.S. reassurance between 1950 and 2010. The unit of analysis is the ally-year, and my sample includes all states defined as having defense pacts or ententes with the United States in Version 4.1 of the Correlates of War's Formal Alliances Dataset (Gibler, 2009).<sup>9</sup> In addition to creating a tractable sample that is not *ad hoc*, limiting

<sup>9</sup>The states included in the sample are shown in Table A4. The differences between the U.S. alliances captured in the COW data and the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP, Version 4.0) dataset are minimal (Leeds et al.,

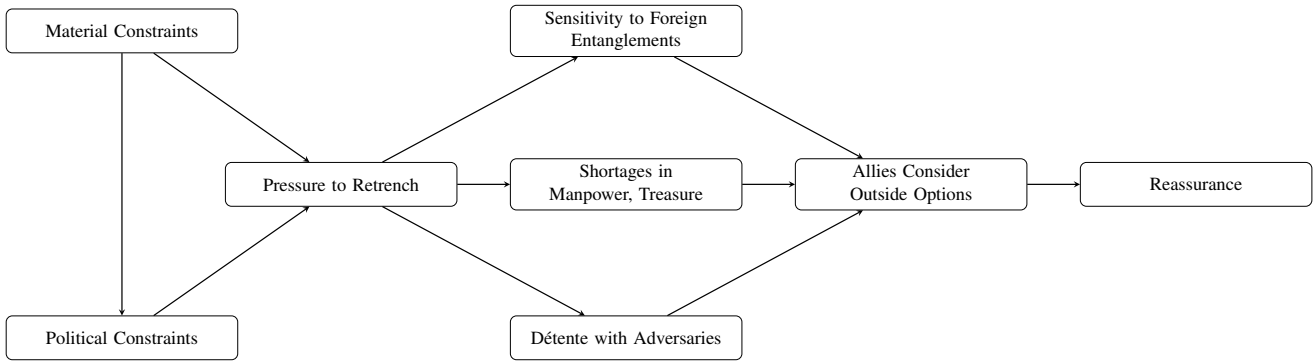


Figure 1: The causal pathway between pressure to retrench and reassurance.

the universe of cases to formal allies allows me to impose a number of scope conditions. First, it establishes a baseline of prior commitment, as treaty allies can most reasonably expect to be reassured in the first place. Moreover, formal allies are likely to share common defense interests and threat perceptions, which is not necessarily the case among informal allies (Resnick, 2010). Second, it limits the sample to relationships in which allies receive guarantees of protection, rather than solely material benefits such as aid and arms.

Ideally, I would also include the Soviet Union’s alliances. However, in addition to data availability issues, there are arguably at least two differences between their blocs that render comparisons problematic. First, participation in the American alliance system was voluntary rather than coerced. Second, Soviet allies were comparatively more concerned with internal threats than external ones (Harrison, 2005). But although I do not explicitly study Soviet alliances, Nelson (1986) and Crump (2015) present evidence which suggests that bargaining within the Soviet bloc was shaped to a great extent by the threat of exit – particularly in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split, which gave members of the Warsaw Pact an alternative patron.

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2002). Only 57 observations appear in ATOP but not in COW (largely accounted for by ATOP’s inclusion of Thailand in the dataset post-1977) while 62 observations appear in COW but not in ATOP (largely due to COW’s inclusion of Liberia), compared to 1,368 observations that the two datasets have in common. Nevertheless, the results are robust to using the ATOP coding. See Tables A10 and A11 in the appendix for more details.

## Threats to Inference

In studying the effects of outside options on U.S. reassurance, there are three primary threats to making inferences about the relationship. The first is endogeneity. It is possible, indeed likely, that allies may make threats or attempts to seek outside options in response to a lack of reassurance, and thus the causality of the relationship could be reversed. Similarly, the United States might withhold reassurance from allies which are distancing themselves from the alliance to punish them. As a result, I do not use attempts to pursue outside options as my independent variables. Instead I focus on factors that affect allies' latent ability to exploit outside options. These factors are observable by both parties, thus allowing them to tailor their behavior in anticipation of the other's actions.<sup>10</sup>

The second is unobserved variation across countries and regions. The threat environment allies face is likely to vary considerably across regions due to their differences in geography – such as whether allies are separated from their neighbors by water, their proximity to the United States, and their proximity to U.S. adversaries. In addition, the type of alliance and the number of U.S. allies varies significantly across regions; whereas it had a tight multilateral alliance (NATO) with numerous states in Europe, it had bilateral pacts (excluding SEATO) with a smaller number of allies in Asia and the Middle East. Cha (2009) argues that multilateral allies can better threaten to exit the alliance because they can rely on each other. Thus, alliance size and the number of regional allies the United States has may be important omitted variables as well. As such, I always include country or region fixed effects in my models.

Third is change over time. It may be the case that U.S. assurances universally increase or decrease over time in ways not captured by the control variables, and thus the estimated effects for the independent variables might be biased if they are correlated with these secular trends.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>10</sup>One may be concerned that the factors discussed in H1b and H1c – latent nuclear capacity and independent partnerships – may be partly endogenous to reassurance. Nevertheless, while these results should be interpreted with some caution, the potential for endogeneity is reduced both because these factors do not *directly* capture allies' efforts to pursue outside options, and because they vary extremely little over time.

<sup>11</sup>The over-time trend in U.S. reassurance can be found in Figure A1 in the appendix, and shows that there has indeed been a gradual uptick in reassurance over time, especially after the 1950s and early 1960s.

order to account for temporal trends, I always include one of the following: linear, squared, and cubic time trends; year fixed effects; or decade fixed effects.

### **Dependent Variable**

For my dependent variable I use several measures of reassurance, the primary of which are instances of public statements and diplomatic visits made by U.S. officials to allied countries. For a quantitative analysis, I argue that statements and visits best capture the theoretical concept of reassurance. Even if allies are reasonably confident in their patron's commitment, continual rhetorical assurances are necessary if only because they are likely to be expected, and thus their absence would be noticeable – and all the more so if they have reason to doubt the patron's reliability (Jervis, 1970: e.g., 81-82). In the case study, I examine additional means of reassurance that are harder to capture in a quantitative analysis, including nuclear and conventional military doctrine and private statements.

While not as costly a signal as more tangible measures such as foreign-deployed troops, statements and visits are far from costless. The time leaders spend visiting other countries or making public statements of support is time not spent on other priorities (Lebovic and Saunders, 2016). Moreover such public signals are likely to generate some expectation of support on the part of allies, domestic audiences, and other international audiences (Schelling, 1966; Fearon, 1994). Signals of support, especially if done in public, can thus have the effect of tying the patron's hands by creating reputational costs if it does not follow through (Guisinger and Smith, 2002; Sartori, 2005). Indeed, McManus (2018) finds that visits and statements of support from major powers decrease the likelihood of attack against their protégés.

The evidence suggests that both U.S. allies and U.S. policymakers take statements and visits of support very seriously. For example, the South Koreans interpreted Vice President Walter Mondale's decision to visit Tokyo but not Seoul in early 1977 as a signal of U.S. disinterest in their country (Lee and Sato, 1982: 107-108). Similarly, U.S. officials in the Nixon Administration

feared that Defense Secretary James Schlesinger’s statement that the United States would be “automatically” involved in the event of a North Korean attack would be misread by the South Koreans as a stronger statement of support than intended (Oberdorfer, 1997: 13-14).

Moreover, other measures of reassurance are even more imperfect, first of all because of data availability. For one, troop deployments change very little over time, and are skewed by a number of outlier countries (Germany, Japan) that account for a large percentage of the total number of troops. Similarly, data on military exercises are not widely available until the late 1970s (D’Orazio, 2013). Second, statements and visits are the most direct form of reassurance. Troop deployments and military exercises can be multi-purpose, and used not only for reassurance but also for power projection and building partner fighting capacity. Nevertheless, in additional models I also use these measures of reassurance as the dependent variable.<sup>12</sup>

Using text from U.S. presidential statements, I hand-coded instances of public presidential declarations of reassurance between 1950 and 2010. With the paragraph as the unit of analysis, I summed the number of statements a president made toward each ally in a given year that expressed a reaffirmation of the United States’ commitment to protect it. My data on U.S. presidential statements come from the American Presidency Project (Peters and Woolley, 2016).<sup>13</sup> Second, I collected data on U.S. President and Secretary of State visits to foreign countries from the U.S. Department of State (2017). I then sum statements and visits together to create my measure of reassurance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Military aid may also in some cases represent a reassuring signal, but is just as likely to be a way of helping allies do more for themselves rather than rely on U.S. protection.

<sup>13</sup>Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/> (accessed March 8, 2017). I thank Roseanne McManus for generously sharing some of the raw speeches data she collected. My coding rules can be found in the appendix.

<sup>14</sup>Statements and visits are correlated with U.S. troop deployments and military exercises, even though the latter two are slow-moving over time. Correlation matrices for the Cold War and post-Cold War periods can be found in Tables A2 and A3 in the appendix, respectively.

## **Independent Variables**

### **Allies' Outside Options**

Allies' latent conventional military power is captured using their logarithmized gross domestic product (GDP). This captures the total resources available to allies for their own self-defense. Data come from version 8.0 of the Penn World Table (Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer, 2015), extended by Gleditsch (2002). As robustness checks I use alternative proxies – namely allies' population and their Correlates of War Composite Indicator of National Capabilities (CINC) scores, though the latter is not an ideal measure since it also captures actual (rather than potential) military strength and thus may be endogenous to U.S. reassurance.

Second, following the convention in the literature (Fuhrmann and Tkach, 2015; Mehta and Whitlark, 2017), I measure whether allies have a latent nuclear weapons capability using a dummy variable, which takes a value of 1 if the ally has an operational nuclear reactor (pilot- or lab-scale), and 0 otherwise.<sup>15</sup> Nuclear latency data are from Fuhrmann and Tkach (2015).

Third, following Lake's (2009) measure of alternative alliances, I use the number of independent alliances an ally has – i.e., those not shared with the United States. The distribution of this variable is skewed by a number of outliers with many independent alliances, so I take the natural logarithm. Importantly, however, the commonality or divergence of an ally's alliance portfolio with that of the United States may influence reassurance not because it shapes the credibility of their outside options, but because it reflects the underlying degree to which the ally and the United States have common interests (Signorino and Ritter, 1999). Thus, when using this variable I also control for the percentage of alliances that the ally shares with the United States.

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<sup>15</sup>This measure includes allies that obtained nuclear weapons (United Kingdom, France, Israel, Pakistan), but the results hold when separating these states out.

## **U.S. Resource Constraints**

My first proxy for resource constraints captures the aftermath of protracted, costly foreign wars. I use a dummy variable which takes a value of 1 during the tenures of presidents who oversaw the end of the wars in Korea (Eisenhower, 1953-1960), Vietnam (Nixon/Ford, 1969-1976), and Iraq and Afghanistan (Obama, 2009-2016) – and 0 otherwise. This is an attractive proxy because I expect resource constraints and concerns about U.S. reliability to be high both during the later stages of a costly foreign war, after years of fighting have inflicted losses in blood and treasure, and for a time thereafter, while policymakers and the public recover from the war and the armed forces rebuild their strength. Second, I measure economic hardship using U.S. GDP growth. Economic contractions constrain government revenues, while war can similarly divert resources from the economy, increase the deficit and debt, contribute to inflation, and lead to shortages in military manpower (Rockoff, 2012: esp. 27-42).<sup>16</sup>

## **U.S. Domestic Pressure**

In order to capture domestic pressure, I coded Congressional bills. Using a dataset of bills from the Policy Agendas Project<sup>17</sup>, I took a subset of bills pertaining to U.S. alliances and then hand-coded them, creating a count variable for “retrenchment bills.” These are bills that either call for troop reductions from allied territory, assert congressional authority over the executive’s ability to use force on allied territory, or which put pressure on allies to contribute more for burden-sharing. This is an attractive measure because Congress has a more direct role in foreign policy than does the public. While the electorate can in theory punish or reward policymakers based on whether they act in ways consistent with public opinion, Congress can directly shape policy by passing laws and by appropriating (or not appropriating) funds (Milner and Tingley, 2015). Moreover, research suggests that public opinion on foreign affairs responds to elite cues (Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2007).

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<sup>16</sup>I prefer this measure to those such as federal debt, which is a weaker proxy in part because U.S. debt as a percentage of GDP varies little during the period under study until the 2000s.

<sup>17</sup><http://www.comparativeagendas.net/> (accessed August 15, 2016).

Finally, annual public opinion data on foreign policy are difficult to come by, particularly during the earlier years of the Cold War (Chanley, 1999).

### **Control Variables**

I include a number of controls, all of which (except those which are time-invariant or are dummy variables for specific years) are lagged by one year to ameliorate concerns about simultaneity bias.

### **External Threat**

First, I control for the level of threat posed by shared adversaries, which one might expect to drive allies' need for reassurance – and the patron's desire to supply it – in the first place. From a purely deterrence perspective, the patron should be more likely to send signals of support to its allies in the context of high threat environments in order to send a strong deterrent signal to the alliance's shared adversaries. I use five variables to account for the level of threat from shared adversaries – which I define as the Soviet Union during the bipolar Cold War period (1950-1989), and then China (for U.S. allies in East Asia and the Western Pacific) and Russia (for allies elsewhere) during the post-Cold War period.

The first is adversary conflict involvement with U.S. allies. This is coded as the number of MIDs in a given year between the adversary and each ally, with each MID weighted by its maximum level of hostility. MID data come from version 4.1 of the Correlates of War's Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset (Palmer et al., 2015). Second, I control for the level of adversary hostility with the United States. This is coded in the same way as ally-adversary conflict involvement. Both of these variables are likely to be somewhat endogenous to reassurance but they may nevertheless be important omitted variables.

Next, I include a dummy indicator for instances in which the adversary – or one of its proxies at its behest – invaded and occupied the territory of a country not allied with the United States. ally. During the Cold War, there were four such instances: Korea (1950), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979). Additionally, after the Cold War I also include the Russo-



Georgian War in 2008. These events are likely to have influenced U.S. and allied threat perception because they represented instances of clear aggression, and because these states did not benefit from U.S. protection, adversary behavior in these cases can be considered more plausibly exogenous to U.S. reassurance. I code the first year of each of these instances as 1, as well as the following two years, as I would expect U.S. reassurance to have increased in response to the initial shock of the attacks.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, I include two measures of allies' geographic proximity to adversaries. The first is a dummy variable indicating whether the ally shares a land border with a member of the Soviet bloc (during the Cold War), or with Russia or China (during the post-Cold War).<sup>19</sup> Data come from version 3.1 of the Correlates of War's Direct Contiguity dataset (Stinnett et al., 2002).<sup>20</sup> The second is the ally's proximity to the centers of adversary military power, which for allies in East Asia I treat as Beijing, both because of its location in China and because of its proximity to the center of Soviet military power in the Far East, and for allies everywhere else I treat as Warsaw, owing to its proximity to the center of Soviet military power in Europe. During the post-Cold War I use distance to Moscow instead of Warsaw, as the Russian western frontier was pushed to the east. This is measured as the distance between the ally's capital city to either Beijing or Warsaw/Moscow (in kilometers). Capital city distance data come from Gleditsch and Ward (2001).

### **Economic Development**

Second, I control for allies' level of economic development using their logarithmized GDP per capita. Wealthier, more developed allies may receive more attention from the United States, both in terms of visits and statements, because they are more economically important to U.S. interests (Lebovic and Saunders, 2016). Data are from Gleditsch (2002).

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<sup>18</sup>The one exception is Afghanistan, which began in December 1979, and thus I also code the year 1982 as 1. See appendix for more details.

<sup>19</sup>The Soviet bloc includes all members of the Warsaw Pact, as well as China, North Korea, North Vietnam, and (starting in 1976) Laos and Cambodia.

<sup>20</sup>Correlates of War Project. Direct Contiguity Data, 1816-2006. Version 3.1.

## Alliance Type

Finally, I also control for alliance type by including a dummy variable for whether the country is allied to the United States via a defense pact, which carries an explicit guarantee of assistance, or via an entente, which does not. These differences in terms may produce different expectations of reassurance.

## Model Specifications

Because my dependent variable is a count of the number of U.S. reassurance statements and visits, I employ count regression models. The distribution of the dependent variable is somewhat over-dispersed, however, which suggests that a negative binomial model is more appropriate than the basic Poisson model (Cameron and Trivedi, 1986). The three negative binomial regression equations I use for testing H1, H2, and H3 are specified as follows:

$$\text{Assurances}_{i,t} = \exp(\beta_1 \text{GDP}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{NuclearLatency}_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 \text{AlternativeAllies}_{i,t-1} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{i,t-1} + \mu_i + \zeta_t + \epsilon_{i,t}) \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Assurances}_{i,t} = \exp(\beta_1 \text{Postwar}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \text{USGrowth}_{i,t} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{i,t-1} + \mu_i + \text{Time}_t + \text{Time}_t^2 + \text{Time}_t^3 + \epsilon_{i,t}) \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Assurances}_{i,t} = \exp(\beta_1 \text{DomesticPressure}_{i,t} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{i,t-1} + \mu_i + \text{Time}_t + \text{Time}_t^2 + \text{Time}_t^3 + \epsilon_{i,t}) \quad (3)$$

where  $i$  indexes countries,  $t$  indexes years, *Postwar* is a dummy variable indicating the aftermath of a protracted U.S. foreign war, *USGrowth* indicates U.S. GDP growth, *DomesticPressure* represents the number of Congressional retrenchment bills, *GDP* represents the logarithmized value of the ally's gross domestic product, *NuclearLatency* represents whether an ally has an operational pilot- or lab-scale nuclear reactor, *AlternativeAllies* represents the logarithmized number of the ally's independent alliances,  $\mathbf{X}_{i,t-1}$  is a vector of control variables,  $\mu_i$  is a vector of country or region fixed effects,  $\zeta_t$  is a vector of year fixed effects, *Time* is the number of years that have elapsed since the beginning of the sample, and  $\epsilon_{i,t}$  is a stochastic error term. I employ standard

errors clustered by country throughout. In the models which test H1, I include region instead of country fixed effects because the independent variables do not vary much within countries. In the models which test H2-H3, by contrast, I do not include year fixed effects because the independent variables do not vary across allies. Instead, I include linear, squared, and cubic time trends to capture secular changes over time, as well as a post-Cold War dummy variable to capture differences between the Cold War (1950-1989) and post-Cold War (1990-2010) periods.<sup>21</sup>

## Results

The econometric results provide support for my propositions. U.S. allies with stronger outside options, measured using latent military and nuclear potential as well as alternative alliance partners, receive significantly more reassurance. Additionally, the United States goes to greater lengths to reassure its allies when it faces resource and political constraints that bring its reliability into question. Finally, I find that these factors provide a stronger explanation for U.S. reassurance than adversary threat, U.S. domestic politics, or the domestic politics of the ally.

Table 1 focuses on explaining variation in reassurance across allies and tests Hypothesis 1. Model 1 contains only the primary independent variables, while Model 2 adds additional controls which vary at the country-level. Both models include year and region fixed effects in order to account for temporal and spatial heterogeneity. The results support the expectations of H1; the United States reassures larger allies and those with latent nuclear capacity more. The results for independent alliances (H1c) are similarly positive but weaker, only reaching statistical significance at the 0.1 level.

Next, Table 2 focuses on variation over time. Models 1-2 test H2, while Models 3-4 test H3. All four models include country fixed effects and linear, squared, and cubic time trends, while Models 2 and 4 also include the year-level control variables.<sup>22</sup> These results provide support for

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<sup>21</sup>Summary statistics can be found in Table A1 in the appendix. As a robustness check, I also cluster standard errors by year for H2-H3, since the independent variables for testing these hypotheses vary at the year level.

<sup>22</sup>Due to collinearity concerns, ally-invariant variables (such as U.S. GDP growth) cannot be included alongside year fixed effects, while time-invariant variables (such as geography) cannot be included with country fixed effects.

	(1)	(2)
	Statements+Visits	Statements+Visits
GDP (log)	0.317*** (0.057)	0.340*** (0.061)
Nuclear latency	0.454* (0.208)	0.466* (0.209)
Independent alliances (log)	0.274 (0.173)	0.279+ (0.146)
Common alliances (%)	0.117 (0.436)	0.159 (0.313)
GDPpc (log)		-0.127 (0.150)
Distance to adversary		-0.000 (0.000)
Land border w/ adversary		-0.053 (0.189)
Entente		0.554+ (0.317)
Ally-Adversary hostility		0.055* (0.026)
Country FE	No	No
T,T <sup>2</sup> ,T <sup>3</sup>	No	No
Region FE	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes
N	1357	1345
Log-likelihood	-1829.163	-1792.812

Country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Table 1: Main results for variation in reassurance across allies (H1).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Statements+Visits	Statements+Visits	Statements+Visits	Statements+Visits	Statements+Visits
Postwar	0.247*	0.211 <sup>+</sup>			0.197
	(0.109)	(0.121)			(0.121)
US GDP growth	-0.026*	-0.033*			-0.032 <sup>+</sup>
	(0.012)	(0.016)			(0.016)
Congressional retrenchment bills			0.051**	0.055**	0.047*
			(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Adversary aggression		-0.054		0.052	-0.043
		(0.091)		(0.069)	(0.092)
US-Adversary hostility		-0.008		-0.018**	-0.008
		(0.008)		(0.006)	(0.008)
Ally-Adversary hostility		0.058*		0.062**	0.061*
		(0.025)		(0.022)	(0.025)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
T, T <sup>2</sup> , T <sup>3</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region FE	No	No	No	No	No
Year FE	No	No	No	No	No
N	1373	1373	1383	1373	1373
Log-likelihood	-1764.394	-1760.681	-1774.815	-1764.203	-1759.162

Country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. <sup>+</sup> $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Table 2: Main results for variation in reassurance over time (H2-H3).

both Hypotheses 2 and 3. The aftermath of costly foreign wars, periods of economic hardship, and periods of Congressional retrenchment pressure all feature more reassurance. Specifically, the United States uses about 25% more reassurance during postwar years, while each one percent reduction in U.S. GDP is associated with about 3% more reassurance, and each retrenchment bill with about 5% more reassurance.

Model 5 tests H2 and H3 simultaneously. These results are largely consistent with those of Models 1-4, though the coefficient on the Postwar variable is no longer statistically significant. This is unsurprising, however, given that I expect political constraints to be partly shaped by resource constraints, and thus controlling for political constraints soaks up some of the variation otherwise explained by resource constraints. Indeed, Table A6 in the appendix shows that domestic retrenchment pressure occurs most often during periods of resource constraints – and, in particular, during the aftermath of foreign wars.

As for the controls, wealth and alliance type do not have a statistically significant effect on U.S. reassurance. Notably, the coefficients on the threat variables other than ally-adversary hostility are negative or statistically insignificant, suggesting that aggressive adversary behavior is not the

sole or even the most important driver of reassurance. This is in direct contradiction to “pure deterrence” explanations for reassurance, which focus on signaling vis-à-vis adversaries rather than allies. This increases my confidence that the results are driven by a logic of reassurance.

### **Causal Mechanisms**

Next, I provide evidence to support the causal mechanisms behind H2 and H3. In particular, I would expect resource constraints and political constraints to be associated with declines in U.S. military spending, as well as with the U.S. pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union. First, I create a dummy variable which takes a value of 1 if the United States reduced its military spending in a given year.<sup>23</sup> Second, in order to capture US-Soviet relations, I use event data from the World Event/Interaction Survey (WEIS) dataset between 1965 and 1989, employing the commonly-used weighting scheme proposed by Goldstein (1992) to assign values to U.S.-Soviet interactions based on how conflictual or cooperative they are. The results, which can be found in Table A7, show that postwar periods and economic hardship are associated with declines in U.S. military spending and U.S.-Soviet détente. These findings support the expectations of Hypotheses 2 and 3.

### **Robustness Checks**

Next, I subject the results to a variety of robustness tests. I do so first of all by adding more control variables, several of which help to further account for the threat environment. First, I control for adversary capabilities, using the Soviet Union’s CINC score between 1950 and 1989, as well as Russia’s and China’s since 1990. Second, I control for the U.S.-adversary nuclear balance, measured as the ratio of adversary nuclear weapons to U.S. nuclear weapons.<sup>24</sup> Third, I control for the number of MIDs an ally was involved in during a given year with all states (rather than solely shared adversaries), weighted by the hostility level of each MID. Finally, I control for U.S. trade

<sup>23</sup>Data on U.S. military spending (in constant 2005 dollars) come from SIPRI. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2016, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (accessed March 25, 2017).

<sup>24</sup>Data on nuclear arsenals run from 1945-2014, and come from the Federation of American Scientists, Nuclear Notebook: Nuclear Arsenals of the World, <http://thebulletin.org/nuclear-notebook-multimedia> (accessed March 16, 2017).

ties with each ally, measured as bilateral trade as a percentage of total U.S. trade, which Lebovic and Saunders (2016) show is positively associated with U.S. visits.<sup>25</sup> The results in Tables A8 and A9 show that the findings are robust to controlling for these variables.<sup>26</sup>

Second, I use alternative proxies to capture my independent variables. For allies' latent conventional military power (H1a), I replace allies' log GDP with both their log population and CINC scores. Table A15 replicates the main results from Model 2 of Table 1 using these measures, and the original findings remain intact. As for the aftermath of costly foreign wars (H2), instead of postwar presidencies I include a dummy variable indicating years in which the United States withdrew troops from a protracted foreign war.<sup>27</sup> Table A16 in the appendix replicates Models 1-2 of Table 2 after replacing the postwar dummy variable with the war withdrawal dummy variable. The coefficients on war withdrawals remain positive, similar in magnitude, and at or near statistical significance.

Additionally, as an alternative to congressional bills, I use measures of isolationist public opinion to capture political constraints (H3). The first of these is public support for foreign aid, which captures the populace's attitude toward promoting the well-being of foreigners. The second is public attitudes toward U.S. involvement in world affairs. These both represent commonly-used metrics for the public's degree of internationalism (Wittkopf, 1990; Chanley, 1999). Table A17 shows that the results for H3 hold when using public instead of congressional isolationism. Years in which a greater percentage of the U.S. population favored reducing foreign aid and staying out of world affairs featured more reassurance.

Finally, I also use different measures for my dependent variable. First, I operationalize reassurance using the number of U.S. troops deployed on an ally's territory, with data on U.S. forces obtained from Kane (2006). Table A18 presents ordinary least squares (OLS) regression results us-

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<sup>25</sup>Trade data are from version 4.0 of the Correlates of War Trade Data Set (Barbieri and Keshk, 2016).

<sup>26</sup>The results are also robust to the inclusion of decade fixed effects, as well as to the use of a lagged dependent variable. See Tables A12-A14 in the appendix.

<sup>27</sup>Troop level data are from Kane (2006).

ing logarithmized troop numbers as the dependent variable. The level of U.S. troops does not vary much over time, however, and so I focus largely on explaining cross-national variation. These results show that more powerful allies and allies with a latent nuclear capability hosted significantly more U.S. troops. Second, I use allies' military exercises with the United States as the dependent variable, employing exercise data for 1977-2004 from D'Orazio (2013). Tables A19 and A20 show the results, which are largely consistent those from using statements and visits.

### **Alternative Explanation: Domestic Politics**

My theory treats reassurance as the result of bargaining, whether tacit or explicit, wherein a patron reassures its allies to the extent that they can credibly threaten to pursue outside options. Alternatively, however, reassurance could be the product of non-strategic factors such as the domestic politics of the ally or of the United States. First, U.S. leaders may be reluctant to show support for certain allies on normative grounds – in particular, if they are undemocratic. Democratic peace theory, for example, might expect that democratic patrons will show favoritism toward their democratic allies due to shared norms and political identities (Doyle, 1986). Even if policymakers themselves do not hold their democratic allies in high regard, domestic audiences may favor democratic allies over more autocratic ones (Owen, 1997). Thus, one might expect democratic allies to receive more reassurance than non-democratic allies. Indeed, McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017) find that the United States is more likely to issue public signals of support such as visits to its democratic allies than its autocratic allies, as it faces domestic constraints against publicly supporting autocracies.

Second, reassurance may vary based on U.S. leaders' electoral incentives. For one, sitting presidents' partisan affiliation may influence their use of reassurance. In American politics, Democrats are often seen as more in favor of dovish and multilateral foreign policies, while Republicans are hawkish and favor unilateralism (Chanley, 1999; Narizny, 2003; Whitten and Williams, 2011). Moreover, presidents may reassure allies more or less depending on their electoral cycles. Presi-



dents facing imminent re-election may be less likely to use reassurance because they are distracted by their campaigns. Alternatively, however, presidents facing re-election may use reassurance in an effort to project leadership to the electorate. Finally, presidents may be more or less likely to reassure allies during their second terms, when they do not have to worry about re-election. Indeed, Lebovic and Saunders (2016) find that second-term presidents visit foreign countries more often, which they attribute to presidents' seeking to cement their personal legacies.

Thus, in Tables A21 and A22 I control for factors capturing features of both ally and U.S. domestic politics. First, to measure allies' regime type I include their composite Polity score, which ranges from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic).<sup>28</sup> For U.S. domestic politics, I include three dummy variables – one for whether a given year was one in which a sitting president sought re-election, another for whether a year took place during a president's second term, and a third for whether the president was a Democrat. The results show that, even after controlling for these variables, H1-H3 receive considerable support. As for the alternative explanations, U.S. presidents use less reassurance during their re-election years, while presidential partisanship and second-term status, as well as ally regime type, have no effect.

### **The United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, 1961-1974**

To further demonstrate the mechanisms behind my hypotheses, I present qualitative evidence from relations between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) between 1961 and 1974. I chose this case and this period because they feature extreme values on my independent variables, as well as change over time. West Germany had considerable latent nuclear and conventional military potential, and the costs of the Vietnam War imposed significant resource constraints on the United States. Compared to President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963), U.S. policymakers in the administrations of Lyndon Johnson (1963-1968) and Richard Nixon (1969-1974) faced both material constraints and considerable pressure from Congress and the American public to retrench

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<sup>28</sup>Data are from the Polity IV Project (Marshall and Jaggers, 2011; Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers, 2014).

and pursue a more inwardly-focused foreign policy. Cases with extreme values on the independent variables are useful for tracing the logic of hypotheses because they are the cases in which one would expect causal mechanisms to be most operative (George and Bennett, 2005; Seawright, 2016). Additionally, comparing the early part of the 1960s to the late 1960s and early 1970s allows me to assess variation over time for H2 and H3.

My theory would predict very high levels of U.S. reassurance toward the FRG, particularly during the late 1960s and early 1970s. West Germany's nuclear latency and conventional military potential made it at high risk of exit, thus forcing the United States to reassure it. Additionally, I anticipate intense West German interest in outside options during the later years of the Johnson Administration and during the Nixon Administration, owing to concern about U.S. unreliability in the wake of the Vietnam War and accompanying domestic isolationism. As such, I would expect to see even greater preoccupation with reassuring the FRG under Nixon (and, to a lesser extent, Johnson) than under Kennedy.

## **Early and Mid-1960s**

### **West Germany's Outside Options**

Throughout the Cold War, keeping the FRG tied to the Western bloc was a near-constant concern among policymakers in both the United States and other NATO countries. As NATO Secretary General Hastings Ismay put it, the purpose of NATO was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down” (Reynolds, 1994: 13). As such, American security assurances to West Germany were not only a means to deter Soviet aggression, but also a means to prevent the emergence of a neutral, nuclear Germany that could play the Western and Eastern blocs against each other, and even threaten its neighbors once more (Trachtenberg, 1999: esp. pp. 321-322). Indeed, Richard Nixon highlighted the importance of reassuring Germany when he remarked in May 1971 that “as a freshman Congressman [I] saw three reasons for NATO: the threat from the Soviet Union, the weakness of Western Europe and the need for a home for the Germans.”

arguing that “one could perhaps debate the first two of the original reasons for NATO, but the third still existed.”<sup>29</sup> After World War II, West Germany hosted the largest number of peacetime U.S. foreign-deployed forces, never fewer than 220,000 between 1955 and 1989.

Concern about German nuclearization, inherent in its economic and potential military might, was exacerbated by the FRG’s ambiguous nuclear behavior. This included covert nuclear cooperation with France and Italy, skepticism of nonproliferation treaties such as the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s refusal to renounce the possibility of West Germany obtaining nuclear weapons (Lanoszka, 2014: 84, 90-91, 95-96, 106; Gerzhoy, 2015: 109-110, 112-114). Indeed, German leaders intentionally used nuclear ambiguity as a bargaining chip to secure American assurances.<sup>30</sup> Adenauer declared in 1955 that the FRG could not indefinitely remain an “atomic protectorate” (Trachtenberg, 1999: 231), while Minister of Defense Franz Strauss made a veiled threat in 1961 that, without some form of nuclear sharing, France and Britain “could easily find followers” seeking to become nuclear states (Kelleher, 1975: 186).

### **U.S. Reassurance**

In an effort to discourage German nuclearization, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations proposed creating a NATO Multilateral Force (MLF) – an integrated NATO nuclear force in which the United States would retain a veto. They hoped that the MLF would allow for centralized American control while also reducing allies’ incentives to develop their own nuclear arsenals (Trachtenberg, 1999: 213-215, 284-285, 304-329).<sup>31</sup> Kennedy admitted in private that the MLF was “merely a façade” designed to discourage German nuclearization (Trachtenberg, 1999: 314). Kennedy’s Military Representative Maxwell Taylor wrote to him that “If West Germany is to continue to be a contented non-nuclear member of NATO....West Germans need reassurance not only through the

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<sup>29</sup>Memorandum for the Record, “The President’s Meeting with Former High Government Officials and Military Officers on the Mansfield Amendment,” May 13, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p. 275.

<sup>30</sup>Memorandum of Conversation, “Nuclear Sharing,” December 20, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 13, pp. 289-292.

<sup>31</sup>Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of Discussion on MLF, Atlantic Defense and Related Matters,” October 31, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 13, pp. 95-100.

provision of this NATO nuclear force but also through evidence of a determination to use all NATO atomic weapons.”<sup>32</sup>

The MLF was never implemented, however, as a result of Soviet, French, and British opposition, as well as skepticism from the U.S. Congress. By early 1966 the concept was effectively dead. As an alternative, the Johnson Administration instead turned to creating a NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) that would give allies greater access to information on U.S. nuclear strategy and input into overall NATO nuclear policy (Kelleher, 1975: 247, 249-257; Gerzhoy, 2015: 118-121). As part of its effort to persuade the FRG to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1966-1968, the Johnson Administration assured the FRG that the NPT’s stipulations were compatible with the NPG, and the new Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt publicly insisted that the FRG’s adherence to the treaty was contingent upon the NATO security guarantee (Mackby and Slocombe, 2004: 190, 192-195, 199).

In addition to nuclear sharing and consultation, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations used other reassurance measures. Kennedy told Adenauer in April 1961 that “the United States was prepared and determined to stand by its commitments,”<sup>33</sup> and to secure the FRG’s signature of the LTBT in 1963 he promised to keep American troops in Germany (Gerzhoy, 2015: 117). The fundamental trade-off U.S. policymakers faced was that, as long as preventing German nuclearization remained a U.S. foreign policy priority, the FRG would continue to need considerable assurances – including a substantial U.S. troop presence. This was ultimately the course they chose, and the one followed by subsequent administrations as well, and U.S. troop levels remained stable until the end of the Cold War.

But Kennedy and Johnson also used threats of abandonment to coerce the FRG into greater defense burden-sharing. Policymakers in both administrations explicitly linked U.S. troop levels to German burden-sharing, and were often brutally straightforward with their pressure. Kennedy

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<sup>32</sup>Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Germany, February 18, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 13, pp. 314-315.

<sup>33</sup>Memorandum of Conversation, NATO and East-West Relations, April 12, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. 13, p. 273.

directed that “we should get ready with actions to squeeze Europe,” in response to allied free-riding and to French efforts to assist the Germans in their nuclear efforts (Trachtenberg, 1999: 374). He argued that “we should be prepared to reduce quickly, if we so decided, our military forces in Germany” in order to cut costs and put pressure on the Europeans to do more for themselves, remarking that “We 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.’”<sup>34</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was an especially vocal proponent of troop withdrawals, telling FRG Defense Minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel that “America cannot carry this burden [of defense] if it couldn’t reduce this deficit” via payments to offset the costs of U.S. deployments, and led the way in crafting plans for withdrawals (Gavin, 2004: 103-108; quote at p. 111). National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy later advised Johnson that Chancellor Ludwig Erhard “should be left in no doubt” that the continuation of American deployments was contingent on offset (Lepgold, 1990: 129, quote at p. 127). This approach would change under Nixon, who had more reason to fear that West Germany would pursue outside options if the United States did not take a soft touch.

## **Late 1960s and Early 1970s**

### **Resource Constraints and Domestic Pressure**

Resource constraints during the late 1960s and early 1970s, stemming in large part from the costs of the Vietnam War, intensified the need for reassurance. Allies increasingly doubted the reliability of U.S. protection, and as a result became more interested in exploring outside options to reduce their dependence on the United States. U.S. military spending declined throughout much of the decade, and Nixon proclaimed the “Nixon Doctrine,” which stressed that allies would hold the primary responsibility when it came to defending themselves (Nixon, 1971: 5-8).

Moreover, the year 1966 saw the first major congressional resolution by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield to cut U.S. forces in Europe, which was followed up by similar resolutions in

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<sup>34</sup>Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting, No. 38 (Part II), January 25, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. 13, pp. 486, 489.

1967, 1969, and 1974, as well as by the Mansfield Amendments in 1971 and 1973-74, which also proposed troop reductions (Kaplan, 1999: 138). Other congressional proposals were less dramatic, but still very much intent on withdrawing troops and demanding that West Germany and NATO make greater contributions (Williams, 1985: 150-151), while the National Commitments Resolution of 1969 and the War Powers Act of 1973 sought to limit the president's ability to deploy U.S. forces abroad without congressional approval. Mansfield and other proponents of troop withdrawals, including Senators Stuart Symington and William Fulbright, argued that the costs from Vietnam made stationing hundreds of thousands of troops in Europe unsustainable, and favored prioritizing domestic spending (Williams, 1985: 142, 162, 170; Kissinger, 1979: 939-940). Additionally, sluggish economic growth coupled with a mounting balance of payments and trade deficit provided further impetus for troop withdrawals to save costs (Williams, 1985: 200-201).

Indeed the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the FRG and other NATO members very much took resource and political constraints in the United States seriously. During the Johnson administration, the West German ambassador reported that a number of factors, including the war in Vietnam and the "neo-isolationist trend" in the United States, made major troop withdrawals quite possible (Gavin, 2012: 48). In 1970 the West Germans requested "an indication...of the minimum European defense contribution" that would be needed to contain the retrenchment pressure that the United States faced.<sup>35</sup>

What also raised concerns about U.S. unreliability was the American effort at détente with the Soviet Union. This included the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaties in 1972 and 1979 (SALT I and SALT II, respectively), as well as negotiations for Mutual Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) from Europe. These efforts were in no small part motivated by the costs of Vietnam, which made reducing tensions more attractive as a means of decreasing the probability of another costly war, and containing the arms race attractive as a means of cutting peacetime costs. Yet détente raised

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<sup>35</sup>Telegram from U.S. Embassy (Bonn) to William Rogers, "Defense Burden Sharing," June 1970, Folder "Germany, Vol. V [2 of 2]," NSC Files, Country Files, Box 683, Richard M. Nixon Library, Yorba Linda, California [hereafter RMNL].

concerns on the part of allies, who feared that the result could be a U.S.-Soviet bargain in which allied interests were sold out so the superpowers could make themselves more secure (Powaski, 1994: 98-99, 102-103; Kaplan, 1999: 116-117).<sup>36</sup> In particular, since the defense of Europe relied heavily on the threat of nuclear escalation, the US-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War in 1973 raised concerns about U.S. willingness to go to war on allies' behalf.<sup>37</sup> Discouraging allies from pursuing their own, separate versions of détente with the Soviet Union thus required reassuring them that the United States would not sell them out, as well as consulting and informing them (Kissinger, 1979: 382-383, 386).<sup>38</sup> National Security Adviser (later Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger put the matter well in his memoirs: "in times of relaxing tension, [Europeans] dreaded a US-Soviet condominium" (Kissinger, 1979: 94).

### **West Germany's Interest in Outside Options**

Indeed, the FRG's interest in outside options increased as U.S. reliability came into question. The first of these was its nuclear option. German leaders implicitly linked potential nuclearization with concerns about American credibility, particularly as Congressional pressure escalated (Gavin, 2004: 142-149, 162-164; Gerzhoy, 2015: 121-123). American fears of German exit became more pronounced as evidence mounted that the FRG was, in fact, "reexamining [its] relations to the United States and to NATO" (Gavin, 2004: 143) and considering nuclear cooperation with France in late 1966 (Gavin, 2004: 154-155). The French option had previously been less attractive, as it could not offer the kind of protection the United States could. But with the American commitment in doubt the FRG's other options became increasingly attractive (Powaski, 1994: 71-72; Gavin, 2004: 112-113).

Fears of German rapprochement with the Soviet Union also intensified beginning in the later

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<sup>36</sup>Kissinger to Ford, "Meeting with Permanent Representatives of the North Atlantic Council," June 19, 1975, Folder "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1975 (3) WH," National Security Adviser's Files, NSC Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff Files, Box 53, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>37</sup>Clift to Kissinger, "Reported Reactions in FRG Cabinet to US-USSR Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War," June 30, 1973, Folder "Germany, Vol. XIII [2 of 3]," NSC Files, Country Files, Box 687, RMNL.

<sup>38</sup>Telegram from U.S. embassy (Bonn) to Rogers, "US-German MBFR Consultations," June 1971, Folder "Germany, Vol. IX [3 of 3]," NSC Files, Country Files, Box 685, RMNL.

years of the Johnson Administration. Ambassador George McGhee warned that if the United States seemed on the verge of retrenchment, West Germany “would be forced to reorient its basic security policy,” which “could take the form of...a ‘go-it-alone’ nationalism or efforts to accommodate itself to the Soviets.”<sup>39</sup> These concerns persisted into the Nixon Administration. Decision-makers feared that West Germany – as well as the other members of NATO – were likely to undertake “increasing accommodation to the Russians on political and economic issues” in response to their perceptions of U.S. unreliability.<sup>40</sup> This process could incite a trend toward “Finlandization,” with allies distancing themselves from the United States and becoming increasingly willing to defer to Soviet preferences (Lepgold, 1990: 138). In the wake of the first Mansfield Amendment in 1971, Kissinger warned “that Europe will seek nuclear autonomy or will move in the direction of Finland or possibly do both things simultaneously” if American withdrawal seemed imminent.<sup>41</sup>

When the Social Democrats came to power and Willy Brandt became Chancellor in 1969, trends toward Soviet rapprochement accelerated in the form of *Ostpolitik*, an effort toward improving relations with the Communist bloc. Brandt argued in 1968 that “West Germany cannot really depend on the Americans” (Trachtenberg, 2012: 167), and as a result pursued rapprochement with East Germany and the Soviet Union to reduce the FRG’s dependence on the United States. Indeed, German officials explicitly used the Soviet option in order to extract U.S. assurances. In a meeting with Laird, West German Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt “made a strong plea for maintaining a substantial US troop presence in Europe,” and warned that “if the U.S. cuts its troop level, Germany and other European countries would inevitably begin to accommodate [sic] with the East.”<sup>42</sup> Both Brandt and NATO Secretariat Manilo Brosio warned in 1971 that troop withdrawals would destroy Europe’s faith in the United States (Kissinger, 1979: 945). The result

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<sup>39</sup>McGhee to State, September 20, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. 15, p. 418.

<sup>40</sup>Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Hillenbrand) to Secretary of State Rogers, “Tensions in US Relations with Europe,” November 15, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p. 326.

<sup>41</sup>Minutes of a Legislative Interdepartmental Group Meeting, “Mansfield Resolution,” May 12, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p 270.

<sup>42</sup>Telegram from U.S. Embassy (Bonn) to William Rogers, “Secretary Laird’s Talk with FRG Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt,” June 1970, Folder “Germany, Vol. V [2 of 2],” NSC Files, Country Files, Box 683, RMNL.



was a significant amount of concern among U.S. policymakers that the FRG would pursue a more neutral foreign policy (Williams, 1985: 217-218).<sup>43</sup>

### **U.S. Reassurance**

In response, American officials used reassurance to offset the perception that the United States was an unreliable protector. For one, American policymakers made great effort to assure NATO allies that there would be no unilateral withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe. Unlike Kennedy, Johnson increasingly balked at threatening troop withdrawals, as he feared that doing so would only further encourage the FRG to reach out to the Soviet Union – as had begun to occur under Chancellor Kiesinger’s leadership (Gavin, 2004: 176-177). Similarly, in 1968 Johnson launched what became the annual Exercise REFORGER, a joint exercise between the United States and the FRG in which two divisions of American forces surged into Germany to demonstrate U.S. capability to quickly reinforce the area in the event of a Soviet attack (Blackwill and Legro, 1989: 69-71).

This trend continued under Nixon, who stressed that although the United States could not take primary responsibility for its allies’ defense, it would honor its alliance pledges (Nixon, 1971: 3-4). He declared that the United States would no sooner withdraw from Europe than from Alaska (Cha, 1999: 69). Nixon’s first visit as President in 1969 was to Europe, during which his primary objective was to “affirm our commitment to NATO” (Kissinger, 1979: 88-89). He declared the NATO security guarantee to be “unique” and “irreplaceable” (Lepgold, 1990: 149; Gavin, 2004: 190), and proclaimed that “the United States will, under no circumstances, reduce, unilaterally, its commitment to NATO.”<sup>44</sup> The administration further stressed that it would consult and inform the NATO allies on bilateral US-Soviet negotiations on arms control and other issues.<sup>45</sup> In this way,

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<sup>43</sup>Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Hillenbrand) to Secretary of State Rogers, “Tensions in US Relations with Europe,” November 15, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 322-328.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Nixon, “Remarks to Reporters Summarizing His European Trip,” October 4, 1970. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2697> (accessed November 27, 2017).

<sup>45</sup>Telegram from U.S. embassy to William Rogers, “Allied Consultation on SALT,” June 1969, NSC Files, Country Files, Box 681, RMNL; “Memorandum of Conversation between President Nixon and Chancellor Kiesinger at the White House,” August 7, 1969, NSC Files, Country Files, Box 682, RMNL.

the administration followed the approach favored by Assistant Secretary of State Hillenbrand, who argued that “Statements by both the President and [Secretary of State Rogers] can still do much to influence European attitudes toward this country, given their continuing psychological need for assurances from us.”<sup>46</sup>

U.S. officials stressed the need for reassurance among themselves as well.<sup>47</sup> They feared that withdrawals would encourage Finlandization among NATO allies and undermine American bargaining leverage with the Soviets (Kaplan, 1999: 151-153).<sup>48</sup> Officials hesitated to threaten withdrawals lest they “erode German confidence in our security commitments.”<sup>49</sup> Kissinger asserted that “one thing we *must* avoid is any arm-twisting of the Germans,” for fear of encouraging German neutralism (Gavin, 2004: 190-191), while Laird and the U.S. Representative to NATO counseled that Nixon go out of his way to emphasize that troop withdrawals would not be forthcoming.<sup>50</sup> Nixon, for his part, argued against troop withdrawals on the grounds that “The key to what we do is what effect does it have on Germany....Some Europeans would think to move toward the Russians because they are uneasy about more US reductions.”<sup>51</sup> He further posited that “the effect [of withdrawals] would be catastrophic” on Germany, potentially setting off a chain of events in which

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<sup>46</sup>Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Hillenbrand) to Secretary of State Rogers, “Tensions in US Relations with Europe,” November 15, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p. 328.

<sup>47</sup>National Security Decision Memorandum 12, “NATO,” April 14, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 57-58; Kissinger to Nixon, “Under Secretaries Committee Recommendation on Scenario for Explaining Reduction in Our Force Commitments to NATO,” October 14, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 69-71; Report on a NATO Commanders Meeting, September 30, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 190-194.

<sup>48</sup>Memorandum of Conversation, “Notes on President Nixon’s Meeting with NATO Foreign and Defense Ministers,” April 11, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 51-56; Minutes of a National Security Council Review Group Meeting, “U.S. Strategies and Forces for NATO,” June 16, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 159-168; Minutes of a Combined Review Group and Verification Panel Meeting, August 31, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 180-189.

<sup>49</sup>C. Fred Bergsten to Henry Kissinger, “German Offset Problem,” March 24, 1969, Folder “Germany, Vol. I [1 of 2],” National Security Council Files, Country Files Files, Box 681, RMNL. See also Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, “Recommended New U.S. Position on the German Offset Problem,” February 22, 1969, Folder “Germany, Vol. I [1 of 2],” National Security Council Files, Country Files, Box 681, RMNL.

<sup>50</sup>Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, “Report on My Trip to Europe,” November 9, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 315-322; Telegram From the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Department of State and the Department of Defense, “NATO’s December Ministerial,” November 29, 1972, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, pp. 346-347.

<sup>51</sup>Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, “NSC Meeting: NATO & MBFR,” November 19, 1970, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p. 230.

“the Germans left the fold and the umbilical cord [was] cut.”<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

In this study I explained the conditions under which great power patrons reassure their allies, a question which until this point has remained understudied in the academic literature. I argued that great powers use reassurance to discourage their allies from pursuing outside options, and that allies are most likely to do so when they perceive their patron’s commitment as unreliable. In order to test these claims, I created an original dataset of U.S. reassurance, and found that these propositions received considerable support in empirical tests. Specifically, the United States has been more likely to reassure its allies when it has faced resource and political constraints that bring its reliability into question, and it has also reassured allies with stronger outside options more.

In addition to offering and empirically testing a theory of reassurance, this study has theoretical implications for understanding alliance management and design, and suggests avenues for future research. For many studies, alliance restraint functions most effectively when the patron can use threats of abandonment to coerce its partners (Crawford, 2003; Pressman, 2008; Lake, 2009). In this view, using reassurance can make allies more difficult to control, creating moral hazard problems and emboldening allies to challenge their adversaries (Fearon, 1997; Benson, 2012; Posen, 2014). By contrast, the theory I present here suggests that reassuring allies can serve as a tool of alliance control, as it encourages them to depend on their patron rather than pursue self-help.

In terms of alliance design, a number of scholars argue that the terms of an alliance pact – for example, whether it contains provisions for trade or joint military coordination – can greatly affect its perceived credibility (Morrow, 1994; Leeds and Anac, 2005). Yet work seeking to explain variation in alliance treaties is rare, and the few studies that do focus on alliance design implicitly assume that great powers can have their way (Kim, 2011; Benson, 2012; Mattes, 2012). In focusing on how weaker allies can bargain for reassurance, this study suggests avenues for further research

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<sup>52</sup>Memorandum for the Record, “The President’s Meeting with Former High Government Officials and Military Officers on the Mansfield Amendment,” May 13, 1971, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. 41, p. 275.

on how weaker allies might also bargain to shape alliance treaties. Additionally, more research could be done to identify the conditions under which reassurance is actually effective at rendering allies more confident in their patron's protection.

The analysis carries policy implications as well. In the wake of Donald Trump's presidency, a number of allies have expressed doubts about the credibility of U.S. commitments. My findings suggest that withholding reassurance and deliberately casting doubt on U.S. protection makes allies prone to reconsider their reliance on the United States and to pursue outside options instead. Indeed, evidence suggests that U.S. partners may be doing just that, with NATO allies increasingly debating the merits of an independent European nuclear deterrent.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the credibility of the U.S. alliance has come into question in South Korea and Japan, with a September 2017 poll showing that a majority of South Koreans favored obtaining nuclear weapons.<sup>54</sup>

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