Revolutions in Reassurance:
How Technological Innovation Alters Alliance Assurances

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Brian Blankenship[1] and Erik Lin-Greenberg[2]

ABSTRACT

How can states most effectively reassure their allies? In recent years, the United States has invested billions to assure its allies of Washington's willingness and ability to defend them. Despite significant investments and the deployment of tens of thousands of troops, the effectiveness of these measures is uncertain and reassurance has received little academic attention. The limited existing research on the topic focuses on the role of resolve in making security assurances credible, overshadowing important questions on the role of capability. We argue that capability is just as – if not more – important. This is particularly true in an era where new military technologies allow states to reassure allies with less need for manpower-intensive deployments in allied territory. We introduce a new typology of reassurance measures based on variation in military capability and resolve, and qualitatively test them using a case study of U.S. and NATO reassurance initiatives in the Baltics. We find that capabilities often matter as much as resolve in reassuring allies. Relatively limited deployments of high-tech capabilities – including air defense assets – can reassure allies just as much as tripwire forces.

Since Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, the United States has redoubled its efforts to reassure its European allies of Washington's commitment to defend the region from Russian aggression. Through the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), the United States has spent billions improving bases, deploying ground, air, and naval forces on rotational tours throughout Central and Eastern Europe, prepositioning combat equipment, and bolstering partner nation defense capabilities.[3] The Pentagon has adopted a similar posture in Asia to reassure allies and partners of its willingness to protect them from a rising China and an erratic North Korea. Despite significant investments and the deployment of tens of thousands of American troops, the effectiveness of these reassurance measures is uncertain. Even when Washington spends billions on efforts to assure its allies and places U.S. troops in harm's way, foreign leaders and publics still question America's security guarantees. In a 2017 poll, between twenty and forty percent of respondents in sampled NATO countries indicated that they did not believe the United States would use military force to defend a NATO member.[4] Similarly, in May 2017 German Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested that Europe may not be able to rely upon the United States.[5] If actions that scholarly theories define as highly credible signals of commitment are greeted with skepticism, what must a great power patron do to reassure its weaker allies of its willingness to fight for their defense? What are the characteristics of credible reassurances in today's security environment?

Statesmen and scholars have long held that security guarantees are most credible when they involve significant sunk costs or tie the hands of policymakers in a way that makes it difficult to renege on commitments.[6] In other words, credible assurances must either entail significant costs through the mobilization or deployment of military forces, or demonstrate resolve by putting a leader in a position where she will suffer political consequences for reneging on a commitment. Accordingly, states often signal commitment to allies and deter rivals by deploying or stationing forces overseas. In some cases, patron states post large numbers of troops equipped with advanced systems overseas to deny an adversary the ability to easily seize allied territory. In other cases, states deploy small numbers of troops to an allied state, where they serve as a tripwire that would trigger a significant military escalation if attacked.

Existing research on security guarantees tends to assume that overseas deployments put a state's "skin in the game," which helps reassure allies by demonstrating resolve. These studies, however, have paid insufficient attention to the role of capability in shaping whether an ally is effectively reassured. Although resolve is important, we argue that signaling capability is equally as – if not more – important in reassuring allies. Indeed, if allies care more about the patron's ability to act quickly to blunt an adversary's attack than about its willingness to intervene later,

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[3] The European Reassurance Initiative was renamed the European Deterrence Initiative in late 2017, however its purpose and mission remain the same. See https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1199828/2018-budget-request-for-european-reassurance-initiative-grows-to-47-billion/ and the 2018 European Deterrence Initiative Fact Sheet, http://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/36102/2018-european-deterrence-initiative-edi-fact-sheet, 6 October 2017.

[4] Pew Research Center, May, 2017, "NATO's Image Improves on Both Sides of Atlantic."

[5] Alison Smale and Steven Erlanger, "Merkel, After Discordant G7 Meeting, Is Looking Past Trump," *New York Times*, May 28, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/28/world/europe/angela-merkel-trump-alliances-g7-leaders.html?mcubz=2 (accessed June 8, 2017).

[6] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Revised edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967); James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68–90.

"tripwire" assurances that serve little military purpose may be far less effective at reassuring allies than commitments that include capabilities that can halt an adversary advance. In other words, we expect that whether a patron succeeds in reassuring an ally should hinge not only on the extent to which their presence communicates the patron's willingness to defend an ally with force, but on its capability to do so effectively. We also suggest that increasingly casualty averse leaders and publics combined with the advent of technologies that allow states to carry out military operations with little risk to friendly personnel – like drones – may reshape the types of foreign-deployed military forces that allies perceive to be credible signals of assurance.

The question of how to effectively reassure allies, and whether a state can do so without expensive overseas deployments, is becoming increasingly important in an era where domestic political pressures make entangling security commitments unpopular. Policymakers in the United States and elsewhere are frequently casualty averse, face fiscal constraints, and often seek grand strategies of restraint that minimize alliance commitments.[7] Given these constraints, great powers may have difficulty establishing security guarantees and find it challenging to follow through on obligations that involve the costly and risky deployment of ground forces, which have traditionally played an important role in reassurance endeavors. As a result, measures that sink costs or tie the hands of a great power patron may not necessarily be perceived as credible signals of commitment by alliance partners. Instead, new technologies that enable operations with lower risk to friendly forces may offer a state greater staying power than ground forces and subsequently more effectively reassure allies.

To disentangle the mechanisms that shape allies' confidence in their patron's security assurances, we first synthesize the existing literature on credible signaling and reassurance. We then provide a framework for understanding the credibility of reassurance measures and introduce a new typology of four classes of reassurance measures: *tripwires, shields, offshore presence,* and *drive-bys.* We assign various reassurance measures into these four categories based on the amount of *resolve* and *capability* they convey. We then use a case study of NATO and U.S. reassurance initiatives in Estonia to identify which types of measures are most effective at convincing an ally of a patron's willingness to fight in their defense. This allows us to assess the degree to which capability or resolve drives perceptions of reassurance. Critically, our case study draws from extensive interviews of national security elite within Estonia and the United States. This approach enables cross-national analysis of perceptions of those in patron and ally states. Assuming that a patron actually intends to reassure its ally, this is critical given that credibility of reassurances depends on both the patron and the ally viewing reassurance measures as effective.

This article makes three contributions. First, to our knowledge this study is the first attempt to systematically theorize about and empirically test the conditions under which military signals are effective at reassuring allies. Most of the existing literature on reassurance, by contrast, focuses either on the causes of reassurance or the choice of reassurance measures.[8]

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[7] Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion and Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, 1 edition (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[8] Roseanne W. McManus and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Logic of 'Offstage' Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations," *International Organization* 71, no. 4 (2017): 701–33; Brian

Second, we provide evidence on the relative importance of signaling resolve and capability in reassuring allies. To the extent that studies do consider the effectiveness of reassurance, they primarily focus on assurances in the context of extended nuclear deterrence. Consequently, studies emphasize signals of resolve that reassure allies of the sender's willingness to defend them, especially with nuclear weapons, while underemphasizing the role of conventional military capabilities.[9] Our study, by contrast, emphasizes the important role that capability and "cheap" signals can play in reassuring allies, including a more nuanced examination of the effect of advanced military capabilities on the effectiveness of reassurances than existing studies. Third, our findings help synthesize the disparate literature on deterrence and reassurance. Effective deterrence should be a critical foundation of effective reassurance, yet deterrence is notoriously difficult to study, as one can rarely prove that the absence of conflict is due to deterrence success. By studying an allied audience, we can gain insight into how divergent receiving audiences are likely to perceive signals of resolve and capability.

Existing Literature on Reassurance

Reassurance has long been an important element in the foreign policies of great powers, yet the topic has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Oftentimes, reassurance is studied in tandem with deterrence, with the assumption that the two go together.[10] This is understandable; since the primary objective of security reassurances is to protect an ally from aggression, military planners in the sender state generally deploy or station overseas assets that make it more difficult for a rival to carry out acts of aggression. In other words, reassurance measures are often intended to deter adversary activity.

A large body of literature on signaling and perception, however, shows that senders' signals often have multiple audiences, and that these audiences do not always interpret signals in the intended way.[11] In the case of security reassurances, the signals that deter adversaries may not be equally effective for reassuring allies. Indeed, British Defense Minister Denis Healey famously argued that "it takes only five percent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians but ninety-five percent credibility to reassure the Europeans."[12] For one, allies cannot afford to consider only the probability of adversary attack. Rather, allies' security calculus will also be shaped by consideration of what the sender will do once deterrence has failed, and of

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Blankenship, "Promises under Pressure: Reassurance and Burden-Sharing in Asymmetric Alliances" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2018).

[9] David S. Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," *International Affairs* 85, no. 4 (2009): 755–80; Clark A. Murdock et al., "Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance: Workshop Proceedings and Key Takeaways" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2009); Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Absolute Alliances: Extended Deterrence in International Politics" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2015); Alexander Lanoszka, *Atomic Assurance: The Alliance Politics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

[10] Murdock et al., "Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance: Workshop Proceedings and Key Takeaways"; Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO"; Justin V. Anderson, Jeffrey A. Larsen, and Polly M. Holdorf, "Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance: Key Concepts and Current Challenges for U.S. Policy" (INSS Occasional Paper 69, USAF Institute for National Security Studies, 2013).

[11] Robert L. Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Robert L. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Kai Quek, "Are Costly Signals More Credible? Evidence of Sender-Receiver Gaps," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (2016): 925–40, https://doi.org/10.1086/685751.

[12] Denis Healey, *Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 243.

how costly a war would be for themselves. If an ally expects that the probability of deterrence failure is high but that sender intervention will be swift and decisive, it may be more reassured than if it expects a low probability of attack but also a weak sender response in the event of an actual attack. Thus, reassurance requires not only communicating that harm can and will be inflicted on the adversary, but also that the harm to allies will be minimized.[13] To make matters even more complicated, patron states are not signaling to a unitary audience in an ally state. Instead, the civilian elite, military decision-makers, and mass public all have different perceptions and interpretations of a patron's attempts at reassurance.[14] Thus, while studying deterrence certainly generates insights for understanding reassurance, one cannot assume that they rise and fall together equally.

However, reassurance is rarely studied in its own right. A small but growing literature focuses on the causes of reassurance and its consequences, but there is very little work on the effectiveness of reassurance.[15] In discussing what reassures, policy-oriented literature tends to focus on putting "boots on the ground" in order to signal resolve. This is in no small part because much of the discussion of reassurance, like that on deterrence, focuses primarily on nuclear coercion.[16] Aside from McManus and Yarhi-Milo, who examine the domestic incentives for providing certain forms of reassurances over others, we know of no other attempt to systematically assess the characteristics that make reassurance measures credible in the eyes of allies. Thus, existing studies do not sufficiently theorize and assess the effectiveness of reassurance.

THEORY: Determinants of Reassurance

Given the scant academic treatment of reassurance, we begin by offering a precise definition of how we use the term. International relations theorists have applied the notion of reassurance in several contexts, but we draw from the work of Jeffrey Knopf and define reassurance as a "strategy that seeks to influence another actor's behavior by alleviating a perceived source of insecurity and/or giving the actor a greater sense of security."[17] Specifically,

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[13] In a seminal article on the distinction between reassurance and deterrence, Michael Howard makes a similar point, noting that "The object of deterrence is to persuade an adversary that the costs [of military action]...will far outweigh the benefits," while "The object of reassurance is to persuade one's own people that the benefits of military action...will outweigh the costs." That is, allies must be concerned with what a war—which would be fought on their territory, not that of the sender, nor even necessarily that of the adversary—would do to their populations and economies. Michael Howard, "Reassurance and Deterrence: Western Defense in the 1980s," *Foreign Affairs* 61, no. 2 (1982): 317.

[14] Statesmen, leaders, and other national security decision-makers often draw from different sets of information and assumptions when making assessments of other state's intentions. Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[15] On the causes, see: McManus and Yarhi-Milo, "The Logic of 'Offstage' Signaling"; Blankenship, "Promises under Pressure: Reassurance and Burden-Sharing in Asymmetric Alliances." On the consequences of reassurance for nuclear nonproliferation, see: Lanoszka, *Atomic Assurance: The Alliance Politics of Nuclear Proliferation*.

[16] Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO"; Murdock et al., "Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance: Workshop Proceedings and Key Takeaways."

[17] Jeffrey W. Knopf, "Varieties of Assurance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 378. Knopf summarizes the four broad ways in which the term assurance have been used in international relations scholarship First, assurance can be used as a component of deterrence in which assurance is a promise not to impose costs if an

we focus on alliance and security assurances where a patron state promises to defend an ally from an adversary attack. In line with the lexicon of national security policymakers, we use the terms reassurance and assurance interchangeably.

To understand the effectiveness of reassurance, we focus on two factors recognized as bedrocks of deterrence: *resolve* and *capability*.[18] Resolve refers to how willing an actor is to use force and accept costs in doing so, while capability refers to the actor's ability to effectively bring military force to bear and impose costs on adversaries. In the literature on reassurance, to date resolve has received the lion's share of scholarly attention. We contend, however, that capability is at least as important. Moreover, we bring new evidence to bear on the relative importance of the two for reassuring allies.

Resolve

The first and most studied means of establishing credibility is by *signaling resolve*, or a tendency to stand firm in a particular class of crises.[19] Resolve can be seen as a function of numerous characteristics including the state's past actions[20], its domestic political situation[21], the nature of its military deployments, or other actors' perceptions of the state's interests.[22] Some of these factors, like a state's regime type, cannot be actively manipulated – at least in the short-term – but can have implications for a state's future behavior. These factors, which Robert Jervis calls "indices," can often shape whether allies believe a patron's security assurances.[23] Alternatively, states can communicate credibility using "costly signals," which are manipulable but prohibitively costly for low-resolve states to undertake. As a result, leaders are unlikely to issue these signals unless they are highly resolved and intend to follow through with their commitments. As James Fearon points out, costly signals can take two forms. States can show their dedication to following through on commitments by tying their hands by making public

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opponent follows a deterrent threat. Second, assurance can be a component of alliance commitments where an assurance constitutes a promise to defend a state from adversary attack. Third, reassurance is often used to describe a strategy where one state attempts to reassure a rival that it holds no aggressive intentions toward it. Fourth, the term can be used in the context of nuclear non-proliferation, where assurances often include pledges to not threaten the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and pledges to come to the aid of non-nuclear states if they are threatened or attacked by nuclear weapons. See Knopf, 383-389.

[18] Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence : A Conceptual Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983); Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (1984): 496–526; Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42, no. 4 (1990): 466–501; Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 25–48.

[19] Paul K. Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (September 1, 1997): 72–99; Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 371–93.

[20] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*; Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (2015): 473–95.

[21] Kenneth A. Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *The American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998): 829–44.

[22] Vesna Danilovic, *When the Stakes Are High: Deterrence and Conflict Among Major Powers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[23] Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*.

promises or threats that would be costly *ex post* to renege on.[24] Or, states can sink costs—that is, taking steps that are *ex ante* costly such as "burning money" by undertaking costly military mobilizations that only make sense if a state is highly resolved.

In the context of security reassurances, patron states often signal resolve by deploying or stationing military forces in or in the vicinity of an ally threatened by a mutual adversary. These deployed military forces can signal resolve by both tying the patron's hands and by demonstrating its willingness to suffer costs on behalf of its allies. Having forces on allied territory gives the patron "skin in the game," as the patron will likely be unable to avoid becoming involved should conflict with an adversary break out. Once the patron state suffers casualties, it is likely to face domestic pressure to escalate by intervening more substantially on behalf of its ally. The most famous historical example of this logic in practice was the United States Army's "Berlin Brigade" stationed in West Berlin during the Cold War. As Thomas Schelling argued, these troops served not as a war-fighting force capable of repelling a Soviet attack, but rather as a "tripwire" that, once overrun, would trigger escalation and lead to a larger U.S. response. Indeed, in describing their purpose, Schelling stated, "Bluntly, they can die. They can die heroically, dramatically, and in a manner that guarantees that the action cannot stop there."[25]

Moreover, stationing forces abroad can be generate significant sunk costs for the patron. At the most basic level, posting troops overseas can allow greater responsiveness during crises, but also increases operating costs. Deploying personnel far from home shores extends logistics chains and, in the case of overseas bases, requires militaries to take on tasks like operating schools, commissaries, and recreation facilities for personnel and their dependents – all of which tend to be more costly when overseas, even when offset with host-nation support.[26] Second, keeping forces tied down in or around an ally's territory precludes them from being used elsewhere, which may force the patron to conscript additional troops if it needs to fight a war in another theater. For instance, during the Vietnam War, Washington continued to station forces overseas to defend Europe, Japan, and South Korea, boosting the need for conscripted troops. Third, overseas basing forfeits the economic benefits of hosting military bases domestically. By investing in costly deployments or overseas basing, patron states thus demonstrate a significant commitment in resources to defending an ally.

Existing theories on credible signaling would therefore expect foreign-deployed forces to demonstrate resolve to the extent that they are relatively *permanent* – that is, difficult to withdraw on short-notice – and that their presence is *salient* to decision-makers and the public in both the sending and ally states The permanence of a military presence is a function of how fixed it is. Forces that can be easily and quickly moved out of the ally's territory, like visiting naval vessels, are less reassuring because they do not tie the patron's hands as much as large forces or fixed installations that would take time to withdraw. The salience of foreign-deployed forces among the patron and ally states in turn, is likely to vary with the size of the deployment.

[24] James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994): 577–92; Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests."
[25] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 47.
[26] Michael Lostumbo et al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013).

Although the subject of an academic debate, the public punishes their leaders for reneging on commitments.[27] Domestic audiences in the patron state, however, must be aware of their country's overseas commitments in order to levy political punishment on leaders who back down from commitments. For the ally state, the visibility of patron troops can help assuage nervous decision-makers and citizens.

Capability

Capability is in some ways a less amorphous concept, as it largely depends on whether a state has the capacity to repel, attrite, or punish a rival's aggression. In the context of security reassurances, capability can include both the resources deployed in or near an ally's territory or those that can be rapidly moved into theater in the event of a crisis. Just as sinking costs through mobilizations and deployments can signal resolve, it also signals a patron's military capability. Deploying assets or positioning forces overseas showcases a state's military equipment and demonstrates a state's ability to project power. While military assets such as troop formations, aircraft, and ships are an important component of capability, Biddle and others point out that a state's effectiveness in combat is difficult to gauge *a priori*. Combat effectiveness is a function not only of material capability but also of doctrine and tactics, cohesion and morale, and leadership.[28]

Patrons can signal capability to an ally in two ways. First, a patron can deploy forces on or near the ally's territory to bolster their ability to impose costs on an adversary. A patron can also take steps – like prepositioning war materiel, building infrastructure, and preparing an expeditionary force – that increase its ability to rapidly project power into the theater. Both approaches, which can be carried out simultaneously, should boost the patron's capability to defend an ally by defeating adversary aggression. We treat the sender's military presence as capable to the extent that it can effectively *punish* the adversary by destroying what it values (e.g., its cities or economic centers) or *deny* it from threatening or seizing allied territory or interests.[29] The requirements for punishment and denial may vary by theater depending on geography and the nature of the conflict. As a result, the combat effectiveness of a given set of forces – and, in turn, the way in which one might assess its value for reassurance – will also vary by theater. In Europe, for example, conflict with Russia would likely entail significant ground combat, giving ground forces an important role in reassurance. By contrast, the nature of geography in the Western Pacific means that land forces would play a less important role relative to naval and air power in carrying out punishment or denial in a conflict with China.[30]

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[27] Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 437–56.
[28] Stephen D. Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[29] On coercion by punishment and denial, see Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). and Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996)..
[30] Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 115–49; Stephen D. Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security* 41, no. 1 (2016): 7–48.

Revolutions in Reassurance: Capability vs. Resolve

Existing research suggests that resolve is a crucial determinant of credible reassurance, but it says far less about the role of capability in convincing an ally that a patron state will come to its defense. Broadly speaking, this is the case for three reasons. The first is the legacy of nuclear revolution and emphasis on nuclear coercion. When a threat involves nuclear weapons, discussions of capability take a backseat to resolve, as capability is effectively a given.[31] However, since the end of the Cold War, conventional deterrence and assurance have regained prominence, owing in no small part to the advent of unipolarity and U.S. dominance in conventional military power. In this context, a sender must be able to credibly signal that it has either the capacity to put up a fight with the troops it has on the ground or can rapidly project power into the theater.[32] Second, scholars have long focused on the role of resolve in part because of the intellectual challenge associated with studying a variable that is not directly observable and is difficult to signal and measure.[33] While signaling overall power may be easy enough, at least in a crude way (e.g., military spending), signaling the ability to fight in a given theater – and to reach it with sufficient forces and quickly enough to make a difference – is another matter entirely and worthy of study.[34] Third, signals of resolve such as costly military mobilizations often end up involving capabilities anyway.[35] As a result, one could argue that resolve and capability covary. However, as described in further detail shortly, the requirements for signaling capability and resolve may diverge, such that there is a tradeoff between the two.

We contend that the dearth of study on signaling capability is a major omission. Even if a state is fully resolved and willing to defend its ally, reassurance means little if the patron lacks the capabilities to deter or defeat an adversary. Further, capability and resolve are not always one-in the-same, and in some cases may even be at odds. Schelling's discussion of the "tripwire" is perhaps the most famous example. In a tripwire scenario, the patron state's military forces stationed in harm's way demonstrate high resolve, but provide limited warfighting capability. Furthermore, some capabilities may even undermine perceptions of the sender's resolve. Pfundstein Chamberlain, for example, argues that capabilities which make using and threatening force "cheap" – such as drones, contractors, and all-volunteer forces – do not communicate resolve.[36] Even if this is the case, however, they nevertheless add capability.

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[31] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.

[32] Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Alan J. Vick, *The Posture Triangle: A New Framework for U.S. Air Force Global Presence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), pp. 5-11; Bryan Clark and Jesse Sloman, "Deploying Beyond Their Means: America's Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2015, p. 3.

[33] For a similar point, see Evan Braden Montgomery, "The Forgotten Function of Military Force: Capability Demonstrations and Perceptions of Power" (International Studies Association, San Francisco, CA, 2018).

[34] Kyle Haynes, "Signaling Resolve or Capability? The Difference Matters on the Korean Peninsula," *War on the Rocks*, May 10, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/signaling-resolve-or-capability-the-difference-matters-on-the-korean-peninsula/ (accessed July 8, 2018).

[35] Branislav Slantchev, "Military Coercion in Interstate Crises," *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 4 (2005): 533–47.

[36] Dianne Pfundstein Chamberlain, *Cheap Threats: Why the United States Struggles to Coerce Weak States* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016).

Patron states must therefore demonstrate both resolve and capability in a way that simultaneously deters rivals and reassures multiple audiences in an allied state. Patron states do this by leveraging different types of forces and assets from their military arsenals. Each of these measures can signal a different degree of resolve and capability to an allied audience. For instance, patron states have long signaled resolve by deploying small units of ground forces, which possess limited warfighting capability. More recently, the United States and Russia have deployed advanced ship-based air and missile defense systems to the waters off the coasts of their allies.[37] These moves provide significant defensive capability, but demonstrate less resolve than forces deployed in allied territory.

Thus, the relevant question becomes: what is the relative importance of resolve and capability in convincing allies that a patron's reassurances are credible? While they have by no means created it, three elements of the current politico-military landscape exacerbate the distinction between signaling capability and resolve. The first are domestic and fiscal constraints, which make it difficult for sending states to credibly promise to go to war on partners' behalf. Although demonstrating resolve and skin in the game has traditionally been viewed as a signal of credible commitment, patron states face domestic political pressure to minimize the risks associated with entangling security commitments.[38] States have long taken steps to avoid being entangled into conflicts that force them to expend blood and treasure.[39] In no small part as a result of constrained military budgets and manpower and casualty-averse populations, allies have reason to fear that their patrons will abandon them when the going gets tough. Indeed, the United States has shuttered bases in Europe and demanded that its NATO partners take a more active role in providing for regional defense. To be sure, states could suffer reputational consequences from reneging on their commitments, but recent actions – such as Washington's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the United Kingdom's Brexit, and U.S. President Donald Trump's veiled threats to abandon allies who do not pay their "fair share" – demonstrate a willingness to defect from international agreements.

In today's security environment, reassurance measures that involve significant demonstrations of resolve – like tripwire forces – may no longer signal a credible commitment to allies. Patron states might face domestic political pressure to withdraw these forces at the start of a crisis in order to avoid casualties. Indeed, President Trump recently ordered the Pentagon to withdraw troops from South Korea and questioned the need to honor mutual defense commitments with NATO allies.[40] If a patron withdraws its tripwire forces, an ally might be

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[37] Masayuki Yuda, "US Deploys Missile Destroyer Fitted with Latest Technology to Japan," *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 22, 2018, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/US-deploys-missile-destroyer-fitted-with-latest-technology-to-Japan; "Russia Deploys Largest Air Defense Ships near Turkish Waters," *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 25, 2015, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-deploys-largest-air-defense-ships-near-turkish-waters-91642.

[38] Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War*; Jonathan D. Caverley, *Democratic Militarism: Voting, Wealth, and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[39] Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 137–68; Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (April 1, 2015): 7–48, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00197.

[40] Mark Landler, "Trump Orders Pentagon to Consider Reducing U.S. Forces in South Korea," *The New York Times*, June 9, 2018, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/world/asia/trump-troops-south-korea.html; Eileen Sullivan, "Trump Questions the Core of NATO: Mutual Defense, Including Montenegro," *The New York Times*,

unable to fend off adversary aggression. Instead of sending troops, a patron may be able to reassure its partners by deploying militaries capabilities such as drones that can be used to fight "on the cheap" if domestic audiences are reluctant to accept high casualties.

This ties in with the second factor which heightens the disjuncture between capability and resolve: the availability of military technologies that can allow states to fight remotely and without putting lives at risk. More credible reassurances might feature military technologies and tactics that minimize the patron's risk of incurring casualties rather than forces that are deployed in a way that ties hands. This form of reassurance increases the capability for military action but simultaneously decreases a patron's "skin in the game." By employing capital-intensive systems like drones and off-shore air defense systems, patron states can keep their personnel out of harm's way while still aiding in an ally's defense.[41] This reduced risk may decrease political roadblocks to following through with security guarantees and increase the staying power of a patron if conflict erupts. While some scholars argue that military capabilities that lower the barrier to using force demonstrate less resolve and make threats and promises less credible by rendering them "cheap,"[42] others suggest that the increased staying power of these systems can actually increase resolve and credibility.[43] Similarly, weapons systems that can be used over great distances may facilitate the sender's ability to project power without actually doing much to signal its resolve, whether by demonstrating its willingness to suffer costs on allies' behalf or by tying its hands. Aegis systems, for example, can be used for air and missile defense from afar, whether they are sea- or land-based. If measures that require few sunk costs or tied hands can credibly reassure allies, our conceptions about what makes for credible signals of commitment may need to be revised. There is thus both theoretical and practical reasons to expect that signaling one's ability to fight is just as important, if not more so, than gaining "skin in the game."

Third, the divergence between signaling capability and resolve has arguably become even more acute in the era of "anti-access area-denial" (A2/AD) capabilities. These include ballistic and cruise missiles capable of striking bases and naval assets, submarines capable of contesting aircraft carriers and troop transports, and air defense systems which can limit aircrafts' ability to operate in certain areas.[44] Taken together, such technologies can make it more difficult for a sender to project power, thus forcing it to demonstrate the ability to overcome the adversary's anti-air and ballistic missile capabilities if it hopes to reassure allies. At the same time, however, A2/AD creates a tension between the needs of signaling capability and resolve – or, as Cooper puts it, between "vulnerability" and "visibility."[45] Sending states may need to forward-deploy military assets to visibly communicate resolve, but doing so puts these assets at risk of being quickly destroyed by an adversary, thus minimizing their capability to defend allied states.

July 19, 2018, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/18/world/europe/trump-nato-self-defense-montenegro.html.

[41] On capital-intensive warfare see, Caverley, *Democratic Militarism: Voting, Wealth, and War*.

[42] Pfundstein Chamberlain, *Cheap Threats: Why the United States Struggles to Coerce Weak States*.

[43] Amy Zegart, "Cheap Fights, Credible Threats: The Future of Armed Drones and Coercion," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2018.1439747.

[44] Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection."

[45] Zack Cooper, "The Visibility-Vulnerability Dilemma and Defense," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 7, 2015, https://amti.csis.org/the-visibility-vulnerability-dilemma-and-the-defense-debate/ (accessed July 9, 2018).

Indeed, this logic has led some to question the wisdom of forward-deploying vulnerable forces such as aircraft carriers and land-based aircraft.[46] Assets less vulnerable to A2/AD such as submarines, on the other hand, may not be sufficiently visible to act as a costly signal of the sender's resolve.[47]

A Typology of Reassurance Measures

Based on the logic we described above, we conceptualize reassurance measures as varying along two dimensions: the degrees of resolve and capability they demonstrate. Signals which demonstrate high resolve are those which are highly costly to deploy, put lives at risk, and are difficult to redeploy. Those which demonstrate high capability must show that the patron will be able to both quickly reach the theater of combat and effectively punish the adversary or deny its ability to take territory. These systems need not be costly to deploy.

To more fully examine the determinants of effective reassurance, we introduce four typologies of reassurance measures. These typologies update theoretical conceptions of reassurance by more closely assessing the amount of capability and resolve associated with each action. A visual depiction can be found in Figure 1. The capability a given measure signals increases from left to right, while resolve increases from bottom to top. As we note above, reassurance is context-specific, so the measures included in each quadrant below are only representative. Further, these assets are not typically deployed in isolation. Patron states often couple various measures as part of a reassurance strategy. There is, however, policy and theoretical value in identifying the specific types of reassurance measures that are most effective. In the following paragraphs we describe each of our typologies in more detail.

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[46] Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection." pp. 130-137; Maj. Gen. Ralph S. Clem, "Forward Basing NATO Airpower in the Baltics is a Bad Idea," *War on the Rocks*, April 18, 2016. http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/forward-basing-nato-airpower-in-the-baltics-is-a-bad-idea/ (accessed July 9, 2018).

[47] Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection," pp. 139-146.
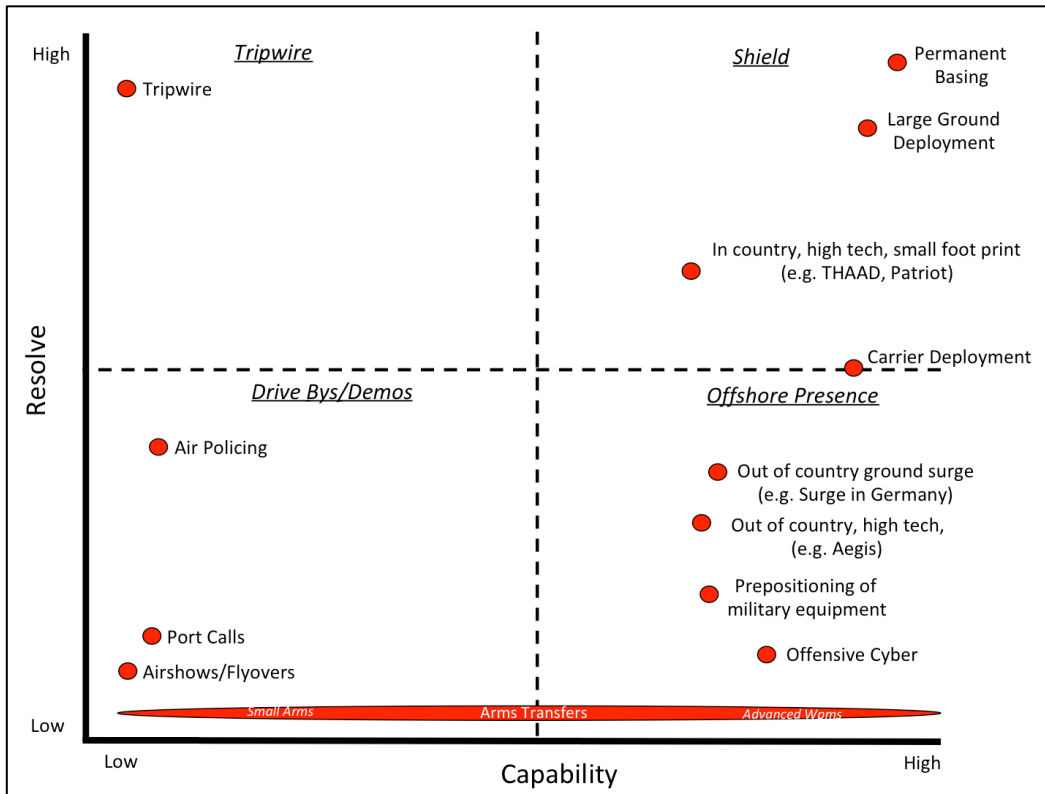
Figure 1 Our typology of reassurance measures, with examples in each quadrant. The x-axis represents the amount of capability signaled, while the y-axis represents the amount of resolve.

Tripwire: High Resolve, Low Capability

Those signals falling in the upper-left quadrant demonstrate high resolve but do little to change the balance of power. The most notable example of these are *tripwires* – small contingents of forces deployed in an allied country. Since Thomas Schelling introduced the term, tripwires have become among the most-discussed means of signaling resolve in the deterrence literature.[48] The logic is straightforward – by visibly putting the lives of its own soldiers at risk, the sending state ties its hands. This is especially the case if the tripwire forces are land-based, as these are more difficult to redeploy.[49] Reneging on a commitment after losing a significant number of soldiers, the argument goes, would severely damage a patron state's reputation internationally and also lead to domestic backlash. In addition to the U.S. Berlin Brigade, other formations that have been described as tripwires include British forces in the Falklands in the years preceding the Falklands War and U.S. ground and air forces stationed in South Korea.

However, tripwires do little to signal capability. Forces stationed directly on allied territory may be vulnerable to quick destruction in the event of a surprise attack by an adversary. If the sender intends for the forces to serve as a tripwire, this may be exactly as planned. But if the sender wants the forces to actually serve as a capability for warfighting, making them

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[48] Schelling, *Arms and Influence,* p. 47.
[49] Michael Allen Hunzeker and Alexander Lanoszka, "Landpower and American Credibility," *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (2015): 17–26.

vulnerable is counterproductive. More generally, tripwires are too small to appreciably change the balance of power, and have little ability to either punish the adversary by striking it offensively or deny its ability to take territory. Indeed, the North Korean Army dwarfs the 23,000 American troops in South Korea and the U.S. infantry brigade in Berlin would have been unable to halt an onslaught of East German and Soviet forces.

Shield: High Resolve, High Capability

In the upper-right quadrant are *shields*, which not only signal high degrees of resolve but are capable of sustained fighting. Shields entail a far larger presence than tripwires, and include assets such as armor, artillery, and air power. As such, much like tripwires, shields demonstrate high resolve, as they are highly visible, they put a large number of lives at risk, and are more difficult to redeploy owing to their size, especially they contain heavy assets like armor and artillery. Heavy land forces are the most difficult to redeploy, as unlike sea and air capabilities they are not inherently mobile except by land, and transporting them presents considerable logistic challenges.[50] In particular, land capabilities which are large and cannot be easily disassembled and reassembled—such as artillery and armor—are the most difficult to redeploy. Indeed, studies show that even medium-sized Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (SBCTs) are difficult to move into and out of theater quickly.[51]

Moreover, shields are meant to be war-fighting forces that can inflict punishment on adversary targets and/or deny the adversary the ability to take and hold territory. Thus, in light of the high levels of resolve and capability they demonstrate, one would expect shields to be highly effective for reassurance. Indeed, Mearsheimer argues that the most effective means of conventional deterrence is to deny one's adversary the ability to achieve a quick, cheap victory, and in light of this allies are likely to be reassured by shields as well.[52] Examples of shields include the U.S. forces deployed to the Persian Gulf under Operation Desert Shield in 1990-91, as well as those stationed in West Germany during the Cold War.

Offshore Presence: Low Resolve, High Capability

In the lower-right quadrant are forces stationed out of the country capable of projecting power into allied territory, or *offshore presence*. Senders can attempt to reassure using an "over the horizon" posture that refrains from putting forces directly on the ally's territory but instead stations them nearby and promises to rapidly move them into allied territory in the event of a conflict. An offshore presence is thus composed of offshore land, sea, and air assets. Gholz and Press, for example, argue in favor of an over the horizon posture to reassure U.S. partners in the Middle East and deter any attempt by a regional actor to disrupt the flow of oil from the region.[53] A limited on-shore presence may be attractive to patron states as it can be less expensive to maintain than an in-country foot print and comes with fewer operational risks (like protests at or

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[50] Hunzeker and Lanoszka, "Landpower and American Credibility"; Michael E. O'Hanlon, *The Science of War: Defense Budgeting, Military Technology, Logistics, and Combat Outcomes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[51] Alan J. Vick et al., *The Stryker Brigade Combat Team: Rethinking Strategic Responsiveness and Assessing Deployment Options* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002).

[52] John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[53] Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "Protecting 'The Prize': Oil and the U.S. National Interest," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (2010): 453–85.

terrorist attacks on bases).[54] An over the horizon approach relies on the promise of quick power projection to reach allied territory before the adversary has had the chance to overrun the partner state's military forces. As a result, the reassurance value of such a posture is enhanced to the extent that the sender prepares an expeditionary force ready for rapid deployment and – crucially – prepositions military equipment on allied territory which can be used by the sender's reinforcements. Alternatively, an offshore presence may be one which can be used without ever putting the sender's personnel on allied territory – including capabilities that can be used from afar (such as Aegis air defense systems) or unmanned vehicles (such as drones).

An offshore presence signals less resolve, as it does not tie hands by physically putting blood and treasure on the ally's territory, and it does not sink costs on the ally's behalf because the forces earmarked for the offshore presence are not tied down and can be shifted to other operations. To be sure, adversaries can use anti-access/area denial weapon systems to hold ships and off-shore assets at risk, but these risks of broader escalation are arguably lower than those of deploying troops directly into allied territory. When a patron state's forces are kept offshore, an adversary can more easily avoid attacking them, allowing the adversary to decouple the patron and its ally by only attacking the ally's forces. Nevertheless, an offshore presence can swing the outcome of a war, as in the case of the U.S. landing at Inchon during the Korean War. Indeed, an offshore presence was in effect the one adopted by the United States toward the Persian Gulf region during the 1980s, when it established a "Rapid Joint Deployment Task Force" made up of forces stationed in the United States that would be quickly mobilized in the case of a Soviet attack.[55] Similarly, during the mid-1970s Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger considered the possibility of removing U.S. forces from South Korea and using them as a "mobile reserve" which could respond to contingencies throughout East Asia.[56]

Drive-bys: Low Capability, Low Resolve

In the bottom-left quadrant are *drive-bys and demonstrations,* which do not signal much capability or resolve. These are essentially limited shows of force, such as port calls by naval vessels or fly-overs by military aircraft.[57] Such signals do little to tie hands, as although they are visible, they put few lives at risk and are easy to redeploy (indeed, they are intended to be redeployed). Moreover, because they are only on or near allied territory temporarily, they do little to sink costs and do not permanently change the balance of power.[58] Drive-bys and demonstrations do, however, offer some strategic benefits. They can signal a state's ability to rapidly project forces and can visibly demonstrate a patron's security commitment to nervous allies. In 1946, for instance, the U.S. Navy dispatched the battleship USS Missouri to transport the remains of the deceased Turkish Ambassador to the United States back to Istanbul. The

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[54] Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, "Hegemony, Force Posture, and the Provision of Public Goods: The Once and Future Role of Outside Powers in Securing Persian Gulf Oil," *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 548–81.

[55] Charles A. Kupchan, *The Persian Gulf and the West: The Dilemmas of Security* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1987), chs. 5-6.

[56] Joo-Hong Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986)., p. 83

[57] We consider larger shows of force like the deployment of multiple carrier strike groups to demonstrate an offshore presence as they demonstrate significantly greater capability than a limited deployment of military assets.

[58] Abigail Post, "Flying to Fail: Costly Signals and Air Power in Crisis Bargaining," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718777043.

highly symbolic deployment of the vessel onboard which Japanese officials had surrendered at the end of World War II was a form of modern gunboat diplomacy that demonstrated Washington's force projection capability in a region threatened by Communist expansionism.[59] More recently, Washington's used "fly-bys" of nuclear-capable, long-range bombers through South Korean airspace to respond to North Korean missile tests.[60] Like offshore presence, fly-bys and demonstrations can entail a degree of operational risk. Ships in port are vulnerable to sabotage and attack, and aircraft conducting fly-bys can be intercepted and shot down. Nevertheless, because fly-bys are so temporary an adversary can wait until the demonstration has passed before launching an attack, - allowing a patron to avoid getting dragged into the conflict far more easily than if it had a permanent, in-country presence.

Empirical Predictions

Foreign-deployed forces can thus be expected to reassure to the extent that they enhance perceptions of U.S. resolve and capability. Forces that demonstrate high levels of U.S. resolve and capability should be the most reassuring, while those that demonstrate low levels of both should be the least. In cases where perceptions of resolve and capability diverge, however, making empirical predictions becomes less straightforward. Table 1, below, compares our expectations with those predicted by existing costly signaling logics, which focus primarily on the role of resolve.[61]

Reassurance Typology	Expectation of Costly Signaling Logic	Our Expectations
Shield	High(est) Reassurance	High(est) Reassurance
Tripwire	High Reassurance	Moderate Reassurance
Offshore Presence	Low Reassurance	Moderate Reassurance
Drive-bys	Low(est) Reassurance	Low(est) Reassurance

Table 2 Our theoretical expectations versus those of costly signaling.

CASE STUDY: Reassuring Estonia

As a first cut at assessing the degree to which resolve and capability shape effective reassurance, we use a case study of NATO and U.S. reassurance of Estonia to qualitatively test our four typologies. Estonia represents a useful case for theory testing for three key reasons. First, Estonia has requested and received significant security reassurances from the United States and NATO, many of which fall neatly into our typologies. This allows us to compare the effectiveness of various assurance measures. Second, Estonia has actively sought security guarantees from western states since the fall of the Soviet Union. The passing of nearly three

[59] Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954*, 1st edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 233.
[60] Thom Shanker and Choe Sang-Hun, "U.S. Begins Stealth Bombing Runs Over South Korea," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2013, sec. Asia Pacific, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/29/world/asia/us-begins-stealth-bombing-runs-over-south-korea.html.
[61] Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests."

decades provides temporal variation in the intensity of the threat environment and the types of assurances provided. Third, security reassurances are critical to Estonian national security, making it a most-likely case for our argument that capability is an important determinant of assurance credibility. Estonia's military capabilities are dwarfed by those of Russia, its primary threat, and the state has previously been victim to Russian-backed attacks. Estonia therefore represents a sort of worst case scenario. If we do not find evidence that capability matters in the Estonia case, we are unlikely to see it in cases where an ally faces a weaker threat. Our case study draws from public opinion data collected by the Estonian Ministry of Defense, analysis of past U.S. and NATO operations in the Baltic region, and in-depth interviews with senior Estonian and American officials, including former Undersecretaries of Defense and Ministers of Parliament, who were responsible for reassurance policies.

Case Summary

After gaining independence at the end of the Cold War, Estonian policymakers sought to ensure that their country would never have to stand alone against Russia.[62] To this end, Estonia pursued military ties with the United States and NATO, joining the U.S. Partnership for Peace initiative in 1994 and declaring NATO membership an explicit goal in its 1996 National Defense Concept. Although Estonia missed the first round of enlargement in 1999, NATO put Estonia on the path to membership by allowing it to join the Membership Action Plan in 1999, which gave Estonia a list of requirements it needed to meet on the path to accession. Ultimately, Estonia was granted membership in 2002, and formally joined the organization in 2004. During this period, the Estonians contributed troops to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and were among the few countries to contribute troops as part of the U.S. "coalition of the willing" in the Iraq War, in the hope that gaining a reputation as a loyal ally would make the United States more inclined to defend Estonia.[63]

Despite a period of relative calm in relations with Russia, events in mid-2000s led to a shift in Estonian threat perceptions. First, in 2007 Russia launched a series of cyberattacks after the Estonians removed the Soviet-era Bronze Soldier of Tallinn statue. The following year, for many Estonian officials the Russo-Georgia War confirmed their fears about Russia's willingness to use force in its "near abroad."[64] Although NATO's force posture did not change in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Georgia, Estonian officials increasingly lobbied other members to take the Russian threat more seriously, and the country adopted a military strategy based on territorial defense using conscripted and militia forces.[65] In addition to strengthening domestic military capabilities, some Estonian officials continued to press for the stationing of NATO forces on Estonian territory, a move that Estonians widely considered to be politically impractical at the time. States such as the United States demonstrated little interest in posting forces in the Baltics and the "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat

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[62] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018.
[63] Andres Kasekamp and Eoin McNamara, "From the Cold War's End to the Ukraine Crisis: NATO's Enduring Value for Estonia's Security Policy," in *Peacebuilding at Home: NATO and Its "New" Member States after Crimea*, ed. Arnold H. Kammel and Benjamin Zyla (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2018), 43–58.
[64] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018; interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.
[65] Kasekamp and McNamara, "From the Cold War's End to the Ukraine Crisis: NATO's Enduring Value for Estonia's Security Policy."

forces" in the region would violate the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.[66] Estonians even criticized officials like then-Estonian defense minister Urmas Reinsalu who called for American boots on the ground during a think tank conference held in January 2014.[67]

NATO and U.S. efforts to reassure Estonia intensified rapidly after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Many Estonian policymakers viewed Moscow's incursion into Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as signaling a greater threat to the Baltics than the 2008 invasion of Georgia.[68] (As a result, they called on the United States and NATO to increase military support and add muscle to NATO's Article V mutual defense commitment. Specifically, Estonian defense officials requested additional NATO fighter aircraft to defend Estonian airspace and the deployment of ground forces into Estonian territory.[69] These requests, which seemed unrealistic just months earlier, quickly helped inform subsequent U.S. and NATO planning efforts.

The invasion of Ukraine also drastically shifted defense planning in the United States. The 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, which was drafted prior to the invasion of Crimea, characterized Washington's relationship with Moscow as one that allowed for significant security cooperation.[70] Following the invasion, however, Washington's efforts quickly shifted to reassuring allies and partners in Central and Eastern Europe. As a first step, the United States deployed 150 troops to each of the Baltic States and F-15C fighter jets to support Baltic Air Policing, a NATO initiative that had helped guard the airspace of the three Baltic States since 2004.[71] More broadly, the United States launched its European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and Operation Atlantic Resolve in June 2014. According to senior U.S. officials involved with its planning, ERI was initially intended to be a short term effort to bolster military capabilities. The initiative boosted multinational exercises, deployed conventional and special operations forces to train with European militaries, and funded construction efforts that prepared facilities like military airfields to support contingency operations.[72] Notably, initial planning efforts did not consider the specific hybrid warfare threat posed by Russia. Instead, ERI efforts were intended to bolster allies' general military capabilities without signaling aggressiveness toward Moscow.[73]

Estonian statesmen continued to press for U.S. and NATO support beyond the U.S. fighter jets and tripwire forces in light of heightened Russian aggressiveness in the Baltic Sea

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[66] Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, May 27, 1997, https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.

[67] Andres Kasekamp, "Are the Baltic States Next?," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 67.

[68] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018.

[69] Interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.

[70] *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2014), 35.

[71] Interview with Mark Cancian, former chief of the Force Structure and Investment Division, Office of Management and Budget, June 20, 2018; "NATO Air Policing," NATO Allied Air Command, 2018, https://ac.nato.int/page5931922/-nato-air-policing.

[72] Interview with Mark Cancian, former chief of the Force Structure and Investment Division, Office of Management and Budget, June 20, 2018; "Operation Atlantic Resolve (2014) Fact Sheet" (U.S. European Command, January 29, 2015), https://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0514_atlanticresolve/Operation_Atlantic_Resolve_Fact_Sheet_2014.pdf.

[73] Interview with Mark Cancian, former chief of the Force Structure and Investment Division, Office of Management and Budget, June 20, 2018.

region. In the months following its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow deployed warships off the coast of the Baltic states, flew Russian Air Force aircraft near and into Baltic airspace, conducted large scale exercises near the Estonian border, interfered with the laying of underwater electricity cables between Lithuania and Sweden, and deployed advanced weapons including S-400 long-rage air-defense systems and Iskander-M ballistic missiles to the region.[74] Leaders of NATO states publicly voiced commitment to defending the Baltics from these threats. During a visit to the Estonian capital of Tallinn just prior to the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014, President Obama announced that the "defense of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defense of Berlin and Paris and London" and that Estonia's "independence will always be guaranteed by the strongest military alliance the world has ever known."[75] To that end, NATO doubled the strength of its Baltic Air Policing efforts and established an air policing base in northwest Estonia.[76] NATO also announced plans to enhance its ground presence throughout the Baltics.

While Estonian officials sought the permanent basing of U.S. or NATO troops in their country, reassurance efforts were limited to rotational deployments of forces. The small tripwire U.S. forces deployed in 2014 were supplanted in 2016 by larger formations of troops deployed to Estonia on six-month rotations under NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative.[77] Under the plan, which NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described as the "biggest reinforcement of…collective defense since the end of the Cold War, " a battalion of 500 British Army troops would be deployed to Estonia supported by two additional companies of NATO troops.[78] NATO also activated the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a force comprised of NATO service members that could deploy within 48 hours in the event of a contingency.[79]

Although Estonian defense officials lament that their "wish list is longer than what is generally delivered," U.S. and NATO efforts have helped reassure Estonian policymakers.[80] Reassurance efforts have also helped assuage concerns of the general public. Public opinion polling conducted by the Estonian Ministry of Defense finds that more than half of Estonians believe NATO would provide direct military assistance to Estonia in the event of a crisis.[81] This represents a significant increase over earlier polls in which a far smaller portion of the population

[74] Andres Kasekamp, "Are the Baltic States Next?," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 64.
[75] Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia," The White House, September 3, 2014, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/remarks-president-obama-people-estonia.
[76] "NATO Opens an Air Base in Estonia," Estonian World, May 2, 2014, http://estonianworld.com/security/nato-opens-air-base-estonia-video/.
[77] Matthew Holehouse and Ben Farmer, "British Troops to Defend Baltics against Russia in New Nato Mission," *The Telegraph*, June 14, 2016, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/14/british-troops-to-defend-baltics-against-russia-in-new-nato-miss/; "NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, February 1, 2018), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_02/20180213_1802-factsheet-efp.pdf.
[78] Holehouse and Farmer, "British Troops to Defend Baltics against Russia in New Nato Mission." In the initial deployment, the British battalion was supported by a company of Danish troops and a company of French troops.
[79] "NATO Response Force / Very High Readiness Joint Task Force," Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe, April 2018, https://shape.nato.int/nato-response-force--very-high-readiness-joint-task-force.
[80] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018.
[81] Juhan Kivirahk, *Public Opinion and National Defence: March 2018* (Tallinn, Estonia: Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2018), 55. 51% of the sample believed NATO would "provide direct military assistance). Notably, trust in NATO was far higher among ethnic-Estonians (64%) than among ethnic-Russians (26%).

believed NATO would intervene militarily.[82] Additionally, nearly three quarters of the population believes NATO's efforts to ensure the security of Estonia are either completely or generally sufficient.[83] Significant funding increases to ERI in recent years may enable additional deployments of forces and assets that bolster existing reassurance efforts.[84]

Reassurance Effectiveness

Interviews with former Estonian defense and foreign policy officials suggest that signals of U.S. and NATO capability are just as important as signals of resolve – if not more so. Consistent with our expectations, members of the Estonian national security elite indicated that they would be most reassured by measures that combined a hand-tying presence of NATO forces directly on Estonian territory with the deployment of advanced capabilities that provide a shield or off-shore presence. Specifically, Estonian officials sought capabilities – such as air defense or long range artillery systems – that could enable NATO to immediately defend the country. At the same time, Estonian defense officials looked for off-shore reassurances such as prepositioning of equipment and a rapid deployment force that would make it easier for NATO to rapidly project power into the area.[85] Underlying this preference is the belief among many policymakers that the Estonian Defence Force has the capability and will to hold off an initial onslaught of Russian forces, but would need specialized support (i.e. air defense) and NATO reinforcements to push back invading forces.[86] Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, Estonia bolstered membership in its paramilitary home guard, carried out mobilization exercises, and developed plans to counter acts of Russian hybrid warfare. Indeed, General Riho Terras, Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, publicly announced that if Russian agents or special forces enter Estonian territory, his troops would "shoot the first one to appear."[87] Estonia, however, has a land centric military and lacks more advanced military capabilities – specifically air and maritime systems – that would strengthen its ability to engage conventional Russian forces.[88] One former Estonian Undersecretary of Defense argued that an ally's deployment of "these military capabilities improves the effectiveness of tripwire forces" and is critical to reassuring Baltic governments and deterring Russia.[89]

These findings depart from a pure costly signaling logic of reassurance. While the demonstration of resolve is important to signal the credibility of reassurances, so too is the deployment of military capabilities that strengthen an ally's ability to counter adversary aggression. Critically, these capabilities need not put a patron's forces directly in harm's way to

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[82] According to earlier Public Opinion and National Defence reports, in 2011, 39% of respondents believed NATO would provide direct military assistance. In March 2014, 43% believed NATO would assist.

[83] Kivirahk, 56. 21% of respondents believed NATO's measures to ensure the security of Estonia were "completely sufficient" and 50% believed the measures were "sufficient in general."

[84] In Fiscal Year 2019, the Department of Defense requested $6.5 Billion for ERI.

[85] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018; interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018; interview with former Member of Parliament, June 21, 2018; interview with Estonian defense academic, June 28, 2018.

[86] Interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.

[87] Sam Jones, "Estonia Ready to Deal with Russia's 'Little Green Men,'" *Financial Times*, May 13, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/03c5ebde-f95a-11e4-ae65-00144feab7de.

[88] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018; interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.

[89] Interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.

bolster the effectiveness of reassurance. For instance, air defense systems can be deployed on naval ships off shore (i.e. Aegis) and prepositioning involves the stationing of warfighting materiel, but not personnel, in allied territory. An Estonian official who previously led the country's coordination with NATO suggested that this dual-foundation approach to reassurance helps assuage multiple audiences in the allied state. On the resolve front, small tripwire forces "don't add much muscle, but the civilian elite understand that it is for political deterrence."[90] As a result, these forces tend to be highly visible and civilian elite continue to seek a permanent U.S. or NATO presence. On the capabilities front, military and defense policymakers seek out specific capabilities that bolster warfighting potential vis-à-vis potential rivals.

Our initial analysis also yields a notable – yet tentative – finding: perceptions of the purpose and effectiveness of reassurance vary significantly across different groups. At the interstate level, officials in patron states often conceive of reassurance differently than their allied counterparts. In the Estonia case, we find that many U.S. officials typically equated reassurance with signaling resolve while Estonian officials emphasized the need for military capabilities sufficient to combat Russian forces. Senior U.S. officials suggested that the reassurance value of American presence came not from their military utility but from a combination of the speed with which they were deployed in the aftermath of Crimea with the visibility of U.S. "skin in the game."[91] In contrast, Estonians often focused on the deterrent and warfighting capability of reassurance measures. One former Estonian Undersecretary of Defense commented, "I don't like the term reassurance…Don't use [the term] reassurance. It is always about deterring another country…When you use 'reassurance' the object of the [patron's] actions changes. The target is no longer the adversary but the allies."[92] Given this perspective, Estonians generally focused on the warfighting capability of reassurance measures, rather than just the presence of foreign troops in the ally's territory. We intend to explore this further using additional interviews and a series of cross-national survey experiments (see below).

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the mechanisms that contribute to credible security assurances and demonstrates that military capability often plays a greater role than resolve in convincing a weaker ally that a patron's security guarantees are credible. While existing research identifies capability and resolve as elements that underpin security commitments, most work falls short of pinpointing the relative importance of each of these factors. Further, most current studies pay insufficient attention to subnational variation in perceptions of assurance credibility and overlook the effect that military technologies have on assurance believability. To contribute to the line of scholarly research on security assurances we introduce four qualitatively typologies of reassurance measures that vary in capability and resolve: *tripwires*, *shields*, *offshore presence*, and *drive-bys*. We then test the effectiveness of each of these measures using a case study of United States and NATO security assurances to Estonia.

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[90] Interview with Henrik Praks, former Head of Estonian MOD NATO Department, June 21, 2018.
[91] Interview with Mark Cancian, former chief of the Force Structure and Investment Division, Office of Management and Budget, June 20, 2018; interview with Derek Chollet, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, June 21, 2018.
[92] Interview with former Undersecretary of Defense Policy, June 21, 2018.

We draw two conclusions from our preliminary analysis. First, capability often matters more to the state being assured than existing studies suggest. Rather than simply hosting a token tripwire force that demonstrates resolve, client states prefer the deployment of military capabilities that provide sufficiently robust means to defeat or deter a rival's aggression. The desired capabilities may vary across states depending on the threat environment and military strength of the client state, but suggest that warfighting potential matters just as much as resolve in dictating the credibility of a security assurance. Second, we find evidence of subnational variation in perceptions of assurance credibility. Interviews with national-security decision-makers provide tentative evidence that military leaders are more likely to perceive capabilities-based deployments as signals of credible reassurance, while members of the civilian elite are more convinced by more symbolic tripwire deployments. This suggests security assurances have both military and political components.

This paper represents a first step in a broader project that attempts to offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors that underlie credible security assurances. We intend to proceed with the project in three phases. First, we plan to expand the case study to examine the Baltic case more broadly, rather than focusing solely on Estonia. This extension enables us to identify cross-national variation in perceptions of assurance credibility, allowing us to study factors that affect the degree to which capability or resolve drive the perceived authenticity of security guarantees. Second, we plan to draft a set of East Asian case studies that examine variation in assurance credibility over time. Finally, we have designed a series of cross-national survey experiments that will be fielded on members of the elite and public that enables a closer examination of subnational variation in perceived credibility of security assurances.