

TAILORED ASSURANCE

Balancing Deterrence and Disarmament in Responding to NATO-Russia Tensions

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Abstract

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) called for tailoring assurance across America's allies, including NATO, as part of an overall deterrence and assurance strategy. NATO is currently dealing with several challenges: Russian hostility, growing pressure internally for nuclear disarmament or withdrawal of non-strategic US nuclear weapons, as well as the questioning of America's credibility as a guarantor of European security. Since these sources of tension are not felt symmetrically across the 29 member states, it has become necessary to adapt assurance measures on a case-by-case basis by adjusting the military capabilities involved and the communication according to the needs of each country. The purpose of this study is to identify the various options available to the United States to enable it to adapt capabilities, messaging strategies, and other tools, thereby providing more effective and consistent assurance in the face of the Russian threat. In order to respond effectively to a strategy aimed at accentuating the internal divisions of the Alliance, it is necessary to combine measures related to the "hardware" of NATO's posture (nuclear weapons, investments, conventional forces etc.) and others related to its "software" (values, Alliance cohesion, communication, etc.).

Résumé

La *Nuclear Posture Review 2018* (NPR) a appelé à une assurance sur mesure entre les alliés des États-Unis, y compris l'OTAN, dans le cadre d'une stratégie globale de dissuasion et d'assurance. L'OTAN est actuellement confrontée à plusieurs défis : l'hostilité de la Russie, une pression interne grandissante pour le désarmement nucléaire ou le retrait des armes nucléaires américaines non stratégiques, ainsi que la remise en question de la crédibilité de l'Amérique en tant que garante de la sécurité européenne. Comme ces sources de tensions ne sont pas ressenties de la même manière dans les 29 États membres, il est devenu nécessaire d'adapter ces mesures d'assurance au cas par cas, en ajustant les capacités militaires et la communication en fonction des besoins de chaque pays. L'objectif de cette étude est d'identifier les différentes options à la disposition des États-Unis pour leur permettre d'adapter les capacités, les stratégies de communication et d'autres outils, offrant ainsi une assurance plus efficace et plus cohérente face à la menace russe. Afin de répondre efficacement à une stratégie visant à accentuer les divisions internes de l'Alliance, il est nécessaire de combiner des mesures liées au « hardware » de la posture de l'OTAN (armes nucléaires, investissements, forces conventionnelles, etc.) et d'autres liées au « software » (valeurs, cohésion de l'Alliance, communication, etc.).

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Introduction

In recent years, the United States and NATO Alliance have moved away from a “one size fits-all” approach to deterrence and assurance and increased emphasis on the need for tailoring to adversaries and allies respectively.¹ The shift towards tailoring assurance is to accommodate for an increasingly diverse set of threat perceptions and audiences among NATO member states. For example, the 2016 Warsaw Summit Communique called for “tailored assurance” to one specific ally, Turkey, due to “security concerns from the south”.² In response to a different type of threat, which is the focus of this paper, the 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) noted the need to tailor assurance to allies facing threats from Russia. While tailoring deterrence has received significant attention in the 21st century, tailored assurance has received less attention but requires similar attention to diverse threat perceptions, audiences, capabilities, and communications.

At present, NATO is experiencing at least three pressure points. From the East, Russian hostility, to include nuclear sabre-rattling and cross-domain coercion³, aims to divide Alliance members. From within NATO, there is increasing bottom-up pressure from domestic populations and parliaments for progress towards nuclear disarmament and removal of NATO’s non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs), partially motivated by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which opened for signature on September 20, 2017. And finally, there is a perceived vacuum of U.S. leadership and increasing questions about America’s credibility as a security guarantor in Europe following the Obama Administration’s “pivot” to Asia and more recent statements by President Trump. Numerous forces are simultaneously playing into Russia’s strategy to divide the Alliance.

These pressure points have asymmetrically affected NATO member states, with some allies feeling disarmament pressure more acutely than others, such as the Netherlands and Germany, while others seek to strengthen NATO’s nuclear component in the face of the threat from

1. See, for example, U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018.

2. NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communique”, July 9, 2016, available at: www.nato.int.

3. D. Adamsky, “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy”, *Proliferation Papers*, No. 54, Ifri, November 2015, available at: www.ifri.org.

Moscow, such as Poland.⁴ Therefore, to carefully balance between fears of entrapment and abandonment, the United States and NATO as a whole can tailor assurance in response to Russian belligerence using a combination of “hardware”, to include nuclear weapons and increased investment by NATO members, along with “software” to focus on Alliance cohesion and communicating assurance.⁵

This paper will identify opportunities for the United States to tailor assurance to NATO allies in response to threats from Russia. It will first define tailored assurance and offer a framework for tailoring assurance based on threats and situational factors, audiences, military capabilities, and communications. The paper will then discuss the three situational factors, or pressure points, highlighted above, before identifying the different audiences within NATO that feel these pressures most acutely. This is not to ignore audiences on NATO’s southern rim, namely states in the Mediterranean region experiencing pressure from the refugee crisis and terrorist groups; rather, that is beyond the scope of this paper and deserving of its own attention. Finally, the paper will identify tools for tailoring assurance to these specific threats and audiences, including military capabilities and communication strategies, and recommendations for new NATO priorities in an age of increasing geopolitical and technological uncertainty. The main argument of the paper is that while NATO must continue to emphasize the importance of hardware, including nuclear and conventional capabilities for extended deterrence and assurance purposes, it must increase emphasis on shared values within the Alliance so as to strengthen cohesion at a time when Russia seeks to compound and exploit divisions among members.

4. For example, Polish legendary politician Lech Walesa suggested his country should “borrow” or “lease” nuclear weapons, which would likely cause an outcry among some of NATO’s western members. Lech Walesa, as cited in “Jitters in Poland...”, *American Foreign Policy Council*, September 25, 2014.

5. Jacek Durkalec has also used the terms “hardware” and “software” provided useful recommendations for NATO nuclear policy in particular. See, for example: J. Durkalec, “NATO Must Adapt to Address Russia’s Nuclear Brinkmanship”, *European Leadership Network*, October 30, 2015, available at: www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org.

Can Assurance be tailored?

Jeffrey Knopf defines assurance as, messaging “attempts by one state or set of states to convince another state or set of states that the senders [patron] either will not cause or will not allow the recipients’ [client] security to be harmed.”⁶ In short, assurance is a promise, expressed in both words and deeds, to an ally’s security. Assurance has received increased attention within NATO since Russian military action in Ukraine. The need for tailored assurance was emphasized in the recent U.S. NPR, which stated, “there is no ‘one size fits all’ strategy for assurance... Our assurance strategies are tailored to the differing requirements of the Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions, accounting for the differing security environments, potential adversary capabilities, and varying alliance structures.”⁷ American strategic requirements are particularly unique in that they extend deterrence, to include nuclear weapons, to dozens of allies facing diverse threats across the globe.

But assurance is not exclusive to the United States; rather NATO members all have a responsibility to guarantee one another’s security. This is codified in the North Atlantic Treaty Article 5, whereby “an attack on one is an attack on all.” The Article goes further, however, in stating that:

“Each of them (allies), in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”⁸

An additional expectation, though less frequently cited, is Article 4: “The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.”⁹ Article 4 is equally important as a smaller step

6. J. W. Knopf, “Varieties of Assurance”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2012, p. 376. Knopf offers an assurance typology, including to potential adversaries, which I have not included here so as to focus on assurance within NATO but is also an important consideration in assurance strategies.

7. U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, 2018, p. 35.

8. “North Atlantic Treaty”, Article 5, April 4, 1949.

9. *Ibid.*

towards providing assurance: allies are therefore expected not only to come to one another's aid, but also to provide transparency into their situational security needs so as to develop a shared sense of threat perception and reduce the risk that an ally's actions may be perceived as unduly escalatory.

Within NATO, assurance has historically been a challenge because of this “paradox” of entrapment versus abandonment, whereby allies historically feared Washington would either drag it into an unwanted war or withdraw and leave it vulnerable to external aggression.¹⁰ Assurance for one is not assurance for all, and what looks like assurance to one may look like entrapment to another. In an alliance, parties trust each other not only to contribute to one another's security, but also trust each other *not* to engage in dangerous adventurism that could unnecessarily escalate into a conflict. Therefore, assurance must simultaneously convince allies that a patron will not engage in adventurism and risk their security while also assuaging any fears of de-coupling¹¹, whereby allies' interests disengage and divert over time- or even during a crisis- to the point that a patron can no longer be relied upon to come to the aid of a protégé state. As observed by former British defence minister Denis Healey: “it takes only five percent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians but ninety-five percent credibility to reassure the Europeans.” Assurance also comes with an additional risk for the patron, whereby its commitments may require minimal financial costs, but failure to live up to promises may entail reputational costs and embarrassment over the mid- and long-term.¹²

Given these priorities and challenges, how can assurance be tailored? Tailored deterrence offers a starting framework, as it was emphasized in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and outlined by Elaine Bunn to include tailoring to specific actors and situations, tailored capabilities, and tailored communications.¹³ The Obama Administration continued the principle of tailoring from the Bush Administration's QDR, whereby regional deterrence architectures included a balance of conventional forces, missile defenses, and, according to Brad Roberts, the need to, “Tailor the

10. See, for example, Knopf's discussion (p. 389) of Virginia Foran (ed.), *Security Assurances: Implications for the NPT and Beyond*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1995.

11. Roberts defines de-coupling as, “the risk that the United States might choose not to defend an ally abroad because its own homeland would be vulnerable to nuclear attack.” B. Roberts, “Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia”, *NDIS Visiting Scholar Paper Series*, No. 1, August 9, 2013, p. 5.

12. M. Fuhrmann and T. S. Sechser, “Signaling Alliance Commitments: Hand-Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence”, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58, NO. 4, October 2014, p. 922.

13. M. Elaine Bunn, “Can Deterrence Be Tailored?”, *Strategic Forum*, No. 225, January 2007, available at: www.files.ethz.ch.

nuclear element to specific geographic and historical requirements.”¹⁴ Effective tailoring requires an understanding of each adversary’s strategic calculus, what it values, and what tools- to include military, diplomatic, and communications- might best deter it from escalating and/or potentially using nuclear weapons. This understanding goes deeper than military doctrines or nuclear postures, but must also includes, “detailed knowledge of the society and leadership that we seek to influence. U.S. decision-makers will need a continuing set of comprehensive country or group deterrence assessments, drawing on expertise in and out of government, in order to tailor deterrence to specific actors and specific situations.”¹⁵

Based on the requirements and risks of assurance, along with the factors for tailoring deterrence, we can develop a framework to tailor assurance based on four variables: 1) tailoring to threats and situational factors, 2) tailoring to audiences, or allies, which will feel these threats asymmetrically, 3) tailoring capabilities to respond to the threats and audiences, and 4) tailoring communications. To better understand how the United States, and NATO as a whole, can tailor assurance, we can apply this framework to the current environment.

14. B. Roberts, “Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia”, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

15. M. Elaine Bunn, “Can Deterrence Be Tailored?”, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

Tailoring to Threats and Situational Factors

First, exploring threats and situational factors as they relate to Russia, American and NATO assurance strategies face at least three main pressures: Russian cross-domain coercion that strives to divide the Alliance; domestic pressure to remove American forward-deployed non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs) or act increasingly independent; and uncertainty about the future of U.S. leadership and its commitment to the security of Europe.

Russian Cross-Domain Coercion

Jacek Durkalec describes a Russian strategy defined by both hard and soft factors, relying on the ultimate threat of nuclear weapons while engaging in cyber and information operations: “The credibility and effectiveness of this hybrid warfare campaign was backed up by Russia’s potential to use its full spectrum of military capabilities, including conventional and nuclear forces.”¹⁶ Russian actions in Ukraine and ongoing belligerence across military and non-military domains seek to assert Moscow’s influence over the European security environment and divide NATO. In the nuclear sector, this includes rejection of arms control, such as its alleged violation of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Additionally, there remains confusion about Russia’s nuclear posture often described as “escalate to de-escalate.”¹⁷ Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine states it would only use nuclear weapons first, “in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation involving the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is under threat”¹⁸; however, confusion around this issue creates ambiguity and increase nuclear-related risks. What it also suggests is that Russia is willing to live with a higher level of nuclear risk than many NATO members. Russian sabre-rattling has included more

16. J. Durkalec and M. Kroening, “NATO’s Nuclear Deterrence: Closing Credibility Gaps”, *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, No. 1, 2016, p. 5.

17. While the 2018 NPR uses this description, numerous Russian experts argue it is a mischaracterization. See, for example, O. Oliker and A. Baklistskiy, “The Nuclear Posture Review and Russia ‘De-Escalation’: A Dangerous Solution to a Nonexistent Problem”, *War on the Rocks*, February 20, 2018.

18. See D. Adamsky, “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy”, *op. cit.*

blatant maneuvers, such as intercepting a U.S. reconnaissance plane over the Baltic Sea with a barrel roll in 2016, deployment of intermediate-range nuclear-capable cruise missiles, and intensifying strategic bomber flights.¹⁹

Nuclear issues are not the only source of pressure on NATO coming from Russia, however. Russia has a significant conventional advantage over NATO forces in the region that would allow it to relatively quickly secure any “land-grab”, hold territory, and deter a NATO response. A recent RAND study, for example, concluded that, “Russia would have a substantial time-distance advantage in the initial days and weeks of its ground campaign because of its strong starting position and ability to reinforce with ground and air units from elsewhere in Russia.”²⁰ Russia has 78,000 personnel in combat units in its Western region compared to 31,813 units across the border in the Baltic states; 87 rocket artillery compared to 0 in NATO; and 757 main battle tanks compared to 129 in NATO, 87 of which are American.²¹ As staggering as these statistics are, the RAND study also highlights that Russia has made significant qualitative improvements in its conventional forces since the end of the Cold War. Following events in Georgia and Ukraine, these conventional forces are a growing cause of concern for NATO members.

There is also an everyday assault on NATO in the form of Russian information operations and what is often labelled as “cyber”, although it entails a much broader set of capabilities than afforded by the English definition.²² This includes the use of media outlets, such as *Sputnik News*, cyberattacks, and information operations to reframe the NATO-Russia conflict and portray Russia in a more favourable light.²³ Such operations are part of Russian “strategic deterrence”, which attempts to “influence the military-political leadership and the population of the potential adversary state (or coalition of states)... Strategic-deterrent measures are carried out continuously, both in peacetime and in wartime.”²⁴ This is particularly concerning with regards to NATO as it is intended to target Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic States and elsewhere. What this means

19. See, for example, BBC, “US Accuses Russia of Nuclear Sabre-Rattling, Amid Nato Tensions”, May 3, 2016, available at: www.bbc.com; and Durkalec for a more comprehensive catalogue of Russian nuclear bullying.

20. S. Boston, M. Johnson, N. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Y. K. Crane, “Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe: Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority”, *RAND Research Report*, Rand Corporation, 2018, available at: www.rand.org.

21. See the *Military Balance*, International Institute for Military Studies, 2018.

22. D. Adamsky, “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

23. K. Ven Bruusgaard, “Russian Strategic Deterrence”, *Survival*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2016, pp. 7-26, p. 15.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

for assurance is that, like deterrence, it must incorporate both military and non-military measures.

Domestic Disarmament

While external pressures would suggest an increased reliance on nuclear weapons, internal pressures in many NATO states lean in the opposite direction. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, also referred to as the “ban treaty”) was passed by the United Nations General Assembly on September 20, 2017. The primary goal of the TPNW is to change the narrative about nuclear weapons and to, “codify the stigma” around any weapons that are associated with inhumane consequences, according to Beatrice Fihn, Director of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).²⁵ The TPNW prohibits states from assisting, encouraging, or inducing any of these activities, essentially undermining partnership or alliance with nuclear weapons possessors or any association with policies of nuclear deterrence.²⁶

Supporters of the TPNW see the withdrawal of forward-deployed weapons in Europe as a short-term objective for tangible progress towards disarmament and disproportionately target NATO members such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany to call for the withdrawal of American NSNW from their territories.²⁷ Activists such as Richard Lenane of the *Wildfire* website refer to these as “weasel states.”²⁸ The TPNW intentionally undermines NATO, as noted by the Netherlands in their explanation for voting against the treaty because, “The obligations in Article 1 are incompatible with our commitments as a NATO state.”²⁹ Fihn noted that NATO members were welcome to join the TPNW and would not have to leave NATO, “but it would have policy implications for NATO and its member states, in particular for hosting nuclear weapons on national territories and participating in nuclear planning.”³⁰ In short, if any NATO members join the TPNW, it will fundamentally change, and potentially threaten, the nature of the alliance. Now that the TPNW has been finalized

25. B. Fihn, “The Logic of Banning Nuclear Weapons”, *Survival*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2017, p. 44.

26. “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons”, Article 1, September 20, 2017.

27. ICAN has branches in 19 NATO member states, including the two independent nuclear powers in Europe and the five states that host U.S. nuclear weapons. It does not have branches in Canada, Iceland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Croatia, or Montenegro.

28. Wildfire, “Taking Control: How Non-Nuclear Weapon States Can Take Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations”, Working paper submitted to open-ended working group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, 2016, p. 2.

29. “Explanation of vote of the Netherlands on text of the Nuclear Ban Treaty”, July 7, 2017, p. 2.

30. B. Fihn, “The Logic of Banning Nuclear Weapons”, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

and states are beginning to join, ICAN and other activist groups are increasing pressure on NATO through advocacy campaigns.

Thus far, NATO has been relatively united in its response to the ban treaty, with 89% of the non-nuclear states opposed to the TPNW coming from “umbrella states”, such as NATO members.³¹ The Netherlands was the only member to attend ban negotiations and it explained its vote against the treaty on the grounds of a continued commitment to the Alliance in its current form. Following conclusion of the ban treaty negotiations, France, the United Kingdom, and United States issued a joint statement that, “Working towards the shared goal of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament must be done in a way that promotes international peace and security, and strategic stability, based on the principle of increased and undiminished security for all.”³² Following ban treaty negotiations, a NATO statement implicitly observed that the TPNW shares a common objective with Russia to divide NATO:

Seeking to ban nuclear weapons through a treaty that will not engage any state actually possessing nuclear weapons will not be effective, will not reduce nuclear arsenals, and will neither enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and stability. Indeed it risks doing the opposite by creating divisions and divergences at a time when a unified approach to proliferation and security threats is required more than ever.³³

Therefore, while the United States and other NATO members may wish to ignore the treaty, doing so could have a negative effect on Alliance cohesion by failing to acknowledge members’ domestic pressures and undermine the credibility of American assurance and interest in allies’ security.

American Leadership Vacuum

The final pressure point is more of a vacuum, namely concern among some NATO members that American interest and leadership in Europe is waning. In addressing these fears, however, it is important to disaggregate historical anxiety of American abandonment from the “Trump factor.” The former set of concerns were revived with the election of President Trump

31. J. Knox, “Haves, Have-Nots, and Need-Nots: The Nuclear Ban Exposes Hidden Fault Lines”, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, July 3, 2017.

32. UN, “Joint Press Statement from the Permanent Representatives of the United Nations of the United States, United Kingdom and France Following the Adoption of a Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons”, July 7, 2017.

33. NATO, “North Atlantic Council Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons”, September 20, 2017.

due to numerous statements he made as a candidate that NATO was “obsolete” and suggesting he might attempt to shift the alliance’s focus to counterterrorism. Trump has since walked back from these campaign statements and acknowledged, “I said it was obsolete. It’s no longer obsolete”; however, these mixed messages contribute to concern and confusion about the credibility and longevity of American commitments to NATO.³⁴ An additional concern with regards to Trump is his open admiration for Putin and the ongoing investigation by the U.S. Justice Department into connections between Trump’s campaign and Russia, which has the potential to further undermine American credibility specifically in the face of threats from Russia.

While Trump may take a transactional approach to the Alliance, American policy and attitudes towards NATO have been relatively consistent for the past decade. The U.S. public is largely favourable towards NATO and recent polling demonstrates American support for NATO is on the rise.³⁵ Additionally, while Trump has criticized NATO members for not contributing the requisite 2% of GDP to defense spending, this is not unique to his Administration. For example, in 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned that in the absence of greater contribution by NATO members,

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress- and in the American body politic writ large- to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense.³⁶

This was reinforced more recently in a February 15, 2017 speech in which Secretary of Defense James Mattis stated, “it’s a fair demand that all who benefit from the best defense in the world carry their proportionate share of the necessary cost to defend freedom.”³⁷ American pressure on NATO members to increase their defense spending will not end with Trump, and therefore tailoring assurance must find a way to encourage

34. J. Johnson, “Trump on NATO: ‘I Said It Was Obsolete. It’s no Longer Obsolete’”, *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2017.

35. Pew Research Center, “NATO’s Image Improves on Both Sides of the Atlantic”, May 23, 2017, available at : www.pewglobal.org.

36. As quoted in T. Shanker, “Defense Secretary Warns NATO of ‘Dim’ Future”, *The New York Times*, June 10, 2011, available at: www.nytimes.com; see also H. Brands and E. Edelman, “Why Is the World So Unsettled? The End of the Post-Cold War Era and the Crisis of Global Order”, pp. 10-11.

37. J. Mattis, “Joint Press Statements with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the US Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis”, *NATO Newsroom*, February 15, 2017.

increased investment without suggesting, either explicitly or implicitly, the threat of American abandonment.

Trump is a short-term challenge for Alliance cohesion, but his Presidency aligns with broader historical anxieties about American credibility. Over the long-term, there are deep concerns about the transition from an era of American primacy to an era of uncertainty as to whether or not the “traditional defenders of the post-Cold War system (and the postwar system before that) will be willing and able” to shape the security and future of Europe.³⁸ All three of these pressures weigh on the Alliance’s ability to maintain cohesion and a shared vision for European security.

38. H. Brands and E. Edelman, “Why Is the World So Unsettled? The End of the Post-Cold War Era and the Crisis of Global Order”, *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment*, May 25, 2017, p. 2, available at: <https://csbaonline.org>.

Tailoring to Audiences

For NATO, these threats are felt asymmetrically across the 29 member countries. Like deterrence, tailored assurance requires an understanding of an ally's interests and shaping military capabilities and communications to best demonstrate the United States' commitment to their security. What may be perceived as assurance by one ally may be perceived as antagonistic by another: the very same action that assures Germany could leave Poland feeling less assured and fearing abandonment, but whereas another action could assure Poland but leave Germany feeling anxious about entrapment due to American adventurism.³⁹ Assurance to one ally could undermine assurance for another *within the same alliance* due to the entrapment-abandonment paradox. Given America's unique alliance structure across different regions, an additional challenge is that it must consider how allies in one region will perceive assurances in another – in short, Tokyo is watching what happens in Tallinn.⁴⁰

With respect to NATO-Russia relations, assurance can be tailored to at least three groups. First, Eastern European allies such as the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania are geographically closer to Russia and feel its strategic ambitions more acutely, particularly following Russian military operations in Ukraine. In a 2017 speech at the United Nations, for example, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė cited “energy blackmail”, spreading fake news, and cyberattacks in a long list of Russian “abuses and indifference to international norms.”⁴¹ For these states, a strong and visible military presence will be an essential component in assuring them of American and NATO commitment to their security in the face of these perceived Russian threats.

Second, states in northern and central NATO have a lower threat perception towards Russia than eastern allies and are also feeling the strongest pressure from domestic audiences regarding nuclear disarmament. These states include Norway, the Netherlands, Germany,

39. Poland and Germany are used here merely as demonstrative examples. The challenge applies across numerous allies.

40. The upcoming U.S.-North Korea talks also demonstrate that the reverse is true: Tallinn is watching what happens in Tokyo.

41. Statement by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly, September 19, 2017.

and Italy. Additionally, NATO partners such as Sweden feel acute pressure from ban treaty supporters. The TPNW has highlighted the ongoing challenge for many NATO members in balancing how they prioritize deterrence with domestic pressure to champion nuclear disarmament—again, this is not a new challenge solely due to the TPNW, rather the ban treaty has exacerbated existing tensions and frustrations for some NATO states.⁴² According to a YouGov poll commissioned by ICAN Germany, for example, 71% of the public supports Germany signing the TPNW⁴³ and German public opinion remains vehemently opposed to nuclear weapons and the presence of NSNWs in Germany.⁴⁴ Another example of this is Italy, which hosts the largest number of forward-deployed NSNWs, albeit as a “silent host” largely due to public opinion.⁴⁵ Italy’s nuclear sharing arrangement was initially a source of prestige for Rome and demonstrated its commitment to NATO at the height of the Cold War to counteract domestic Communist political movements.⁴⁶ But more recently, Italian parliamentarians have called on the government to explore joining the TPNW in response to public support.⁴⁷ For these states, an increased military presence could exacerbate fears of entrapment and disregard allies’ domestic pressures. Therefore, tailoring assurance to these states can rely increasingly on communications tools, such as consultations, to acknowledge their concerns and build consensus around nuclear deterrence.

And finally, France and the United Kingdom as independent nuclear actors require relatively less assurance. Like the United States, they play a greater role as assurance patrons rather than clients and emphasize the importance of cohesion within the Alliance. This was particularly evidenced not only in the joint statement in response to the TPNW, but also more recently in response to the nerve agent attack in the United Kingdom by the United States, Germany, and France: “The United Kingdom briefed thoroughly its allies that it was highly likely that Russia

42. S. von Hlatky, “Transatlantic Cooperation, Alliance Politics and Extended Deterrence: European Perceptions of Nuclear Weapons”, *European Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2014, p. 8.

43. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, “71% of Germans Favour the Ban Treaty”, September 17, 2017, available at: www.icanw.org.

44. T. Volpe and U. Kühn, “Germany’s Nuclear Education: Why a Few Elites Are Testing a Taboo”, *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2017, pp. 7-27.

45. M. Fitzpatrick, “How Europeans View Tactical Nuclear Weapons on their Continent”, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 67, No. 2, 2011, pp. 57-65.

46. S. Frühling and A. O’Neil, “Nuclear Weapons, the United States and Alliance in Europe and Asia: Toward an Institutional Perspective”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2016, p. 8.

47. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, “Italian Parliament to Instructs Italy to Explore Possibility of Joining Nuclear Ban Treaty”, September 20, 2017, available at: www.icanw.org.

was responsible for the attack. We share the UK assessment that there is no plausible alternative explanation, and note that Russia's failure to address the legitimate request by the UK government further underlines its responsibility."⁴⁸

Based on situational factors and various audiences, therefore, America faces a complex set of priorities for tailoring assurance, to be addressed by policymakers in the Department of Defense, National Security Council, and State Department, along with NATO's own decision-making bodies, such as the Defence Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group. A new assurance strategy must address conventional and nuclear threats to allies in Eastern Europe, but without exacerbating fears of entrapment among allies such as Germany. It must acknowledge domestic pressure in northern Europe to make progress towards nuclear disarmament, but without weakening its nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis Russia. It must strengthen credibility despite a strong anti-Trump sentiment abroad and mixed messages from the White House. It must continue to emphasize burden-sharing, without giving the impression America will abandon allies if they fail to contribute more to their own defense spending. And above all, it must strengthen NATO's overall cohesion amidst threats that seek to undermine the Alliance as a whole. Doing so will require a suite of capabilities, including hardware, such as forward-deployed nuclear weapons and conventional forces, along with software, such as consultations with allies and an overall effort to renew commitment to "a Europe whole and free".

48. J. Watts, "UK, France, Germany and US Release Joint Statement Blaming Russia for Nerve Agent Attack", *The Independent*, March 15, 2018, available at: www.independent.co.

Hardware-Tailoring Capabilities to Demonstrate Resolve

One set of tools for tailoring assurance includes military capabilities in response to Russian cross-domain threats, including nuclear bullying. Tailored *deterrence* included direct and enabling tools that can also be applied to assurance. Direct tools include force projection, active and passive defenses, and global strike. Enabling tools facilitate these military measures and send signals in their own right, such as global situational awareness, command and control, and interoperability.⁴⁹ Based on the threats and audiences discussed above, at least three tools are particularly important for tailoring assurance- forward-deployed nuclear weapons, conventional capabilities, and bilateral military agreements.

Forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe play both a strategic and symbolic role. Strategically, they increase the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrence by providing more flexible and diverse options, as called for in both the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy and the 2018 NPR. They offer a flexible option with quick reaction time and can be recalled unlike nuclear weapons delivered by submarine-launched or intercontinental ballistic missiles.⁵⁰ American NSNWs in Europe provide a vector for America to influence the Alliance, and their removal could, on the contrary, limit this ability.⁵¹ They also tie allies to the Alliance's nuclear function by sharing the financial costs, risks, and responsibilities associated with nuclear weapons.⁵²

More importantly for the purposes of assurance, however, the weapons also play a crucial symbolic role of American commitment to European allies and NATO's nuclear status for "As long as nuclear weapons

49. M. Elaine Bunn, "Can Deterrence Be Tailored?", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

50. D. J. Trachtenberg, "US Extended Deterrence: How Much Strategic Force Is Too Little?", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2012, p. 79.

51. S. Frühling and A. O'Neil, "Nuclear Weapons, the United States and Alliance in Europe and Asia: Toward an Institutional Perspective", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

52. D. Yost, "The US Debate on NATO Nuclear Deterrence", *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 6, 2011, pp. 1410-1411.

exist”, per the Warsaw Communiqué.⁵³ This includes sharing highly valued technology and decision-making among allies and serve a unifying function.⁵⁴ Nuclear weapons are particularly important for responding to Russian nuclear bullying, and the NPR emphasized the need to convince Russia that any attempts to divide the Alliance or use nuclear weapons for escalation control would be unsuccessful. Indeed, sowing uncertainty into Russia’s confidence in its own offensive/coercive capabilities and escalation control is an important extended deterrent benefit and tool of assurance.⁵⁵

But while NSNWs continue to provide an assurance and deterrence function for many NATO members, particularly in the east, they are a growing source of discontent among others due to domestic pressures. Russia has picked up on this divide, along with the TPNW activist movement, and sees it as a vulnerability to be exploited.⁵⁶ An additional criticism of NSNWs, albeit from a different perspective, is that they are paltry in the face of improving Russian anti-air and area-denial capabilities and its own NSNWs, estimated at 2000. The variance of these criticisms is but one manifestation of the different views and threat perceptions within NATO. Therefore, any use of forward-deployed nuclear weapons for assurance purposes may need to be balanced by assurances that they will not lead to escalation or entrapment and do not undermine NATO’s commitment to Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Numerous options have been suggested for resolving this debate over NSNWs, one of which is to increase NATO’s conventional forces as another means of assurance. For example, the 2013 U.S. Nuclear Employment Strategy suggested before the Ukraine crisis a growing role for conventional weapons, whereby:

Although nuclear weapons have proven to be a key component of U.S. assurances to Allies and partners, the United States has relied increasingly on non-nuclear elements to strengthen regional security architectures, including a forward U.S. conventional presence and effective theatre ballistic missile defenses. As the role of nuclear weapons is reduced in U.S.

53. NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué”, *op. cit.*

54. J. Durkalec and M. Kroenig, “NATO’s Nuclear Deterrence: Closing Credibility Gaps”, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

55. P. Bernstein, D. Ball and B. Roberts, “Putin’s Russia and U.S. Defense Policy – Workshop Report”, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, October 13, 2015, pp. 6-7.

56. This is but one example of Moscow’s opportunist strategy, as described in E. Colby and J. Solomon, “Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe”, *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 6, 2015.

national security strategy, these non-nuclear elements will take on a greater share of the deterrence burden.⁵⁷

In response to rising threats since 2014, the United States has responded with conventional military and political measures in collaboration with allies, including the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and a strong focus on deterrence at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. The VJTF is intended to provide a multinational, brigade-size “spearhead force” to the NATO Response Force (NRF) and includes approximately 5,000 multinational troops. In its 2018 budget, the Department of Defense increased funding to the ERI by \$1.4 billion to total \$4.8 billion, which was hailed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as a “strong sign of U.S. continued commitment to NATO and to European security.”⁵⁸ Additionally, following the 2016 Warsaw Summit NATO launched the enhanced Forward Presence to include battalions in the Baltic States and Poland, with contributions from Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and United States, which was described as, “the biggest reinforcement of Alliance collective defence in a generation.”⁵⁹ Other suggestions for increasing conventional presence include permanent stationing of forces in Eastern Europe or additional deployments to compensate for Russia’s conventional advantage, as discussed above.

As a final hardware option, NATO allies can take on great responsibility either unilaterally or bilaterally with the United States. There is already evidence of these steps and sentiments, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s calls for Europe to “take our fate into our own hands”, and EU activities through the Common Security and Defence Policy, which includes six ongoing military operations and ten ongoing civilian operations.⁶⁰ As another example, Poland has become increasingly involved in air policing missions, established a permanent U.S. aviation base at Lask, and formed a Territorial Defence Force.⁶¹ The Alliance as a whole also seems to be responding to pressure for more burden sharing: in May 2017 NATO members agreed to develop national plans for “cash, capabilities, and contributions” to meet their defence spending

57. U.S Department of Defense, *U.S Nuclear Employment Strategy*, 2016, p. 9.

58. As quoted in D. M. Herszenhorn, “NATO Cheers Trump’s Military Budget”, *Politico Europe*, May 24, 2017, available at: www.politico.eu.

59. NATO, “Boasting NATO’s Presence in the East and Southeast”, March 2, 2018, available at: www.nato.int.

60. “The EU Strengthens Cooperation on Security and Defence”, *European Union External Action*, March 1, 2018, available at: <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

61. L. Simon, “Understanding US Retrenchment in Europe”, *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2015, p. 163.

commitments⁶², which remains a priority on the agenda for regular NATO meetings. One risk of this option, however, is that it may give the impression to external actors, including Russia and TPNW supporters, that the Alliance is wavering in its cohesion and/or commitment to nuclear weapons.

The use of hardware to tailor assurance presents the risk of exacerbating existing domestic pressure in some NATO members, increasing concerns of entrapment, and further dividing the Alliance. Nonetheless, these steps are crucial for the deterrence of Russian threats and assurance of a large percentage of NATO allies, and have been kept relatively limited. Therefore, these hardware options must be carefully tailored to threats and audiences, but must also be balanced with software options, such as consultations to assure allies that the United States will not engage in nuclear adventurism and is working to reduce nuclear risks, unlike Russia.

62. "NATO Leaders Agree to Do More to Fight Terrorism and Ensure Fairer Burden Sharing", *NATO Press Release*, May 17, 2017.

Software-Tailoring Communications to Avoid Decoupling

While these hardware options may respond to Russian conventional and nuclear threats, ultimately Russia's goal is to divide the alliance and strengthen its "psychological position", particularly during a crisis.⁶³ Therefore, tailoring both assurance and deterrence requires responding in kind, with software options that address these psychological threats and Russian messaging. Tools for doing so include consultations, which will be particularly important to balance the use of hardware, and a publicly declared unity of purpose across all NATO members based on shared values and mutual interests.

Turning first to consultations, based on his experience in the Obama Administration's Department of Defense, Roberts highlighted specific tools of extended deterrence and assurance in Japan and South Korea, to include declaratory policy, missile defense, and consultations.⁶⁴ In these cases, one challenge was not only tailoring assurance across a spectrum of actors, but also across contingencies, whereby deterrence must account for high-end conflicts, escalating regional crises, and at the lower end of the escalation ladder.⁶⁵ As evidenced by Roberts' experiences, consultations with allies and personal engagement by political leaders were an important step in crafting nuclear policy, particularly on issues of declaratory policy and addressing disarmament commitments.⁶⁶

Assurance also flows from consultations. Allies deserve a seat at the table and full participation when the United States is making decisions potentially affecting their vital interests. When the United States acts

63. J. Durkalec and M. Kroening, "NATO's Nuclear Deterrence: Closing Credibility Gaps", *op. cit.*, p. 17.

64. B. Roberts, *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015.

65. B. Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia", *op. cit.*

66. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

unilaterally in making and implementing extended deterrence policies, assurance is weakened.⁶⁷

To a large extent, consultations are a prime example of tailored assurance within NATO wherein there is variation in the scope and frequency of consultations across the allies and sharing of intelligence.⁶⁸

Consultations are typically focused on military issues, but in the context of tailoring assurance they can be expanded upon to include opportunities to build personal relationships through face-to-face interaction and to improve understanding of allies' unique domestic pressures. Indeed, consultations are as much political as they are military activities. This is particularly important for states that face rising pressure to disarm – ignoring these pressures would suggest U.S. disinterest and potentially weaken assurance. But it is also important for states feeling the greatest pressure from Russia's information operations. Consultations come in the form not only of government talks, but also Track 2 dialogues and engagement by non-governmental experts to better understand the unique interests, histories, threat perceptions, and the domestic politics of America's closest allies. Indeed, it often seems academics and experts have a deeper understanding of what happens in Moscow and Beijing than in Madrid and Berlin. These opportunities for dialogue offer flexibility in participants and format, but more importantly strengthen mutual understanding and trust between the United States and its allies, which are the foundations not only of the Alliance but also of America's assurance strategy.

Senior-level engagement, often demonstrated through public speeches, is another example of software assurance. As an example of rhetoric being used as a tool for tailored assurance, in 1988 Reagan gave a speech at NATO following the conclusion of the 1987 INF Treaty, which had the potential to increase anxiety among NATO members that may have seen it as conciliatory towards Russia. He stated not only that it was military pressure that brought about the agreement, but also, "Our responsibility is to the future. Our first priority is to maintain a strong and healthy partnership between North America and Europe, for this is the foundation on which the cause of freedom so crucially depends."

Russia's ultimate goal is to convince NATO members that the Alliance is no longer in its interests. This could result in reduced defence spending

67. B. Roberts, *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century*, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

68. S. Frühling and A. O'Neil, "Nuclear Weapons, the United States and Alliance in Europe and Asia: Toward an Institutional Perspective", *op. cit.*, p. 6.

and contribution to missions, including exercises; or it may be a more subtle doubt that is exacerbated during a crisis. Tailoring to this threat, therefore, may not be best achieved solely through additional troop deployments or bilateral consultations, but rather through a restated commitment to NATO itself. Decades have shown that NATO's message of democracy, sovereign borders, and collective security is overwhelmingly preferable to that of Russia. Moscow's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, support for the Assad regime, flagrant disregard for international norms, and use of weapons such as nerve agents, as acknowledged by key NATO members, demonstrate where its interests lie: undermining the rule of law and international norms and the European security architecture. Ideally, these actions would not drive NATO members apart, but rather would drive them away from Russia and lead to Alliance cohesion rather than chasms.

Conclusion: New NATO Principles

Addressing the paradox of entrapment and abandonment requires a combination of the hardware and software options offered here. For example, a stated commitment to maintain forward-deployed nuclear weapons in NATO could be balanced with bilateral consultation with those allies feeling domestic pressure to disarm or a restated commitment to arms control and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. Another example would be if allies take on a more independent role, which could be perceived as undermining NATO cohesion, and would be balanced with a strong NATO Summit Communiqué restating the allies' shared values, commitment to the Alliance as a whole, and principles of democracy and sovereign borders. To be sure, identifying and implementing these balances will present additional challenges at the tactical, bureaucratic, bilateral, and national levels.

The 2014 NATO summit focused on assurance, whereas the 2016 Warsaw summit explicitly shifted focus to deterrence although many measures serve both deterrence and assurance purposes.⁶⁹ The next NATO summit needs to focus on both deterrence and assurance – in short, to use an American expression, NATO needs to “walk and chew gum at the same time” by tailoring capabilities and communications to the increasingly complex geopolitical environment. With that in mind, the policy options offered here are an attempt to both tailor and to coordinate assurance tools:

- NATO should commit to remaining a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist and restate its negative security assurances from the Warsaw Communiqué. Others have suggested NATO should be more transparent about its nuclear policies⁷⁰; however, this may threaten to undermine cohesion with allies such as Germany and therefore should be done on a private basis through consultations.

69. For a useful discussion on the shift from assurance to deterrence, see D. Santoro and B. Glosserman, “Healey Is Wrong: It’s Deterrence, Stupid”, *War on the Rocks*, October 14, 2016.

70. J. Durkalec, “Nuclear-Backed ‘Little Green Men’: Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis”, *The Polish Institute for International Affairs*, July 2015.

- NATO should reiterate its statement in response to the TPNW, but it should also restate its commitment to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and commitment to the NPT. One important measure would be to explain why current conditions are not conducive to further nuclear reductions and outline what would be the necessary conditions for further nuclear disarmament. This might include: 1) universality of the NPT; 2) advances in nuclear disarmament verification; 3) security conditions under which states would respect international borders and do not present existential threats to states; and 4) universal support and adherence to norms of non-use and non-proliferation across all WMDs, starting with chemical weapons in light of the recent Salisbury attack and ongoing chemical weapons use in Syria.
- NATO should adopt language stating that its nuclear weapons are not for offensive purposes nor are they intended to escalate a conflict, similar to recommendations offered during the height of the Cold War.⁷¹
- NATO members should identify opportunities for making independent contributions to the Alliance, similar to the “gift basket” model used in the Nuclear Security Summits. This may include troop deployments, air patrolling, or participation in initiatives to tackle cyber threats. Such measures would allow states to tailor their own deterrence and assurances, but would also contribute towards assuring the United States about other members’ commitment to NATO.
- NATO should affirm the importance of additional U.S.-Russia arms control, risk reduction, and crisis communication tools. Unless the Alliance as a whole is prepared to acknowledge Russian violation of the INF Treaty, this should not be publicly addressed; rather, allies should pressure Russia on a bilateral basis to return to compliance with the INF Treaty and cease nuclear sabre-rattling in Europe.
- The United States should engage in extensive consultations, as occurred during the Obama Administration, to explain the NPR, demonstrate commitment to allies, understand and acknowledge their concerns, and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- The United States should actively explore risk reduction and crisis communication measures with Russia, starting with clarification

71. See, for example, C. Bertram, “The Implications of Theater Nuclear Weapons in Europe”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Winter 1981, pp. 305-326.

into both sides' nuclear doctrines as a source of misperception. This could occur in the ongoing strategic stability dialogues or as part of the NPT "P5 process" so as to demonstrate commitment to the NPT while also tying further reductions to a change in security conditions and reciprocity.

- The NATO Summit Communiqué should outline the original values of NATO and why these remain valid and crucial in the 21st century. This includes democracy, rule of law, observation of norms and treaties, collective security, and respect for sovereign borders and transitions of power. These principles present a clear juxtaposition to Russian activities and interests to see Europe divided.

These recommendations and indeed this entire analysis come with two important caveats. First, these trends are not new and questions about American credibility did not begin with Trump, nor are they likely to end with his presidency. Indeed, the forces that elected Trump will remain present in the American public electorate and mixed messages about American alliances may therefore endure. To balance the Trump effect in the short-term, Secretary Mattis has proven to be effective at delivering America's assurance message to allies and coordinating a consistent message across Washington, aside from the President's Twitter account.

Second, the United States has been relatively successful at assurance throughout history. Indeed, no U.S. ally has pursued an independent nuclear deterrent since the French. NATO remains a strong and functional Alliance despite a pendulum swing across both new and familiar threats. Russia has not openly attacked a NATO member. Assurance has not been easy, however. As highlighted in the framework for tailoring deterrence, assurance would be particularly difficult in the event of a crisis or what Bunn referred to as the "steady state and surge dichotomy."⁷² Assurance in crises is an evolving priority. But while the tools may change, the underlying principle of assurance remains strong and has served international security well.

And finally, the list of tools offered here is not exhaustive. Indeed, new technologies and new threats will require flexibility and resilience on the part of NATO and the United States. Above all, however, the alliance would benefit from proclaiming its purpose and refusing to compromise on its founding principles.

72. M. Elaine Bunn, "Can Deterrence Be Tailored?", *op. cit.*, p. 5.



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