THE TRINITY SITE PAPERS

Credibility of U.S. Deterrence in the Baltic States After Crimea's Annexation

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When the Baltic states reasserted their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, each sought rapid incorporation into international institutions that would provide economic and security stability. All three countries were relatively small, incapable of forming militaries that could match Russia without some equalizing factor such as developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. Instead, all three Baltic states voluntarily acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1991 (Lithuania) and 1992 (Estonia and Latvia).[1]

Aligning with Europe, the Baltic states undertook many reforms to meet North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) standards, joining NATO in 2004.[2] The Baltic states now had a measure of security from Russian hostility to include falling under the "nuclear umbrella" of the United States. The United States provides extended deterrence to NATO countries via nuclear weapon sharing per NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept and the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review.[3] This is in support of the U.S.-backed international norms of nonproliferation espoused by NATO and the NPT.

When Ukraine broke from the Soviet Union, it still had Soviet nuclear weapons within its borders. While not extended deterrence, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances did obligate Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (U.K.) to respect Ukrainian independence and sovereignty if Ukraine gave up its former Soviet nuclear weapons and joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.[4] Ukraine was also considering becoming a NATO member when, in 2014, Russia annexed Crimea.[5] Russia's resurgence naturally led NATO allies and Budapest Memo signatories to closely weigh the commitment of the United States to the region in response. Decreasing U.S. credibility, especially in the Baltic states, could invite increased Russian aggressiveness in the region and potential proliferation activities by allies. The Baltic states still highly value U.S. extended deterrence, such as in 2016 when Estonian Defense Minister Hannes Hanso specifically stated NATO's nuclear deterrent was a vital part of Estonia's defense and deterrence posture.[6]

Although historically within the Russian sphere of influence, after gaining independence, the Ukrainian government began moving closer to Europe, to include overtures about joining the European Union (E.U.) and NATO.[7] The continual slowdown of these actions by the President Viktor Yanukovych led to civil unrest within Ukraine, finally resulting in his removal by the Ukrainian Parliament in February 2014. Russia used this opportunity to clandestinely seize control of the Crimea Supreme Council and install a pro-Russian government in March 2014.[8] The Crimea Supreme Council then voted to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. Russia declared the Crimea annexation complete in July 2015.[9]

The 1994 Budapest Memo obligated Russia, the United States and the U.K. to respect Ukrainian independence and sovereignty if Ukraine gave up its former Soviet nuclear weapons and joined the NPT. Ukraine has continued to appeal internationally for action against Russia for violating the Budapest Memorandum, but Russia denies the violation, claiming it was Crimea's decision to secede from Ukraine.[10] While the Budapest Memo did not require a response from the United States, international perception is that Russia did violate the Memo and the United States, as a signatory, should take action to counter Russia's actions or at least prevent Russia from taking similar action again.[11] The U.S. response to Russia's annexation of Crimea has implications to how NATO allies view U.S. commitment in the region, including extended deterrence via nuclear weapon sharing. As Russia has demonstrated a desire and willingness to reassert control over its former Soviet republics, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are potential future targets for Russian expansion. As protégés of the United States, they are certainly measuring their patron's response to assess the capability and credibility of U.S. deterrence via NATO.

This paper will examine the question, "To what extent did the U.S. response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 affect the credibility of U.S. deterrence via NATO to the Baltic states?" Russia's actions in 2014 raised the apparent threat level to the Baltic states and demanded additional deterrence to match it, either in the form of internal Baltic state capability or

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reassurance via the U.S. response. The United States responded via a whole-of-government approach, of which extended deterrence was just one aspects of the military response. This included a broad spectrum of diplomatic, economic, and conventional military actions in addition to extended deterrence to demonstrate an increased level of commitment. Each of these actions will be considered, including aspects of both conventional and nuclear actions of the military instrument of power. While internal Baltic-state capability increases are expected following Russia's actions, this paper will examine Baltic actions to signal in terms of judgment of U.S. commitment, such as a firmer belief or abandonment fears. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for the United States to maintain extended deterrence credibility through NATO for the Baltic states.

— Reassurance and Abandonment Theory —

In order to be reassured, a protégé must believe that the combined deterrent provided internally by the protégé and extended by the patron matches the perceived threat by an attacker (*Figure 1*). From the protégé's perspective, an attacker has some perceived threat level, which this paper describes as the product of the attacker's perceived capability and the perceived willingness to use it. Actions on the part of the attacker to increase or decrease their capability or actions demonstrating willingness to use or refrain from using that capability will change the protégé's perceived threat level from the attacker (*red bar*). The protégé knows its own organic capability and intrinsically trusts it will use those capabilities, perhaps to their fullest extent, in self-defense. With this knowledge, the protégé can estimate its own internal deterrent level (*green bar*) and determine with relative confidence how large of a gap exists between its own deterrent level and the perceived threat level.

The capabilities of the patron may be less known to the protégé, but it likely has sufficient capability to match or exceed the capabilities of the attacker. However, the protégé does not know if the patron is willing to devote none, some, or its full capability in defense of the protégé. Thus, the "amount" of deterrent the patron is perceived to provide to the protégé is highly dependent on the credibility perceptions of the patron by the protégé (*blue bar*). Similar to assessing the attacker, the protégé

will assess the credibility of the patron by the actions it takes, which will likely be whole-of-government responses, not strictly military, to attacker actions.

Many scholars have written extensively about the credibility, trust, and assurance relationship between protégé and patron states. Brad Roberts notes that extended deterrence actually has two audiences, the attacker posing the threat and the protégé under threat, and that the credibility difference required to assure the protégé is much higher than the credibility needed to deter the attacker. The rationale is that the protégé is less certain that the patron would be willing to threaten nuclear weapon use if retaliation from the attacker can be reasonably expected. The patron must more credibly demonstrate to the protégé that it is willing to put at risk one or more of the patron's cities in exchange for defense of its ally.[13] Dr. Rupal Mehta states that credibility is often highly difficult for the patron to demonstrate, as the protégé has no practical means of forcing the patron to honor its extended deterrence commitments.[14] Thus, the attacker views the patron's "blue bar" as larger than the protégé does, because of the differences in the way the two perceive the patron's credibility. The patron must therefore ensure that the protégé perceives its credibility is enough to meet the perceived threat level and be assured, more so than the attacker's perception of the patron's credibility to be deterred.

Any gap between the protégé-perceived threat from an attacker and the combined deterrent provided internally by the protégé and perceived by the protégé to be extended from the patron will be indicated by actions on the part of the protégé to seek other sources to close the gap. Such actions could be the protégé seeking new agreements with other countries to supplement patron-provided capability and credibility, placating the attacker to reduce the perceived threat level, seeking reassurances from the patron of its credibility, or increasing its internal capabilities.

In describing the relationship between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, Victor Cha stated five policy responses a protégé may take if it fears the patron does not have sufficient credibility, which he terms 'abandonment:'

1. Building up internal capabilities
2. Seeking out new alliances or reinforcing existing alternate ones
3. Bolstering its commitment to the alliance in order to get the ally to reciprocate
4. Appeasing the adversary
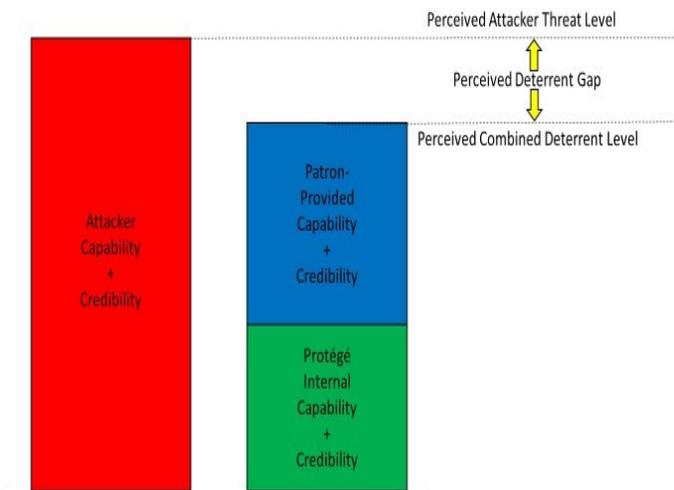5. Bluffing abandonment in order to elicit greater support from the ally.[15]

Depending on the policy of the patron, actions by the protégé to close the deterrent gap may be encouraged or discouraged by the patron. For example, if a patron's policy is to retain influence or hegemony over the protégé, the protégé seeking agreements with the patron's rivals would signal a capability or credibility gap that the patron's policy would drive them to close. Conversely, the protégé seeking agreements with the patron's allies might be acceptable as it relieves the burden placed on the patron. Likewise, if the patron's policy or interests have changed, the protégé seeking any alternative arrangements may be acceptable to the patron. For internal capabilities, the patron's policy could be that it is desirable for the protégé to develop internal capabilities to relieve the patron's responsibility, or the patron could desire that the protégé remain weak or never built certain capabilities (non-proliferation).

Perceived Attacker Threat Level

Perceived Deterrent Gap

Perceived Combined Deterrent Level

Attacker
Capability
+
Credibility

Patron-
Provided
Capability
+
Credibility

Protégé
Internal
Capability
+
Credibility

Figure 1: Components of Extended Deterrence[12]

However, these differences may create some confusion or uncertainty in the protégé about the strength of the patron's credibility. The protégé's understanding of the patron's policy and unique relationship between the patron and protégé based upon patron policy must exist for credibility. If not, signs of abandonment such as those described by Cha indicate that the protégé believes the patron's actions are falling short of or inconsistent with the patron's policies.[16]

Since the Baltic states are part of the multinational NATO alliance, their actions and reactions to the United States and NATO response must be considered as to whether they indicate abandonment fears. NATO encourages member states to provide for their own self-defense by establishing the two-percent gross domestic product (GDP) guideline. For the past 20 years, the United States policy has been to press NATO allies to increase spending to meet the NATO guideline.[17] The Baltic states increasing conventional military capability would be in accordance with U.S. and NATO policy, as it would decrease the burden on other NATO countries for collective defense. For example, if a Baltic state develops a capable air force, the NATO Baltic air policing mission may no longer be needed. While Cha argues that increasing internal capabilities could signal abandonment fears, in the context of NATO, a country would have to greatly increase spending well beyond the two-percent guideline to clearly signal abandonment. For the specific case of nuclear weapons, any Baltic state seeking to acquire or develop nuclear weapons would also clearly signal abandonment fears.

For the protégé response of seeking new alliances or reinforcing alternate ones, the multinational nature of NATO again complicates Cha's methodology. Seeking additional bilateral or multilateral security agreements among NATO members serves to bind NATO more tightly together, so the United States and NATO do not discourage intra-NATO agreements for cooperative security. For example, after the 2007 cyberattack by Russia, Estonia established the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn,[18] which is currently sponsored by 22 of the 29 NATO members and subsequently published two manuals promulgating international cyberoperations norms.[19] The Latvian Ministry of Defense began the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in 2014, with original sponsorship from seven NATO members,[20] now 12.[21] Both U.S. and NATO policy encouraged these actions, as they enhanced the collective security of the NATO alliance. Thus, while Cha argues that seeking new or alternate alliances outside of the existing bilateral alliance can signal abandonment, seeking agreements within or among NATO members does not necessarily signal abandonment. In this case, seeking an alternate NATO-like or bilateral alliance with non-NATO countries such as Russia or China would signal a NATO credibility gap. Additionally, a NATO country seeking a nuclear sharing program with another NATO nuclear weapons state (U.K. or France) would signal abandonment fears of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence credibility.

For Cha's policy response of bolstering commitment to the alliance in hopes that the patron will reciprocate, this again becomes challenging in the case of NATO as motive is difficult to establish. NATO cooperative security requires that each member country contribute to the alliance as it is able. Similar to the response of building up internal capabilities, a NATO member fearing abandonment would have to greatly or suddenly increase its contribution to defense to such a level as to seem unreasonable or with questionable motive. Such a contribution would likely also be accompanied by increased public state-

ments seeking reassurance from NATO. When Russia annexed Crimea, it is reasonable to assume NATO would respond to the perceived threat of increased Russian aggression. One must therefore look closely at the Baltic states' actions towards NATO following 2014, which signaled a greatly increased or unreasonable commitment and whether this had the motive of seeking reciprocity.

Applying Cha's abandonment fear policy response of appeasing the adversary is equally applicable to a bilateral or multilateral alliance. If the Baltic states make pro-Russian public statements or acquiesce to Russian threats or aggression, this would be a clear signal of existence of a NATO credibility gap. Likewise, any Baltic state could bluff abandonment of NATO to elicit a greater response or support from NATO. Cha notes that both of these policy responses are risky to the protégé, as appeasement could be a seen as a sign of weakness to a revisionist adversary and bluffing abandonment could result in mutual abandonment.[22] If the Baltic states appease Russia, it could signal that they are weak and could be easily taken over. Moreover, NATO could actually abandon the Baltic states if they bluff that they want to leave. Due to their risk, any indication of these actions by the Baltic states would be clear signs of abandonment fears.

In assessing the credibility gap related to extended deterrence, tactical nuclear weapons can be considered a conventional substitute or fallback de-escalatory capability in Europe, making separation of conventional and nuclear credibility and associated gaps. Additionally, the U.S., NATO, and Baltic state actions do not take actions and assess credibility strictly in the nuclear realm, or even just the military realm, but respond with all instruments of power using a whole-of-government approach. Both the United States and European Union, which is almost a direct overlay of NATO countries, can flex significant economic muscle, each with GDPs several times the size of Russia's GDP. Since nuclear weapon use is seen as a last-resort response, the Baltic states are likely to assess the credibility of the United States and NATO credibility by actions taken by the whole of government, with observed conventional military response having the greatest impact on perceived extended deterrence credibility. The only clear tripwires of U.S. extended deterrence failure are evidence of the Baltic states seeking alternate nuclear weapon sharing agreements (a new patron) or engaging in proliferation activities such as development, pursuit, or acquisition of nuclear weapons.

— Methodology —

This paper assumes that the internal deterrent level provided by any of the Baltic states conventionally was, is, and will remain insufficient to match the perceived conventional threat level of Russia. In addition, the internal nuclear deterrent level of the Baltic states was and is nonexistent. Additionally, this paper assumes the protégé intrinsically knows and trusts its own capabilities in order to bracket the unknown variable as patron credibility. Likewise, the internal capabilities of the United States, both conventional and nuclear, if used fully are assumed to have been able, are able to, and will remain able to match the threat from Russia. Thus, the remaining variable is how much the protégé trusts the patron's credibility. Any protégé-perceived deterrent gap is then due a perceived American credibility gap, further tempered by the dampening effect of the multinational NATO structure.
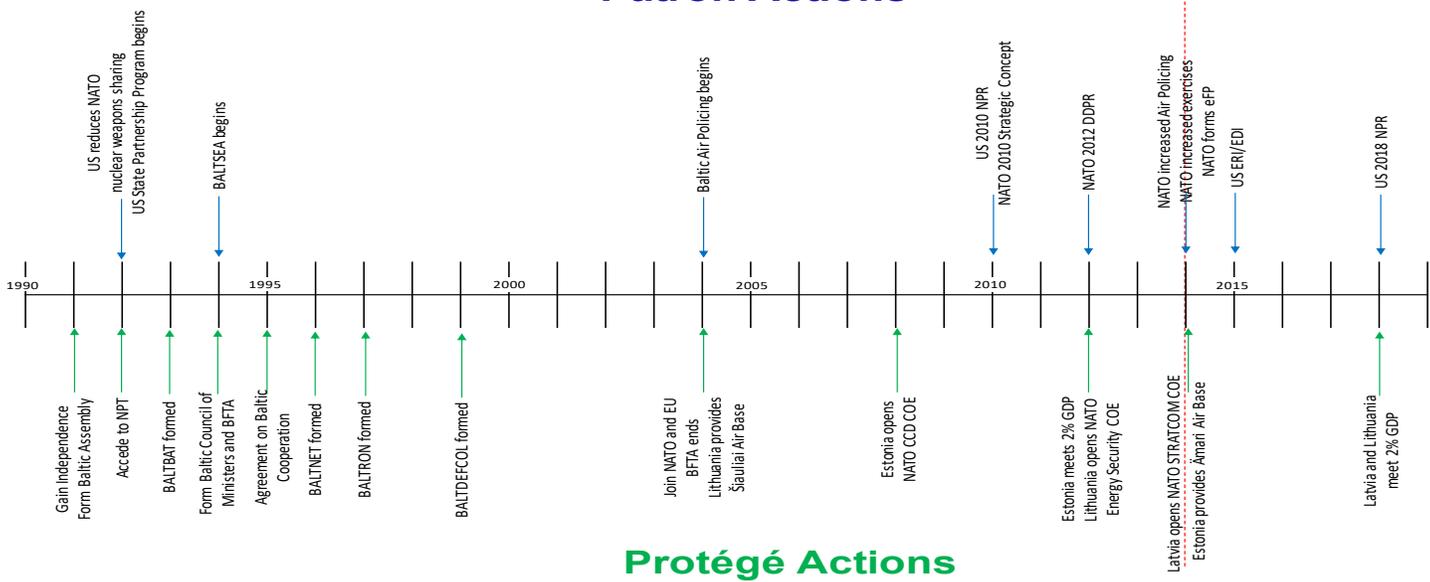
Patron Actions

Patron Actions (above timeline):
- US reduces NATO nuclear weapons sharing
- US State Partnership Program begins
- BALTSEA begins
- Baltic Air Policing begins
- US 2010 NPR
- NATO 2010 Strategic Concept
- NATO 2012 DDPR
- NATO increased Air Policing
- NATO increased exercises
- NATO forms eFP
- US ERI/EDI
- US 2018 NPR

Timeline years: 1990 — 1995 — 2000 — 2005 — 2010 — 2015

Protégé Actions (below timeline):
- Gain Independence
- Form Baltic Assembly
- Accede to NPT
- BALTBAT formed
- Form Baltic Council of Ministers and BFTA
- Agreement on Baltic Cooperation
- BALTNET formed
- BALTRON formed
- BALTDEFCOL formed
- Join NATO and EU
- BFTA ends
- Lithuania provides Šiauliai Air Base
- Estonia opens NATO CCD COE
- Estonia meets 2% GDP
- Lithuania opens NATO Energy Security COE
- Latvia opens NATO STRATCOM COE
- Estonia provides Ämari Air Base
- Latvia and Lithuania meet 2% GDP

Protégé Actions

Figure 2: Timeline of Patron and Protégé actions

For the purposes of creating a baseline for comparison, this paper assumes that no credibility or capability gap, either conventional or nuclear, existed between the United States via NATO and the Baltic states prior to Russia's actions in 2014, or if a gap did exist, that it was constant. Ostensibly, NATO nuclear sharing provided sufficient extended deterrence – capability and credibility (will) – to deter Russia and provide sufficient reassurance to the Baltic states that they joined in 2004. Alternatively, even during their first decade of NATO membership, the Baltic states "understandably clamoured for operational planning and resources to be directed towards deterrence,"[23] which could indicate preexistence of a gap intentionally unclosed due to NATO's desire not to provoke Russia. NATO nuclear posture remained unchanged between 1991 and 2014, and even the 2010 and 2012 NATO policy largely kept the status quo.[24] Regardless of whether a gap existed, the period from 2010 to 2014 can be used as a baseline constant capability and credibility level. Russia's actions in March 2014 provided a "shock" to the system and is assumed to have increased the perceived threat level of the attacker, requiring a corresponding response from either or both the patron and protégés to close the created or greatly increased deterrence gap.

To determine the effect of the United States response in Europe to its credibility, this study will compare patron and protégé actions prior to and after the event. The four years prior to the shock (2010-2014) are the baseline period to be compared to the four years following the event (2014-2018). Data from 2014 itself requires some interpretation as the shock event occurred midway through both the calendar and fiscal years.

It is very difficult to measure generalized extended deterrence, as past inaction by itself of the potential attacker cannot be used as a measure of future success. Instead, this study will focus on actions taken by the United States via NATO (patron) and Baltic states (protégés) after the shock event to close the gap. Indicators of the patron providing insufficient perceived deterrence should be evidenced by the protégés taking action inconsistent of discouraged by the patron's policies. Likewise, credibility in the nuclear realm is difficult to visibly demon-

strate, but is highly likely influenced by credibility in other areas. Conventional military credibility is likely to be the most correlated to nuclear credibility, but both the patron and protégés respond with a whole-of-government approach. This study will consider how the U.S. response via NATO – including policy changes, economic aid and sanctions, and both conventional and nuclear military capabilities and posture – affected protégé assurance by measuring protégé reactions for abandonment fears.

Likewise, the protégés' response will be considered as to whether they are in line with U.S. and NATO policy, such as protégé public statements and reassurance requests closer/drifting alignment to NATO ideals or appeasement of attacker. In addition, we'll look at protégé internal defense spending changes aligning with/drifting from within NATO guidelines. This paper will use Cha's five policy responses modified for U.S. and NATO policy to subjectively measure protégé actions and protégé perception of the patron's actions across all instruments of power. The only objective measure of any extended nuclear deterrent gap would be overt protégé proliferation activities such as exploration, development, acquisition of internal nuclear weapons. Again, each of these actions will be assessed as to whether the protégés are closing a perceived capability gap by taking actions in alignment with or drifting from U.S. and NATO policy.

— Findings —

Research found that the United States responded via NATO to Crimea's annexation across many instruments of national power between 2014 and 2018, to include increased military capabilities and actions compared to 2010 through 2014 to demonstrate credibility (*Figure 2*). The Baltic states, in general, reacted in a way typical of a country facing a growing threat, but without an excessive reaction that might have occurred had they not been part of an alliance. Research did not find sufficient evidence in any of Cha's five protégé policy response

Figure 3: NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Participation

areas to indicate abandonment fears of the United States via NATO by the Baltic states.

— Build-Up of Internal Capabilities —

Prior to the annexation of Crimea, the U.S. European Command set up a Joint Contact Team Program in the Baltic states in 1991, which grew from the three Baltic states to included other countries in 1992 to become the State Partnership Program. This program pairs an ally of the United States with a state national guard for military-to-military engagements promoting security cooperation.[25] The United States has main-

tained this program since that time.

In response to Russia's invasion of Crimea, both the United States via NATO and the Baltic states increased capabilities. Militarily, the United States, which had the Baltic air policing responsibility at the time, immediately increased its Baltic air policing presence from four aircraft to 10 by providing out-of-cycle aircraft. In addition, NATO increased this to 12 aircraft at the next rotation.[26] NATO notes it "intensified" its mission of patrolling the skies along NATO's eastern border in 2015 following the Russia-Ukraine crisis.[27] Estonia also offered Ämari Air Base as a second location to station the increased NATO Baltic air policing aircraft.[28] NATO has continued using both
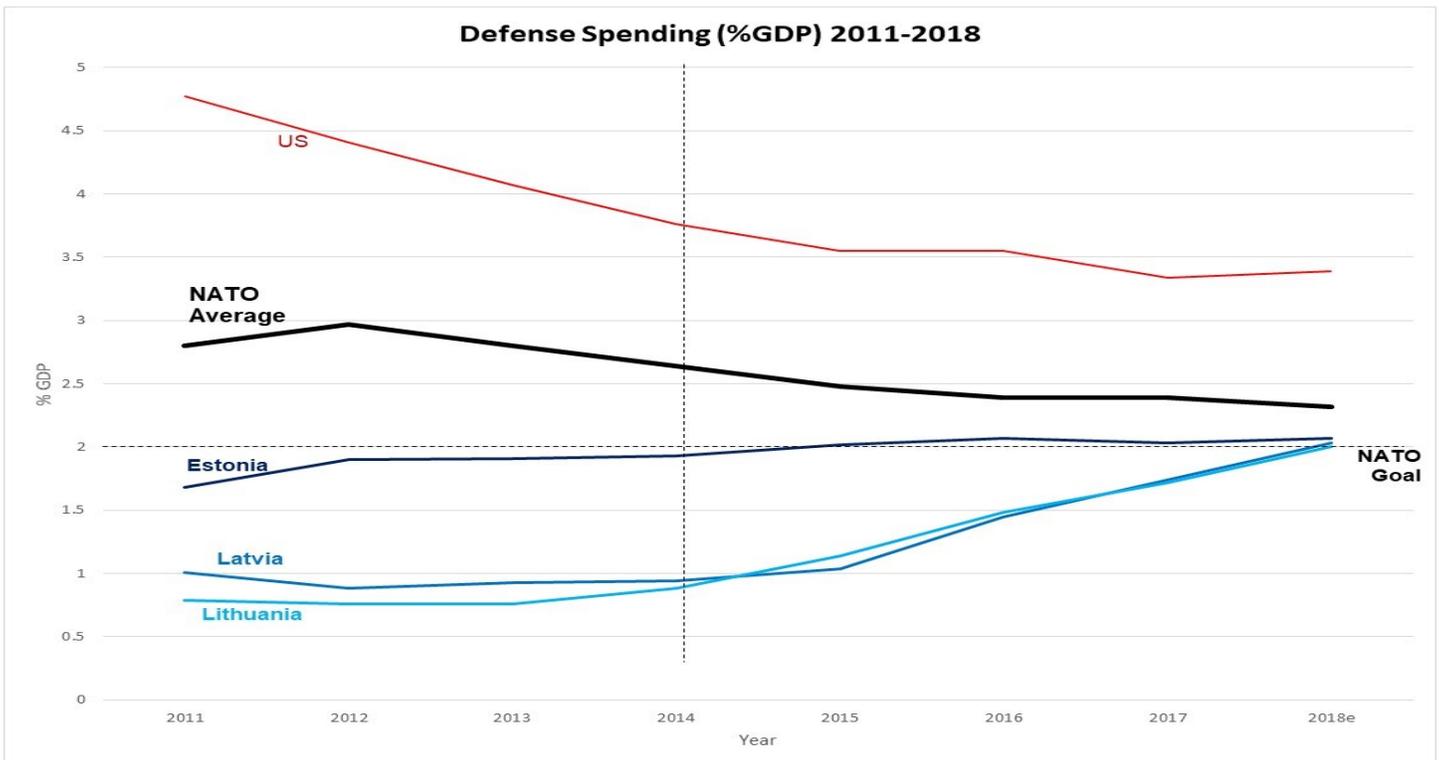

Figure 4: Percent GDP Expenditure on Defense[40]

Šiauliai Air Base in Lithuania and Ämari Air Base in Estonia for this mission.[29] Additionally, NATO and the three Baltic states signed a letter in 2016 to enhance training opportunities in the air policing mission.[30]

NATO also increased joint military exercises in 2014[31] and started the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) program by stationing four multinational battlegroups in the Baltics as well as Poland. These began with immediate small troop deployments and exercises following Russia's actions, which were meant as more of signal to Russia than an effective deterrent.[32] NATO has since grown the EFP to include just about every NATO country and a substantial number of troops and weapon systems (*Figure 3*).[33] Although the EFP is strictly a conventional capability and likely no more than a "speed bump" for a determined Russia, it does provide some nuclear credibility as it shows that an attack on a Baltic state is considered an attack on all, which could respond with up to and including nuclear weapons.

Lastly, the United States announced its intention to increase the strength of its deterrent by increasing nuclear weapons capability in the 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR). The United States reaffirmed the importance of the NATO nuclear sharing mission and adding the intent to insert dual-capable aircraft (DCA) capability in the F-35 to "maintain the strength of NATO's deterrence posture."[34] To better return to a great power competition with Russia, the United States stated it would develop and deploy a low-yield submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and a sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM).[35] While the NPR did not state whether these new weapon systems would be included in the NATO nuclear sharing agreement as additional options, they do signal increased U.S. deterrent capability to NATO allies. The most recent NATO nuclear policy reviews were at the 2016 Warsaw and 2018 Brussels NATO meetings, which reaffirmed the 2010 and 2012 policy documents, but did not modify them.[36]

In considering protégé actions to build up internal capabilities that might signal abandonment fears, all three Baltic states increased their defense spending from 2014 to 2018 (*Figure 4*). NATO estimated defense spending in the three countries changed from 1.93 percent GDP (Estonia), 0.94 percent (Latvia), and 0.88 percent (Lithuania) in 2014 to estimated 2.07 percent, 2.03 percent, and two percent respectively in 2018.[37] These actions do not indicate abandonment for several reasons. First, all three Baltic states were admitted to NATO in 2004 without meeting the two-percent GDP defense spending guideline, making promises that they would do so in the future. Andres Kasekamp notes, "Estonia met this goal in 2012, and Latvia and Lithuania pledged to attain it in 2018,"[38] which both did.[39]

Second, their actions were in line with U.S. and NATO policy encouraging defense investment, so the Baltics actions were consistent with patron policy. Third, the defense spending increases were modest and remained consistent with the NATO guidelines. Abandonment fears may be warranted if the spending had spiked drastically or greatly exceeded the NATO two-percent guideline, but this is not the case.

Any of the Baltic states may also indicate abandonment fears by seeking to acquire or developing nuclear weapons. The National Threat Institute reports that there is no evidence of a nuclear weapons program in any of the Baltic states. Moreover, all three have additional protocols in place with the International Atomic Energy Agency, granting them additional inspection

	2012[45]	2018-19[46]
Estonia	0.1004%	0.1157%
Latvia	0.1447%	0.1478%
Lithuania	0.2143%	0.2379%
United States	22.20%	22.1387%

Figure 5: *NSIP (NATO Direct Funding) Share (percentage of the NATO Total)*

authority beyond the underlying safeguards agreements.[41] As Estonia's, Latvia's and Lithuania's behavior both in defense spending and proliferation do not indicate strong evidence of abandonment fears, it is probable that the U.S. response via NATO has been sufficient to close the perceived deterrence gap following Crimea.

— Seeking Out New Alliances Or Bolstering Alternate Existing Ones —

Prior to the Baltic states joining NATO, the United States did provide some funding to them as part of the 14 western nations in the Baltic Security Assistance Group (BALTSEA).[42] BALTSEA continues to this day, although the Baltic states have gradually taken on responsibility for joint projects themselves.[43] The United States did directly fund a portion of NATO's costs via the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP), but has kept the level of direct funding constant at around a 22-percent share of NATO's total (*Figure 5*).[44]

As a patron normally acting via NATO, the United States responded in one unusual way to Russia's annexation of Crimea. In addition to increasing capability and credibility through the Baltic air policing and EFP, the United States announced its intent to create a European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) in June 2014, providing the actual funding in December 2014. The ERI provided an initial $1 billion in Fiscal Year 2015 in funding unilaterally to NATO members Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania for training of forces, multinational military exercises, and development of military equipment and capabilities to deter further Russian aggression. In 2016, the ERI was renamed to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), and the United States has continued funding the EDI in increas-

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
$1	$0.8	$3.4	$4.8	$6.5

Figure 6: U.S. EDI Budget[48]

ing amounts to a $4.8 billion budget request in FY 2018 (*Figure 6*).[47] Although not an alliance, it is a military agreement inside existing NATO channels to specifically aid countries in Eastern Europe facing the largest threat from Russia.

Upon gaining independence, the Baltic states formed several intra-Baltic agreements, such as the Baltic Assembly, Baltic Council on Ministers,[49] and the Baltic Free Trade Area to promote cooperation between the new countries, much of which was aimed at mutual help to join the E.U. and NATO.[50] Both the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council were reconfigured in 2004 in response to completion of the goal of each country joining the E.U. and NATO, and the Baltic Free Trade Area ceased entirely.[51] On the military side, the Baltic states also signed the Agreement on Baltic Cooperation in the Fields of Defence and Military Relations in 1995, prior to joining NATO. It calls for "acknowledging the necessity of strengthening mutual cooperation in defence and security issues,"[52] well short of a full security cooperation alliance. Additionally, the Baltic states jointly formed the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT, 1994), Baltic Air Surveillance Network (BALTNET, 1996), Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON, 1997), Baltic Defense College (BALTDEFCOL, 1998) to demonstrate readiness to join NATO.[53] Rather than serving as an alternate alliance, these intra-Baltic military organizations were interoperability preparation and demonstrations for NATO membership, and integrated well into NATO once joined.[54] Between 2004 and 2014, each of these institutions worked to develop the Baltic region.

Following 2014, the Baltic Assembly and Baltic Council have continued functioning much as before. In a recent joint statement from the Baltic Council, the three prime ministers jointly reiterated their commitment to NATO and, "Remain convinced that close transatlantic relationship is indispensable for security and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area."[55] The statement also thanked the United States for the "unwavering support in the form of the EDI."[56] There is no evidence of any of the Baltic states seeking a new alliance with either Russia or China, and the Baltic states have kept their direct funding contribution to NATO constant before and after Crimea.

None of the Baltic states' actions indicate any abandonment fears. Although the Baltic states have preserved preexisting inter-Baltic relationships, these relationships are not intended to replace the NATO alliance, and were modified upon entry into NATO so as not to conflict. The statements expressing support for NATO and the EDI show belief from the Baltic states that the alliance and aid are credible for their defense. The lack of any Baltic states seeking out new alliances with other patrons such as Russia or China indicates a lack of abandonment fears. Lastly, none of the Baltic States have publicly sought a new nuclear sharing agreement from the other two NATO nuclear weapons states, the U.K. and France.

— Bolstering Commitment to the Alliance In Order to Get the Ally to Reciprocate —

While Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have participated in NATO engagements after Russia's annexation of Crimea, such as Resolute Support in 2015,[57] this is consistent with their prior behavior. Kasekamp notes that all three of the Baltic states sent troops and civilians to participate in U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan well before 2014.[58] Anders Wivel and Matthew Crandall note that President Barack Obama called Estonia a "model ally" during his visit to Tallinn in 2014, likely not due to their actions after Crimea. but for their history of behavior

leading up to it.[59] In addition to Estonia establishing the NATO Collective Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in 2008 and Latvia establishing the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in 2014 (both of which were begun before Crimea) mentioned before, Lithuania established the NATO Energy Security Center of Excellence in 2012 in response to Russia's crude oil blockade in 2008.[60] Aldis Purs notes that the Baltic countries have paid a price for their commitment to NATO: Eight Estonian, three Latvian, and one Lithuanian soldier were killed in NATO missions in Afghanistan, all before 2011.[61] Lastly, none of the Baltic states changed their NATO direct funding contributions from the levels prior to Crimea's annexation.

The Baltic states' actions after joining NATO have demonstrated a consistently strong commitment to NATO, which could demonstrate a deep-running and constant abandonment fear motivating their actions. As Purs notes, the Baltic states action could be due to the countries having experienced occupation by both the Soviet Union and briefly Germany. Therefore, they strongly value the independence provided alignment with NATO and Western values.[62] Additionally, NATO encourages members to enhance collective and self-defense, so establishment of the Centers of Excellence are consistent with NATO policy. However, when considering that all of the Baltic states demonstrated that level of commitment prior to the Russian annexation of Crimea, their actions cannot be seen as evidence of a credibility gap created after the event occurred. Any abandonment fears, if they existed, likely remained the same both before and after.

— Appeasing the Adversary —

Neither the United States via NATO nor the Baltic states have made any concessions to Russia. Quite the opposite. Both the United States and NATO condemned Russia's actions in Crimea. NATO specifically invoked a violation of the Budapest Memo.[63] In 2014, the Group of Eight nations expelled Russia from the upcoming meeting, renaming itself the Group of Seven.[64] Economically, the United States and the European Union began the first of several rounds of sanctions in July and September of 2014 against Russia (*Figure 7*).[65] The E.U. Parliament Research Service indicates that Russia's economy did decline in mid-2014, but the decline was also due to decreasing oil prices upon which the Russian economy depends.[66] In the 2010 National Security Strategy, the United States focused on defeating al-Qaeda and other terrorists worldwide,[67] while the 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States returned the United States to a great power competition with Russia.[68]

After gaining independence in 1991, the Baltic states remained cautious and vigilant for possible Russian aggression, having been occupied by the Soviet Union since 1940. Estonia and Latvia suffered from several waves of "Russification" during the period from 1940 to 1991 in which the Soviet Union moved ethnic Russians into the countries in an attempt to better integrate them into the Soviet Union.[70] Although there has been some reintegration after independence, the Baltics still contain some ethnic Russians or Russian speakers within their population that are still pro-Russian.[71] The governments must be cautious about how outspoken either in favor of or against Russia, they are.

Despite this, all three Baltic governments reacted strongly negatively to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Estonia's president called for Russian aggression to stop, and stated that the

Budapest Memo had failed.[72] Latvia's Foreign Ministry condemned what it called the invasion of Ukrainian territory and called for respecting Ukraine's borders.[73] Lithuania's president stated Russia was dangerous and feared that all of Ukraine would be next, followed by Moldova (a non-NATO member).[74] Since then, the Baltic states have made no other actions or statements that could be considered appeasement of Russia or acquiescence to threats, indicating a lack of a policy response that shows abandonment fears.

— Bluffing Abandonment in Order to Elicit Greater Support From the Ally —

Prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea, all three Baltic countries stated their public commitment to NATO. In the 2011 Estonian National Defense Strategy (NDS), Estonia stated the goal of joining NATO from their 2005 NDS had been met, and noted that "today, thanks to NATO and E.U. membership, Estonia is more secure than ever."[75] Latvia's 2012 State Defense Strategy noted, "The collective defence principle of NATO, along with the mutual assistance clause of the E.U., are a stable foundation for Latvia's national security and defence."[76]

Sanctions timeline, 2014-2018

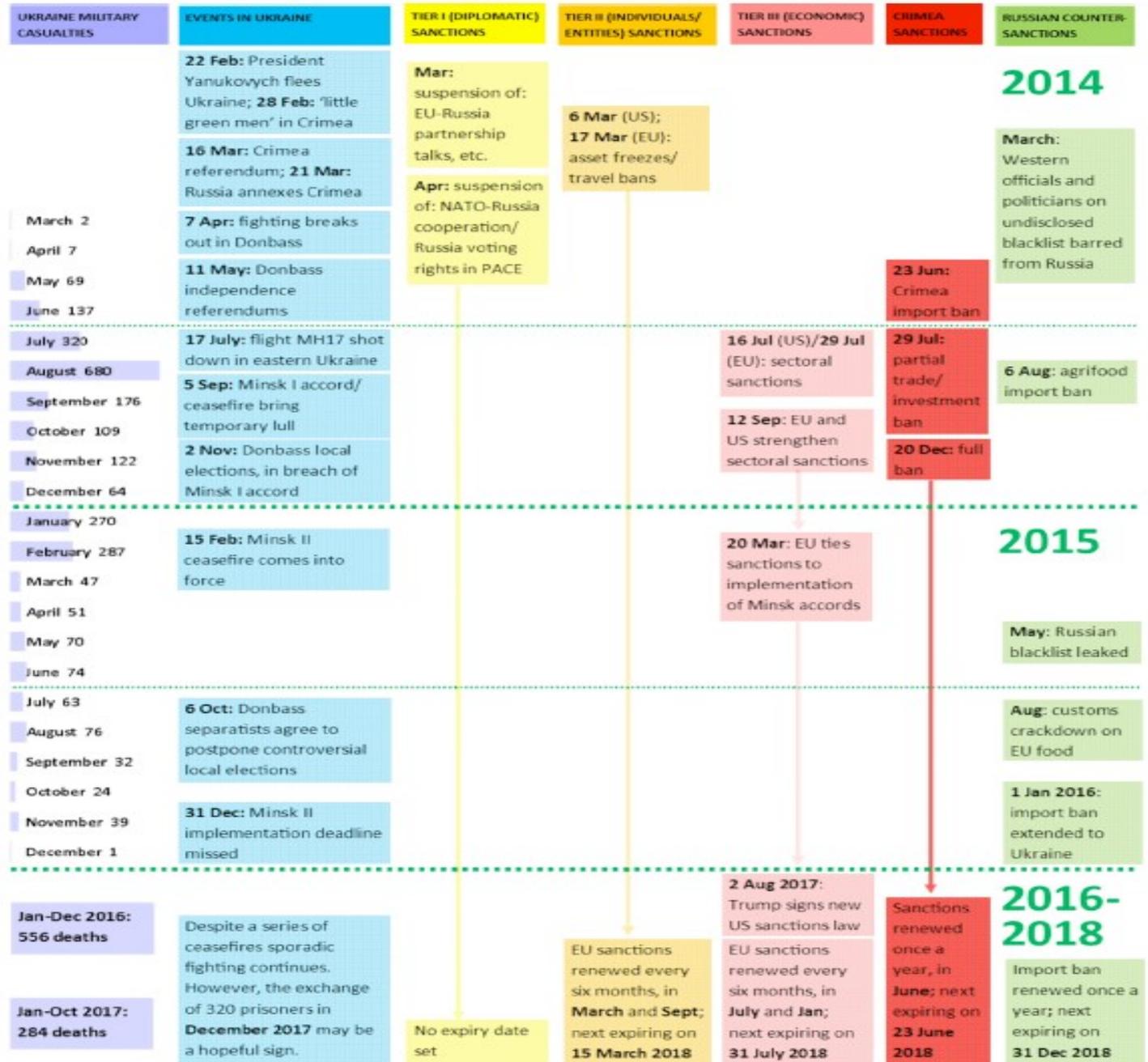| UKRAINE MILITARY CASUALTIES	EVENTS IN UKRAINE	TIER I (DIPLOMATIC) SANCTIONS	TIER II (INDIVIDUALS/ ENTITIES) SANCTIONS	TIER III (ECONOMIC) SANCTIONS	CRIMEA SANCTIONS	RUSSIAN COUNTER-SANCTIONS
	22 Feb: President Yanukovych flees Ukraine; **28 Feb:** 'little green men' in Crimea	**Mar:** suspension of: EU-Russia partnership talks, etc.	**6 Mar (US); 17 Mar (EU):** asset freezes/ travel bans			**2014**
	16 Mar: Crimea referendum; **21 Mar:** Russia annexes Crimea	**Apr:** suspension of: NATO-Russia cooperation/ Russia voting rights in PACE				**March:** Western officials and politicians on undisclosed blacklist barred from Russia
March 2	**7 Apr:** fighting breaks out in Donbass					
April 7	**11 May:** Donbass independence referendums				**23 Jun:** Crimea import ban	
May 69						
June 137						
July 320	**17 July:** flight MH17 shot down in eastern Ukraine		**16 Jul (US)/29 Jul (EU):** sectoral sanctions	**29 Jul:** partial trade/ investment ban		**6 Aug:** agrifood import ban
August 680	**5 Sep:** Minsk I accord/ ceasefire bring temporary lull		**12 Sep:** EU and US strengthen sectoral sanctions	**20 Dec:** full ban		
September 176						
October 109	**2 Nov:** Donbass local elections, in breach of Minsk I accord					
November 122						
December 64						
January 270	**15 Feb:** Minsk II ceasefire comes into force			**20 Mar:** EU ties sanctions to implementation of Minsk accords		**2015**
February 287						
March 47						
April 51						
May 70						**May:** Russian blacklist leaked
June 74						
July 63	**6 Oct:** Donbass separatists agree to postpone controversial local elections					**Aug:** customs crackdown on EU food
August 76						**1 Jan 2016:** import ban extended to Ukraine
September 32						
October 24						
November 39	**31 Dec:** Minsk II implementation deadline missed					
December 1						
Jan-Dec 2016: 556 deaths	Despite a series of ceasefires sporadic fighting continues. However, the exchange of 320 prisoners in **December 2017** may be a hopeful sign.	No expiry date set	EU sanctions renewed every six months, in **March and Sept;** next expiring on **15 March 2018**	**2 Aug 2017:** Trump signs new US sanctions law / EU sanctions renewed every six months, in **July and Jan;** next expiring on **31 July 2018**	Sanctions renewed once a year, in **June;** next expiring on **23 June 2018**	**2016-2018** Import ban renewed once a year; next expiring on **31 Dec 2018**
Jan-Oct 2017: 284 deaths						

Figure 7: United States and European Union Sanctions Timeline[69]

Lithuania's 2012 National Security Strategy (NSS) states that its national security is a "constituent part of the indivisible security policy of" and "based upon the security guarantees embedded within" NATO and the E.U.[77] Each Baltic state thus recognized and stated it relied upon the security assurances within NATO, including extended deterrence.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea, none of the Baltic states have altered their policies to test abandonment by NATO. Estonia's NDS is subject to revision every four years, but Estonia has kept the 2011 NDS in place through 2015 and 2019.[78] Latvia did replace its 2012 State Defense Concept in 2016 with a State Defense Strategy that specifically named Russia as an adversary, "and most importantly for NATO, Latvia now openly [declared] a significant long-term presence of Allied militaries in Latvia to be in its national interest."[79] Likewise, Lithuania revised its National Security Strategy in 2016 to specifically state: "The national security of the Republic of Lithuania is strengthened by NATO and E.U. membership and the military presence of the United States of America in Europe."[80] Research did not find any of the Baltic countries engaged in the risky behavior of bluffing abandonment, indicating a lack of abandonment fear.

As the research shows, the U.S. response via NATO to Crimea's annexation increased the perceived patron deterrence level by increasing capabilities and credibility compared to 2010 through 2014. As part of NATO, the Baltic states improved their own defensive capabilities consistent with NATO guidelines in response to the increased adversary threat level, but not to such an extent that signaled abandonment per Cha's five policy response areas. For extended deterrence credibility provided via nuclear weapon sharing, there is no evidence that the Baltic states are seeking a different nuclear sharing agreement of seeking nuclear weapons of their own. The findings indicate no U.S. extended deterrence credibility gap at this time, but with the perceived threat of Russia subject to change at any moment, the United States must continue to take action to remain capable and credible.

— Conclusion —

Although this paper concludes that the Baltic states do not show abandonment fears signifying a credibility shortfall in U.S. extended deterrence, the United States can still improve policy to enhance both the capability and credibility components of deterrence for the future. Russia possesses a large number of tactical nuclear weapons that it has stated it would use as a means of "escalating to de-escalate" and ending the war on its terms.[81]

To counter Russia's tactical nuclear weapon superiority, the 2018 NPR announced the intent to develop and field both a low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and submarine-launch cruise missile (SLCM).[82] The United States should continue these efforts from the NPR, but could increase the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence by making explicit that these new Navy weapon systems, once deployed, are available via NATO nuclear sharing as gravity bombs are to deter Russia.[83]

With the withdrawal of the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), the United States could also begin development of medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles to be stationed in Europe.[84] This would provide a greater range of options to NATO to deter Russian aggression. Although the United States does not need to seek tactical number parity with Russia, new U.S. tactical nuclear capabilities would be more likely to reassure allies that Russia would not exploit a perceived short-term conventional superiority while the rest of NATO mobilizes nor use nuclear weapons first to end the conflict.[85] Past experience has also shown that Russia might be willing to negotiate new arms control treaties to decommission or eliminate ballistic or cruise weapons if the United States reciprocates.[86] This policy change could result in future arms reductions that diminish the threat of tactical nuclear weapons to the Baltic states in the future.

The United States should also continue its plans to add DCA capability to the F-35, including those delivered to NATO allies. Although the Baltic Air Policing mission is primarily air defense and superiority, ensuring the aircraft used have DCA capability could increase the perceived deterrence level by Russia and reassure allies. The action of assigning only DCA aircraft to the Baltic air policing mission sends a further message to Russia. This increase in DCA capability across NATO will also enable greater nuclear-conventional integration, should the United States develop that doctrine, and increase NATO's deterrence posture.

The United States should continue funding both NATO and the EDI, but it should pursue methods to merge them. NATO has grown much larger than its initial countries, and as such, interests of the member nations vary greatly geographically. While EDI funding is certainly targeting the countries most under threat from the resurgent Russia, it may be exacerbating somewhat contentious subject of "fair share" funding. The United States acting unilaterally via EDI may be creating two distinct groups within NATO, the haves (East NATO) and have-nots (West NATO), fracturing NATO cohesiveness. Further, sending special funding to just certain countries, while it has a reassurance effect, signals that NATO agreements alone are not sufficient protection. By merging the funding streams, all nations within NATO will benefit from the generosity of the United States and be encouraged to make contributions to their own collective security.

Russia's doctrine for use of nuclear weapons seems to be more advanced compared to that of the United States. Development of U.S. conventional-nuclear integrated doctrine will provide positive deterrence in that the United States that can counter Russian strategy and guide development of U.S. additional tactical nuclear weapon capability. Roberts specifically notes

that NATO should reopen the "appropriate mix" discussion, but based on a greater understanding of Russia's theory of victory.[87] Since low-yield nuclear weapons are in development, the United States and NATO must think about their potential use and any future needs, versus letting the weapons guide the doctrine.

NATO's expansion, which is likely to continue, also presents a possible widening credibility gap due to increased decision-making complexity. Since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, 10 other countries in addition to the Baltic states have joined NATO.[88] The new members enhanced the cooperative security agreement capabilities, but solely on the conventional side. Additionally, NATO's expansion increased the geographic scope of NATO's responsibilities and added complexity to the alliance decision-making process. The U.S. credibility provides via nuclear sharing decreases each time a new NATO member, with differing interests, is added to the Nuclear Policy Group concurrence required to use nuclear weapons.[89]

As mentioned before, NATO's nuclear policies date from 2010 and 2012,[90] prior to Crimea in 2014 and the 2018 NPR, and remained unchanged in the 2016 and 2018 NATO reviews. The United States could increase its credibility of nuclear weapon use by streamlining the NATO nuclear decision-making process to increase the role of the United States as the nuclear weapon provider.[91]

This paper examined the credibility of U.S. deterrence via NATO to the Baltic states and determined from protégé responses that it is likely that no credibility gap exists. Following Crimea, the United States employed a whole-of-government that sufficiently demonstrated its commitment to NATO nuclear sharing without actual nuclear weapon use. By comparing protégé reactions to the patron's behavior before and after Crimea's annexation, the responses of both countries to the increased perceived threat level from Russia indicate a sufficient increase in perceived deterrence credibility and capability due to no overt signs from the protégé of abandonment fears that would indicate a perceived deterrence gap. Nevertheless, there are always additional policy changes to further increase credibility with the Baltic states, but the United States must balance such actions against the risk of further antagonizing Russia into a conflict of which the actions are seeking to avoid.

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