

AIR WAR COLLEGE

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STRATEGIC ASSURANCE AND  
SIGNALING IN THE BALTICS

By

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## **Biography**

Colonel Paulson entered the Air Force in 1995 through Officer Training School and has served in a variety of operational and staff assignments. As an RC-135 Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO), he flew numerous missions in direct support of Operations SOUTHERN WATCH, DELIBERATE GUARD, NOBIL ANVIL and ALLIED FORCE and deployed worldwide in support of JCS tasked Sensitive Reconnaissance Operations. He then assumed duties as a T-43 Instructor Navigator/EWO where he served as Assistant Director of Operations then EWO evaluator and Executive Officer at the group level. After serving as the RC-135 Functional Manager at Headquarters Air Force in the Pentagon, he returned to operations as Chief, Operations Group Standardization and Evaluations then Director of Operations of a Formal Training Unit. He was then selected to command a reconnaissance squadron in support of European Theater tasking including Operations ODYSSEY DAWN and UNIFIED PROTECTOR. Following command, Colonel Paulson began duties at United States Strategic Command as Airborne Command Post Mission Commander, Deputy Director of the Commander's Action Group and finally Deputy Executive Officer to the Commander before being selected to attend Air War College.

## Abstract

What show of force methods such as Bomber Assurance and Deterrence missions, joint exercises, US forces deployments, or joint operations provide the most strategic assurance in the Baltic region? Assurance is not new. However, because of a changing security environment, there needs to be a departure from traditional nuclear umbrella assurance and a push toward tailored strategic assurance that employs all methods of national power to message a specific audience at a specific time in a specific scenario. The three Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were all occupied by the former Soviet Union and are today surrounded by Russian territory and facing a resurgence of Russian military capability, both conventional and nuclear. Prior to recent Russian aggression across the region, the United States drew down dramatically in Europe after the Cold War, signaled their “pivot to the Pacific,” and has not modernized military capability in the region at the rate Russia has. Working to reverse this trend, the U.S. is pursuing recent efforts to assure the Baltic states and message to them that they will not stand alone in future conflicts.

Addressing this assurance challenge, particularly how it applies in Europe requires understanding the potential threat posed by a resurging Russia and discussing what and how the United States and NATO are signaling to assure the Baltics. After gaining a foundational understanding of the situation, current assurance methods can be assessed, measured, and tailored to determine their effectiveness. Once measured, the results can be used to explore more effective ways to conduct strategic assurance of the Baltic republics by providing recommendations to Senior Leaders.



Figure 1. Department of Public Information Cartographic Section, Map No. 3876, United Nations February 1995

“The defense of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defense of Berlin and Paris and London.”<sup>1</sup>

President Barack Obama,  
3 September 2015

## **Introduction**

By analyzing recent military modernization and maneuvers along the border with Eastern Europe, it seems Russia is on a quest to return to the great power status it enjoyed in the past. This resurgence has Europe, especially the formerly occupied Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, concerned. Recent Russian military actions and President Putin’s tough-stance rhetoric demonstrate the Former Soviet Union is attempting to reassert its influence along its periphery aiming to end U.S. influence in the region by weakening the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance.<sup>2</sup> President Putin is increasing Russia’s presence along the borders of the Baltic republics by conducting numerous exercises, increasing aircraft activity, deploying Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBM) to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and conducting aggressive maneuvers against U.S. and NATO assets in the Baltic Sea. Following Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea, concern continues in Europe over President Putin’s intentions.<sup>3</sup> Currently there are nearly 100,000 Russian troops stationed along the border of Eastern Europe made up of forces comprising of the same units that annexed Crimea.<sup>4</sup> According to David Shlapak in a recent RAND study, should Russia look to re-occupy the Baltics, there is not much that can be done to initially defend against an invasion creating concern in the Baltics requiring effective assurance from the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

Assuring the Baltics is imperative given the threat perceptions in the region. NATO is currently under-equipped to defend against a Russian grab for territory in Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> According to Loren Thompson, “Simply stated, the United States seeks to deter aggression or

blackmail against NATO allies from a nuclear armed Russia.”<sup>7</sup> Several U.S. assurance methods such as joint exercises, flying nuclear capable bombers in the region, and deployments of U.S. troops to Eastern Europe are currently being employed to assure the Baltic states. The challenge lies in determining how to measure the effects of assurance to ask what show of force methods such as Bomber Assurance and Deterrence missions, joint exercises, US forces deployments, and joint operations provide the most strategic security assurance in the Baltic region?

### **Thesis**

Of the various methods used by the U.S. to assure the Baltics, physical presence of U.S. forces stationed or deployed to Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania have the greatest assurance effect by creating solidarity. The thesis will be addressed by interviewing various stakeholders in U.S. deterrence and assurance and by surveying various Baltic military leaders and military and civilian students and faculty attending the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia. Prior to using the results to measure what assurance method works best in the Baltics, an analysis of the current threat and current U.S. assurance methods will lay the foundation toward answering the research question and supporting the thesis.

## Assuring Baltic Partners

Current U.S. assurance policy is addressed in government issued policy documents such as the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Military Strategy (NMS), and Deterrence and Defense Posture review. These policy documents lay a foundation from which an assurance campaign can be developed. Today's deterrence and assurance is moving away from being nuclear-centric and instead encompasses conventional, space, and cyberspace to create a more holistic strategic deterrence and assurance approach. The February 2015 NSS makes it very clear the United States' policy toward assuring Europe by stating "we will steadfastly support the aspirations of countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration...Our Article 5<sup>8</sup> commitment to the collective defense of all NATO Members is ironclad."<sup>9</sup> Additionally, "Russia's aggression in Ukraine makes it clear that European security and the international rules and norms against territorial aggression cannot be taken for granted."<sup>10</sup> The 2015 NMS aligns with the NSS by asserting "in Europe, we remain steadfast in our commitment to our NATO allies. NATO provides vital collective security guarantees and is strategically important for deterring conflict, particularly in light of recent Russian aggression on its periphery."<sup>11</sup>

Another important document that articulates the importance of assuring our allies is the 2010 Deterrence and Defense Posture review, especially with regard to messaging and signaling. Messages can be interpreted as aimed at Russia by asserting assurance and "deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy" and "as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance."<sup>12</sup> The review articulates the capabilities of nuclear allies stating "the independent strategic nuclear

forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the allies.”<sup>13</sup>

The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) demonstrate renewed U.S. commitment to assuring European allies. The peace dividend (the drawing down of forces after major conflict) after the Cold War saw the retirement of many nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and a re-focus on other contested regions that allowed policies towards Europe to atrophy.<sup>14</sup> In this case, it left an opening for a resurgent Russia to be aggressive toward Eastern Europe and produced security concerns. As Brad Roberts surmises, Russia’s resurgence, including the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, extensive modernization of Russian strategic forces and threat-laced rhetoric against NATO has sparked a renewed assurance initiative.<sup>15</sup> The NPR and ERI attempt to reassure Europe by including them under the United States’ strategic umbrella to increase deterrence in the region.<sup>16</sup>

Originally proposed in Warsaw, Poland on 3 June 2014, four months after Russia annexed Crimea, ERI aims to reassure NATO allies and European partners that the U.S. is committed to security in the region and assistance with increasing military capability and readiness against threats to the continent. The initiative is built on five lines of effort, according to the Department of Defense (DoD): “(1) Continued increased U.S. military presence in Europe; (2) additional bilateral and multilateral exercises and training with allies and partners; (3) improved infrastructure to allow for greater responsiveness; (4) enhanced prepositioning of U.S. equipment in Europe; and (5) intensified efforts to build partner capacity for newer NATO members and other partners.”<sup>17</sup>

More specifically, ERI funds several initiatives such as an increased presence from all services, additional exercises, improving infrastructure, increasing Baltic air policing missions,

increasing Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) including Remotely Piloted Aircraft capability, and increasing intelligence and warning capability. ERI is becoming well-funded by the U.S. In total ERI was funded \$985 million in fiscal year 2015 and \$789.3 million in fiscal year 2016.<sup>18</sup> For 2017, the White House has promised to quadruple funding to over three billion dollars providing the funding with which to execute effective assurance in Europe.<sup>19</sup> The NPR and ERI renewed U.S. efforts to assure the region, but the effects of assurance methods should be measured to ensure efficiency and effectiveness by studying the threat, analyzing current signaling methods and determining the effect in order to improve methods, if necessary.

### **The Threat - Russia's Resurging Military Machine**

Since the Baltics joined NATO in 2004, Russia has taken aim at the three countries and signaled an effort to destabilize the region. Indeed, Russia has been very active militarily on land, sea, and in the airspace surrounding the Baltics. In 2013, NATO scrambled around 200 combat aircraft to intercept Russian aircraft that were approaching their airspace. That number increased to 400 the next year and has held steady since. At the same time, Russian has intercepted NATO and U.S. aircraft and ships in international waters and airspace in and over the Baltic Sea with fighters launched from modernized bases near the NATO border. On the ground, Russia has been holding countless drills involving large numbers of troops and vehicles just to the east of the region that NATO could interpret as being aimed at the Baltics. United States European Command considers Russian aggression in the East one of its three primary security concerns. In a RAND Corporation wargame study, it was determined that Russian forces could arrive at two of the three Baltic capitols (Riga and Tallinn) within 60 hours.<sup>20</sup> If allowed to travel through Belarus or launch an invasion from Kaliningrad, the time to reach Vilnius, the capitol of Lithuania, is significantly shorter.

To complicate a comprehensive defense of the Baltics, Russian Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities have improved in the region complicating assistance during conflict. Aside from refurbishing airfields, Russia has deployed systems to the region capable of denying access in the air, sea and land. For example, Russia has deployed surface-to-air missiles, nuclear capable Iskander-M surface-to-surface missiles to the Kaliningrad enclave, and continues to modernize Saint Petersburg-based Baltic Fleet surface ships and submarines.<sup>21</sup> This posture poses a growing threat to allied naval forces and the capability to blockade the Baltic states from approach by sea. Also worth noting, Russia's military resurgence has re-introduced around 100,000 ground forces along its border with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Within these forces are included the same units that invaded Georgia in 2008 and annexed Crimea in 2014.<sup>22</sup>

Though it should not be ruled out entirely, the likelihood of an attack into the Baltics from Russia is arguably low. To support the opposing view, according to a student at the Baltic Defence College, most of NATO and the European Union (EU) do not see Russia as a threat, however, the Baltic nations see it differently which creates a gap in perception.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, a recent article in the Economist surmised it is in Russia's calculus that an invasion of the Baltics would bring a large multinational force in defense of the region that would include nations possessing nuclear weapons including the United States, United Kingdom, and perhaps France.<sup>24</sup> President Putin is a rational actor so it would be difficult to believe he would risk a large-scale conflict with the West by moving into Eastern Europe. The killing of a NATO soldier, including those deployed to the region from the U.S., could act as a tripwire bringing total war to the region, an unappetizing scenario for Russia.<sup>25</sup>

The issues faced by the Baltics by being somewhat isolated from the rest of NATO is similarly faced by Kaliningrad. The enclave, being surrounded by Lithuania, Poland, and the Baltic Sea makes it difficult for Russia to defend, especially if Belarus was unwilling to join into a conflict on the side of Russia.<sup>26</sup> This scenario should be a deterrent for Russia. In the end however, an invasion should still be considered a possibility and effective assurance and deterrence should be deliberate.

## **Current U.S. and NATO Assurance and Signaling Efforts**

### **Sending the Right Message**

Proper signaling is key, but according to Daniel Wasserbly there are “complications in the current information and communication environment because the U.S. strategic message is too often muddled, the speed and availability of information reduces decision making times, and properly reading an adversary’s intent is increasingly difficult.”<sup>27</sup> Another challenge lies in the difficulty of measuring effects of deterrence. As Adam Lowther puts it: “understanding the culture, interests, and objectives of adversaries has the potential to decrease the number that cannot be deterred” and perhaps increase the number that can be assured.<sup>28</sup>

During the Wales Summit in 2014, the U.S. committed to assuring allies in Europe and promised to defend every NATO country. The current signaling policy has shifted from assurance to deterrence, but assurance should remain an important aspect of an overall policy. Though assurance can in itself send a message of deterrence, the U.S. and NATO need to know the difference to ensure the right signals are being sent. Executing a deterrence campaign is complex and challenging. The overall effort of a campaign of this type is to alter the adversary’s decision calculus, in other words, forcing the adversary to weigh the cost versus benefit of action and cost versus benefits of restraint. Today’s deterrence is required to be adversary, objective,

and scenario specific with a continuous whole of government approach using both hard and soft power. Once engaged in an assurance and deterrence campaign it is also imperative that the effort is adjusted to an ever-changing environment.<sup>29</sup>

A strategy for the Baltics includes understanding Russia's behavior, goals, values and intentions and should include a team made up of intelligence analysts and subject experts.<sup>30</sup> The Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept (DO JOC) is commonly used as a source document for employing deterrence and assurance. With regard to the difficulty of measuring deterrence, the DO JOC provides several key mitigation concepts including making "explicit...assumptions and logic in both assessing adversary perceptions and develop plans to affect them, identify specific conditions and U.S. actions (or inaction) that may deleteriously affect specific deterrence strategies and operations," and "analyze the potential impacts on an adversary's deterrence calculations of both planned and unplanned changes in the strategic context and operational situation."<sup>31</sup> U.S. and NATO leadership have been careful to not send a message that would escalate tensions. Not signaling correctly may send a weak signal allowing Russia to further test the resolve of the alliance, but sending too strong a signal may be seen as escalatory and invite conflict.<sup>32</sup> This dilemma requires the U.S. and its European allies remain careful to stay in the safe zone in between and constantly monitor Moscow's reactions to movements in Europe to avoid Russia taking advantage of either extreme.

### **Signaling Methods and Intentions in Eastern Europe**

Below are several assurance methods currently employed by the U.S. and NATO. Understanding these methods will lead to asking right questions as the whether or not these methods have an impact in assuring the Baltic republics.

## Conventional U.S. Forces and Actions

During the Cold War, the U.S. stationed large numbers of military forces in Europe to protect countries that could not protect themselves in the face of a powerful Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Driven by Russia's military resurgence, strategic modernization, and re-assertiveness into the world stage, the security environment has changed significantly since the relatively stable Cold War Europe. Russia's behavior with regard to Europe requires deliberate messaging that combines several methods. According to United States Army Europe, the Army is increasing its presence in NATO from two to three brigades, increasing aviation deployments, supporting the ongoing Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE, designed to assure U.S. allies in Europe after Russia's takeover of Crimea and to demonstrate commitment in the region.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, NATO agreed to the deployment of battalion of British, German, and Canadian troops to each of the Baltic states. Articulated by Dempsey, this is clearly aimed at countering Russia's recent aggression and can act as a "trip wire" "that should give President Putin pause for thought."<sup>35</sup> The Baltic states are providing signals of their own. Since NATO prescribed a defense spending level of two percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) many countries have not committed. The story is different in the Baltics where Estonia has met the two percent level for quite some time and Latvia and Lithuania are on track to meet the two percent level by 2020.<sup>36</sup>

Besides deploying forces, the U.S. Army is positioning equipment along the eastern border, enough to support company and battalion sized units, to shorten response times. Called Army Prepositioning Stocks (APS), the equipment is being stored at locations formerly used by the U.S. before pulling out of many locations in the early 1990s. This is an expensive option and is vulnerable to a preemptive strike, but the effort undoubtedly increases defense posture and signaling in the region. Additionally, the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS)

deployed to Romania and the four Aegis ballistic missile defense stationed at Rota Spain, the U.S. plans to have a second AAMDS site constructed in Redzikowo, Poland by 2018. Finally, as part of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) to bolster defense in Europe, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is a spearhead capability of the NATO Response Force (NRF) made up of various NATO members that can deploy within 48 hours in response to crisis.<sup>37</sup> For proper signaling, it is not just deploying assets, but how they are utilized once in theater through exercises.

### Joint Exercises in Europe

Exercises Ample Strike and Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) are exercises involving US and NATO forces conducted to prove interoperability and demonstrate a collective resolve for security in Europe.<sup>38</sup> Exercise Ample Strike deployed two B-1 conventional bombers and a non-nuclear configured B-52 to Europe to support the air exercise. The exercise was aimed at addressing concerns of an increasingly aggressive Russia in the region.<sup>39</sup> In total, Exercise Ample Strike involved air assets and Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC) from 24 allied and partner countries including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to signal U.S. and NATO capabilities in the theater.<sup>40</sup> Exercise BALTOPS is another major signaling effort for both assurance and deterrence in the region. Held annually for two weeks, the 2015 exercise included military forces from 17 countries and included an amphibious assault landed in Poland near Kaliningrad. The 2016 BALTOPS also included around 6,100 troops, includes participants from the Partnership for Peace nations of Finland and Sweden, and focused on maritime interdiction, anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, and air defense operations.<sup>41</sup> This year the exercise combined U.S. bombers concurrently conducting Bomber Assurance and Deterrence (BAAD) missions adding to assurance in the region.

## Bomber Assurance and Deterrence Missions

BAAD missions have become a key component to signal steadfast support to allies and deterring with a show of force to demonstrate U.S. resolve, capability and credibility. BAAD missions are planned and executed by USSTRATCOM's Joint Force Component Command – Global Strike (JFCC-GS) to assure audiences in each of the Geographic Combatant Commands' (GCC) Area of Responsibility (AOR). Since USSTRATCOM owns these missions, the command retains Operational Control (OPCON) while relinquishing Tactical Control (TACON) once the asset arrives in the GCC AOR. The advantage of this authority relationship is USSTRATCOM is able to secure tankers where if the bombers were assigned to the GCC, they would unlikely receive tanker support for this type of mission due to higher priorities within theater. Requests for BAAD missions may be made by GCCs or other states or USSTRATCOM may push the asset to theater as part of its own planning cycle or assurance requirements decided on by the command.<sup>42</sup>

The drawback to BAAD missions is that they are difficult to assess in terms of effectiveness. BAAD missions are typically stand-alone and not integrated with other signaling methods or part of a larger coordinated messaging campaign. One reason why is there is not a lead integrator that combines the objectives with other DIME. In fact, many times Public Affairs are not brought into the process until the mission is under way. The unintentional risk with this approach is that it could be seen as provocative to states other than those the U.S. is attempting to assure. Additionally, through the research there was little to no evidence that mission analysis is done after mission completion to determine whether or not objectives were met.<sup>43</sup>

## Public Messaging

The U.S. political message needs to be clear, consistent, coordinated, and support the physical actions taken in Eastern Europe by asserting U.S. national security interests are at stake. The messages, according to Damon Wilson, “should be tied to the U.S. standing as a global superpower, able to bring all elements of national power and relationships to bear to deter and defeat aggressions...there must be no doubt among those in the Kremlin that the United States and its NATO allies will defend their Baltic allies in any scenario”<sup>44</sup> At the Combatant Command and NATO headquarters level, General Breedlove wrote, thereby signaling to Russia, that “EUCOM<sup>45</sup> ensures that United States nuclear weapons and the means to support and deploy those weapons are fully ready to support national and Alliance nuclear directives.”<sup>46</sup> Adding to the signal is the public relationship United States European Command (USEUCOM) has made with United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) in which the two combine messages with actions such as BAAD missions to create a combined signaling effort. Measuring the effectiveness of these methods will ensure efficiency of the overall assurance campaign.

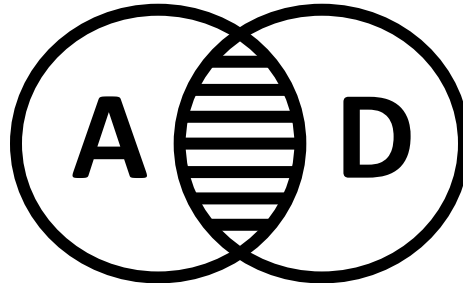
## **Measuring Effectiveness**

While deterrence effectiveness proves difficult to determine, assurance levels can be measured to a large extent by simply asking those the U.S. is trying to assure. With regard to deterrence and state-run media in Russia, it is difficult for the U.S. and NATO to influence the government or population. Russia controls the print, broadcast, and on-line media to where the only way to assess the effectiveness of deterrence signaling on Russia would be to ask the Russian leadership. Since that is not feasible or even possible, it is required to look elsewhere to try to determine or at least assume effectiveness by applying educated assumptions. According to Stephen Blank, what can be done is “NATO must continue to provide security, deter Russia,

reassurance, and lead the non-NATO states and Europe's other security organizations-the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-toward regional and European military-political integration."<sup>47</sup> Though Russia desires to expand its influence, it cannot do so in Eastern Europe militarily. Instead it will take advantage diplomatic, politics economic and, of course, rhetoric associated with each to try and expand its hegemony. Therefore, a U.S./NATO assurance approach should include counter elements in messaging and signaling.

The formula for creating an assurance and deterrence scheme starts off straight forward – deter adversary X from doing Y in situation Z. From this formula, a set of values can be created where the value of an adversary action can be applied to cost versus benefit to arrive at a probability an adversary might take action such as the very low to very high range on the Likert scale.<sup>48</sup> Deterrence and assurance have separate formulas but should be applied concurrently because of the inherent overlap of deterrence and assurance effects (see Fig 2). With C1 being capability and C2 being credibility then  $C1a + C2a = D$  (deterrence) and  $C1b + C2b = A$  (assurance).<sup>49</sup> Studied together, the formula could read  $C1 + C2 = A(x)D(x)$  where x is a level of effectiveness applied to deterrence or assurance. The amount of x with assurance can be measured and given value such as zero meaning no assurance to 10 for fully assured. Gaining confidence that assurance is having the desired effect starts with the signaling effort and discovering new ways to employ and coordinate messaging. The DO JOC recognizes the difficulty of assessing deterrence and therefor states "...analysts must develop innovative methods to objectively assess strategic deterrence operations."<sup>50</sup> Assurance can provide deterrence as a by-product so it benefits planners to understand deterrence and apply assurance

methods and improve techniques to take full advantage of assurance. To start, it needs to be determined what assurance methods work best.



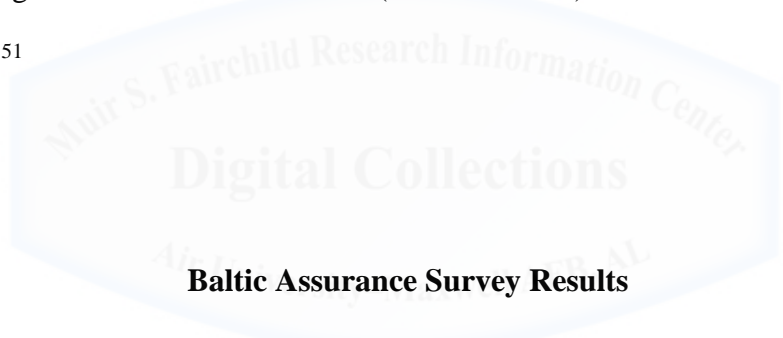
**Figure 2. Model demonstrating the overlap of assurance and deterrence. Dr. Todd Robinson.**

### **Measuring Assurance in the Baltics**

To measure U.S. assurance effectiveness in the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, a survey was forwarded to the Baltic Defence College in Tartu, Estonia and distributed to the faculty and students from the Baltic states. The survey requested the following assurance methods be ranked from one to six with one providing the most assurance to six providing the least assurance:

1. Bomber Assurance and Deterrence Missions
2. US forces deployed to the Baltics
3. US forces stationed in the Baltics
4. US participation in regional exercises
5. US conducting integrated operations in the region
6. Public statements by US civilian and military leadership

13 individuals ranking from O-4 to O-6 responded. All are from the Baltic states except for two, one from Poland and one from Ukraine. 70% responded with US Forces stationed at or deployed to the Baltics as making them feel the most assured. 23% felt that BAAD missions provided the most assurance. Of the remaining 7% (two respondents) one felt most assured by exercises in the region and the other from combined operations. Though sending forces to the region is more costly than BAAD missions, the data suggests that the U.S. should continue investing in assuring the region by staying involved on the ground in Eastern Europe. Backing up this data are statements made by several members of the Estonian and Latvian Ministries of Defence. Both nations agreed that U.S. and other NATO forces deployed to or stationed in the Baltics create the greatest level and assurance (and deterrence) and create a solidarity for which they are grateful.<sup>51</sup>



**Baltic Assurance Survey Results**

<b><u>Respondents</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>	<b><u>7</u></b>	<b><u>8</u></b>	<b><u>9</u></b>	<b><u>10</u></b>	<b><u>11</u></b>	<b><u>12</u></b>	<b><u>13</u></b>
BAAD	6	1	4	5	1	5	6	6	4	6	6	1	5
Deployed	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	5	1
Stationed	1	4	1	6	6	1	5	3	1	5	1	6	2
Exercise	4	6	3	1	5	4	2	5	3	2	5	3	4
Operations	3	3	6	2	4	3	3	4	2	3	4	4	3
Statements	5	5	5	4	3	6	4	1	2	4	3	2	6

**Table 1 – Results from survey delivered to the Baltic Defence College. 1 = most assured, 6 = least assured**

## Improving Signaling in the Baltics

### Signaling Without Provoking

In determining where to start with an effective signaling campaign, it is required to analyze the adversary's signaling to properly counter-signal. In this case, why does President Putin view the U.S. and NATO as a threat to its security? Has U.S. and NATO signaling, or lack of, driven President Putin to reach this conclusion? According to Fiona Hill, Russia is trying to reach an end-state that advances Russia's preferred geo-political arrangements and President Putin has made it clear his preference "would be one without NATO and without any other strategic alliances that are embedded in the European Union's security concepts."<sup>52</sup> The challenge is determining where where deterrence and assurance become escalatory and provocative. Once Russia's decision calculus is determined, the U.S. and NATO can send tailored assurance messages signaling the resolve of the alliance and message with clarity and precision to avoid misunderstanding or miscalculation by Moscow that could actually provoke conflict.

In *NATO Review*, a key to the successful transmission and intended receipt of a message is based on credibility and its three components of cohesion, capability, and communication. First, cohesion is the actual and displayed "unity and solidarity" of the NATO alliance. This unity has been strengthened, not weakened as President Putin intended with his aggressive rhetoric, by recent actions by Moscow. Second is capability. NATO capability as well as the export of U.S. capability to the region add to credibility. Making credibility stronger, this capability has been demonstrated in Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE, numerous exercises, and deploying strategic assets such as bombers and SSBNs to Europe. Finally, credibility requires it be communication properly. To counter Russia's doctrine of escalate to de-escalate,

modernizing and reigniting extended deterrence would increase the cost of action and force Moscow to think twice about using tactical nuclear weapons to escalate its way out of a failing conventional conflict.<sup>53</sup>

### **Innovate to Create New Ways to Signal**

Not knowing exactly what effect current US and NATO assurance signaling has on Russia requires strategists to innovate to find new ways or combine old ways effectively. One way to change signaling is to include Sweden and Finland into a messaging campaign. Though not members of NATO they are regional partners and can be used to demonstrate Western Europe's commitment to security in the region. Bringing these two into the campaign prevents Russia from using their non-NATO status as an assumption that they will not come to defend the Baltics because they are not NATO.<sup>54</sup> If invaded and if Russia has A2/AD in the air and in the Baltic Sea, the Baltics lose resupply routes. Forging strong cooperation with Sweden and Finland could ensure supplies could still reach the Baltics from Scandinavia. An article released by the five Scandinavian countries of Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland "...emphasized that in view of the rising uncertainty in the Baltic Sea region, the Nordic states would act in solidarity, and also extend that solidarity to the Baltic states. This attitude by Sweden and Finland...is immensely important because of the Russian disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting the two states as reliable partners for NATO."<sup>55</sup>

Jan Osburg from the RAND Corporation offers an interesting idea to increase defense in the Baltics while adding to the signaling effort that an attack by Russia on the Baltics will not be easy. Called the "Swiss approach" because of one its proponents, Swiss Army Major Hans von Dach, it utilizes the local population to add to a resistance effort. The "Swiss approach" seeks to deny the enemy victory through infrastructure denial, such as preset charges on bridges and

railroads, and military and civilian resistance activities creating a “credible and demonstrated will to resist [to] deter aggression by increasing the potential cost to the adversary.”<sup>56</sup>

Assessing the adversary’s perceived cost-benefit ratio might be determined by studying psychology. Due to its impact and severity, basic human emotions can play a large role in President Putin’s decision calculus if planning to invade the Baltics. Though a move to invade the Baltics may appear irrational, President Putin is a very rational actor, therefore analysts may begin to understand his decision calculus by studying President Putin’s human nature traits such as lust for power by expanding influence, fear of losing credibility on the world stage, and regime survival desires. Using these traits, and others, would assist in developing a deterrence tailored to the Baltic scenario. In employing deterrence, the U.S. should also keep in mind its own psychology and avoid errors such as mirror imaging where U.S. values are erroneously transferred to how the U.S. predicts an adversary would act.

Other considerations to improve, change, or tailor signaling in the Baltics are various nuclear and conventional means. First, positioning a carrier battle group of the coast presents a large deterrence and assurance effect. Deploying a carrier to the Baltic Sea assures the NATO and partner nations in the region and signals to Russia resolve and diminishes their A2/AD capability. Secondly, the United Kingdom and France possess a strong signaling capability with their nuclear missile submarines and Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) aircraft. Having this capability show up at ports in the Baltic Sea would be definite shift in current policy and gather much attention in Moscow. Finally, the U.S. and NATO could increase or change the tracks of ongoing manned ISR sorties in the region and introduce Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) to the equation. Patrolling over the Baltics near the Russian border would change the signaling variable and surely provoke a reaction from Moscow. Being strong signaling methods, the

previous require great care in implementing due to the strong possibility of appearing escalatory and should therefore be used at most as part of a multi-national exercise.

### **Full-Spectrum Collaboration**

General Chilton, then Commander of USSTRATCOM, stated in today's deterrence environment, it is necessary to in all the capabilities of U.S., allies, and partners with each bringing together all elements of respective national power to calculate success.<sup>57</sup> Signaling should combine various conventional capabilities, both U.S. and those of allies and partners, with economic signals such as modernization and infrastructure improvements. These signals should then be integrated into a strong IO campaign, or set of campaigns, that is supported by consistent statements by all stakeholders. Where applicable, the same messages should be signaled by the private sector.

According to former Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, the Department of Defense "is working to integrate conventional and nuclear deterrence strategies in Europe...to prepare for low-end conflict."<sup>58</sup> A successful signaling campaign begins with getting all the right parties together. At the very least, this group should include Members of Congress, USSTRATCOM Commander, USEUCOM Commander, NATO leaders and heads of state, Department of State, and Department of Defense. Messaging opportunities should also always include public affairs and the media. To complete the package, the signals need to be tailored by taking into account analysis conducted on the intended audience. New methods can be tried and their effectiveness determined by asking those that are to be assured. Any method will have a deterrence aspect and therefore thought should be given to whether or not the method or methods are seen as escalatory by Russia.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

New and evolving security environments require new ideas with regard to deterrence and assurance. Today's approach requires deliberate tailoring of signals and requires messaging is coordinated and supported by persistent and consistent statements by U.S., allied, and partner leadership. The next NPR must align with the NSS and NMS and any signaling with military capability should support these documents and should continue evolving from Cold War assurance methods due to an evolving geostrategic environment.<sup>59</sup> Equally important, statements and testimony should not deviate from the core documents mentioned and any statements should be consistent. In the case of the Baltics, assurance needs to transition to a tailored and flexible deterrence campaign that utilizes all of the United States' and NATO's instruments of power to achieve effective signaling against a resurgent Russia, starting with continuing a strong U.S. presence in the three nations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia" (speech, Tallinn, Estonia, 3 September 2014), Briefing Room, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/remarks-president-obama-people-estonia>

<sup>2</sup> National Institute for Public Policy, *Russia's Nuclear Posture* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>3</sup> David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 1, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html)

<sup>4</sup> Notes, Briefing at Estonian Ministry of Defence, 6 March 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Shlapak, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Loren B. Thompson, "Why the Baltic States Are Where Nuclear War Is Most Likely to Begin," *The National Interest*, 20 July 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-the-baltic-states-are-where-nuclear-war-most-likely-17044>

<sup>8</sup> Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty states: The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

<sup>9</sup> United States, and Barack Obama. 2015. *National Security Strategy*: The White House, 25.

"North Atlantic Treaty." Washington, DC: GPO, 4 April 1949.

[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm)

<sup>10</sup> United States, and Barack Obama. 2015. *National Security Strategy*: The White House, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2015, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Brad Roberts, *The Case for US Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 183.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Markusen, "How We Lost The Peace Dividend," *The American Prospect*, July-August 1997. Accessed 22 February 2017, <http://prospect.org/article/how-we-lost-peace-dividend>

<sup>15</sup> Brad Roberts, *The Case for Nuclear Weapons*, 176.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, Report (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2010), 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense, *European Reassurance Initiative*, Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, February 2015), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3-14.

<sup>19</sup> "Trip Wire Deterrence," *The Economist*, 2 July 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21701515-ageing-alliance-hopes-russia-will-get-message-it-serious-trip-wire-deterrence>.

<sup>20</sup> David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Stephan Fruhling and Guillaume Lasconjaras, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge," *Survival* 58, no. 2 (April-May 2016): 106-107.

<sup>22</sup> Notes, Meeting with Latvian Ministry of Defense, 6 March 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence with a student at the Baltic Defence College, 18 January 2017.

<sup>24</sup> "Trip Wire Deterrence," *The Economist*

<sup>25</sup> Sumantra Maitra, "Why the Scenario of Russia Invading the Baltics is Unlikely," *Russia Direct*, 12 February 2016, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Stephan Fruhling and Guillaume Lasconjaras, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge," 106-107.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Wasserbly, "US to Recalibrate its Strategy of Deterrence," *IHS Jane's Defense Weekly* 52, no. 31 (3 August 2016): 12.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Lowther, ed., *Thinking About Deterrence* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Briefing, Michelle Black, United States Strategic Command, "Adversary Decision Calculus and Deterrence Analysis Applied," USSTRATCOM J55 brief, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Briefing, Pat McKenna, United States Strategic Command, "Deterrence Concepts and Force Structure Analysis," USSTRATCOM J55 brief, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, December 2010, 49-51, [www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare](http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Wasserbly, "US to Recalibrate," 12.

- <sup>33</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2016, 74.
- <sup>34</sup> Jim Dorschner, "Smart Deterrence," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly* 53, no. 33 (17 August 2016): 28-31.
- <sup>35</sup> Judy Dempsey, "In Defense of the Baltics," *Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe*, <http://carnieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=64244>, 1.
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- <sup>37</sup> John-Michael Arnold, "NATO's Readiness Action Plan," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2016, 77.
- <sup>38</sup> Jim Dorschner, "Smart Deterrence," 28-31.
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- <sup>41</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Naval Striking and Support Forces, BATOPS 16" accessed 5 November 2016, [www.sfn.nato.int/activities/current-and-futer/exercises/baltops-16.aspx](http://www.sfn.nato.int/activities/current-and-futer/exercises/baltops-16.aspx).
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Commander from United States Strategic Command, 21 December 2016.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Damon Wilson and Magnus Nordenman, "A US Strategy," 4.
- <sup>45</sup> EUCOM is an acronym for United States European Command.
- <sup>46</sup> Philip Breedlove, "US Depends on European Allies and Partners to 'Fully Defend Our National Security Interests'," *Atlantic Council* (blog) 25 February 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/gen-breedlove-us-depends-on-european-allies-and-partners>.
- <sup>47</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia, NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States," *World Affairs* 160 no. 3 (Winter 1998): 2.
- <sup>48</sup> Pat McKenna, "Deterrence Concepts," slide 3.
- <sup>49</sup> Dr Todd Robinson, "The Always Never Problem" (lecture, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 31 October 2016).
- <sup>50</sup> Department of Defense, *Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept*, 52.
- <sup>51</sup> Notes, Meetings with Estonian Ministry of Defense, 2 March 2017; Notes, Meetings with Latvian Ministry of Defense, 6 March 2017
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- <sup>54</sup> Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, "The Role of Sweden and Finland in NATO's Defense of the Baltic States," *The Heritage Foundation Issue Brief*, No. 4554 (28 April 2016), 3.
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- <sup>58</sup> Daniel Wasserbly, Secretary Aston Carter quoted in "Nuclear Deterrence is Changing," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 53 no. 40 (5 October 2016), 13.
- <sup>59</sup> Tal Tovy, *The Changing Nature of Geostrategy 1900-2000, The Evolution of a New Paradigm* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2015), xix.

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