

Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma

Evan Braden
Montgomery

Realism, Reassurance, and the
Problem of Uncertainty

In an anarchic international system with no overarching sovereign, can great powers overcome uncertainty and establish trust, or does the possibility that others hold aggressive motives inevitably lead to fear, competition, and conflict? Are nonaggressive powers capable of revealing their preferences and proving to others that their foremost goal is security? Can these states discover whether potential adversaries are similarly benign or instead greedy, motivated by nonsecurity goals such as the desire to enhance prestige or spread a particular ideology? If offense and defense are distinguishable, will benign and greedy actors be able to differentiate themselves and identify one another by the military forces they choose? Two variants of contemporary realism offer different answers to these questions.¹

Offensive structural realism assumes that uncertainty is complete and invariant, as well as a determinative constraint on state behavior. Because great powers are unable to know either the present or future intentions of other actors, they are conditioned to remain fearful and maximize their relative power whenever possible. Alternatively, defensive structural realism builds on the familiar logic of the security dilemma, the situation where one state's attempts to increase its security appear threatening to others and provoke an unnecessary conflict. As a result, it places significant emphasis on factors that influence the severity of the security dilemma between states, such as military technology, geography, and estimates of adversaries' intentions and motives.²

Evan Braden Montgomery is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Politics at the University of Virginia.

The author is grateful to Dale Copeland, Lance Hannon, Robert Jervis, David Kearn, Jeffrey Legro, John Owen, two anonymous reviewers, and especially Stacie Pettyjohn for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this article.

1. The seminal work on structural realism remains Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

2. On offensive realism, see John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 9–14; and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), chap. 2. On defensive realism and the security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 50–90; and Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997), pp. 171–201. The distinction between offensive and defensive branches of structural realism is first made in

Defensive realism's main observations indicate that hard-line policies often lead to self-defeating and avoidable consequences. If so, then conciliatory policies should have the opposite effect. Several scholars have elaborated this intuitive logic. Drawing on rational-choice deterrence theory,³ cooperation theory,⁴ and Charles Osgood's GRIT strategy,⁵ they argue that benign states can reveal their motives, reassure potential adversaries, and avoid unnecessary conflict with costly signals—actions that greedy actors would be unwilling to take. In particular, by engaging in arms control agreements or unilateral force reductions, a security seeker can adopt a more defensive military posture and demonstrate its preference for maintaining rather than challenging the status quo.

This argument generates an obvious puzzle, however: If states can reduce uncertainty by altering their military posture, why has this form of reassurance been both uncommon and unsuccessful?⁶ Few states, for example, have adopted defensive weapons to de-escalate an arms race or demonstrate their intentions,⁷ and repeated efforts to restrain the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union either failed or produced strategically negligible agreements that, at least until its final years, "proved incapable of moderating the superpower rivalry in any deep or permanent way."⁸ How can scholars and policymakers understand why states often avoid military reas-

Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 10–13. For comparisons of the two, see Stephen G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 445–477; Robert Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63; and Stephen M. Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition," in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, eds., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline III* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

3. See, for example, James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (February 1997), pp. 68–90. For an overview of rational choice approaches to signaling, see James D. Morrow, "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 86–91.

4. See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation under Anarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

5. The acronym stands for Graduated Reciprocation in Tension reduction. See Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

6. For an early discussion of this type of signaling, see Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 38–40. On alternative methods of reassurance, see Janice Gross Stein, "Reassurance in International Conflict Management," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 431–451.

7. George W. Downs, David M. Roache, and Randolph M. Siverson, "Arms Races and Cooperation," in Oye, *Cooperation under Anarchy*, p. 124; and Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 4.

8. Barry Buzan and Eric Herring, *The Arms Dynamic in World Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 215.

assurance, when they choose to undertake it, why it fails, and when it can succeed? In 1906 Britain tried to prevent a further escalation of its naval race with Germany by decreasing the number of battleships it planned to construct, but this gesture was unreciprocated and the competition continued. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Soviet Union substantially reduced its conventional forces, yet the United States did not view these reductions as proof of benign motives. The later Soviet efforts under Mikhail Gorbachev were more successful, however, and seem to be a rare instance of a state using both arms control and arms reductions to disabuse others of the belief that it is or may be an aggressive actor. This is perhaps the only case in which such actions helped to bring about a fundamental change in a once-adversarial relationship.

This article critically addresses these issues and elaborates several modifications to existing realist theories. The relative paucity of empirical support indicates that states are often unwilling or unable to combat the problem of uncertainty by altering their military posture. To explain this observation, I show that attempts to incorporate reassurance into realism face several theoretical obstacles. In particular, while states can often demonstrate their intentions, the conditions under which benign actors can reveal their underlying motives without also increasing their vulnerability are significantly restricted.⁹

The arguments presented below build on elements of defensive realism and offense-defense theory to provide a more complete account of the disincentives, constraints, and opportunities associated with military reassurance. I argue that the primary way a benign state reveals its motives to its adversaries is by taking actions that decrease its ability to defeat them in the event of a conflict. Because greedy states prefer to expand when possible, they would rarely undermine their ability to conquer potential targets; benign states must therefore do just that so as to distinguish themselves. If offense and defense cannot be differentiated, however, reductions in a state's ability to attack will also decrease its ability to defend, and gestures sufficient to communicate benign preferences will increase its vulnerability to possible aggressors.

Consequently, benign states are often confronted with a difficult trade-off:

9. The concept of greedy or aggressively motivated states as distinct from benign or security-seeking states is made in Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (July 1992), pp. 497–538. Below, I use the terms "motives" and "preferences" synonymously to refer to a state's underlying goals, as distinct from its "intentions" or the strategies it chooses to achieve those goals. See *ibid.*, pp. 499–500; Jeffrey A. Frieden, "Actors and Preferences in International Relations," in Lake and Powell, *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, pp. 42–45; and Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 318.

the same actions necessary to reassure their adversaries will also endanger their own security if those adversaries are in reality aggressive. One way defensive realism has addressed this constraint is by implicitly assuming that states know their rivals' motives before revealing their own. Although defensive realists have focused on how security seekers can demonstrate their preferences, they have placed less emphasis on explaining why they would do so in the first place. Yet, if reassuring a greedy actor decreases a state's security and offering concessions to a state whose motives are unknown entails significant risk, then states are most likely to engage in reassurance when they are already confident that their adversary is benign. This makes reassurance an effect, as well as a cause, of reduced uncertainty.

Defensive realists also rely on two particular variables—the offense-defense balance and offense-defense differentiation—to explain when states can and will reveal their motives.¹⁰ Specifically, when defense is distinguishable from and more effective than offense, benign states can adopt military postures that provide for their security without threatening others. Combining both variables yields six ideal-type conditions, yet only one—offense-defense differentiation and a neutral offense-defense balance—clearly allows security seekers to communicate their motives without increasing their vulnerability. Offense-defense differentiation is a necessary condition for reassurance without vulnerability, as benign and greedy states will each be able to choose military postures that visibly reflect their preferences. Differentiation is not sufficient, however. In contrast to defensive realists, I argue that a defensive advantage does not constitute a favorable condition for reassurance. Only when offense and defense are distinct and the balance between them is neutral will both types of states be willing to adopt different capabilities, due to (1) the absence of structural pressures compelling all actors to favor either offense or defense, and (2) the ability of each type of actor to choose its preferred capabilities with no accompanying disadvantage.

The remainder of the article is divided into three sections. The first section

10. The offense-defense balance generally refers to the relative effectiveness of offensive versus defensive forces and doctrines, as determined primarily by military technology and geography. Offense-defense differentiation refers to the ability to distinguish between offensive and defensive postures. For definitions and discussions of these concepts, see Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 186–214; Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," pp. 185–188; Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics," *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 660–691; Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, "What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?" *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 44–82; and Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

reviews the debate between offensive and defensive realism on the role of uncertainty. The second section develops the article's main theoretical arguments. The final section presents three historical examples of military reassurance—Britain's reduction in its naval estimates before the Second Hague Conference in 1907, the Soviet Union's troop reductions under Nikita Khrushchev, and the Soviet disarmament and arms control initiatives under Gorbachev—and shows that my arguments help to explain why the first two efforts failed, whereas the third was considerably more successful.

Anarchy, Uncertainty, and the Offensive-Defensive Realist Debate

The issue of uncertainty represents a significant point of disagreement not only between realism and alternative approaches to international relations, but also between different branches of realism.¹¹ At one extreme, offensive realism holds that uncertainty is immutable and a central cause of conflict. As John Mearsheimer argues, "Intentions are impossible to divine with 100 percent certainty."¹² Because the international system compels all actors to provide for their own security, decisionmakers cannot rely on the internal characteristics of other states as adequate sources of information. Instead, they are forced to infer what potential adversaries may do by observing their aggregate power and assessing their capacity to inflict harm. Moreover, every state is assumed to possess some offensive capability at all times; the chance that any actor might abruptly choose to attack can never be dismissed. There is therefore little room in offensive realism for a strategy of reassurance. Instead, "the best way for a state to survive in anarchy is to take advantage of other states and gain power at their expense."¹³ States must act as if their rivals are aggressive and continually attempt to increase their relative power, ensuring that the security dilemma will remain severe.

11. Alternatives to realism are generally more sanguine about uncertainty. Neoliberalism, for example, argues that international institutions reduce uncertainty over intentions by increasing the probability that states will continue to cooperate with one another. See Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Celeste A. Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies: German-Russian Cooperation after the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999). Both democratic peace and constructivist approaches maintain that states often know others' motives because of the presence (or absence) of a shared liberal ideology or socialization through repeated interaction, respectively. On democratic peace theory, see Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). On constructivism, see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

12. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 31.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Defensive realists have challenged these claims.¹⁴ Departing from offensive realism's strict focus on the distribution of power, defensive realism argues that the offense-defense balance significantly affects the degree of insecurity states face. A strong offensive advantage makes conquest comparatively easy, increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior, and intensifies the security dilemma between states. Conversely, a strong defensive advantage makes conquest more difficult and leaves states more secure.¹⁵

Because a state's military posture serves as an indicator of its likely behavior, the offense-defense balance also affects how states perceive their rivals. Defensive realists maintain that a state's security policies are determined in part by its assessment of others' intentions and motives.¹⁶ Hard-line strategies are generally chosen when others are thought to be hostile. For example, states are more likely to balance against than bandwagon with adversaries believed to be "unalterably aggressive."¹⁷ Most realists would agree, moreover, that these beliefs are largely a function of a state's military posture. Barry Posen notes that, "in watching one another, states tend to focus on military doctrines and military capabilities," and "take these capabilities at face value."¹⁸ This suggests that, at a minimum, the offense-defense balance communicates information about others' immediate intentions. When offense has the advantage, states believe that others are more likely to attack. When defense has the advantage, states know that others are less likely to do so. The security dilemma can therefore be exacerbated or mitigated absent any knowledge of others' underlying motives; the choice of offensive or defensive postures can indicate what a state will do, but those postures may themselves be the result of structural pressures rather than state preferences. As long as states remain uncer-

14. Neoclassical realists such as Randall L. Schweller and Andrew Kydd also maintain that uncertainty is minimal, arguing that states can use mechanisms including but not limited to military reassurance to mitigate the security dilemma. See Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 91–121; and Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 114–154. For a recent critique of these arguments, see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 144–152.

15. Van Evera, *Causes of War*, chap. 6; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 185–199.

16. This argument is most clearly expressed in Robert Jervis's discussion of the spiral and deterrence models. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3. See also Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," pp. 499–508; and Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 25–28.

17. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 26.

18. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 17.

tain of others' motives, however, the security dilemma between them will persist.¹⁹

Both Robert Jervis and Charles Glaser have addressed this issue, arguing that states can at times act to significantly reduce this uncertainty. According to Jervis, when offense and defense can be distinguished, greedy actors will identify themselves by choosing forces useful for expansion. He writes, "Assuming that the defense is at least as potent as the offense, differentiation between them allows status-quo states to behave in ways that are clearly different from those of aggressors."²⁰ Only states determined to expand would choose offensive weapons when defensive capabilities were distinct and more effective. Glaser expands this logic, suggesting three strategies that should allow a benign actor to demonstrate its motives: engaging in arms control to limit offensive forces (when offense and defense are distinct) or the size of forces (when they are not), unilaterally shifting to a defensive military posture, and unilaterally reducing military capabilities below what is necessary for defense and deterrence. In each case, a security-seeking state could diminish its ability to expand or even to defend in a way that a greedy actor would not.²¹ In general, then, these arguments indicate that states do possess the ability to overcome the key constraint of an anarchic system.

Defensive Realism and the Limits of Reassurance

The following section examines and evaluates defensive realism's arguments for military reassurance. I first address the lengths to which benign states must go to reveal their preferences, arguing that increased vulnerability is often the necessary result of successful efforts to overcome uncertainty. Second, I argue that although uncertainty frequently prevents states from communicating their motives, this constraint is at times implicitly assumed away. Third, I show that the effects of offense-defense variables on reassurance are different than previously understood.

19. On this point, see especially Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 120–128. The related problem that another state's preferences may become hostile in the future cannot, however, be overcome by the use of costly signals, which reveal only an actor's current motives. See Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 246.

20. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 199. See also Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," pp. 178–180.

21. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," pp. 67–70; and Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 181. For a formal treatment of reassurance, see Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 325–357.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF REASSURANCE

Perhaps the central dilemma of reassurance is that the very actions necessary to overcome uncertainty between security-seeking states will often leave these actors more vulnerable to greedy ones. This constraint stems from the logic of signaling and the assumptions of structural realism. The underlying logic of signaling is straightforward: "If discrete types take different actions, then observers can infer the actor's type from its actions."²² For example, a state involved in a crisis may attempt to communicate resolve—demonstrating that it is not the type to back down—by taking steps a less determined actor would avoid, such as making public commitments or mobilizing the military.²³ In the context of reassurance rather than deterrence, a nonaggressive state can similarly distinguish itself by taking actions that an aggressive actor would find too costly.²⁴ Specifically, the primary way a state can reveal benign motives is by taking actions substantial enough to decrease its ability to defeat an adversary in war, if one were to occur. Because an aggressor "will be reluctant to sacrifice concrete military advantages," a nonaggressive state must "go beyond tokens, and make concessions weighty enough so that a state contemplating attack or coercion would be unwilling to make them."²⁵ That states must reach this threshold to prove that their motives are benign follows directly from realism's central assumptions: because security seekers are concerned foremost with their continued survival and because they fear that other states are greedy and prefer to expand at their expense, only signals that clearly diminish a state's ability to do so will differentiate the two types of actors.²⁶

This suggests that, to demonstrate its motives, a benign state must take actions that will increase its vulnerability to potential adversaries or negotiate agreements that would have this effect if others did not abide by them. Although a gesture substantial enough to communicate a benign state's preferences will reduce the probability of unnecessary conflict with other security seekers, it will also decrease its ability to fight or deter any greedy states that might choose to attack—a heightened possibility if the signaling state appears less willing or able to defend itself. As Dale Copeland observes, "Conciliatory reassurance may reduce the probability of major war breaking out as a result

22. Morrow, "The Strategic Setting of Choices," p. 87.

23. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests."

24. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," p. 68.

25. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 144–145.

26. Another possible method of reassurance may be to avoid expanding or taking advantage of the adversary's vulnerability when an opportunity to do so arises. See Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. 20; and Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p. 43.

of an inadvertent spiral. But by sacrificing relative power in the process, it can lower a state's likelihood of winning any war that does occur."²⁷ Moreover, unless offense and defense can be differentiated, a state will use the same forces for both offensive and defensive missions. Signals of reassurance large enough to decrease a state's ability to pursue an offensive or expansionist strategy against a rival will therefore decrease its ability to defend against that rival.²⁸ This indicates that among states with comparable resources, the vulnerability of the signaling state would be greater after its attempt at reassurance than prior to it.²⁹ It is, however, this willingness to accept an increase in vulnerability that makes a signal of reassurance credible.

Small gestures that do not affect a state's capabilities are thus likely to be discounted, and gestures sufficient to convey information are likely to be dangerous if others are in fact greedy. This presents a difficult trade-off for states attempting both to avoid unnecessary wars and to deter potential aggressors. On the one hand, the risks of continued competition may at times outweigh its benefits and provide an incentive for cooperation.³⁰ Indeed, Andrew Kydd argues that, for a benign state, avoiding war with another security seeker may be worth the cost of a diminished capacity to fight off an aggressor.³¹ Yet this cost explains why significant gestures are often anathema to states.

Throughout much of the Cold War, for example, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was willing to make major concessions to curb the arms race, even though both "were driven by nightmares of inferiority . . . not by hopes for gain."³² According to Raymond Garthoff, both sides possessed a "natural conservatism" toward arms control and pursued agreements that would limit the other's forces without offering equivalent reductions. Until

27. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, p. 40.

28. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 192.

29. The following discussion assumes that power is approximately equal and constant. These restrictions are useful for determining the effects of offense-defense variables on reassurance. It can be suggested, however, that large power disparities may make reassurance more difficult. When power is unevenly distributed, the more powerful state can make small concessions that do not diminish its ability to defeat a weaker opponent; larger concessions will therefore be necessary to demonstrate benign motives. Small gestures may not appear credible from weak states either, because these states cannot defeat a more powerful state and therefore have no military advantage to relinquish. When two states are evenly matched, small concessions will likely have a larger impact on one's ability to defeat the other. For a somewhat different argument that more powerful states will be less willing—rather than less able—to reassure, see Andrew Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (April 1997), p. 395.

30. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," pp. 58–60.

31. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," p. 144.

32. Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2001), p. 56.

Gorbachev's tenure, "that contradiction had been resolved by reaching agreements that did not seriously reduce the strategic forces of either side."³³ Reflecting on the negotiations that led to the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Talks agreement, Henry Kissinger notes that "the basic assignment of each side's negotiators became to protect those weapons which their planners were in the process of developing and eager to deploy. At the same time, each side's negotiators sought to constrain to the greatest extent possible those weapons of the adversary that worried them the most."³⁴ Even the 1972 Antibalistic Missile Treaty, with its virtual prohibition on the development of missile defense systems, constituted only a minor sacrifice for both sides. For the United States, these systems promised great expense with little if any military payoff,³⁵ for the Soviet Union, the treaty eliminated an area of competition in which it lagged far behind its opponent.³⁶ As a result, the two countries' decisions "were as much an admission of impracticability as a statement of preference."³⁷

Defensive realists have addressed this fear of vulnerability both by assumption and by argument, describing signaling as a process of overcoming one-sided uncertainty—situations in which the sender knows the receiver's motives before revealing its own—and maintaining that offense-defense variables explain when reassurance can be successful as well as safe. The following subsections assess each explanation in turn.

KNOWING THE ENEMY: REASSURANCE AND REDUCED UNCERTAINTY

Benign states can undoubtedly communicate their preferences if they are willing to accept sufficient reductions in their capabilities, yet this may also lead to greater vulnerability. Why, then, should they choose reassurance over continued competition? The logic of defensive realism is clear: a relative decrease in a state's capabilities can increase its security by revealing its benign motives,

33. Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1994), p. 513.

34. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 252. See also John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 326.

35. Warner R. Schilling, "U.S. Strategic Nuclear Concepts in the 1970s: The Search for Sufficiently Equivalent Countervailing Parity," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 1981), p. 54; and Sidney D. Drell, Philip J. Farley, and David Holloway, "Preserving the ABM Treaty: A Critique of the Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1984), p. 52.

36. Sayre Stevens, "The Soviet BMD Program," in Ashton B. Carter and David N. Schwartz, eds., *Ballistic Missile Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1984), pp. 203–204; and Raymond L. Garthoff, "BMD in East-West Relations," in Carter and Schwartz, *Ballistic Missile Defense*, pp. 286–287.

37. Buzan and Herring, *The Arms Dynamic in World Politics*, p. 221.

which will in turn reduce the adversary's insecurity and decrease its need for aggressive policies. Facing a more secure and less hostile opponent, the first state will become more secure as well.³⁸ Glaser, for example, suggests that even a substantial, unilateral, and unreciprocated decrease in a state's capabilities may increase its security if correctly interpreted by others as a gesture of reassurance.³⁹ This argument only holds, however, if the state's opponent is in fact benign. If its opponent is greedy, a decrease in capabilities will have the opposite effect.

Defensive realism minimizes this dilemma by implicitly suggesting that states know others' preferences before revealing their own; both its logic and its description of reassurance appear to reflect situations of one-sided uncertainty.⁴⁰ As Glaser argues, "A state seeking security should be concerned about whether its adversary understands that its motivations are benign. Uncertainty about the state's motives, or even worse, the incorrect belief that the state is motivated by greed . . . will increase the adversary's insecurity, which in turn will reduce the state's own security. Thus, structural realism suggests that states should be very interested in demonstrating that their motives are benign."⁴¹ Two factors are notable here. First, reassurance is proposed as a solution to a specific problem: the adversary's uncertainty over the state's preferences. Second, the state presumably knows that its adversary is benign; if the latter were greedy, the former could not increase its security by demonstrating its benign motives and would therefore have no incentive to engage in reassurance. Both factors suggest an interaction characterized by one-sided uncertainty. In this context, the signaling state will have a diminished fear of exploitation and will be more likely to take actions that clearly reveal its preferences.⁴² Reassurance is therefore an unexplained effect of reduced uncertainty as well as a cause of it. This perspective diminishes the importance of a

38. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," pp. 72–76; and Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 181.

39. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 181.

40. In "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," Kydd formally demonstrates that reassurance can succeed when both sides are uncertain of each other's motives. He argues, however, that benign states "prefer to be ill prepared for wars that are forced upon them by greedy types if this enables them to avoid unnecessary wars with other security seekers" (p. 388). Why benign states would necessarily have these preferences is unclear; it is equally plausible that they would prefer to deter or defeat an aggressive actor that sought out war, even at the expense of an unnecessary conflict with a security seeker.

41. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," pp. 67–68; see also *ibid.*, pp. 60, 70.

42. This is not to suggest that reassurance is unnecessary in situations of one-sided uncertainty where state *A* knows that its rival, state *B*, is nonaggressive, because *B* must still be convinced that *A* is nonaggressive to prevent any conflict between them. The question, however, is how *A* discovered that *B* was not a threat absent any reassurance on the part of *B*.

second problem—namely, the signaling state's own uncertainty and its need to determine the adversary's preferences.

When a state believes that its adversary seeks security, the argument for reassurance is a compelling one. By contrast, uncertainty over the other's motives and the fear it may exploit any concession often inhibit cooperation and diminish the prospects for reassurance. In 1946, for example, President Harry Truman was reluctant to support the international control of atomic energy without extensive institutional safeguards that, in the opinion of then Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson, would guarantee that negotiations with the Soviet Union would break down. Truman, however, argued that the United States should not "throw away our gun until we are sure that the rest of the world cannot arm against us."⁴³ Several years later he chose to pursue the development of hydrogen weapons once aware that the Soviet Union was capable of doing so as well; there was no guarantee that the Soviets would refrain from exercising their influence if they developed this capability and the United States did not.⁴⁴ Kissinger also opposed any unilateral concessions when negotiating with the Soviet Union: "I did not accept the proposition that unilateral restraint in weapons procurement on our part would evoke a comparable response from the Kremlin. As believers in the predominance of 'objective factors,' the Soviet leaders were likely to interpret such steps less as gestures of conciliation than as weakness."⁴⁵

In addition, efforts at reassurance under uncertainty will be complicated by the presence of multiple goals requiring contradictory strategies. Not only must a signaling state endeavor to reveal its benign preferences; it must also attempt to discover whether its adversary is a security seeker.⁴⁶ Although the first goal calls for significant gestures that will serve as adequate proof of the signaling state's motives, the second calls for smaller gestures as a test of the adversary's reaction. Yet smaller gestures will not be viewed as credible signals of reassurance and are unlikely to be reciprocated. This dilemma is nicely captured by what George Downs and David Rocke have called "the basic paradox of tacit bargaining." They write, "*A state will rarely be certain enough*

43. "Truman to Baruch," July 10, 1946, Baruch Papers, box 65, quoted in Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 115.

44. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 100. See also Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, pp. 327–333.

45. Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 203.

46. As Deborah Welch Larson notes, concessions can have more than one purpose. Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 26–27.

about an opponent's response to make a large cooperative gesture, and the opponent will rarely be trusting enough to respond enthusiastically to a small gesture."⁴⁷ Thus, even when uncertainty encourages states to engage in reassurance, it also restrains them from taking actions that will clearly reveal their preferences. Credible gestures are therefore less likely to be made when they are most needed—when uncertainty is a significant constraint.

OFFENSE, DEFENSE, AND REASSURANCE

Even if uncertainty is pronounced, are there conditions under which benign states can use military reassurance to reveal their preferences without accepting a greater degree of vulnerability? The inclusion of offense-defense variables would seem to provide a clear, affirmative answer. By increasing the costs of expansion, a strong defensive advantage correspondingly increases the security of states. In addition, when offense and defense are distinct, "much of the uncertainty about the other's intentions that contributes to the security dilemma is removed."⁴⁸ A benign state can then "deploy forces that are useful only for protecting its territory, which does not reduce its adversary's ability to defend itself," and in doing so demonstrate its motives, "since only a country that wants to take territory will buy forces that have offensive potential."⁴⁹ Given that a strong offensive advantage will compel security seekers to deploy offensive capabilities even if differentiation is possible, it is the combination of differentiation and defensive advantage that creates a "doubly safe" world in which aggression is difficult, motivations are transparent, and the security dilemma is effectively eliminated.⁵⁰

These arguments are correct, in part, yet also incomplete. Differentiation is a necessary condition for reassurance without vulnerability; if offense and defense cannot be distinguished, gestures large enough to decrease a state's ability to attack will also decrease its ability to defend against an attack. A defensive advantage does not, however, make reassurance easier to accomplish. To reveal its motives, a benign state must take actions—that meet the same threshold—reducing its ability to defeat an adversary—whether offense or de-

47. George Downs and David Rocke, "Tacit Bargaining and Arms Control," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (April 1987), p. 322 (emphasis in original). Similarly, Colin S. Gray argues that the paradox of arms control is that it is possible to achieve only when it is unnecessary. Gray, *House of Cards: Why Arms Control Must Fail* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 17–24.

48. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 201.

49. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 186.

50. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 214. For qualifications regarding when benign states might choose offensive capabilities, see *ibid.*, pp. 201–202; and Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," pp. 186 n. 57, 192.

fense has the advantage. Choosing those forces that are most effective will fail to meet this threshold, even if they do not threaten others. Ultimately, actions that simply conform to structural pressures are unlikely to be perceived as a genuine reflection of a state's motives.⁵¹ This limits—though does not eliminate—the influence of the offense-defense balance on reassurance, and casts doubt on the stability of a “doubly safe” world.

According to defensive realists, adopting defensive forces when defense is distinct and has the advantage should send a clear message that a state does not intend to expand, while leaving it no less capable of protecting itself. To disclose information about a benign state's motives, however, greedy states must be less likely to pursue the same policy and thus more willing to retain or develop offense under these conditions. This is less certain. Defensive realists acknowledge that security seekers will often choose offensive forces when offense has the advantage, despite their preference to the contrary. Yet greedy states seem exempt from this logic. As Jervis argues, when defense is both distinguishable and strong, “There is no reason for a status-quo power to be tempted to procure offensive forces, and aggressors give notice of their intentions by the posture they adopt.”⁵²

If defensive forces are more efficient, however, all actors have an incentive to adopt them: “States buy the force that works, hence they buy defensive forces when the defense dominates, and they buy offensive forces when the offense dominates.”⁵³ Although a greedy state prefers offensive capabilities that will allow it to expand, it may be unable to act on this preference: offensive weapons will consume a greater portion of its resources, provide other states with the opportunity to balance by revealing its aggressive motives, and ultimately reduce its ability to defeat states that have adopted more effective defensive forces.⁵⁴ Given this likely disadvantage, a greedy state could defer its aggressive ambitions due to strategic exigencies, choose the same capabilities as a security seeker, and bide its time until offense regained the advantage. Glaser notes, for example, that “even a greedy state should not engage in an arms race to gain offensive capabilities that it has virtually no chance of acquiring.”⁵⁵ Mearsheimer—for whom all states are revisionists bent on overturning

51. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, pp. 35–36; and Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*, p. 28.

52. Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” p. 214.

53. Van Evera, *Causes of War*, p. 147. I am grateful to David Kearn for calling this point and its implications to my attention.

54. Lynn-Jones, “Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics,” p. 671.

55. Charles L. Glaser, “When Are Arms Races Dangerous? Rational versus Suboptimal Arming,” *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Spring 2004), p. 58.

the status quo—makes a similar point: “If launching an arms race is unlikely to leave the initiator in a better strategic position . . . it will sit tight and wait for more favorable circumstances.”⁵⁶ This in turn suggests that, like an offensive advantage, a defensive advantage may also lead greedy and benign states to adopt similar postures and appear indistinguishable.⁵⁷

Although the security dilemma will be diminished when defense has the advantage, this condition is much less favorable for reassurance than is generally supposed. If a state’s prospects for achieving success with an offensive strategy are extremely small, offensive capabilities will become less important,⁵⁸ and forgoing offense or shifting to defense will communicate little information about a state’s motives.⁵⁹ Until each actor knew that others were adopting a more defensive posture by choice, rather than due to circumstance, benign states able to concentrate on defense would appear the same as greedy states unable to adopt offense. Demonstrating benign preferences will therefore require a state to accept limitations on or reductions in the very capabilities that are most effective, whether offensive or defensive.

This conclusion limits the influence of the offense-defense balance on reassurance; neither an offensive advantage nor a defensive advantage is inherently more favorable. Nevertheless, the balance does influence the extent to which a state must limit or reduce its forces if the goal is to reveal its motives. It does so by affecting whether a particular signal will in fact decrease a state’s capabilities, and to what degree. As Stephen Van Evera notes, when offense has the advantage even small changes in the size of a state’s military forces will generate large shifts in its relative power. When defense has the advantage, however, only much more substantial changes in a state’s forces will significantly affect its ability to attack and defend.⁶⁰ This argument can be ex-

56. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 76.

57. Because greedy actors value expansion more than security seekers do, the former may be less willing than the latter to forgo offensive capabilities when defense has only a small or moderate advantage and structural pressures to adopt defense are weaker (i.e., when the offense-defense balance is closer to neutral). Doing so may communicate some information, allowing the receiver of a signal to update its beliefs while still remaining somewhat uncertain of the sender’s motives. A partial separation of types would then occur. See Morrow, “The Strategic Setting of Choices,” pp. 90–91; and James D. Morrow, *Game Theory for Political Scientists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 225. As the advantage of defense grows and pressures to adopt it become stronger, even greedy states should become increasingly likely to devote their resources to these capabilities. Doing so would consequently be a less distinctive action and communicate little information.

58. This is less so if one state is powerful enough, relative to its adversaries, to build an offensive force that is able to counter the defender’s advantage either quantitatively or qualitatively.

59. Glaser, “Realists as Optimists,” p. 69.

60. Van Evera, *Causes of War*, pp. 104, 129–130.

tended to reassurance. Specifically, an offensive advantage will make smaller gestures credible but dangerous; a defensive advantage will have the opposite effects. These effects further indicate, however, that neither offensive nor defensive advantages are conducive to reassurance.

When offense is strong and conquest is easy, small gestures can significantly decrease a state's ability to defeat its adversary and should therefore reveal its preferences. Halting an offensive arms buildup, for example, may be sufficient for reassurance, while large reductions in offensive forces will be unnecessary.⁶¹ Even small gestures will appear prohibitively dangerous, however, as a state would be left at a potential disadvantage vis-à-vis adversaries that retained the ability to develop less expensive or more efficient offensive capabilities.⁶² Efforts at reassurance when offense is strong should therefore be particularly rare. Alternatively, a defensive advantage has the reverse and somewhat paradoxical effects of encouraging reassurance while making it more difficult to pursue successfully. When conquest is difficult, a benign state can accept small reductions in its defensive forces without endangering its security. Yet smaller gestures are unlikely to decrease the threat it poses to its adversary, which is already small. Therefore, only more substantial concessions will reveal its preferences. Consequently, larger reductions in a state's defensive forces may be necessary. Because states are more secure when defense is strong, however, they have virtually no incentive to attempt reassuring gestures that might undermine that security in the hope of overcoming uncertainty. In short, neither offensive nor defensive advantages allow states to reveal their motives without also increasing their vulnerability.

If offense and defense both act as a constraint on reassurance, the question remains as to whether structural variables also provide opportunities to overcome uncertainty. Incorporating offense-defense variables does suggest conditions that would allow states to reveal their motives without the disincentive of increased vulnerability, though these are not the conditions usually identified as having such effects. Specifically, when offense and defense are differ-

61. The discussion in this paragraph assumes that offense and defense are differentiated. When they are not, small reductions in the number (rather than the type) of forces will diminish a state's ability to defeat its adversary, demonstrate its benign motives, and increase its vulnerability; only larger reductions will have these effects when defense is strong.

62. For example, when offense has the advantage, even negotiated agreements to limit offensive capabilities will be dangerous. Because the costs of exploitation are so high, fears of cheating and relative gains concerns will be especially pronounced. See Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," p. 66; and Robert Powell, "Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory," in David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 213.

entiated and the offense-defense balance is neutral, benign states can identify themselves with the forces they choose, and can do so without endangering their security. When these two conditions are met, states have a choice between offensive and defensive capabilities. More important, because both are equally effective, structure is indeterminate as to which should be chosen. Greedy actors can deploy offense; benign actors can deploy defense; and, if states have approximate parity in resources, each type of actor can choose its preferred forces without suffering any disadvantage. A security seeker's military posture will clearly reveal its motives, and the danger of vulnerability will be avoided. Figure 1 summarizes the effects of offense-defense variables on military reassurance.

Historical Examples of Military Reassurance

This section illustrates the preceding arguments with three empirical examples: Britain's decision in 1906 to reduce its naval estimates in the hope of reaching an agreement with Germany to limit arms; Khrushchev's efforts to reduce the size of the Soviet military through significant troop reductions; and Gorbachev's willingness to engage in unilateral force reductions and arms control agreements that required asymmetrical Soviet concessions.⁶³ These examples were selected for several reasons. First, each represents a prominent instance of military reassurance. Second, each includes attempts at unilateral reassurance. Although uncommon, if states should be able to mitigate uncertainty independent of others' actions, then efforts to do so are particularly important and warrant attention. Finally, these examples exhibit variation on the dependent variable. The first two examples—cases of failed reassurance—illustrate that a defensive advantage may encourage signaling because small or moderate concessions will not diminish a state's security, but that these concessions are unlikely to be viewed as an indication of benign motives. The third example—a case of successful reassurance—illustrates that signaling can help to reduce uncertainty over motives when conditions are perceived to more closely approximate offense-defense differentiation and offense-defense neutrality.⁶⁴

63. These examples are intended to illustrate the article's main arguments, and should be considered plausibility probes rather than complete case studies. See Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," reprinted in Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 147–152.

64. The notion that offense and defense can be differentiated remains a contentious one. Although treating this issue in detail is beyond the article's scope, I do suggest that differentiation was possi-

THE ANGLO-GERMAN NAVAL RACE AND THE SECOND HAGUE CONFERENCE

Germany's attempt to construct a battleship fleet capable of challenging British naval supremacy, beginning in 1898 and carried out under the direction of Adm. Alfred Tirpitz, prompted one of history's most well known arms races. By 1902 Britain concluded that it was indeed threatened by the German buildup, and within several years the naval competition had become the central issue of contention between the two powers.⁶⁵ Two developments between 1905 and 1906 preceded British efforts to diffuse this competition, which included an attempt at military reassurance. The first was the construction of the dreadnought battleship; the second was the fall of England's Conservative government in late 1905 and the succession of a Liberal cabinet. These events would provide supporters of arms limitations with a new motive and improved opportunity, respectively, to achieve their goal.

Authorized by the Conservative government, the launch of the dreadnought in 1906 introduced a ship two to three times as powerful as its predecessors. The new vessel thus had the effect of rendering "all other battleships obsolete with its strength, speed and firepower."⁶⁶ Britain's navy was the first to construct all-big-gun capital ships, a category that included dreadnought battleships as well as faster but more lightly armored battle cruisers. The development of both provided Britain with a unilateral advantage that quickly extended its naval supremacy. There was, however, a widespread belief that the superiority of the new ships over their older counterparts so devalued the latter that Britain was in fact relinquishing its strategic advantage by initiating a new naval competition in which its initial lead would be much smaller.⁶⁷ In-

ble to some degree in each case. For criticisms of this concept, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 24–27; and Jack S. Levy, "The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology: A Theoretical and Historical Analysis," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1984), pp. 219–238. For the counterargument that differentiation is possible and does not impede signaling, see Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," p. 199.

65. For overviews of the naval race and its impact on Anglo-German relations, see Paul M. Kennedy, "Strategic Aspects of the Anglo-German Naval Race," in Kennedy, ed., *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870–1945* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp. 129–160; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), especially pp. 418–430; Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter*, Vol. 2: *The Problem of Militarism in Germany*, trans. Heinz Norden (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1970), pp. 137–167; E.L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935); and Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, Vol. 1: *The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904–1919* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

66. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 218. See also Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 468–473.

67. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, pp. 108–112; and Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, pp. 56–57, 69.

Figure 1. Offense-Defense Variables, Military Reassurance, and Vulnerability

		Offense-Defense Balance		
		Strong Offensive Advantage	Neutral	Strong Defense Advantage
Offense-Defense Differentiation	Yes	<p>Small limits on offensive forces will be sufficient to reveal benign motives.</p> <p>Small concessions will also increase a state's vulnerability.</p>	<p>Benign states can reveal their motives without increased vulnerability, for two reasons.</p> <p>Differentiation allows these states to choose the defensive forces they prefer.</p> <p>Defense is as effective as offense—benign states will not be at a disadvantage if they choose defense and others do not.</p>	<p>Large reductions in defensive forces will be necessary to reveal benign motives.</p> <p>Large concessions will also increase a state's vulnerability.</p>
	No	<p>Signals that decrease a state's ability to attack will also decrease its ability to defend.</p> <p>Small reductions in the number of forces will be sufficient to reveal benign motives.</p> <p>Small concessions will also increase a state's vulnerability.</p>	<p>Signals that decrease a state's ability to attack will also decrease its ability to defend.</p> <p>Moderate reductions in the number of forces will reveal benign motives.</p> <p>Moderate concessions will also increase a state's vulnerability.</p>	<p>Signals that decrease a state's ability to attack will also decrease its ability to defend.</p> <p>Large reductions in the number of forces will be necessary to reveal benign motives.</p> <p>Large concessions will also increase a state's vulnerability.</p>

deed, this is how the decision to build the dreadnought was viewed in Germany.⁶⁸

This change in the strategic environment was accompanied by a change in Britain's domestic political environment. The Liberal Party came to office in 1906 with a pledge to expand social welfare programs at home. Members believed that rising international pressures could impede this goal and therefore opposed a more aggressive policy toward Germany that might exacerbate relations and lead to war. If the apparent German threat was not mitigated or revealed as hollow, resources necessary for social reform would be consumed by military spending.⁶⁹

These circumstances formed the background to Britain's efforts to restrain the growing naval competition with Germany. Although foreign policy was largely the responsibility of Liberal-imperialists such as the new foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and though supporters of arms limitations did not seriously question Britain's need to maintain naval superiority, the general sentiment among Liberals was that arms expenditures could and should be reduced. Shortly before stepping down, the previous government had issued the Cawdor memorandum, which called for the construction of four new dreadnoughts (battleships and battle cruisers combined) per year. Concern that these new ships would only further stimulate competition and require more resources once other states began to build them generated significant pressure to slow this rate of construction.⁷⁰

A negotiated limit on the arms race held the prospect of significant domestic and international benefits for the British, though only if it codified a sufficiently favorable balance of naval forces. To strengthen the possibility of reaching an agreement on arms limitations at the 1907 Hague Peace Conference, the Liberal government "went beyond a mere gesture."⁷¹ In July 1906 it announced that the 1907–08 naval estimates would include only two new capital ships; one ship was canceled completely, and a second was provisionally canceled with the assurance that it would be constructed if the conference proved unsuccessful.⁷² Although motivated in part by the need to reduce de-

68. Holger H. Herwig, "The German Reaction to the Dreadnought Revolution," *International History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 1991), p. 274.

69. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914*, pp. 331–333.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 333–334; Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, pp. 123, 219–220; and Harold Weinroth, "Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1971), p. 119.

71. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, p. 123.

72. Andre T. Sidorowicz, "The British Government, the Hague Peace Conference of 1907, and the

fense expenditures, this gesture was also intended to demonstrate a lack of aggression. Writing in the *Nation* in March 1907, Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman made an appeal for arms control and noted that the British had “already given earnest of our sincerity by the considerable reductions that have been effected in our naval and military expenditure, as well as by the undertaking that we are prepared to go further if we find a similar disposition in other quarters.”⁷³ This gesture was also intended as a way to determine German motives. Grey, for example, “was inclined to regard the issue as a useful test of the sincerity of the German government’s desire for better Anglo-German relations.”⁷⁴

Military reassurance appeared to be a viable strategy at the time, for several reasons. First, Britain still retained naval superiority, and its fleet had been redistributed so that a greater portion was concentrated in home waters to counter the rising German naval threat.⁷⁵ Second, by laying down dreadnoughts in advance of the other powers, Britain had forced them into a delay in shipbuilding. With this head start, it would be difficult for another state to reach a position of parity; Germany would have to widen the Kiel Canal just to accommodate the larger ships.⁷⁶ Finally, the advantage of defense was growing. In the past, a key element of British naval strategy had been the imposition of a close blockade of enemy ports. Yet the continuing development of torpedoes and submarines was making such an offensive strategy prohibitively dangerous, and support for the close blockade had largely evaporated by 1904.⁷⁷

Armaments Question,” in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., *Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899–1939* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), pp. 1–19; and Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, pp. 126–127. One ship had been dropped earlier from the 1906–07 estimates to reduce costs, and only two new armored ships were constructed under the 1908–09 estimates. See Massie, *Dreadnought*, p. 499.

73. Henry Campbell-Bannerman, “The Hague Conference and the Limitation of Armaments,” *Nation*, March 2, 1907, quoted in A.J.A. Morris, “The English Radicals’ Campaign for Disarmament and the Hague Conference of 1907,” *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (September 1971), p. 384.

74. D.W. Sweet, “Great Britain and Germany, 1905–1911,” in F.H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 218.

75. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, pp. 40–43.

76. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, pp. 111–112.

77. Kennedy, “Strategic Aspects of the Anglo-German Naval Race,” p. 148; Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, pp. 334–335, 369–377; M.S. Partridge, “The Royal Navy and the End of the Close Blockade, 1885–1905: A Revolution in Naval Strategy?” *Mariner’s Mirror*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (May 1989), pp. 119–136; and Paul Haggie, “The Royal Navy and War Planning in the Fisher Era,” in Paul M. Kennedy, ed., *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880–1914* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 118–132. Germany, assuming that Britain would impose a close blockade in the event of war, understood that defense had the advantage and calculated that an attacking force would require a 3:2 numerical advantage. Until at least 1909, Germany continued to believe that Britain

From the British perspective, submarines and torpedo craft not only posed a threat to blockading fleets, but also could be used to provide a more affordable defense for the British Isles. Under the direction of the first sea lord, Adm. Sir John Fisher, the Board of Admiralty supported a new strategy that would rely on these flotilla craft to attack approaching enemy troop transports. Nicholas Lambert argues that this strategy “represented a shift towards an essentially ‘reactive’ form of naval warfare” and “was fundamentally at odds with the idea of using the battle fleet offensively to enforce command of the sea by seeking out and destroying the enemy fleet in the blue water.”⁷⁸ Moreover, the new emphasis on these forces for naval deterrence and defense in the event of war “was the key to the Admiralty’s willingness to accept a much smaller margin of superiority in armoured warships than previously.” The change in strategy implied that “battleships were no longer required to the same extent.”⁷⁹

For these reasons, Britain’s actions did not diminish its naval capabilities,⁸⁰ nor did they have their intended effect on German policy. By the time of the Hague conference, Germany was clearly unwilling to accept any measure on disarmament, and even those who would negotiate required a British commitment of neutrality in a continental war.⁸¹ E.L. Woodward writes that “German diplomats, politicians, and writers were unable to see in the action of the Liberal Government at The Hague Conference anything more than a hypocritical attempt to secure British naval predominance without additional cost to the British taxpayer.”⁸² Based on the relative position of the two states and given that Britain’s signal did not significantly affect its military capabilities, this reaction was likely inevitable.

More dramatic attempts to demonstrate Britain’s desire for arms limitations were not viewed as an appropriate response to this situation. During the Hague conference, Grey spoke to the House of Commons and expressed his cautious support for such an agreement. At the same time, he rejected calls for

would take the offensive, despite the costs of doing so. See Kennedy, “Strategic Aspects of the Anglo-German Naval Race,” pp. 134, 150; and Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter*, pp. 150–153.

78. Nicholas A. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 126.

79. Nicholas A. Lambert, “Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904–1909,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (October 1995), p. 659.

80. Sidorowicz, “The British Government, the Hague Peace Conference of 1907, and the Armaments Question,” p. 15. The 1906 decision to cut production of two ships was accompanied by a government announcement that it had been taken “with the concurrence of the naval experts and without risk to British supremacy on the high seas.” Weinroth, “Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914,” p. 101.

81. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914*, pp. 428–429.

82. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, p. 151.

Britain to offer larger concessions to end the naval competition: "Of course it is natural, in these circumstances, feeling how much might be done if the nations would only agree, and how little is done, that there should be strong pressure upon one nation to step out in advance and set an example. The difficulty in regard to one nation stepping out in advance of others is this, that while their courageous action may lead to reform, there is also a chance it may lead to martyrdom."⁸³ After the conference's failure, hopes for negotiated arms limitations largely waned.

Not only was the British attempt at reassurance unsuccessful, but it "increased the temptation for the Germans to catch up."⁸⁴ Tirpitz's concept of a "risk" fleet—one capable of deterring Britain by threatening to render its navy vulnerable to its other rivals—had come undone as a result of Britain's ententes with France and Russia as well as the redistribution of its fleet. Nevertheless, the development of the dreadnought seemed to present a new opportunity to challenge British supremacy; Britain's lead in constructing the new ships was smaller, and the value of older ships would continue to decline as more of the former were built. This opportunity was only strengthened by Britain's attempt at reassurance. A supplemental naval law passed in 1908 decreased the life span of German battleships from twenty-five to twenty years; the result of this change would be an increase in their rate of construction.⁸⁵

Britain's overall naval superiority and the increasing strength of defense appeared to create a favorable circumstance for reassurance, but its unwillingness to incur any significant military disadvantage meant that its signal would not appear credible to Germany. Consistent with security dilemma logic, Germany's response—increasing its naval buildup rather than agreeing to limit arms—signaled hostile intent and helped to convince those in Britain who had supported disarmament that the German threat was genuine.⁸⁶ Where this episode differs from traditional descriptions of the security dilemma is that conflict was actually exacerbated by conciliatory gestures as well as provocative ones. Britain's actions, while insufficient to reduce uncertainty over its motives, did provide an improved opportunity for Germany to press its naval challenge.

83. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 4th ser., Vol. 179 (August 1, 1907), cols. 1315–1316, quoted in Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, p. 134.

84. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe: 1848–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 447.

85. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, pp. 115–116, 153–155; and Massie, *Dreadnought*, p. 183.

86. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914*, p. 423; and Weinroth, "Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914," p. 119.

KHRUSHCHEV'S TROOP REDUCTIONS

Although often remembered for the crises in Berlin and Cuba, the Khrushchev era also saw a number of efforts to restrain the Cold War arms race. In 1955 the Soviet Union presented an arms control proposal that offered to trade disproportionate reductions in its conventional forces for the eventual elimination of both U.S. and Soviet nuclear weapons.⁸⁷ As Khrushchev would later write, "We wanted to show our good intentions to the West. But the West did not follow our example."⁸⁸ After the United States rejected this proposal in favor of its Open Skies plan for aerial surveillance, the Soviet Union undertook several attempts at unilateral military reassurance. Despite substantial reductions in the size of the Soviet military, these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful. This lack of success can be traced in large part to the increased importance of nuclear weapons and the belief, on both sides, that a state's military strength relied less on manpower than it had in the past.

In August 1955, after the Geneva summit held that summer, the Soviet Union announced that 640,000 troops would be cut from its military by the end of the year. This was the first of several public, unilateral troop reductions that were intended, at least in part, to demonstrate a lack of hostility toward the West. The following March, Khrushchev commented to Denmark's prime minister that since the death of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union had "convincingly proved our peace-making nature, and we will continue to prove it. . . . We will continue to reduce armed forces unilaterally."⁸⁹ A second publicized reduction of 1.2 million troops was announced in May 1956. This was followed by cuts of 300,000 soldiers in 1958 and another 1.2 million in 1960, though the latter would be halted during the 1961 Berlin crisis before being completed.⁹⁰

87. See Matthew Evangelista, "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (July 1990), pp. 502–528.

88. Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, trans. and ed. Jerrold L. Schecter, with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), p. 71. While the proposal constituted a major change in Soviet policy, it was also an attempt to neutralize unfavorable strategic developments, particularly the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons and the rearmament of West Germany. Despite the reductions in the Soviet Union's forces, its conventional superiority in Europe would also have been maintained due to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the continent. Evangelista, "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s," pp. 509–510; and Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945–1970* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 163.

89. Quoted in Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 185.

90. On these reductions, see especially Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), chap. 5; and Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945–1970*, pp. 164–166.

These reductions in troop strength were also accompanied by changes in other parts of the Soviet armed forces, including limitations on earlier plans to develop a large surface naval fleet.⁹¹

Along with the goal of reducing international tensions, the desire to transfer resources to social and economic programs played an important role in Khrushchev's decision to restructure the Soviet military.⁹² Both were consistent with his political views that war with the West was not inevitable, that peaceful coexistence was possible, and that the Cold War would be won by economic rather than military competition. A key factor in achieving these ends was the changing balance between conventional and nuclear capabilities: "In 1957, after the first successful tests of the R-7 and the launch of the Sputnik satellite, Khrushchev made a final decision: intercontinental ballistic missiles would become the core of the Soviet strategy of containment, making possible a fundamental reduction in the size of the army. Khrushchev dreamed of using the money saved for economic development, to catch up to and overtake the United States in all areas, including standard of living."⁹³ The new strategic environment provided the opportunity to decrease the Soviet reliance on a large land army and impress upon the West that the Soviet Union was not as aggressive as it believed.

The 1960 reduction, which was intended to decrease the number of Soviet troops by one-third (from 3.6 million to 2.4 million and would include the demobilization of 250,000 officers), was preceded in December 1959 by the formation of the Strategic Rocket Forces as a separate branch of the Soviet military. In his January 1960 speech to the Supreme Soviet announcing the new round of troop cuts, Khrushchev expounded his views on the future of warfare and military strategy. Citing the increased significance of nuclear and missile capabilities, he argued that these had become the main instruments of warfare and the primary determinants of a state's power. The increased firepower of nuclear weapons would allow conventional forces, many of which were becoming obsolete, to be reduced without decreasing their effectiveness.⁹⁴

91. For a discussion of Khrushchev's reductions in naval and air forces, see Sergei Khrushchev, "The Military-Industrial Complex, 1953-1964," in William Taubman, Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason, eds., *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 242-274.

92. Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev's 1960 Troop Cut: New Russian Evidence," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8/9 (Winter 1996), p. 417; and George F. Minde II and Michael Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military under Khrushchev and the Role of America's Strategic Modernization," in Robert O. Crummey, ed., *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.: Past and Prospects* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 185.

93. Khrushchev, "The Military-Industrial Complex, 1953-1964," p. 258.

94. Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroad* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University

Khrushchev was revealing himself as “a convert of the nuclear revolution.”⁹⁵ The possession of nuclear weapons and strategic missiles guaranteed the security of the Soviet Union and justified substantial decreases in the size of the Soviet military, which he claimed had been as large as 5.7 million troops when the reductions began in 1955.⁹⁶

These reductions failed to reassure the United States, however, and were described as propaganda and dismissed as militarily insignificant. Despite their size, large troop cuts in an era of nuclear weapons were not viewed as decreasing the Soviet Union’s military capabilities in any significant way.⁹⁷ Anticipating a large Soviet troop reduction in May 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower maintained that “the Soviets would be doing nothing in the world, in making such a reduction, except to imitate what this [the United States] Government had done earlier in connection with its formulation of the so-called ‘new look strategy.’”⁹⁸ After the Soviet announcement, the *New York Times* reported the skeptical reaction of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who “said he would rather have the 1,200,000 Soviet soldiers standing around doing guard duty than making atomic weapons.”⁹⁹ In 1958 a CIA special national intelligence estimate assessing the motives behind the Soviet Union’s disarmament policy noted its “probable belief that the USSR can still gain con-

Press, 1964), pp. 30–31; Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 92; and Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917–91* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 117–118.

95. Zubok, “Khrushchev’s 1960 Troop Cut,” p. 417. See also Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 516–517; and Sergei Khrushchev, *Khrushchev on Khrushchev: An Inside Account of the Man and His Era*, trans. and ed. William Taubman (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), p. 22. For an overview of Khrushchev’s strategic thinking, see Vladislav M. Zubok and Hope M. Harrison, “The Nuclear Education of Nikita Khrushchev,” in John Lewis Gaddis, Philip H. Gordon, Ernest R. May, and Jonathan Rosenberg, eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 141–168.

96. Khrushchev’s number of 5.7 million troops in 1955 was accepted, though U.S. estimates had placed Soviet strength at approximately 4 million. See Raymond L. Garthoff, “Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels: Some Light from the Past,” *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Spring 1990), p. 99. The actual size of Soviet forces in 1955—before Khrushchev’s announcement that year—was 4.8 million, owing to unpublicized reductions of 600,000 from a postwar high of 5.4 million in 1953. Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, p. 93.

97. Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*, p. 69. See also *ibid.*, pp. 29, 68–69, 77, 97; and Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces*, p. 90.

98. “Memorandum of Discussion at the 284th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, May 10, 1956,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1955–1957*, Vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 80. Both Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles believed the troop cuts were also a response to Soviet labor shortages. See *ibid.*, pp. 80–81; and Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1953–1961* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), p. 471 n. 4.

99. James Reston, “Confusion in Capital,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1956.

siderably by propaganda and unilateral actions, at minimum real cost to itself."¹⁰⁰ Efforts to modernize Soviet forces also appeared to compensate for the decline in manpower and prevented the West from decreasing its own force requirements.¹⁰¹ According to Thomas Wolfe, "The personnel cuts [to theater forces deployed in forward positions] . . . were largely in connection with organization reforms accompanying the introduction of new weapons and did not alter their significance as a combat 'spearhead' poised against Europe."¹⁰²

By making conflict prohibitively costly and deterrence the most, if not only, viable strategy, the possession of nuclear weapons among two or more states is generally considered equivalent to a strong defensive advantage.¹⁰³ Although the United States and the Soviet Union would not both possess large, survivable retaliatory arsenals until the mid-1960s, the logic of mutual deterrence was beginning to prevail a decade earlier.¹⁰⁴ Khrushchev's 1960 speech expressed his view that a future war would be fought with nuclear missiles, and Eisenhower also believed that any war between the two countries would eventually escalate to the nuclear level.¹⁰⁵ This provided a foundation for strategic stability, but it had other implications as well. On the Soviet side, even large troop reductions could be made without sacrificing security, irrespective of whether they were reciprocated or led to an agreement on arms limitations. On the U.S. side, these decreases in conventional forces could more easily be regarded as rational military modernization rather than signs of nonaggressive preferences. Although U.S. estimates of Soviet capabilities would become more accurate after the troop reductions, and though the Soviet conventional advantage would appear less pronounced as a result, its strategic military power was nevertheless increasing.¹⁰⁶ Khrushchev's troop reductions therefore did not reassure the United States and did not function as costly signals.

100. Director of Central Intelligence, "The Soviet Attitude toward Disarmament," June 24, 1958, p. 1, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/nsa/documents/SE/00215/all.pdf>.

101. Phillip A. Karber and Jerald A. Combs, "The United States, NATO, and the Soviet Threat to Western Europe: Military Estimates and Policy Options, 1945-1963," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 1998), p. 425.

102. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970*, p. 147.

103. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 198. See also Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 50; Van Evera, *Causes of War*, p. 246; and Lynn-Jones, "Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics," p. 676.

104. David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 344.

105. Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 138.

106. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1991), p. 47.

GORBACHEV AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The most familiar examples of military reassurance are undoubtedly those that took place during Gorbachev's leadership of the Soviet Union. Through unilateral gestures and negotiated agreements, Gorbachev attempted to minimize the Soviet threat to the West, de-escalate the arms race, and create a more favorable international environment for necessary domestic reforms.¹⁰⁷ These efforts to adopt and implement a defensive military posture were an important contributing factor to the Cold War's end.¹⁰⁸

The details regarding Gorbachev's concessions in arms control are well known and can be recounted briefly. Between 1985 and 1987, the Soviet Union took a number of small steps to demonstrate a lack of hostility and a desire to pursue arms limitations with the United States and its allies. These included a halt in the deployment of its SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Europe, a reduction in the number of SS-20s facing Europe from 270 to 243, a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing (which was extended four times), and a proposal to eliminate nuclear weapons by the year 2000. These gestures had little effect on Soviet capabilities—or in the case of the SS-20s would have maintained the Soviet advantage, particularly if the United States had reciprocated and stopped the deployment of its own IRBMs—and were largely ignored or dismissed as propaganda.¹⁰⁹

Late 1987 saw the first of several more significant steps to reduce international tensions. In December 1987 the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, generally viewed as a milestone in arms control. The treaty eliminated both sides' shorter and

107. For discussions of the internal and external material pressures confronting the Soviet Union, see Kenneth A. Oye, "Explaining the End of the Cold War: Morphological and Behavioral Adaptations to the Nuclear Peace?" in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 57–83; Geir Lundestad, "'Imperial Overstretch,' Mikhail Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000), pp. 1–20; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 5–53; and Celeste A. Wallander, "Western Policy and the Demise of the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Fall 2003), pp. 137–177.

108. Works that emphasize this factor include Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," pp. 340–351; Alan R. Collins, "GRIT, Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 201–219; Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*, chap. 6; and Matthew Evangelista, "Turning Points in Arms Control," in Richard K. Herrmann and Richard Ned Lebow, eds., *Ending the Cold War: Interpretations, Causation, and the Study of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 83–105.

109. See Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 213, 222, 229, 274, 252–253, 521–522. The testing moratorium, if reciprocated, would have been strategically valuable to the Soviet Union by limiting the United States' ability to develop technologies associated with its Strategic Defense Initiative. Evangelista, "Turning Points in Arms Control," p. 86.

longer intermediate-range missiles, and provided for extensive monitoring and verification measures. More important, the Soviets made a disproportionately large concession and committed to destroy 1,846 missiles to only 846 for the United States.¹¹⁰ Even though the numerical asymmetry was clearly important, there was nevertheless a strong strategic rationale for the Soviet position: the high accuracy and short flight time of the United States' Pershing II IRBM was considered a serious threat to Soviet command and control facilities, and may have even raised the specter of a U.S. first-strike capability.¹¹¹ As Gorbachev would write in his memoirs, "By signing the INF treaty, we [the Soviet Union] had literally removed a pistol held to our head."¹¹² The effect of the treaty was not, therefore, a weakening of the Soviet military position.¹¹³

Reactions among U.S. policymakers after the signing of the INF treaty were mixed. Secretary of State George Schultz, for example, disagreed with colleagues who believed that Gorbachev's reforms were intended to buy time and create breathing space until the Soviet Union could more effectively compete with the West, and considered INF to be a "watershed agreement."¹¹⁴ By contrast, in early 1988 Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci's annual report to Congress counseled that the United States continue to base its policy on Soviet capabilities rather than on Gorbachev's stated intentions, and maintained that the former were still increasing.¹¹⁵ According to incoming National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, the key question facing the United States was whether it was "once again mistaking a tactical shift in the Soviet Union for a fundamental transformation of the relationship." He himself remained "suspicious of Gorbachev's motives" and until 1990 believed that Gorbachev's desire to revitalize the Soviet Union made him "potentially more dangerous than his predecessors."¹¹⁶

Although the INF treaty did not clearly demonstrate benign Soviet preferences, subsequent attempts at reassurance appeared more substantial by reducing Soviet conventional capabilities. Since the late 1960s, Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces had been structured to fight an offensive conventional war

110. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, pp. 312–327.

111. See *ibid.*, p. 306; and Aleksandr' G. Savel'yev and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), p. 57.

112. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 444.

113. Savel'yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, pp. 136–138.

114. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), pp. 1002–1006, 1130–1131.

115. *Annual Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 1989*, Frank C. Carlucci, *Secretary of Defense*, February 18, 1988, pp. 23–25, cited in Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 533.

116. George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 12–13.

in Europe with the goal of quickly defeating NATO before a conflict escalated to the nuclear level. Toward that end, the Soviets engaged in a continual quantitative and qualitative buildup of their ground forces and frontal aviation throughout the 1970s.¹¹⁷ In his December 1988 speech at the United Nations, Gorbachev declared that the Soviet military posture would be shifted to a more defensive stance.¹¹⁸ In addition, he announced a unilateral reduction of 500,000 troops, including six tank divisions from Eastern Europe. In total, 10,000 tanks, 8,500 artillery pieces, and 800 combat aircraft would be cut from Soviet forces in Europe.¹¹⁹ Discussing his speech in a Politburo meeting later that month, Gorbachev stated that his declarations had undermined those who doubted the sincerity of his “new thinking” and remained skeptical of Soviet motives: “The Soviet Union, they said, should still provide evidence. There was plenty of talk . . . but not a single tank is withdrawn, not a single cannon. Therefore the unilateral reduction left a huge impression, and . . . created an entirely different background for perceptions of our policies and the Soviet Union as a whole.”¹²⁰ The reduction was militarily significant and “marked the end of the Cold War in Europe, as it rendered Soviet forces incapable of either a standing-start invasion of the West or a major intervention to maintain control of the ‘fraternal’ allies of Eastern Europe.”¹²¹

Although its full importance may not have been immediately apparent, then Vice President and President-Elect George H.W. Bush viewed the speech as “encouraging” and the reduction of 500,000 troops as “small but a good start.”¹²² Gorbachev’s later readiness to make concessions to meet Western concerns regarding a conventional arms control agreement did cause President

117. Michael K. MccGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987), pp. 55–56. While the Soviet Union’s political-military doctrine was placing greater stress on war prevention during the 1970s, its military-technical doctrine continued to emphasize the role of offense if war should occur. See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1994), p. 860.

118. On the Soviet shift to a defensive doctrine, see Raymond L. Garthoff, *Deterrence and the Revolution in Soviet Military Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1990), chap. 4; Michael MccGwire, *Perestroika and Soviet National Security* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1991); and Gerard Snel, “‘A (More) Defensive Strategy’: The Reconceptualisation of Soviet Conventional Strategy in the 1980s,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (March 1998), pp. 205–239.

119. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 366; and MccGwire, *Perestroika and Soviet National Security*, pp. 322–325.

120. “Minutes of the Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU CC), 27–28 December 1988 (excerpts),” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001), p. 24.

121. Evangelista, “Turning Points in Arms Control,” p. 94. See also Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era* (New York: Poseidon, 1991), p. 358.

122. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 6.

Bush to proclaim to his advisers: "This guy's really serious, isn't he?"¹²³ The resulting Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), though quickly overtaken by the collapse of communist governments in Eastern Europe, involved highly asymmetrical military reductions to the benefit of the United States and its NATO allies. According to Richard Falkenrath, "Had it not been for Gorbachev's willingness to sign away enormous military advantages, the CFE negotiations certainly would have failed."¹²⁴ Secretary of State James Baker similarly writes that the treaty entailed significant reductions in "the very weapons that for a generation had raised fears of a Soviet blitzkrieg into Western Europe."¹²⁵

Even before the reductions in strategic nuclear weapons achieved in the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Talks treaty, military reassurance played an important role in altering the prevalent belief that the Soviet Union was an aggressive state. Gorbachev's concessions reflected the general logic of defensive realism—relative losses in capabilities could be accepted if an increase in security was the net result.¹²⁶ The impact of offense-defense variables on Soviet reassurance would also seem to be evident: the large defensive advantage afforded by nuclear deterrence allowed Gorbachev to sacrifice the Soviet Union's offensive conventional capability, which helped to reduce uncertainty over Soviet motives while leaving its security undiminished. Gorbachev's own views suggest this logic; possession of nuclear weapons implied that "if one country engages in a steady arms buildup while the other does nothing, the side that arms will all the same gain nothing."¹²⁷ Yet this cannot be entirely correct, because U.S. policymakers did not act as though defense was over-

123. Quoted in Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Little, Brown, 1993), p. 75.

124. Richard A. Falkenrath, *Shaping Europe's Military Order: The Origins and Consequences of the CFE Treaty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), p. 254.

125. James A. Baker III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 473.

126. In part, these efforts likely reflected a more benign view of the United States as well; as Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein argue, Gorbachev "came to office with a fundamentally different attitude toward the West . . . confident that the United States would not deliberately attack the Soviet Union." Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 370. Examining the ideational sources of these beliefs has been central to constructivist studies of the Cold War's end. See, for example, Jeffrey Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (January 1993), pp. 271–300; and Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War," *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 185–214.

127. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 219.

whelmingly strong or that nuclear weapons ruled out a military conflict. Rather, the success of Gorbachev's efforts depended on the belief among NATO members that the Soviet Union's conventional forces did indeed constitute an offensive capability that posed a genuine threat to Western Europe. If this were not the case, the reduction of those forces would have done little to make the United States and its allies less fearful and more secure and would not have demonstrated benign motives.

A possible answer to this apparent contradiction is that circumstances were in fact favorable for military reassurance; that is, conditions approximated offense-defense neutrality and offense-defense differentiation. As argued above, when these conditions are met, benign states can adopt or retain defense, avoid offense, and maintain their security while revealing their motives. In general, each side's strategic nuclear forces contributed to the advantage of defense, although this advantage was tempered by forces that ostensibly provided an offensive nuclear capability to the side that deployed them.¹²⁸ At the same time, however, the European theater was a more offensive environment due largely to the presence of Soviet conventional forces structured for a blitzkrieg attack, as well as NATO conventional forces structured for a forward defensive strategy.¹²⁹ The Soviet military buildup of the 1970s had raised fears of aggression on its part,¹³⁰ generating considerable debate over NATO's ability to use conventional forces to deter and, if necessary, defend against a Warsaw Pact offensive without resorting to nuclear weapons.¹³¹ Despite the presence of

128. While the Soviet Union viewed the IRBMs eliminated in the INF treaty as particularly threatening, the United States had been concerned throughout the 1970s and 1980s about the size and throw weight of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles. See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 82–90. In addition, the Soviet Union was extremely concerned about the offensive implications of the United States' Strategic Defensive Initiative. See Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, p. 243; MccGwire, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy*, pp. 263–264; and Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 528, 564–565.

129. John C. Matthews III, "Current Gains and Future Outcomes: When Cumulative Relative Gains Matter," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Summer 1996), pp. 135–140. While the greater expense of conventional forces indicates that defense had the advantage, Gorbachev also wanted to be rid of Soviet SS-20 missiles because of their "exorbitant and unjustifiable costs." Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, p. 444.

130. See, for example, Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 127. This reflected long-standing concerns over the stability-instability paradox. See the discussion in Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 29–34.

131. Examples from this debate include Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, chap. 6; Samuel P. Huntington, "Conventional Deterrence and Conventional Retaliation in Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Winter 1983/84), pp. 32–56; and Richard K. Betts, "Conventional Deterrence: Predictive Uncertainty and Policy Confidence," *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (January 1985), pp. 153–179.

nuclear weapons, states were still insecure, and the United States and its allies still feared the offensive capabilities of the Soviet Union. Although this was a source of potential instability, it also allowed Gorbachev to decrease the Soviet Union's conventional forces, reduce its offensive capability vis-à-vis NATO, and largely eliminate the Soviet threat to the West. Gorbachev was in a perhaps unique position: he was able to reduce forces that posed a significant threat to his adversary, while retaining different forces that preserved his state's security.

Conclusions and Implications

One of the most significant problems confronted by states in an anarchic environment is the uncertainty over others' intentions and motives that can lead to counterproductive policies and suboptimal outcomes. This issue is central to the debate between offensive and defensive realism. The arguments advanced in this article suggest that the latter's solution to the problem of uncertainty—military reassurance—is incomplete because it does not fully explicate the difficulties states will confront.

For security-seeking states, military reassurance poses a number of difficult trade-offs. First, to reveal their motives, these states must alter their military posture in a way that will often leave them more vulnerable to potential aggressors. This explains why successful military reassurance is so uncommon. Second, if a state is uncertain of its rival's motives, it must attempt to determine those motives as well as demonstrate its own. Although the latter goal encourages security seekers to undertake larger gestures of reassurance to prove that they are benign, the former restrains them from doing so, encouraging them instead to take smaller, less convincing gestures so as to discover whether or not their rivals are aggressive. Third, even if offensive and defensive capabilities can be differentiated, an advantage for either will still require states to accept a greater degree of vulnerability if they want to reveal their preferences; an offensive advantage makes smaller gestures credible but dangerous, while a defensive advantage makes smaller gestures safe but unconvincing. Despite this series of trade-offs, reassurance can be achieved without increased vulnerability when offense and defense are distinct and the balance between them is neutral. Under these conditions, structure allows benign actors to choose defensive forces that reflect their preferences and that are equal to any offensive capabilities a greedy state might choose.

These arguments have implications for both theory and policy. Theoretically, the article occupies the middle ground in the debate between offensive and de-

fensive realism. The relative historical absence of military reassurance implies that the former approach is correct, and that uncertainty will force states to err on the side of competition. Yet even though the conditions favorable for reassurance are rather limited, the latter approach does provide a conceptual framework indicating that states can mitigate if not eliminate the threat posed by the security dilemma, even if only in the present. Whether and to what extent these conditions occur empirically is a separate question, but they are in principle conducive to military reassurance. Offensive realism and defensive realism therefore underestimate and overestimate, respectively, the possibility of overcoming uncertainty and the security dilemma.

With regard to policy, the article's arguments suggest a limitation on what can be accomplished by arms control and disarmament if states behave as described by realism. Agreements that limit military capabilities will likely convey information about a state's intentions and, for that reason, can be useful in reducing tensions and decreasing the probability of conflict. Actions that communicate a state's core motives will often require sacrifices that seem prohibitively dangerous and are less likely to be taken in such cases. This constraint on what military reassurance can safely accomplish will frequently leave competition the preferred option, unless a state believes that its adversary is and will likely remain benign.

These issues can be identified in debates over current U.S. defense policy. By virtue of the United States' position of dominance in the international system, its interests would appear to favor the reassurance of possible opponents so that it can preserve this dominance and forestall any significant attempt at balancing. Realists have in fact called for such a strategy.¹³² Yet the 2002 National Security Strategy has called instead for building and maintaining "defenses beyond challenge,"¹³³ and the United States remains committed to pursuing national and theater missile defense systems despite continued signs that such efforts may prove destabilizing and provocative.¹³⁴ Until those states whose reactions are crucial—for example, China and Russia—are believed to be fundamentally nonaggressive, actions sufficient to dispel any notion that the

132. Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance': Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 148–150.

133. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2002), p. 29, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

134. Norimitsu Onishi, "Japan Support of Missile Shield Could Tilt Asia Power Balance," *New York Times*, April 3, 2004; and Stephen Lee Myers, "Putin Says New Missile Systems Will Give Russia a Nuclear Edge," *New York Times*, November 18, 2004.

United States is or may be aggressive are unlikely to be taken. Because of these obstacles, alternative sources of information and strategies of reassurance may be more viable and merit the attention they have received.¹³⁵ Whether such strategies—which often involve domestic institutions—can be incorporated into realism remains debated.¹³⁶

135. See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 75–79; and Kydd, “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing,” pp. 129–139.

136. On the potential problems of incorporating additional variables into realism, see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55. For an alternative argument that domestic-level variables can be incorporated into realism, see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (March 1997), pp. 1–25.