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WEAPONIZING RISK:
Recalibrating Western Deterrence
Antulio J. Echevarria II
CONVERSATIONS ON STRATEGY

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Weaponizing Risk: Recalibrating Western Deterrence

Antulio J. Echevarria II

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Foreword

Risk is an essential part of deterring aggression. Yet its role is insufficiently analyzed in the vast literature on deterrence theory. Professor Antulio J. Echevarria II, the author of this monograph, underscores the need for further study of risk and its relationship to costs. Echevarria suggests the use of risk-benefit models in conjunction with cost-benefit models can help us leverage risk more effectively. His suggestion is especially pertinent given the high cost thresholds autocratic regimes enjoy compared to democratic governments. Costs appear less important to such regimes than their perception of the risk involved (the probability of failure). Merely threatening to impose high costs on autocratic regimes, therefore, may not suffice to dissuade them.

Echevarria's suggestion is also timely. If the United States reduces its presence in Europe, as seems likely, NATO will need innovative ways to maintain—and perhaps, to increase—the credibility of its deterrence threats. One such way would be to adopt a proxy strategy that would replicate the successful deterrence-by-denial approach the alliance implemented (albeit hastily) after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But this time, the strategy would have all the benefits of hindsight and deliberate preparation.

C. Anthony Pfaff
Director, Strategic Studies Institute
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Summary

This monograph discusses how NATO might better leverage risk to strengthen the alliance's extended deterrence. Such leverage would prove especially useful because Kyiv is unlikely to be permitted to join NATO and the United States may reduce its presence in Europe. Western analysts have not given Russian deterrence enough credit for the alliance's deterrence failure on February 24, 2022. The alliance did not act fecklessly, nor did it self-deter. Rather, NATO's deterrence measures were calibrated more for hybrid/gray-zone attacks of the sort it saw in 2014, not for the large-scale combat operations the alliance witnessed in 2022, which involved a nuclear-armed adversary with stronger interests in Ukraine than NATO had. To be sure, the alliance's leaders acted responsibly in managing the risk of escalation. But in so doing, the leaders also facilitated Russian deterrence efforts, which succeeded in keeping Washington and Brussels from intervening in the war. The alliance thus demonstrated its need for a strategy that could increase the risks and costs of war for Russia without unduly raising NATO's. In short, the alliance needs a proxy strategy of "waging war without going to war" whereby NATO can provide its full political, economic, and military support to Ukraine without running the risk of putting alliance troops in harm's way.

The alliance inclined toward risk-averse options during the crisis. Risk-averse behavior was reasonable and responsible in this case given the possibility of lateral and vertical escalation. But this behavior did facilitate Russian deterrence efforts. Russian deterrence effectively weakened NATO's extended deterrence, though both sides scored some deterrence wins. Since in the future, NATO may face a similar security dilemma—in which the alliance's propensity to accept risk is lower than an adversary's—NATO must gain a better understanding of the influence of risk on decision making and how to transfer the majority of the risk to alliance adversaries. Risk-benefit models offer a means to achieve the former; proxy relationships offer a means to achieve the latter.

Although Ukraine became a de facto proxy for the alliance, Kyiv retained autonomy over the strategic and operational direction of the war. Western military assistance bolstered Ukrainian resistance and repeatedly frustrated Russian offensives, thereby proving proxy warfare can work as a viable deterrence-by-denial strategy, provided production capacities and logistical pathways (supply) can meet the demand. The alliance must formalize its proxy strategy by developing general defense plans, correcting resource and production deficiencies, remedying infrastructural problems, and aligning NATO policy and strategy documents in ways that acknowledge the value of proxy warfare. The alliance should not assume it will do the fighting in the next war.

For its part, Western deterrence theory should explore the value of risk-benefit models and how they might complement cost-benefit models. While anticipated costs can certainly deter aggression, perceptions of the likelihood of failure (or success) may be more influential. Prospect theory—which explores the tendency to value perceived benefits higher than anticipated costs—may offer a useful starting point. But risk-benefit models would go one step further by exploring the tendency to dismiss costs when the expectations of success are high.

Executive Summary

This monograph discusses how NATO might leverage risk more effectively against authoritarian regimes to strengthen the alliance's extended deterrence efforts, especially with respect to Ukraine. If Kyiv is not permitted to join NATO and the United States' presence in Europe is reduced, then leveraging risk may prove to be foundational to any security guarantee for Ukraine. In the Russia-Ukraine War, Western military assistance has bolstered Ukrainian resistance and repeatedly frustrated Russian offensives, thereby proving proxy warfare can work as a viable deterrence-by-denial model on a large scale, provided production capacities and logistical throughput can keep pace with demand. But to make such a strategy work, NATO must formalize the strategy. The alliance must develop general defense plans for its partners (especially Ukraine), correct resource and production deficiencies, remedy infrastructural problems, and align NATO policy and strategy documents in ways that both acknowledge the value of proxy warfare and leverage it. Above all, the alliance must revise its foundational assumption NATO will do the fighting in the next war. The alliance may indeed do most of the heavy lifting in the next major conflict, but NATO will not necessarily do the fighting.

For its part, Western deterrence theory should explore the value of risk-benefit models and how they might complement cost-benefit models. While anticipated costs can deter aggression, perceptions of the likelihood of failure (or success) may be more influential. Prospect theory—which explores the tendency to value perceived benefits higher than anticipated costs—may offer a useful starting point. But risk-benefit models would go one step further by exploring the tendency to dismiss costs when the expectations of success are high.

The alliance's deterrence policy—the core of which was the European Reassurance Initiative/European Deterrence Initiative—and NATO's deterrence strategy—which combined practical punishment and denial measures in sanctions and military aid, respectively—failed to deter Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But this failure did not occur because NATO acted fecklessly or self-deterred. Rather, the failure occurred because following Russia's hybrid or gray-zone warfare of 2014, NATO's deterrence policy assumed future Russian aggression would take a similar form. The alliance also placed too much faith in sanctions, believing the Russian economy would collapse quickly under their bite. The alliance's policy and strategy were thus undercalibrated for deterring large-scale combat operations led by an overconfident foe.

As the Ukraine crisis of 2021–22 intensified, the alliance inclined toward risk aversion. This approach was prudent and responsible, given the risk of escalation. But the approach facilitated Russian deterrence, enabling it to undermine NATO's extended deterrence. The crisis and the ensuing conflict provide an example of simultaneous deterrence in which both sides scored some deterrence wins. In short, the alliance attempted to deter war without risking war and to contain the conflict, whereas Moscow endeavored to prevent NATO from entering the conflict directly and achieved this end by occasionally threatening to escalate. Since NATO may face a similar security dilemma—in which the alliance's propensity to accept risk is lower than an adversary's—in the future, NATO requires a risk-based deterrence option that will enable the alliance to deter war without threatening war. Proxy relationships offer just such an option.

Once the conflict got underway, the alliance developed an effective, albeit ad hoc, defensive strategy due in no small way to the surprising resilience of Ukrainian resistance. Whereas this strategy was more emergent than deliberate, it provides a blueprint for a potent denial strategy wherein Kyiv would play the role of a NATO proxy (or special partner if "proxy" is considered too negative). Put differently, the alliance's emergent strategy for aiding Ukraine's defense amounted to "waging war without going to war." This approach had the crucially important advantage of enabling NATO to apply its collective military and economic might against Moscow while avoiding the potential costs and other consequences of putting alliance troops in harm's way.

Weaponizing Risk: Recalibrating Western Deterrence

Antulio J. Echevarria II

Within weeks of the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, defense scholars began asking why the United States and its allies in NATO had failed to deter Russia. Some experts claimed the question was nonsensical because the alliance never had an official deterrence policy for Ukraine in the first place; others maintained US President Joe Biden and NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg self-deterred in taking military force off the table too soon; still others suggested Russian President Vladimir Putin may have been undeterrable in this case because his interests in Ukraine, which he apparently believed lay within his sphere of influence, clearly exceeded those of the alliance.[1] But after Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Washington and Brussels implemented an official deterrence policy to dissuade Moscow from further aggression against Kyiv. Moreover, the supporting strategy that flowed from this policy does not qualify as self-deterrence; rather, the strategy qualifies as risk calibration—that is, matching the level of risk one is willing to bear given one's interests. In short, NATO chose to "deter war without threatening war" and, in so doing, to manage the risk of unwanted escalation. The fundamental question, then, is not *why* NATO failed to deter Russia in 2022, but *how* might the alliance deter a nuclear-armed adversary short of risking unacceptable escalation? This monograph argues the answer to this question lies in NATO's ability to weaponize the risk.

The transatlantic alliance has established a habit of avoiding risk (using only sanctions) when attempting to deter Russia—for example, in the cases of Moscow's invasion of Georgia, Russia's intervention in Syria, and the Kremlin's initial assault on Ukraine in 2014. The alliance's approach has both failed and put NATO in danger of losing the "competition in risk-taking"—a phrase coined by Nobel laureate Thomas C. Schelling that refers to the game of threats and counterthreats that sometimes characterizes international relations, particularly in crisis situations.[2] To be sure, NATO can still use the traditional model of deterrence—that is, "deterring war by threatening war"—in situations that involve smaller parties not armed with nuclear weapons. But the traditional approach appears patently ill-suited for major powers whose risk and cost thresholds outstrip those of the threatened parties and those of the deterring parties, as occurred in the Ukraine crisis

of 2013–14. Nor is advising NATO to take greater risks against its major adversaries sufficient. Western democracies have too much to lose in taking greater risks, and the nations' bluff will likely be called. Instead, NATO needs an approach to deterrence that will enable the alliance to compound the risks its adversaries face in crisis situations—without appreciably raising its own. In a word, NATO needs a methodology for decisively influencing a rival power's risk calculus.

This study is divided into three parts. Part 1, "The US-NATO Deterrence Policy and Strategy," outlines the deterrence policy and supporting strategy the United States and its NATO allies implemented after 2014 to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine. This section outlines NATO's official deterrence policy, which will be critiqued in the later sections.

Part 2, "Risk Aversion, Russian Deterrence, and Self-Deterrence," discusses the relationships among the alliance's risk aversion, the Russian approach to deterrence, and the notion of self-deterrence. Western defense analysts have downplayed the effectiveness of Russian deterrence, perhaps because they wished to avoid giving credit to Moscow. Instead, the analysts have claimed the alliance self-deterred by overreacting to Putin's warnings about nuclear escalation and not standing up to a Russian military that proved far less capable than expected. But to the extent these claims are true, they show Russian deterrence worked rather than the alliance self-deterred. Thus, to avoid solving the wrong problem, this section clarifies the distinctions among risk aversion, Russian deterrence, and self-deterrence.

Part 3, "Weaponizing Risk," describes several methods by which the alliance might level the competition in risk taking without taking greater risks. As the Russia-Ukraine War has shown, a proxy relationship can bolster NATO deterrence by arming and supporting Ukraine and perhaps others to drive up the risks and costs of war for aggressive parties without doing the same for NATO. The alliance's deterrence policy and strategy would thus amount to "waging war without going to war."

As the Ukraine crisis of 2021–22 has shown, cost-imposing strategies alone may not generate enough coercive leverage to deter (or compel) authoritarian regimes, especially within the constraints established by the West's legal, ethical, and moral norms. But costs aimed directly at that which such regimes value most—their political survival, regional or global balance of power, and ability to control their subjects—can increase coercive leverage and thus improve the odds of successful deterrence.[3] "Weaponizing risk" is simply shorthand for this process.

This study defines deterrence as measures taken to dissuade actors from pursuing certain actions.[4] As Schelling noted, deterrence measures can be active or passive, and they can include threats as well as (re)assurances, both implicit and explicit.[5]

Successful deterrence is notoriously difficult to prove, though it is painfully obvious when it fails. Nor can any special approaches guarantee the success of deterrence. A deterring party can do everything right, yet its deterrence efforts might still fail. For this reason, structuring deterrence as a prelude to defense is best.

— 1 —

The US-NATO Deterrence Policy and Strategy

After Putin's seizure of Crimea and parts of the Donets Basin in 2014, the United States and its NATO allies implemented three deterrence measures to dissuade further Russian aggression against Ukraine. The United States and NATO first established a formal deterrence policy by means of the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI)/European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). Second, Washington and Brussels provided Kyiv with security force assistance through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine, while also strengthening Ukraine's defensive capabilities by making it an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP). Whereas Kyiv was not a member of the alliance and thus did not enjoy the protection of Article 5, Ukraine nonetheless benefited from a formal NATO deterrence policy.[6] Lastly, as the crisis intensified, high-level US and NATO officials collectively warned the Kremlin of severe consequences if it were to go ahead with its plans to attack Ukraine.

1. *The ERI/EDI.* American President Barack Obama established the ERI in 2014. The initiative received start-up funding of $1 billion at the beginning of fiscal year 2015. In 2018, the ERI became the EDI, and US funding reached a total of $29.7 billion by fiscal year 2022; the ERI's annual allocation, therefore, was about $4.2 billion over seven years.[7] This amount brought Ukraine's average annual military spending to slightly more than $10 billion, an amount comparable to Ukraine's neighbor, Poland, which averaged $12 billion from 2017 to 2021; Ukraine's defense budget also totaled more than those of Norway and Finland (which averaged $8 billion and $4 billion, respectively), both of whom have traditionally taken the Russian threat seriously.[8] Among other things, the EDI also enabled NATO to train more than 10,000 Ukrainian military personnel.[9]

Although these funding levels may appear low compared to the many tens of billions Ukraine has received since February 24, 2022, the levels aligned well with NATO's security priorities at the time—namely, addressing gray-zone and

hybrid threats.[10] The alliance's bias was thus toward such threats rather than large-scale, conventional conflict. The alliance's *Strategic Foresight Analysis 2017 Report*, for instance, went so far as to characterize Putin's seizure of Crimea as evidence of an "evolution of hybrid warfare" and a "paradigm shift in the use of power."[11] The report also claimed the "risk of major conflicts" had declined, while that of "hybrid warfare" and actions "short of conventional war" had risen.[12] Academics, too, pondered the seeming demise of major war.[13] Between 2016 and 2022, no fewer than 900 books, 3,700 articles, and 780 reports were published on hybrid warfare.[14] Given these perceptions of the security climate, readiness for conventional conflicts received a lower priority.[15] Funding for Ukraine thus rested on the dual assumptions Russia continued to pose a serious threat to Europe but large-scale combat operations were unlikely.

2. *The CAP and the Partnership Interoperability Initiative*. The West also enhanced Ukraine's defensive capabilities via two NATO partnership-building programs. The first began in the summer of 2016, when NATO created the CAP for Ukraine.[16] The CAP sought to assist Ukraine to "become more resilient, to better provide for its own security and to carry out essential reforms."[17] National resilience, as events would show, proved vitally important to Ukraine in February and March of 2022.[18] To be sure, the CAP also rewarded Ukraine for developing better "democratic oversight and civilian control" of Kyiv's security and defense activities, two prerequisites for NATO membership.[19]

The second partnership-building program occurred in 2020, when Ukraine received the status of an EOP as part of the alliance's Partnership Interoperability Initiative. This initiative aims "to maintain and deepen cooperation between Allies and partners that have made significant contributions to NATO-led operations and missions," as the Armed Forces of Ukraine had done by participating in alliance operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan.[20] The special status of EOP had been granted to only five other non-NATO states at the time: Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden.[21] (Finland and Sweden, of course, are now NATO members.) With the EOP, NATO officially recognized Kyiv's intended political and military reforms and agreed to increase Armed Forces of Ukraine interoperability with NATO forces, which included quality upgrades in equipment as well as closer military-to-military relations. Both partnership programs, therefore, brought Kyiv closer to Brussels, enhancing the former's defensive and, by extension, deterrence capabilities.[22]

3. *Threats of sanctions and other warnings*. The third deterrence measure consisted of a series of warnings given by senior leaders in Brussels and Washington in the months preceding Russia's full-scale invasion. Some 42 such warnings were communicated to Moscow publicly between November 10, 2021, as the Russian

buildup along Ukraine's borders increased, to February 24, 2022, when the attack commenced. Some classified communiques also likely took place, though only a representative sample of open-source communications is presented here.[23]

On November 10, 2021, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken began the series of warnings in earnest by stating "[a]ny escalatory or aggressive actions [by Russia] would be of great concern to the United States."[24] The occasion of Blinken's speech also marked the signing of the US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, in which the United States expressed its "unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity."[25] On November 26, 2021, ahead of a meeting of NATO foreign affairs ministers, Stoltenberg warned Russia of "costs" and "consequences" if it invaded Ukraine.[26] Director of the CIA William J. Burns flew to Moscow to deliver a personal message from Biden: "We know what you're up to, and if you invade, there will be severe consequences."[27] On December 7 and 30, 2021, and February 12, 2022, Biden personally threatened severe sanctions if Putin took any military action against Ukraine.[28] On December 1, 2021, Blinken also warned his counterpart, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, of severe consequences if the Kremlin attacked, a warning Blinken repeated multiple times throughout January 2022.[29] On February 11, 2022, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan conveyed similar threats on Biden's behalf.[30] Eight days later, Vice President Kamala Harris reiterated the message, stating Washington intended to impose sanctions on those complicit in any military assault on Ukraine.[31] The Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin both issued warnings to the Kremlin and dispatched several thousand US troops to Europe to strengthen NATO's deterrence posture.[32]

As the crisis intensified, Washington and Brussels continued to warn Moscow of two things: severe sanctions if Russia proceeded with its attack and the distinct possibility of failure due to the discovery of key elements of the Kremlin's plan.[33] The alliance's intelligence communities had already begun to disclose details about Russian military intentions to undermine Moscow's confidence in its plan. But despite all these threats and warnings, on February 24, 2022, Stoltenberg had to announce NATO's deterrence efforts had failed: "[W]hat happened over the last hours demonstrates that Russia, despite our diplomatic efforts and despite our clear messages of economic sanctions, decided to once again invade Ukraine."[34]

In sum, high-level Western officials had put their credibility on the line by issuing public warnings to the Kremlin, albeit not without the inevitable contradiction.[35] In so doing, the officials reinforced the formal deterrence policy Washington and Brussels had established after 2014 through ERI/EDI and its associated partnership programs with a de facto (or informal) one that was agreed to but not necessarily captured in official documents.

As the discussion above makes clear, this case was not a failure of "general deterrence," as described by Daniel Morgan, who coined the term. Morgan defined "general deterrence" as "anticipating possible or potential threats, often hypothetical and from an unspecified attacker."[36] In this case, the attacker, Russia, was not unspecified, nor were its threats merely hypothetical because Putin had already invaded Ukraine in 2014, though on a much smaller scale. Instead, the West's deterrence measures constituted a form of immediate extended deterrence wherein, as Morgan explained, an "actor realizes that another specific actor is seriously contemplating attacking and undertakes to deter that attack."[37]

The US-NATO Deterrence Strategy

As the threat of invasion grew imminent, NATO's resultant deterrence strategy relied predominantly on deterrence by punishment, defined as imposing severe costs on an opponent. In this case, punishment came in the form of the West's most comprehensive sanctions package to date.[38] The strategy also included an important element of deterrence by denial, defined as increasing the odds an opponent's intended action will fail. In this case, denial entailed releasing critical intelligence about elements of the Russian plan, thereby reducing its chances of success.[39]

1. *Punishment*. The West's sanctions aimed to weaken Russia's economic base by depriving the country of critical technologies and markets, thereby crippling its ability to wage war.[40] The United States sanctioned some 1,705 Russians, 2,014 entities, 177 vessels, and 100 aircraft.[41] The European Council, for its part, had implemented 11 packages of sanctions beginning in 2014 with Putin's initial hybrid war against Ukraine.[42] In total, the Russian state had brought upon itself more than 13,000 sanctions—exceeding those placed on Iran, Cuba, and North Korea combined.[43]

Given the disparity in economic power that existed on paper between the West and Russia, the former's sanctions packages ought to have afforded it significant coercive leverage over the latter.[44] After all, the Russian economy was only the 11th largest in the world at the time, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of $1.78 trillion or 1.8 percent of the world's total GDP.[45] Whereas Russia was the world's largest wheat exporter, second-largest natural gas producer, and third-largest oil producer, the country's total GDP still amounted to less than 7 percent of the US GDP and less than 15 percent of the EU's GDP.[46] Given such disparities and the optimism that flowed from the damage the West had inflicted on the Russian economy after the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, experts predicted the Russian economy would collapse within a matter of weeks or months and would not recover fully for decades.[47]

But those predictions proved egregiously optimistic. Russia's rates of economic growth indeed slowed for a time, as did the country's supply, resupply, and production rates.[48] And worse may yet come for Russia's economy in the years ahead. But after more than three years of conflict during which the Ukrainian economy lost some 30 percent of its GDP, Russia has fully transitioned to a "war footing."[49] Russia's financial support from India and China has increased, and Moscow has received military support in terms of hardware, such as drones, from Iran, as well as ammunition (albeit of a lower grade) from North Korea in addition to tens of thousands troops.[50] The West has disrupted some of this support through political, fiscal, and cyber interdiction. But for sanctions to bite, a significant amount of trade must exist between the sanctioning parties and the sanctioned parties. Unfortunately, the United States did not have a significant trade relationship with Russia before the war. From 2012 to 2022, combined US-Russian trade fell from $42.9 billion to $16.1 billion.[51] On the other hand, the EU had a considerable trade relationship with Russia before the war. Yet Brussels's sanctions regimes have not hurt Moscow as much as anticipated, perhaps due to Russia's decision to offset the loss of EU trade by increasing its volume of trade with India and China.[52] Nor is whether NATO's policymakers accurately estimated the strength of Putin's economic lifeline to the east clear. Indeed, China has shown an abiding interest in keeping the Russian state economically viable.[53]

Perhaps more worrisome is the fact that although sanctions regimes can genuinely hurt a rival's economy, the pain that is inflicted, however severe it might be, does not necessarily lead to policy compliance, as one can see in the case of Russia.[54] The United States' use of sanctions has almost tripled since President George W. Bush's administration. Yet the success of sanctions at coercing policy compliance has not kept pace.[55] Research shows the coercive power of sanctions has diminished since the end of the twentieth century due, chiefly, to three factors: overuse, mistargeting, and the emergence of effective countermeasures. Sanctions can also have downsides, such as reshaping security environments in undesirable ways by motivating targeted societies to form new alliances, arm themselves, or go to war.[56] Whereas sanctions can appear to be a low-risk option in the short term, they can have significant repercussions over the long term. The evidence thus far does not indicate the West's sanctions against Russia have failed entirely, but the evidence does suggest the desired effects and anticipated timelines might have been too ambitious.[57] Sanctions may function best as a form of interdiction as a means of introducing additional friction into an adversary's production and distribution systems. But sanctions may not be decisive when employed alone.

2. *Denial*. The alliance attempted to reduce Russia's confidence in its intended invasion by releasing credible intelligence about aspects of the Kremlin's plan, hoping to persuade Moscow to abandon its intentions. This intelligence included information about the Kremlin's false-flag operations designed to blame Ukraine for starting the war, Moscow's planned decapitation strikes intended to remove high-level Ukrainian leaders, as well as Russia's "kill lists" of local Ukrainian officials.[58] But the release of such intelligence clearly failed, suggesting either Putin was undeterrable by this time or the Russians were either too stubborn, inept, or committed to abort.

Importantly, Biden and Stoltenberg withheld a key denial measure: NATO's military might.[59] On this matter, the leaders received sharp criticism, even though arguments claiming Putin would have backed down to the threat of force were merely speculative.[60] Admittedly, some 5,000 troops of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, the spearhead of the NATO Response Force, could have deployed within days, if not hours, to parts of Ukraine. The force's command-and-control architecture could have accommodated a total force of some 40,000 military personnel.[61] But since not all NATO forces enjoyed the same levels of readiness, how quickly reinforcing elements would have arrived or how prepared they would have been to take on the Russian military, especially since many of them would have needed time to refit and retrain in the wake of operations in Afghanistan, is unclear.

To be sure, the United States could have acted unilaterally and deployed a brigade or two of the 82nd Airborne Division as a "tripwire force," as the country did in 1990 to deter Saddam Hussein from invading Saudi Arabia.[62] Yet research into the use of trip-wire forces suggests they seldom prevent an aggressor from seizing its objective and subsequently establishing strong defensive positions prior to the deterring party's counterattack. Nor do trip-wire forces necessarily signal a sufficiently credible commitment to defend the threatened party. If political and popular support for war are measurably low, the signal of commitment will lack credibility. For example, a Gallup poll taken just weeks before February 24, 2022, revealed, "Ukraine clearly has Americans' sympathy in the conflict, but it's not clear they want to engage Russia to protect it."[63]

Moreover, trip-wire forces rarely incur enough casualties to impel the remaining alliance members to honor their commitment and enter the conflict. While NATO members, such as France and Germany, promised to back Kyiv once the full-scale invasion began, those promises did not include deploying troops to Ukraine. Later, French President Emmanuel Macron reversed his earlier position and said the idea of sending troops to Ukraine "should not" be ruled out, but this idea was immediately rejected by key NATO leaders.[64] Similarly, as negotiations

to end the fighting gathered momentum, many of Europe's defense leaders would not commit to sending troops.[65]

Furthermore, when trip-wire forces are "sufficiently substantial to shift the local balance of power," they are no longer trip-wire forces.[66] While the White House's decision to deploy the 82nd Airborne Division to Saudi Arabia clearly represented a commitment to defend Riyadh, the fact Iraqi forces did not attack may have been due to Saddam Hussein having no intention of doing so. As historical analyses have shown, "no plans [to attack Saudi Arabia] were found as coalition forces sifted through the debris of the Iraqi military after the war."[67] The lack of political support within the alliance for deploying forces into Ukraine thus created an additional hurdle.

Other security agreements between the West and Ukraine existed. For instance, in the Budapest Memorandum (1994), Ukraine agreed to turn over its nuclear weapons to Russia in return for security assurances from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. But the memorandum did not obligate the White House or the memorandum's other signatories to respond militarily on Ukraine's behalf if it were attacked.[68] Russia obviously violated the agreement by invading Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Additionally, on September 1, 2021, just months after tens of thousands Russian troops had occupied staging areas along the border with Ukraine, Washington strengthened its strategic partnership with Kyiv in a joint document pledging "unconditional support."[69] But unconditional support in this case did not include dispatching US troops to Ukraine in the event of additional Russian attacks.

Ukraine was both not entitled to the protection of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and not yet a full democracy, despite strategic narratives to the contrary. Various independent organizations, such as the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House, provided evidence Ukraine was not a full democracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit said Ukraine was essentially a "regime in transition."[70] Freedom House considered Ukraine's 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections as "generally competitive and credible," but the organization also described how "endemic corruption" prevented such basic freedoms as freedom of expression and freedom of the press from being realized. Attacks against "journalists, civil society activists, and members of minority groups," said Freedom House, "occurred frequently and often went unpunished."[71] In short, Kyiv had made significant democratic reforms over the previous decade, but Ukraine's status as a fledgling democracy was not enough to inspire a military intervention its behalf.

Admittedly, the White House could have ignored the lack of political and public support and deployed US troops to Ukraine regardless.[72] But if these forces had failed to deter Putin, Biden would have faced a larger strategic problem, not to mention a more vigorous impeachment inquiry from his opponents in Washington.[73] What Putin might have done as US forces deployed toward Ukraine is, of course, a matter of conjecture. Given his overconfidence in the plan, Putin might have accelerated the timetable for the coup de main. After all, reliable reports have revealed the failure of the "special operation" was a near-run thing, suggesting chance and human errors played important roles in Ukraine's initial successes.[74] Had Moscow not underestimated Ukrainian resistance (as Washington and Brussels also did) and weighted its attack on Kyiv and the surrounding areas with more forces—particularly, the crucial Hostomel Airport—Putin might have presented Washington with a fait accompli the United States could only have reversed with great difficulty.[75] As analyst Michael Kofman warned days before the attack, Putin had decided to launch his invasion partly because the sundry hybrid methods he had tried previously had failed to yield the results he desired.[76] Hence, the Russian president may well have found himself running low on options and perhaps time, all of which might well have encouraged him to accept greater risk or made him incapable of assessing risk objectively.[77] For its part, NATO might have received just enough intelligence to persuade the alliance not to raise its own risk threshold. As it was, the alliance's deterrence strategy stopped well short of the inherently risky approach of "deterring war by threatening war." Again, this choice was a responsible one given the risks and potential costs of being wrong.

Once the full-scale attack commenced, NATO's strategy shifted to providing military assistance to Ukraine, a shift that abruptly changed Ukraine from a strategic partner into a strategic proxy.[78] Not surprisingly, NATO had not prepared itself for a proxy situation and consequently had little in the way of a political, strategic, or operational doctrine to guide the alliance's actions. Alliance doctrine at all levels assumed NATO troops would be doing the fighting according to the principles of maneuver warfare. But Ukraine found itself fighting a war of attrition against a numerically superior foe in a maneuver-restricted battlespace. Accordingly, Ukraine needed a strategy and an operational doctrine aimed at bleeding Russian forces at a much higher rate than Ukrainian units might bleed. Additionally, shortfalls in the interoperability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and NATO were exposed: The structure and culture of the Armed Forces of Ukraine did not align well with NATO's emphasis on mission orders and junior officers exercising initiative.Thus, alliance instructors reported difficulties in attempting to train the Armed Forces of Ukraine to fight like a NATO force, nor could the instructors readily adapt their training procedures to the Ukrainian military's fighting style, which was based on the Soviet model.[79] Therefore,

the alliance could enhance its extended deterrence measures by expanding its interoperability initiatives to include strategic, operational, and training situations more relevant to its partner proxies, which may have had to face a major adversary without the direct participation of NATO members.

Just as NATO's deterrence strategy was risk averse, so too was the alliance's ad hoc strategy for providing security assistance to Ukraine. Washington and Brussels fed material support to Kyiv incrementally—also known as "salami slicing"—to avoid provoking vertical or lateral escalation. Alliance members first debated whether to provide Kyiv lethal aid at all, then what types and how much. Germany, for example, dithered over whether sending helmets would come across as too provocative.[80] As Stoltenberg explained: "There are some differences between allies. . . . I don't try to hide that. . . . Some are not ready to provide, for instance, lethal aid or military equipment."[81] Other factors worked to limit the flow of security assistance to Ukraine: political factors, such as domestic reticence; material factors, such as infrastructural challenges and the pace at which the Armed Forces of Ukraine could incorporate new weapons and equipment into its force structure; and competing strategic priorities, such as deterring Beijing and Tehran. While these limitations restricted what the Armed Forces of Ukraine could accomplish operationally, the limitations did not prevent the Ukrainian military from inflicting severe defeats on the Russian Armed Forces and blunting its advances on numerous occasions.

Accordingly, the alliance should take measures to remove or to reduce the negative influences of such factors to strengthen its strategy of denial and, thus, NATO's extended deterrence measures. In so doing, the alliance should embrace rather than eschew the term "proxy," which need not be pejorative in character or imply exploitation. A proxy relationship between NATO and Ukraine can benefit both parties by increasing the defensive capabilities of the latter, which is obviously in the interest of the former. Moreover, some ethical guidelines for proxy relationships already exist.[82]

To be sure, NATO followed a risk-averse approach to deterrence as the crisis intensified. But this approach, which amounted to "waging war without going to war," offered the alliance significant advantages. Foremost among these advantages was the approach afforded Washington and Brussels opportunities to weaken Moscow politically, economically, and militarily without putting their own troops in harm's way. The alliance's forces thus remained available as a deterrent against lateral escalation and as a strategic reserve. In addition, the approach enabled Washington and Brussels to seize the moral high ground and to condemn Moscow for its renewed aggression against Ukraine. In effect, NATO found itself in a position to raise the risks and costs of war for Russia

while avoiding the bulk of them itself. In short, the alliance's decision to aid Ukraine foreshadowed what a viable deterrence-by-denial strategy via a state proxy might look like and what such a strategy might require to succeed.

— 2 —

Risk Aversion, Russian Deterrence, and Self-Deterrence

As stated at the beginning of this monograph, Putin's full-scale invasion has prompted Western defense analysts and policymakers to examine why NATO's deterrence measures failed. But most of the answers thus far have focused too inwardly—that is, on what NATO did wrong—and less on external factors, such as the success of Russian deterrence. The Russia-Ukraine War to this point has represented a case of simultaneous deterrence: Each side has dissuaded the other from taking certain actions, creating an ongoing, Schelling-like form of bargaining that has continued with the fighting. Russian deterrence facilitated NATO's risk aversion (defined below), and vice versa. Self-deterrence (also defined below) played a less significant role than one might suppose. Self-deterrence does not mean "appeasement" or allowing oneself to be cowed into compliance.[83]

Risk aversion is the reluctance to take chances. One should not confuse risk aversion with accounting for risk objectively and adjusting one's actions accordingly, also known as risk calibration. Risk aversion is a pattern of behavior that tends to regard even low levels of risk as too high. As nuclear strategist and game theorist Daniel Ellsberg explained, a risk-averse party might consider a 1 percent probability of a negative event, such as an armed conflict, as too high.[84] The alliance acted risk averse when it opted not to intervene (except via sanctions) when Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, and when Russia intervened in the Syrian Civil War in 2015 and began committing war crimes.[85] Risk-averse behavior often aligns with acting responsibly, especially if a crisis involves at least one party armed with nuclear weapons since under some circumstances, taking even a 1-percent chance of escalating to nuclear war can be irresponsible. A sustained habit of risk aversion can undermine actor A's credibility and thereby increase actor B's inclination to risk taking action against actor A.[86] Paradoxically, behaving responsibly or acting cautiously can encourage further aggression and, thus, over the long term, amount to acting irresponsibly.[87]

Risk aversion can obviously lead to a preference for strategies of deterrence by punishment because such strategies presumably offer better escalation management. Unfortunately, punishment strategies are less reliable than denial strategies because the decision of how much pain to take is left to the aggressor, whereas denial removes the choice altogether.[88] The alliance's risk aversion thus creates a strategic dilemma by forcing NATO to choose between short-term risks and long-term ones.

As the Ukraine crisis of 2021–22 intensified, NATO's risk-averse stance became clearer. As an anonymous official in the Biden administration explained, Americans were "war weary" after Afghanistan and not interested in getting into another conflict: "We have made clear, we're not going to take steps that would expand this war, put more lives at risk and that could lead to a much larger conflict. That is a responsible approach and that is one centered on saving lives and bringing an end to this conflict as quickly as we can."[89] Stoltenberg's statements expressed a similar sense of responsibility as well, especially when he responded to the prospect of implementing no-fly zones just weeks into the war: "We are not part of this conflict, and we have a responsibility to ensure that it does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine, because that would be even more devastating and more dangerous."[90]

Alliance leaders had indeed opted for a responsible approach. But Russian military capabilities—and, therefore, Russian deterrence—played a key role in heightening NATO's risk aversion because a clash between the two parties would have been the proximate cause for a "more devastating and more dangerous" conflict.[91] Even if the alliance would have eventually defeated the Russian military, NATO leaders were unwilling to accept the risk such a clash would result in escalation and high military and civilian casualties. The leaders' sense of risk aversion hearkens back to the Cold War, when leading strategy intellectuals such as Bernard Brodie and Schelling described war's nature as volatile and unpredictable.[92] Like a coiled spring, war could explode suddenly and uncontrollably, regardless of the proximate cause.

Russian deterrence. According to experts, Russian strategic deterrence (*sderzhivanie*) aims to restrain, keep out, or hold back an adversary from taking unwanted actions. Importantly, Russian deterrence does not rely on the cost-benefit calculus commonly found in Western thinking, though the underlying logic of Russian deterrence is similar in that the logic aims to make an action not worth taking. More specifically, Russian deterrence seeks to contain and to shape the decision making of the foe more directly through the distortion of information.[93] As such, Russian deterrence places greater emphasis on precluding or narrowing a rival party's available options than does the Western version of deterrence.

But the Russian and Western concepts do share two critical characteristics. Both concepts view the two primary methods of deterrence, denial and punishment, in much the same way. Both also consider deterrence a form of coercion—that is, an act of intimidation designed to induce fear in a rival's thinking to persuade the rival not to do something.[94] The Russian concept places comparatively more emphasis on intimidation in the form of cruelty or extraordinarily brutal acts of violence, including sabotage and assassination.[95] Western concepts of deterrence also view intimidation as an integral part of coercion. But the Russian version appears to leverage intimidation more energetically, even to the point of committing atrocities and other violations of international law. Mistaking the influence of intimidation for self-deterrence (described below) is easy. Whereas critics viewed NATO's decision not to put troops on the ground in Ukraine as appeasement or self-deterrence, the alliance essentially backed down because of its assessment of Russian capabilities and the likelihood a clash would have led to a larger conflict—which is to say NATO buckled to Russian deterrence.[96] Of course, intimidation can also prove counterproductive if it provokes a forceful counterreaction or inspires resistance.

In addition, Russian deterrence has succeeded despite the Russian Armed Forces' struggles against the smaller militaries of the Chechnya Republic and Georgia.[97] In each case, the Russian Armed Forces stumbled at first but then managed to "win ugly." Even though the Russian military has suffered extensive losses in the conflict thus far and exhibited major operational shortcomings, the Russian Armed Forces' capacity to absorb such losses without a large-scale mutiny—as the French Army did in 1914—bears some deterrence value.[98] Little wonder, then, two-thirds (17 of 27) of defense scholars surveyed in 2015 rejected the proposition the West "should provide whatever military aid the Ukrainian government needs" to defend itself against Russian-supported rebel attacks.[99] The chief reasons offered for the rejection of the proposition were: (1) the risk of escalation was too high; and (2) Putin would surely go to greater lengths to capture Ukraine than the United States and its NATO allies would to protect Ukraine.[100] Indeed, Putin has yet to reach his cost ceiling.

But Russian deterrence has its limits. Whereas Russian deterrence efforts dissuaded NATO from sending troops to Ukraine or establishing no-fly zones, the efforts did not prevent the alliance from providing Ukraine with financial and material support, which eventually included advanced warfighting capabilities such as High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, Army Tactical Missile Systems, and F-16s.[101] Admittedly, Russian deterrence succeeded in reducing the volume and speed of this support for a time. But NATO has managed to provide some $178 billion in military support since January 2022.[102] The alliance can learn from this experience and establish swifter channels for flowing military (and other)

support forward, thereby strengthening the credibility of NATO's deterrence-by-denial strategy.

Self-deterrence consists of deciding not to take certain actions, provided another party's deterrence measures are not the cause.[103] The key factor is whether one's restraint is due to fear of one's rival or internal reasons. The classic example is a nuclear-armed party deciding not to employ its nuclear weapons against a rival party who cannot credibly deter their use.[104] Self-deterrence can be difficult to discern because, as Lawrence Freedman explains, "all deterrence is self-deterrence in that it ultimately depends on the calculations made by the deterred, whatever the quality of the threats being made by the deterrer."[105] The alliance's decision not to send troops to Ukraine is not an example of self-deterrence because this decision was influenced by Russian deterrence measures. Russia's decision to hold much of its air force in reserve during the initial stages of the full-scale invasion is not an example of self-deterrence because the Kremlin intended to use these forces at an appropriate place and time. In contrast, the willingness of Western-style democracies to conduct war according to certain legal and ethical norms is a collective and, ultimately, beneficial form of self-deterrence.

Some scholars also see threat inflation—the intentional or unintentional exaggeration of an adversary's capabilities—as a source of self-deterrence.[106] But this view is problematic. Threat inflation can be a byproduct of a rival's misinformation campaigns, a common deterrence measure.[107] Even the famous article published in 1947 under the pseudonym "X" by George F. Kennan, the architect of America's grand strategy of containment, can be seen as an example of threat inflation because the article included some hyperbolic statements about Soviet aims and intentions.[108] Whereas Kennan's hyperbole was meant to galvanize Washington's "plodding bureaucrats" into action, his statements (unintentionally) amplified Soviet general deterrence. Also, notably, even if an adversary's capabilities have been inflated, it cannot necessarily inflict devastating harm on oneself or one's allies and partners.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the Russia-Ukraine War is self-evidently a case of simultaneous deterrence involving multiple parties, not just Russia and NATO. Reports indicate Moscow has refrained from escalating to nuclear weapons due to its concerns over "NATO's military capabilities and reactions" as well as the potential for "broader international sanctions," the possible loss of support from China, and the Kremlin's confidence (or overconfidence) in the Russian ability to achieve goals "without further escalation."[109] Moscow has also responded to the deterrence efforts of Washington and Brussels by strengthening Russian ties with Tehran, Pyongyang, Beijing, and New Delhi. The Kremlin has not escalated to nuclear weapons, but it has retaliated asymmetrically by cutting off

gas exports to Europe; interrupting Ukrainian grain shipments; and intensifying Russian attacks against nonmilitary targets, such as Ukrainian residential areas and critical infrastructure, and against several NATO members through hybrid tactics such as sabotage, assassination attempts, and cyberattacks.[110]

The risk of nuclear escalation remains in the realm of possible but not probable, unless Russia's conventional forces disintegrate or mutiny or domestic support collapses, leaving the regime with its borders undefended.[111] Under such conditions, Moscow might resort to nuclear weapons to stabilize the situation according to the theory "states only die once." Putin lowered his country's nuclear threshold on November 19, 2024, allegedly in response to Biden's decision to allow Ukraine to use Western-supplied long-range weapons to strike targets on Russian soil; the doctrine now states nuclear weapons can be used against "any aggression from a nonnuclear state with the support of a nuclear state."[112] But experts continue to warn against interpreting this change or the doctrine in general as Russia's fundamental theory of victory in this war.[113]

Russia's conventional military clearly lost some of its deterrent value due to early defeats. Prominent NATO officials have begun to regard the Russian threat as far less intimidating. As Lieutenant General Martin Herem, Estonia's chief of defense, remarked, "Today what I have seen is that even this huge [Russian] army or military is not so huge."[114] Former NATO Secretary-General Anders Rasmussen later added to the general sense of relief and surprise, "We have overestimated the strength of the Russian military. Despite huge investments in military equipment and the reopening of old Soviet bases, we have seen a very weak Russian military."[115] But such statements would not have been uttered in the first place had not the Russian military previously inspired apprehension among NATO officials, albeit an apprehension that derives at least partially from the West's habit of inflating threats.

As this section has shown, NATO's risk-averse behavior, however justifiable in this crisis, aided Russian deterrence efforts. Likewise, Russian deterrence, especially in the form of conventional and nuclear capabilities, persuaded alliance leaders to continue thinking in risk-averse terms. Critics have described NATO's risk aversion as self-deterrence, but this judgment is misleading. Accepting risk aversion as the root cause of NATO's deterrence failure would lead to solving the wrong problem by not facing the reality Western-style democracies have lower risk and cost thresholds than do autocratic regimes. The alliance owed its caution to the desire to act responsibly in attempting to contain a conflict started by an aggressive, overconfident, and irresponsible adversary. Putin played Schelling's game of risk manipulation (discussed below) better than did either Biden or Stoltenberg. To consider NATO's deterrence failure as a case

of self-deterrence is to say the alliance must act more recklessly in the next crisis. The solution, therefore, lies not in ignoring the lower risk and cost ceilings of Western-style democracies but in finding ways to compensate for the lower ceilings by weaponizing risk.

— 3 —

Weaponizing Risk

Since brinkmanship is a game of risk taking or risk manipulation wherein opposing parties attempt to intimidate each other into conceding, one would expect risk—the probability of a negative outcome—to feature more prominently in deterrence literature. Western deterrence theory acknowledges the importance of risk in an actor's decision making, but risk is subsumed within cost-benefit models rather than being treated as a separate calculus, a risk-benefit calculus.[116] Risk-benefit models abound in the medical and actuarial fields but, surprisingly, have yet to migrate fully into the discipline of strategic studies.[117]

Whereas cost-benefit models assume an actor's decisions hinge on costs, risk-benefit models assume an actor's decisions revolve around probabilities. For example, risk-benefit models would use such variables as the Ukrainian willingness to resist, the fighting capabilities of the Ukrainian forces, the logistical challenges the Russian military might face, and problems with the timing and coordination of the plan of attack—all of these factors, and others not mentioned, have a bearing on an operation's probability of success. Risk-benefit models thus assess the probability of an action's success, but they can also assist in identifying the key problems standing in the way of success. By comparison, cost-benefit models weigh an action's costs against its benefits to determine whether the action is worth pursuing.

Autocratic regimes with high cost ceilings can shrug off many (though obviously not all) costs. Risk-benefit models can help deterring parties target the costs aggressive regimes cannot ignore and can thus encourage a more effective use of finite resources. Typically, military planners conduct risk assessments of a planned operation, such as the defense of Taiwan or—when considered from the Chinese perspective—the invasion of Taiwan, to identify the operation's problem areas.[118] Blue-team (friendly) assessments identify ways to address these problem areas to reduce the probability of failure. Red-team (enemy)

assessments search for ways to exacerbate problem areas for one's foe to raise the risk of failure.

But the problem is not all costs are equal. To oversimplify the problem for the sake of clarity, some costs matter less to an actor, some matter more, and still others matter most. Autocratic leaders value the health and welfare of subjects the least, the regional or global influence of the leaders' regimes more, and the leaders' political survival—their personal safety and ability to retain power—the most.[119] Costs aimed at a regime's political survival would thus offer much more coercive leverage than costs directed at the regime's subjects.

Western economic sanctions clearly imposed heavy costs on Moscow. But these costs mainly impacted Russia's subjects, some of its oligarchs, and its defense industrial base.[120] When Finland and Sweden joined NATO, the regional balance of power shifted further against Russia, a cost that likely mattered more to Putin than the costs caused by sanctions.[121] As Stoltenberg remarked, "What we see is that President Putin went to war against Ukraine with a declared aim to get less NATO. . . . [But] he's getting the exact opposite."[122] At this point, whether NATO leaders threatened Putin with this consequence before the invasion or the alliance pursued the consequence as an opportunity cost once the shooting began is unclear. The alliance's sanctions, as heavy as they were, did not directly threaten Putin's political survival. The sanctions represented costs Putin could shrug off, at least for the short period of time he expected the conflict to last. One obvious way for NATO to threaten Putin's regime, therefore, would have been to pursue a determined strategy of denial aimed at increasing the probability his invasion of Ukraine would fail, which in turn would have undermined confidence in his leadership and jeopardized his hold on power. Few autocratic regimes have managed to survive a loss of confidence in their leadership.[123]

To offset its evident risk aversion, NATO must develop a deterrence strategy that forces the alliance's adversaries into shouldering the various risks and costs of war while denying the adversaries the satisfaction of inflicting the same. Stated differently, NATO needs the capability to "wage war without going to war," which the alliance can do by means of proxy warfare. Nevertheless, all solutions contain some amount of risk, so NATO leaders must expect some uptick in risks and costs, even if such a strategy is adopted.

1. *Defining risk.* Risk is the probability of a negative outcome.[124] This definition runs counter to the two primary ways the Department of Defense characterizes risk: (1) "the probability and severity of loss"; and (2) the "probability and consequence of an event causing harm to something valued" ("Risk = Probability x

Consequence").[125] These definitions conflate probability and severity/consequence, but risk cannot be both the probability of something and its severity at the same time. Instead, risk is essentially two probabilities: the probability the event will occur and the probability the event will be severe in nature. The two probabilities then must be multiplied together. The probability a first-person-view drone will destroy a tank equals (1) the probability the drone will strike the tank multiplied by (2) the probability the hit will inflict enough damage to be lethal. If the probability of the first event is 50 percent and the probability of the second event is 10 percent (because the tank has countermeasures and is less vulnerable in certain areas), then the overall probability of destroying the tank with a first-person-view drone is 50 percent x 10 percent = 5 percent. Hence, this type of first-person-view drone has a 5 percent chance of destroying a tank.

Iran's long-range strikes against Israel on April 13, 2024, and October 1, 2024, offer a more strategic example, but the principles are the same. The missiles had to complete their launch sequences; penetrate Israeli air defenses; hit their targets; and finally, detonate successfully. Computing the overall risk would require multiplying the odds of success at each stage. According to reports, Iran fired some 320 projectiles in the first attack and 180 in the second (approximately 500 total); of these, fewer than 15 (3 percent) penetrated Israeli and neighboring air defenses, and those that did inflicted minor damage.[126] Whether Tehran knew its strikes faced such a high risk of failure but launched them anyway, wanting simply to send a message, is unclear. Regardless, the strikes resulted in a physical and moral "win" for Tel Aviv and a loss of prestige for Tehran.[127]

Decoupling the probability an event will occur from the probability the event will be severe also accords with accepted defense practices. These practices fall within two broad categories or regimes: prevention, which includes the measures one might take to avert a negative event, and mitigation, which involves the measures one might take to reduce or limit the damage caused by the event. Each of these regimes can require distinct capabilities.

After the Cold War, the Department of Defense added risk to its traditional elements of strategy, increasing them from three to four: (1) ends/goals; (2) ways/methods; (3) means/resources; and (4) risk.[128] The change obliged the Pentagon's strategists to ensure their courses of action minimized losses to friendly forces and noncombatants. But making risk explicit also inserted a bias into the process of evaluating courses of action that favored low-risk options. This bias is not necessarily unwise or debilitating. Indeed, as highlighted in this study's recommendations, US military and policy practitioners would do well to parse the types and degrees of risk further. One might begin by representing risk in terms

of two distinct types, material and political, because these types differ in nature and, hence, ofttimes work at cross-purposes.

A. Material risk is the probability a military action—whether tactical, operational, or strategic in nature—will fail. This category includes all risks identified in the Department of Defense's 2023 *Joint Risk Analysis Methodology*: (1) military strategic risk or threats to US interests; (2) military risk or threats to mission execution and support; (3) risk to force or threats to force management, institutional functions, as well as challenges to the future force; and (4) risk to missions at any operational level or operational risk.[129] Typically, strategists and planners can reduce material risk by adding more resources; by awaiting better circumstances, such as favorable weather; or by adjusting the plan.

B. Political risk is the probability a military action will become a liability for a policymaker. Military actions, even successful ones, often come with political costs. For instance, introducing additional military forces into a conflict can reduce material risk by providing commanders with more resources to accomplish missions and to serve as a hedge against uncertainty. But doing so can increase political risk by inviting greater domestic scrutiny and criticism: If things were going according to plan, why did commanders call for more troops? This cycle repeated itself several times during the Vietnam War as Republicans and Democrats both opportunely used the war's mounting losses and dubious gains to damage the incumbent administration's credibility. When Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky lowered his country's draft age from 27 to 25, he succeeded in reducing material risk by alleviating some of the Armed Forces of Ukraine's personnel shortfalls. But Zelensky also raised his own political risk because the measure was unpopular, sparked a domestic backlash, and led to a drop in his approval ratings.[130]

The *Joint Risk Analysis Methodology* does not address political risk, but it should. As noted earlier, military planners must incorporate risk into the courses of action the planners develop and communicate risk to policymakers, a task the planners can perform better if they have a more complete understanding of the perspectives and concerns of policymakers.

2. *Advantages of risk-benefit models*. Risk-benefit models can enhance the effectiveness of strategic coercion (deterrence and compellence) in at least four ways: by framing strategic coercion more fully, leveling the playing field against adversaries with higher cost ceilings and risk ceilings, increasing the odds of penetrating a reckless actor's decision calculus, and offering utility in strategic competition beyond brinkmanship situations. The point is not experienced strategists do not account for risk when using cost-benefit models. Rather, these models are designed primarily to capture costs rather than risks. Moreover, experienced strategists are

not always at hand, so tools that can shed light on alternative courses of action can prove quite useful to those who are at hand.

A. *Framing*. Strategic coercion is more than a function of capability and credibility. Strategic coercion is also a function of probability or, more precisely, risk—that is, the likelihood the measures a party takes will deliver actual costs for the targeted party. This probability is not always 100 percent. Probability in this case represents the gap between the costs one desires to impose and the costs one inflicts. Whereas they may well have known they would not get 100 percent compliance with the sanctions packages they imposed on Russia, the United States and the EU probably expected they would get enough compliance for the sanctions to have the desired effects. Israeli air defenses blunted the Iranian missile attacks of 2024 such that Tehran's capability to inflict actual costs via missiles was near zero, despite the weapons' potential to inflict harm. Admittedly, Tehran might have felt the need to make a statement without wanting to escalate the conflict and thus could have launched the missiles knowing they would inflict little real harm. Still, Tehran's decision validates the inescapability of probability in strategic coercion: Intended pain is not always matched by actual pain.

B. *Imbalances in cost ceilings and risk ceilings*. Risk-benefit models can facilitate more precise cost targeting, which can be especially useful against foes with high cost ceilings. Indeed, risk-benefit models can mean the difference between "betting smart" and "betting blind." As noted, "betting smart" means making the most of finite resources, rather than reflexively imposing costs.[131] The alliance's cost-benefit deterrence model left both NATO and Ukraine playing to Russia's strengths. This model has continued as the conflict has unfolded, with the predictable result after an extended period of continuous fighting, the party with lower cost ceilings has shown signs of backing away from maximalist aims.[132] By focusing its full efforts on the Kremlin's top- and mid-tier costs, NATO would have been in a better position to offset Russia's cost advantage.

Likewise, risk-benefit models can offer value in situations that involve foes with higher risk ceilings. Ironically, some experts have portrayed Putin as risk averse or even indecisive.[133] Yet Putin's risk ceiling was clearly higher than NATO's in late 2021 and early 2022. The Russian president may have interpreted the alliance's flawed withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 as a sign of weakness, and this debacle might have encouraged him to take greater risks in the winter of 2021–22. In any case, a risk-benefit model would have helped NATO better calibrate its deterrence strategy so it imposed costs Putin could not easily dismiss. Admittedly, NATO leaders may not have wanted to threaten Putin's control directly. But the value risk-benefit models offer is they can facilitate better risk calibration. This value is especially high when risk asymmetries lead to bargaining asymmetries.

C. *Asymmetries in rationality*. Risk-benefit models may also prove useful in situations in which asymmetries in rationality exist. These asymmetries may be more common than one supposes. Research into rationality suggests assuming opposing parties are equally rational is no longer useful and may even be dangerous. Such a rationality baseline might not exist. Instead, research has shown rationality to be bounded or contingent and limited by internal and external influences.[134] What's more, as Schelling noted, a party might choose to adopt an attitude of "anticipated irrationality" whereby the party attempts to disguise its rationality as irrationality.[135] Anticipated irrationality resembles the madness theory, which many scholars have openly rejected as being too risky since the counterfeit irrational actor must establish credibility by consistently behaving irrationally, which in turn may put any number of the actor's other interests at risk along the way.[136] But this verdict almost serves as an invitation for authoritarian leaders to behave with anticipated irrationality, especially against risk-sensitive or risk-averse democracies, because the general assumption is no actor in its right mind would do so. Ellsberg's decades-old observation remains true: One does not need madness or recklessness to make coercion work, but both can be helpful.[137] Ultimately, an actor's willingness to take risks may matter more than the actor's degree of rationality. Risk-benefit models can shed useful light on the former, revealing whether a deterrence strategy has a low or high probability of failure and what the deterring party might be able to do to increase the probability in the party's favor.

D. *Strategic competition*. Risk-benefit models can also apply in long-term strategic competition scenarios beyond crises involving brinkmanship. Strategic competition is about gaining advantages—whether they have to do with access to resources, the building of alliances or partnerships, or new markets. Just as in brinkmanship, one's risk proclivities (risk-averse, risk-acceptant, or risk-neutral inclinations) can prove advantageous or ruinous in strategic competition.[138] A risk-averse actor may relinquish an advantage or invite more aggressive competition, just as a risk-acceptant actor may embark upon a wasteful enterprise. In either case, risk-benefit models can help to prioritize both the risks and the benefits of pursuing particular advantages because almost nothing is free of risk. In addition to the use of military force, risk manipulation within the context of strategic competition might involve trade tariffs or embargos, debt-trap diplomacy, diplomatic or economic sanctions, as well as trade deals and special treaties and agreements.

3. *Guidelines for punishment and denial strategies.* Deterrence literature offers several methods by which the leaders of Western-style democracies might increase the risks to autocratic regimes. Four such ways are listed below; the first two (A and B) fall within the category of costs, which autocratic regimes typically

care about most. The remaining methods (C and D) fall within the second realm of costs—that is, those that autocratic regimes care about more than the third category, their military and economic losses.[139] Crises leave little time for leaders to deliberate over the most suitable courses of action; therefore, the alliance's political and military leaders should war-game in advance the branches and sequels of each of the methods below.

A. *Intensifying intraelite competition*. This method entails threatening to support one internal rival over others within the regime, thereby fueling suspicions of disloyalty and betrayal.[140] Most experts agree "managing elite competition is perhaps Putin's most formidable challenge" because some oligarchs believe he has not managed the war very well.[141] Along these lines, alliance leaders might have taken advantage of the so-called Prigozhin rebellion of 2023, which created a brief but genuine crisis for the Kremlin.[142] But the fissures between the leader of the Wagner Group and the top officials in the Kremlin came into existence months before the invasion. Threatening to exploit the fissures would have preyed on Putin's sense of insecurity and added some much-needed bite to NATO's other warnings.

B. *Exploiting systemic flaws in an adversary's political structure*. This method involves playing a regime's major institutions—such as its executive branch, intelligence apparatus, and military—against one another. Such tensions certainly existed among Russia's power institutions, such as the Federal Security Service and the Russian Armed Forces, before the invasion, though NATO does not seem to have exploited them as part of its punishment strategy.[143] Directly overthrowing the regime is not the goal; such a move would be left to internal stakeholders to decide. In any case, coercive leverage comes from the potential a coup may happen, rather than assuming the burden of trying to carry out the coup—an uncertain proposition at best.

C. *Shifting the global or regional balance of power to weaken an aggressor's status and influence*. An example of this method would be adding new members to an alliance or driving wedges between the aggressor and its strategic partners. Finland and Sweden entered NATO, shifting the regional balance of power away from Russia. To be sure, Putin might have considered the risk of losing Ukraine to be worth the risk of Finland and Sweden joining NATO.

D. *Exacerbating the regime's political vulnerabilities by supporting revolutionary groups or resistance movements*. To be sure, NATO and the United States have had inconsistent success with supporting resistance movements and insurrections, particularly during the Cold War.[144] A prominent example is the failed Bay of Pigs invasion launched by the John F. Kennedy administration in the spring of 1961.

Yet many autocratic regimes have militant factions, albeit weak or fragmented, that openly agitate for overthrow. The Freedom of Russia Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps, though on opposite sides of the political spectrum, are examples of such organizations in Russia.[145] Whereas the United States and its NATO allies may have good reasons for not supporting some of these factions, others may warrant Western backing. These groups' potential to gain influence makes them a threat to autocratic regimes and, thus, useful to the alliance.

In addition to employing threats or increasing risks, Schelling advised using reassurances to enhance the prospects for successful deterrence.[146] If a targeted regime is preparing to attack due to fear, then employing only sticks may induce the regime to accelerate the timetable for its strike. Employing carrots in addition to the threat of sticks may help to allay the regime's insecurities. The foremost reassurance measure, of course, is the promise not to carry out a threat if the would-be aggressor complies. But other potentially effective reassurances might include economic incentives, such as lifting sanctions, or security-related arrangements, such as agreeing not to invite a given party to join a military alliance. One obvious problem with reassurances is they can appear to reward an aggressor's bullying tactics (coercive diplomacy), thereby encouraging further aggression. Again, all solutions contain some amount of risk.

The alliance possesses many of the means necessary to implement these strategies. For example, NATO's robust cyber and social media platforms are better than those Russia has at its disposal.[147] The platforms can penetrate the information ecosystems Moscow has constructed around its civil society and exploit weaknesses, albeit imperfectly, in Russia's political system (and those of its allies) through extensive information campaigns. Moreover, CIA assets and special operations forces can intensify Moscow's security risks through clandestine and covert operations.[148] To be sure, such efforts come with a risk of discovery. But discovery can also enhance a party's coercive leverage by uncovering the extent of its reach. The Kremlin has already increased its use of hybrid warfare techniques in any case.[149] Hence, the alliance's response with similar measures would hardly come as a surprise. In addition, evidence suggests Russia and NATO have tacitly agreed to tolerate some degree of subversive meddling in each other's affairs. For instance, even though the American intelligence community discovered Russian attempts to influence the US elections of 2016 and 2020, which amount to serious infringements on US national sovereignty, Washington did not declare war on Moscow.[150] Instead, as some experts maintain, both sides seem to have consented to comanage the risk of escalation by taking actions within the so-called "gray zone."[151] In any case, the purpose behind such clandestine and hybrid measures is not to topple an opposing regime; rather, the purpose is simply to underscore just

how vulnerable the regime is and, by extension, how the intended action would only expose the regime to further risks it may want to avoid.

Naturally, success would also depend on the deterring party's credibility. Any governing body would typically face more than one security threat at time. Credibility can ensure the targeted government takes one's threats seriously. In 2002–2003, Saddam Hussein failed to give US threats the credibility they warranted because he assumed American forces would withdraw once their casualties began to mount. In fact, Iraqi intelligence ranked internal threats, especially Iraqi Shiʿah, as the most dangerous; threats from Iran ranked second, and US threats ranked only a "distant third."[152] Iraqi intelligence also regarded the first two threats as interrelated because Iran's Shiʿi-led government often collaborated with Iraq's Shiʿah groups to weaken Saddam's hold on power. Ironically, US threats would have garnered more credibility had they somehow been combined with those of Iran. The larger point, though, is credibility is subjective and may require substantial efforts to establish.

In sum, this section discussed how NATO might offset its risk aversion by weaponizing the element of risk itself. This section offered a practical definition of risk, described the advantages of risk-benefit models, and outlined guidelines that can aid in designing punishment and denial strategies to increase risks as well as costs. Since potential aggressors have already begun drawing lessons from this conflict, NATO must take steps to ensure these parties do not draw the wrong conclusions about Western deterrence.[153] The alliance's strategic communications should continue to highlight the egregious harm Russia has done to itself due to its aggression while also admitting NATO was caught off guard in 2022 because the alliance did not believe Putin was foolhardy enough to launch an attack that had such low odds of success. Whereas its deterrence measures were under-calibrated for the scale of this attack, NATO will not make the same mistake twice. At the NATO summit of 2022, alliance leaders unveiled their intention to adopt a strategy of deterrence by denial for Ukraine that entails delivering arms rather than troops, and NATO and the EU have already undertaken measures to strengthen the "steel porcupine."[154] More assistance is needed (and implied) than just arms, of course. But the principle of "waging war without going to war" has gained popularity. Nonetheless, such a strategy will accomplish less than it might if the element of risk is left unaddressed. The recommendations outlined below offer suggestions for Western deterrence theory; deterrence practice; as well as NATO's strategic, operational, and training doctrines.

Recommendations

Recommendations for deterrence theory. Deterrence theory should more actively examine the utility of risk-benefit models. Deterrence literature acknowledges the importance of risk, but the literature assumes a direct and proportional relationship exists between costs and risks (so costs, so risks). But the problem with this assumption is some costs can be readily ignored, easily mitigated, or quickly recouped. Hence, the costs may not pose serious risks to an autocratic regime and so offer little coercive leverage against the regime. New research efforts should examine types of costs and the degree of risk they typically generate for certain kinds of regimes.

Recommendations for the practice of deterrence. The EU should continue to develop its "steel porcupine" deterrence strategy, whatever future appellation it might assume. The transatlantic alliance should follow suit under the principle of "waging war without going to war." To strengthen their denial strategies further, both the EU and NATO should establish mutually beneficial proxy relationships that involve security guarantees to Ukraine. Again, the term "proxy" need not indicate an exploitive relationship. On the contrary, "proxy" can signal a firm and low-cost security relationship that exceeds that which the term "partner" might convey.

Secondly, to enhance their punishment strategies, the EU and NATO should conduct political war games aimed at exploring the conditions under which the aforementioned strategies (intensifying intraelite competition, exploiting systemic political flaws, shifting the global or regional balance of power, and exacerbating the regime's political vulnerabilities with subversive activities) would generate compelling coercive leverage against would-be aggressors, especially Russia.

Thirdly, to bolster their credibility in proxy warfare, both the EU and the alliance must revitalize the defense industrial bases in both Europe and the United States. Whether the revitalization occurs independently or together, neither the American nor the European defense industrial base can at present keep pace with the demands of large-scale combat operations.[155] Without the capability to sustain such operations for a protracted period, the deterrence efforts of both the United States and the EU/NATO would lack credibility.

Recommendations for NATO doctrine. As discussed above, US military doctrine should revise its definition of risk, decoupling the probability of an event from its severity. These two probabilities are distinct: the probability an event will occur, which one addresses by prevention; and the probability the event will have a severe negative effect, which one accounts for through mitigation. American military

doctrine should also parse the types and degrees of risk further by representing risk in terms of two discrete but interrelated types, material and political, because these types differ in nature. Understanding how and why the two types differ is important. The *Joint Risk Analysis Methodology* does not address political risk—that is, the probability a military action will become a liability for a policymaker. But the methodology should address political risk because military officers must understand it so they can better appreciate the perspectives of the policymakers whom they advise.

Additionally, NATO doctrine writers should revise the alliance's key strategic, operational, and training documents to strengthen NATO's deterrence by denial via proxy warfare. Specifically, the alliance should do the following.

A. *Revise NATO's key strategy and policy documents—such as the* NATO 2022 Strategic Concept *and the* Political Guidance for Defence Planning 2023—*to prioritize extended deterrence for the alliance's partners*.[156] These documents assume NATO will have a direct, rather than indirect, role in a future conflict. But Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has exposed this assumption as too narrow. Ergo, these documents and similar ones should stress building NATO's capability to "wage war without going to war."

B. *Revise NATO operational doctrine—such as* Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations *and* Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations—*so they accord with the alliance's amended strategy documents*.[157] Putin's attempted coup de main on February 24, 2022, failed for reasons not necessary to be explained here.[158] But Russia nearly succeeded in delivering a fait accompli the alliance would have had great difficulty reversing. Accordingly, NATO should broaden its operational focus from maneuver warfare to a form of warfare the alliance does not prefer—namely, attrition warfare—and accept the possibility of a protracted conflict.[159] Whereas the alliance may prefer to fight wars of maneuver, NATO's proxies may not have this political option nor the resources to carry it out. Furthermore, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations* and *Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations* refer only tangentially to the role of irregular forces, whether friendly or hostile. Ukraine has an abundance of such forces (militias, volunteer battalions, and territorial defense units), without which the country could not have executed its defense. Hence, NATO's operational doctrine should address the roles of irregular/nonregular forces with respect to friends and foes.

C. *Revise the alliance's training concepts, programs, and major exercises—such as Steadfast Defender 24—so they reflect the operational requirements of NATO members as well as partners and likely proxies*.[160] As the Russia-Ukraine

War has shown, a viable denial strategy requires alliance partners such as Ukraine to conduct predominantly defensive operations because both retaining territory and bleeding an aggressor in an attritional contest are critical political imperatives. Unexpectedly high casualty rates combined with the influx of diverse weapon systems, such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System and F-16s, created major training challenges for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and caused the supply of trained personnel to fall short of the demand.[161] Accordingly, the alliance should expand its training programs to allow greater participation by NATO partners as de facto proxies, thereby strengthening the prospects of executing a successful denial strategy.

Conclusion

As this monograph has shown, NATO had an established deterrence policy as of 2016 in ERI/EDI as well as a corresponding deterrence strategy in place by February 24, 2022. But NATO's pattern of risk aversion, among other factors, resulted in the alliance's deterrence measures being under-calibrated for the task of deterring Putin's full-scale invasion. As the conflict unfolded, NATO's deterrence measures evolved into a defensive strategy, albeit an ad hoc one, that consisted of providing security assistance to Ukraine for as long as necessary.[162] This defensive strategy presumed the alliance and Ukraine could sustain more costs than Putin could. Regrettably, Putin's cost ceiling has proven higher than either Washington or Brussels appears to have anticipated, underscoring the need for a different approach—namely, one that weds risks and costs more closely.

The alliance's ad hoc strategy for aiding Ukraine amounted to "waging war without going to war." The strategy was a viable proxy strategy that, though impromptu, enabled NATO to apply its collective might against Russia while managing the risks of escalation and reducing the probability alliance members would suffer serious harm.[163] As a de facto proxy of the alliance, and a potent one at that, Ukraine retained autonomy over the direction of the Ukrainian war effort but not over the types and timing of the weapons the country ultimately received. The protracted nature of the war proves proxy warfare can work as a tool of deterrence both because costs continue to mount for Putin—thus, reinforcing punishment strategies—and more importantly, Ukrainian resistance with Western backing continues to deny him his original goal, thereby keeping the risk of strategic failure alive.

Nonetheless, NATO must formalize this strategy so the alliance can pose a serious threat to an opponent's intended act of aggression. The transatlantic alliance must also take the steps outlined above, at a minimum, to give the strategy more bite. Risk-benefit models can assist alliance leaders in weighing risks as well as costs. Risk-benefit models can also prove invaluable in identifying the costs that matter most to an autocratic regime as well as the most beneficial ways to inflict the costs. But ultimately, to be able to "wage war without going to war,"NATO's leaders must commit to strengthening both their capabilities and their credibility without waiting for the Russian threat to reconstitute.

Endnotes

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124. Unfortunately, most texts on risk theory avoid offering a definitive definition of risk. But arriving at a synthetic definition based on common elements identified by risk theory is possible: (1) an unwanted effect or harm; (2) uncertainty; and (3) exposure. See Isabelle Peschard et al., *Philosophy and Science of Risk: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2023), 10–15. Furthermore, Baruch Fischhoff and John Kadvany characterize risk as "some chance of losing something of value." Baruch Fischhoff and John Kadvany, *Risk: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 41. The term "probability" thus accounts for chance and uncertainty; a "negative outcome" accounts for loss, unwanted effects, and harm. "Value" and "exposure" are already inherent in the definition: to lose something of no value is not a loss, and a loss cannot occur without some exposure to harm.

125. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (JCS, February 2016); and James J. Mingus, *Joint Risk Analysis Methodology*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3105.01B (JCS, December 2023), B-1–B-4.

126. Shaan Shaikh, "The Iran-Israel Air Conflict, One Week In," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 19, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/iran-israel-air-conflict-one-week; and David Gritten et al., "What We Know about Iran's Missile Attack on Israel," *BBC News*, October 3, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70w1j0l488o.

127. Jerome Taylor et al., "April 14, 2024 - Iran's Attack on Israel," *CNN*, updated April 15, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-04-14-24/index.html. The attack of October 2024 reportedly included some ballistic and hypersonic missiles, which are more difficult to hit. But the air defenses held. Lex Harvey et al., "October 1, 2024 Iran Launches Missile Attack on Israel," *CNN*, updated October 2, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/israel-lebanon-war-hezbollah-10-1-24-intl-hnk/index.html.

128. The field of security studies has explored risk on multiple levels. Robert Pape referred to a separate category of "risk strategies" aimed at incrementally increasing the threat to a rival's civilian populations: "The coercer puts at risk essentially the same targets as punishment strategies, but the key is to inflict civilian costs at a gradually increasing rate rather than destroy the entire target set in one fell swoop." Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 18–19. In contrast, Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman found this category too confining and thus expanded risk strategies to mean "particular applications of force" against all types of targets (not just civilians). Daniel Byman and Max Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50. Robert Art and Kelly Greenhill committed the same error as the Department of Defense by defining "risk" as a form of punishment *and* the threat of it: "Risk is a form of punishment. . . . It is essentially the promise to inflict pain if no pain has yet been inflicted, or to inflict more (and more) pain if some has already been administered, in order to convince the target to concede." Robert J. Art and Kelly M. Greenhill, "Coercion: An Analytical Overview," in *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics*, ed. Kelly M. Greenhill and Peter Krause (Oxford University, 2018), 20. Morgan refers to "risk-taking proclivities," an actor's "ability to shrug-off threats," as one reason deterrence sometimes fails. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, 107, 161, 171.

129. Mingus, *Joint Risk Analysis Methodology*, A-2.

130. Andrew E. Kramer, "Zelensky Lowers Draft Age for Ukraine's Depleted Army," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/03/world/europe/zelensky-ukraine-military-draft-age.html.

131. Russia's population reportedly remains supportive of the war. Keith Gessen, "Do Russians Really Support the War in Ukraine?," *The New Yorker*, January 10, 2025, https://www.newyorker.com/news/a-reporter-at-large/do-russians-really-support-the-war-in-ukraine; and Mikhail Zygar, "How Russian Elites Made Peace with the War," *Foreign Affairs*, June 28, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/how-russian-elites-made-peace-war.

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133. Some of the more compelling portrayals are Lucian Kim, *Putin's Revenge: Why Russia Invaded Ukraine* (Columbia University Press, 2024); Lawrence Freedman, "Strategic Fanaticism: Vladimir Putin and Ukraine," in *War in Ukraine*, 55–70; and Mark Galeotti, *We Need to Talk about Putin: Why the West Gets Him Wrong, and How to Get Him Right* (Ebury Press, 2019).

134. Herbet A. Simon, *Models of Man: Social and Rational* (Wiley, 1957) coined both "bounded rationality" and "satisficing," both of which also appeared in his earlier work, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations*, 4th ed. (Free Press, 1997), 118–22. See also Freedman, *Deterrence*, 29, 49.

135. Schelling correctly noted the friction inherent in the political-military machinery of decision making might hinder each leader's ability to pull back from the brink (also known as "the threat that leaves something to chance"): "It is our sheer inability to predict the consequences of our actions and to keep things under control, and the enemy's similar inability, that can intimidate the enemy (and, of course, us too)." Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 99, 109.

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137. Ellsberg, "Political Uses of Madness."

138. Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, 161–62, 171.

139. These security risks, which amount to vital interests for would-be aggressors, are found in Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, xxii–xxviii, 71–84. See also Richard Ned Lebow, "Thucydides and Deterrence," *Security Studies* 16, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 163–88; and Richard Ned Lebow, "Deterrence Deadlock: Is There a Way Out?," *Political Psychology* 4, no. 2 (June 1983): 333–54.

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141. Thomas Graham, "How Firm Is Vladimir Putin's Grip on Power?," Council on Foreign Relations, October 2, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-firm-vladimir-putins-grip-power; and Tatiana Stanovaya, "Can Putin's Center Hold?," *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/19/russia-putin-elites-threat-regime/.

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144. Lindsey O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

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