



**DETERRENCE AND  
ESCALATION  
IN COMPETITION  
WITH RUSSIA**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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*Cover: Top—Military vehicles cross a floating pontoon bridge built over the Oka River as part of a joint military exercise held in Murom, Russia, 137 km northeast of Vladimir, between an engineer unit of the Russian Ground Forces and the Teikovo missile formation on July 28, 2021. Alexander Ryumin/TASS/Alamy Live News. Bottom—U.S. Army Soldiers from B Battery, 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment, 41st Field Artillery Brigade, and United Kingdom soldiers from the Royal Horse Artillery conduct a Multiple Launch Rocket System live fire exercise on May 5, 2021, in Estonia. Sgt. 1st Class Jeff VanWey/U.S. Army.*

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## KEY FINDINGS

- The same logic of deterrence that has been applied for decades to armed conflict generally also applies to competition below the level of armed conflict, but the relationship between U.S. forward posture and deterrence appears to be more subtle in the competition space.
- U.S. military forward posture (which includes U.S. forces positioned overseas, activities conducted by U.S. military forces, and military agreements) has the potential to deter hostile measures (such as economic coercion, political subversion, and military intimidation). Employed inappropriately, however, forward posture also has the potential to provoke hostile measures.
- Whether U.S. posture is associated with escalation or deterrence depends on the type of posture (forces, activities, or agreements) and three characteristics of its employment: proximity, continuity, and capability.
- Of the elements of forward posture, U.S. forces are most consistently associated with deterrence. Forces send a strong signal of U.S. commitment and provide important capabilities. When these forces are first introduced in-theater, however, they can make host countries the targets of Russian hostile measures.
- U.S. military activities (such as multilateral military exercises) are less likely to be associated with deterrence of Russian hostile measures and more likely to be associated with escalation. The relationship between U.S. military exercises and escalation appears to be reduced when the United States conducts these exercises farther from Russian territory and takes measures to increase their predictability.
- Military agreements are associated with deterrence of Russian malign activities under some conditions, especially when the United States enters into an alliance, thus putting its international reputation at stake. Lesser military agreements are more-weakly associated with deterrence.
- Many escalatory consequences are not proximate in space or time. Instead of a clear action-reaction cycle, there are often considerable lags before Russian reactions, and thus there are greater opportunities for misunderstanding.
- Typically, forward posture is one contributing factor to competition outcomes, is seldom the primary driver, and most often has effects that are cumulative and long-term.



# INTRODUCTION

The current U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy both emphasize that the United States is locked in competition with other powers. This is a competition in which hostile powers seek advantage—often through coercive measures—without escalating to the level of armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> Despite the clearly articulated threat of malign activities to U.S. national interests, U.S. guidance is much less clear about how to deter such activities.

Historically, the United States has relied on its *forward military posture*—the combination of U.S. overseas forces, footprint, activities, and agreements used to project military power—as a core pillar of deterrence. The deterrence of armed conflict has been studied intensively for decades, as have the dynamics of escalation along the path to such conflicts. But how relevant is forward military posture in a competition that is waged frequently (if not primarily) through nonmilitary tools? This question has received much less attention.

We recently conducted a study within RAND Arroyo Center to provide insight into the dynamics of deterrence in strategic competition, seeking to understand how the United States might use its military posture in Europe—with a particular focus on ground forces—as part of a strategy to deter Russian malign activities in the competition space. We had two objectives. First, we sought to illuminate past patterns of deterrence and escalation in strategic competition to understand how demonstrations of U.S. commitment and capability might deter hostile measures below the level of armed conflict, just as a previous generation of deterrence theory sought to understand how these



*An AH-64 Apache attack helicopter takes off near soldiers participating in the Allied Spirit VII training exercise on November 18, 2017, in Grafenwöhr, Bavaria, Germany. The U.S. Army, along with its allies and partners, continues to forge a dynamic presence with a powerful land network that simultaneously deters aggression and assures the security of the region.*

factors might deter armed conflict. Next, we applied insights from this analysis to try to understand what future U.S. forward military posture decisions might be associated with deterrence of specific types of Russian hostile measures below the level of armed conflict without escalating competition to more-dangerous levels. We drew on the results of these analyses to develop actionable recommendations on how to protect and advance U.S. interests in competition with Russia while mitigating the risk of inadvertent escalation to the level of direct armed conflict. Beyond Russia, the findings of this research have broader implications, including for such defense concepts as *dynamic force employment* and *calibrated force posture*.

Decisionmakers and military planners have multiple objectives for U.S. forward posture. Its primary purpose is typically to deter armed conflict. The research presented

<sup>1</sup> Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2017; and Jim Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018.



*Two CH-47 Chinooks from 1-214th Aviation Regiment land at battalion headquarters on the evening of November 6, 2019, at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, during Dragoon Ready 20.*

here, however, indicates the wide variety of effects that forward posture can also have in competition below the level of armed conflict. Understanding both the potential and the risks of U.S. forward posture in competition is essential to defense planning. U.S. decision-makers and planners might ultimately decide that they are willing to accept some risk of escalation in competitors' hostile measures to gain warfighting or other advantages. But this research can help to highlight such trade-offs and suggest ways in which the risk of inadvertent escalation might be mitigated.

This executive summary describes the key findings and recommendations from our analyses. It is based on a longer RAND Corporation report.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis reflected in this shorter executive summary was conducted in three steps. First, we used statistical analysis to examine broad patterns of interactions

between the United States and its competitors over the course of several decades. Second, we analyzed five case studies of U.S.-Russian (or U.S.-Soviet) competition to determine whether the patterns observed in the statistical analysis occurred in these cases for the reasons suggested by the deterrence literature—that is, that U.S. forward posture was actually the cause of the observed trends in these cases rather than merely a correlate. Finally, we convened two workshops and conducted multiple interviews with more than 20 practitioners and policy experts to explore several scenarios related to possible future changes in U.S. posture in Europe. This analysis helped to refine the historical analysis and determine the ways in which it might relate to future decisions.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Watts, Bryan Rooney, Gene Germanovich, Bruce McClintock, Stephanie Pezard, Clint Reach, and Melissa Shostak, *Deterrence and Escalation in Competition with Russia: The Role of Ground Forces in Preventing Hostile Measures Below Armed Conflict in Europe*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A720-1, 2022.

# THE LOGIC OF DETERRENCE AND ESCALATION IN COMPETITION

U.S. forward military posture can both deter and provoke armed conflict. On the one hand, forward posture can deter opportunistic powers bent on aggression by providing a strong signal of U.S. commitment to its allies and partners and demonstrating in-theater capabilities to defend them. On the other hand, building up U.S. military capabilities overseas can make other powers feel threatened and thus more likely to take aggressive measures either to warn the United States against further strengthening its regional presence or to impose costs on the United States or its allies and partners.

A similar logic might also apply below the level of armed conflict. For example, forward posture might deter hostile measures in competition by serving as a **signal** of the United States' commitment to its allies and partners or by providing **conventional capabilities** to neutralize hostile powers' attempts at military intimidation and coercion. Forward posture might also be used either to provide **irregular capabilities** (such as for foreign internal defense) for allies and partners who are threatened with political subversion or **provide support using other instruments of U.S. national power**, such as economic sanctions.

Despite the potential advantages of U.S. forward posture in competition, there are reasons to believe that it can also lead to an escalation in competitor activities.

First, if U.S. forward posture increases competitors' sense of threat, it could lead them to respond with aggressive actions in an attempt to signal their unease with U.S. military measures or to impose costs on countries that cooperate closely with the United States (an example of the so-called **security dilemma**). Second, the United States' success at deterring armed conflict might push rivalry with a U.S. competitor below the level of armed conflict, leading to an increase in hostile measures (a dynamic related to the well-known **stability-instability paradox** that was a recurring feature of the Cold War). Finally, if U.S. allies and partners believe that the United States will shield them from the consequences of even reckless actions, they might adopt assertive policies that fuel escalatory risks (an **indirect pathway** to escalation).

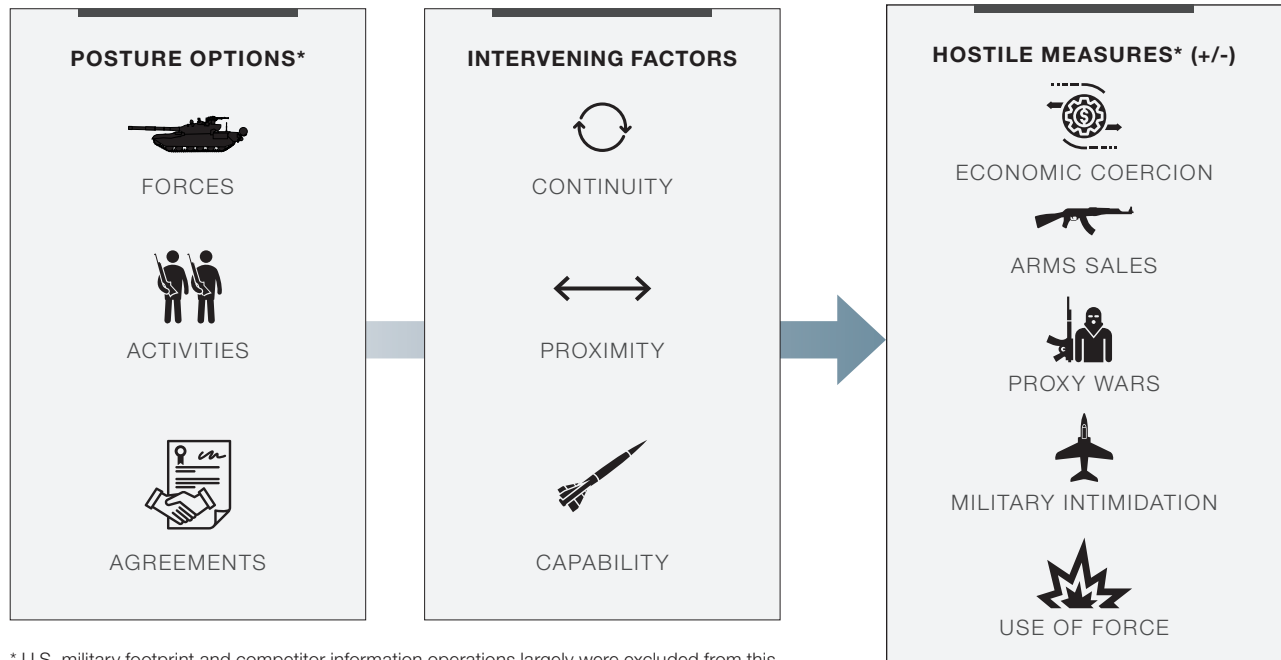
We seek to illuminate the ways in which U.S. forward posture can be structured to maximize its deterrent value while reducing its escalatory risks. To determine the likely effects of U.S. posture choices on competitors' use of hostile measures, we distinguished between five types of hostile measures to be deterred, three types of U.S. forward posture, and three intervening factors that condition the effects of U.S. posture, as shown in Figure 1. Table 1 lists key definitions that were used in the analysis.

*A soldier assigned to Destined Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade, fires a missile using the BGM-71 TOW anti-armor missile system during a live fire exercise at the Central Training Area, Estonia, September 25, 2015, as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve. Operation Atlantic Resolve is an ongoing series of training events and exercises designed to build relationships, trust, and interoperability between the U.S. and its NATO allies.*



**FIGURE I**

Elements of the Analytic Framework



\* U.S. military footprint and competitor information operations largely were excluded from this analysis because of data limitations.

**TABLE I**

Key Definitions

Term	Definition
Competition	The “attempt to gain advantage, often relative to others believed to pose a challenge or threat, through the self-interested pursuit of contested goods such as power, security, wealth, influence, and status.” <sup>a</sup>
Deterrence	The persuasion of one’s opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action that one might take outweigh its benefits. <sup>b</sup> We primarily focus on deterrence as a form of “dissuasion by means of threat” <sup>c</sup> —that is, the ability of military instruments to impose costs on and deny benefits to a potential aggressor rather than on potential inducements. Extended deterrence means preventing an act of aggression against an ally or partner rather than an act of aggression targeted directly at the United States itself.
Escalation	An increase in the intensity or scope of hostile measures below the level of armed conflict, such as proxy warfare or military intimidation. <sup>d</sup>
Forward military posture	The combination of U.S. overseas forces, footprint, activities, and agreements used to project military power. <sup>e</sup>
Military forces	All U.S. military forces overseas, both those permanently stationed and those on rotational or other deployments. Following previous RAND research, we focus primarily on the role of ground forces, although air and naval forces receive some attention.
Footprint	All U.S. overseas military facilities and prepositioned equipment and other stocks.
Military activities	These can include all official actions of U.S. overseas forces, but in practice, it principally refers to (1) security cooperation activities with U.S. allies and partners, such as multilateral military exercises and military training or exchanges, and (2) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities.
Agreements	These can include all formal military agreements between the United States and its allies and partners that establish the formal obligations of both parties. They can range from alliance treaties to status of forces agreements to agreements related to military movement and the availability of fuel, contracted support, and other military support requirements.

<sup>a</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, Jonathan S. Blake, Abigail Casey, Tim McDonald, Stephanie Pezard, and Michael Spirtas, *Understanding the Emerging Era of International Competition: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2726-AF, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>b</sup> Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>c</sup> Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “Deterrence Failure and Crisis Escalation,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 1988, p. 30.

<sup>d</sup> Adapted from Forrest E. Morgan, Karl P. Mueller, Evan S. Medeiros, Kevin L. Pollpeter, and Roger Cliff, *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-614-AF, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>e</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 3000.12, *Management of U.S. Global Defense Posture*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, incorporating Change 1, May 8, 2017, p. 2.

## KEY FINDINGS

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF POSTURE ARE ASSOCIATED WITH DIVERSE PATTERNS OF DETERRENCE AND ESCALATION

Existing work on deterrence suggests that different types of U.S. forward posture are likely to be associated in diverse ways with likelihood of armed conflict. Our study found that the same logic can be applied to forms of aggression below the level of armed conflict.

The **forward deployment of U.S. forces** is strongly associated with deterrence of hostile measures. By positioning U.S. forces overseas, the United States sends a clear signal of its commitment and provides important capabilities to defend its allies and partners. Our statistical analysis found that the presence of U.S. personnel *nearby* the potential target of hostile measures (in-region as opposed to in the target country itself) is particularly associated with a reduction in the likelihood of many types of malign activities,

including competitive arms transfers, proxy wars, and military intimidation.

**Military activities**, such as multilateral military exercises, training events, and materiel transfers, also signal some degree of U.S. commitment, and could build capabilities over the long term, although these activities tend to be more-weakly associated with deterrence because they do not precommit the United States to defend its allies or partners in the same way as forward-positioned forces. Moreover, by interjecting greater uncertainty about U.S. and other states' intentions and local capabilities, military activities can cause competitors or potential adversaries to miscalculate (for instance, by interpreting a large-scale military exercise as a precursor to aggression). Our statistical analysis of historical patterns suggests that, while military activities are associated with deterrent outcomes in some circumstances, overall they appear to be mildly associated with escalation of hostile measures.

*Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 41st Field Artillery Brigade conducted the first U.S. Multiple Launch Rocket System live fire in more than a quarter century on June 10, 2021, in Setermoen, Norway during Exercise Thunderbolt, a joint multinational exercise that included the Norwegian Army Brigade North and U.S. Marines from 2nd Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company.*





Finally, **military agreements** are also associated with deterrence of malign activities under some conditions. By entering an alliance, the United States places its international prestige at stake if it fails to come to the defense of an ally and thus provides a strong form of commitment. Lesser military agreements—such as status of forces agreements (SOFAs) or logistics and sustainment activities—can also signal some degree of commitment, but they are less visible and thus represent a less powerful form of deterrence. Overall, our statistical analysis of past interactions found relatively weak relationships between military agreements and competitors' use of hostile measures; alliances were associated with small declines in competitors' willingness to use higher-risk measures, such as limited use of force, while weaker U.S. commitments (in particular, status of forces agreements) were associated with small increases in military intimidation and competitive arms transfers.





















Thus, while different forms of U.S. forward posture can all contribute to deter-


rence, they have the potential to contribute to deterrence in some circumstances and provocation in others. Figure 2 summarizes at a high level the baseline results of our statistical analysis. As with any such analysis, there is a great deal of complexity beneath the high-level findings, and some specific findings might be influenced by a few outlying cases. The overall patterns, however, seem clear:


- A **continuous U.S. force presence** in a region is associated with lower levels of hostile measures conducted by U.S. competitors.
- **U.S. military activities**, on balance, are associated with a small but statistically significant increase in the likelihood of hostile measures.
- **U.S. military agreements** appear to have little relationship with deterrence, except for defense treaties, which are associated with a reduced likelihood of outright uses of military force.

FIGURE 2

## Relationships Between Types of U.S. Forward Posture and Incidence of Hostile Measures

	 ECONOMIC COERCION	 COMPETITIVE ARMS SALES	 PROXY WARS	 MILITARY INTIMIDATION	 USE OF FORCE
 FORCES					
 ACTIVITIES					
 AGREEMENTS					

 Increase in malign activities

 Decrease in malign activities

NOTES: The table in this figure is a summary of all relationships that involved U.S. forward posture for which there was sufficient data from approximately 1946 to 2010; exact dates depend on the relationship being considered. Darker shading indicates a strong relationship, and an empty cell indicates that there was no statistically significant relationship or that there were insufficient data for analysis.



*U.S. soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division from Fort Riley, Kansas march toward a tree line to advance on a mock enemy-controlled village during an Allied Spirit VII training event on November 18, 2017, in Grafenwoehr, Germany.*

## THE MANNER IN WHICH FORWARD POSTURE IS EMPLOYED CAN INCREASE THE PROSPECTS FOR DETERRENCE AND DECREASE THE RISK OF INADVERTENT ESCALATION

For U.S. decisionmakers and military planners, it is important to understand not only the general patterns associated with different types of U.S. force posture but also the ways in which context conditions those general patterns. We examined three intervening factors in this study: continuity, proximity, and capability. Decisionmakers and military planners can increase the likelihood of deterrence and reduce the risk of inadvertent escalation by calibrating these three aspects of forward posture.

Deterrence theory focused on armed conflict suggests that **continuous presence** is likely to enhance deterrence, while sharp discontinuities in U.S. forward posture undermine it. Discontinuities increase the opportunities for misperception or miscalculation on the part of U.S. competitors or potential adversaries. Our statistical findings indicated that these same patterns hold for levels of competition below the level of armed conflict. In particular, the continuous presence of U.S. forces in a region is associated with decreases in competitive arms transfers, economic coercion, and proxy wars, while newly introduced U.S. forces are consistently

associated with escalatory outcomes in the countries in which they are positioned—increased competitive arms transfers, economic coercion, and military intimidation.

The **proximity** of U.S. forward posture to competitors or potential adversaries is also likely to influence the extent to which U.S. presence is escalatory. Although positioning forces close to a competitor or adversary could help to deter short-notice forms of conventional aggression, these forces also are likely to be viewed as threatening by other powers. Those powers could respond by targeting the host countries with hostile measures to signal their opposition to the U.S. presence, impose costs on the host countries, or both. Our statistical analysis suggests that positioning U.S. forces close to competitors, conducting military activities close to them, or signing military agreements with their neighbors are associated with a much higher level of competitor hostile measures below the level of armed conflict than when any of these forms of forward posture are employed farther away.

Figure 3 illustrates one statistical relationship between the proximity of U.S. forward posture and the likelihood of a competitor's responding with hostile measures. It plots a line graph of the likelihood of Russian hostile measures in response to U.S. multilateral military exercises on a map of Europe. The red portions of the line indicate an increased (positive) risk of Russian hostile measures, and the green portions indicate a decreased (negative) risk. As can be seen in the graph, U.S. exercises are associated with an increased risk of Russian retaliation when conducted in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union, but that risk becomes negligible in Central Europe and reverses in Western Europe, where such exercises appear, on balance, to deter Russian measures. These statistical relationships are consistent with U.S. experience in the former Soviet republic of Georgia in the early 2000s.

Finally, the military **capabilities** involved in U.S. forward presence are relevant to the relationship between posture and deterrence or escalation. Any capabilities that pose direct threats to a potential adversary's state security, leadership, or regime stability

are likely to be particularly sensitive. These capabilities include long-range precision fires that might be used in a decapitating strike against adversary command and control, or cyber or information capabilities that might be used to destabilize a regime.

Military planners and decisionmakers can use the following three factors to mitigate the escalatory risks and maximize the deterrent value associated with U.S. forward posture:

- A **persistent, predictable U.S. forward posture** is associated with lower levels of malign activity in the competi-

tion space, while sharp, unpredictable discontinuities are associated with much more-escalatory outcomes.

- **Forward posture in the general region to be defended but not too proximate to the U.S. competitor** is associated with a decline in the occurrence of a variety of hostile measures. Forces that are positioned close to the U.S. competitor—especially if they are positioned in a host country that is vulnerable to hostile measures—are much more likely to be associated with an increase in malign activities, at least if the forces are sizeable.

**FIGURE 3**

Conditioning Influence of Proximity on the Size of the Relationship Between U.S. Multilateral Military Exercises and Incidence of Russian-Supported Proxy Wars



- Finally, **sensitive military capabilities that pose a direct threat to a potential adversary's state security, leadership, or regime stability** represent a particular escalatory risk. Such capabilities might be important for deterring armed conflict, but they are more likely to be associated with an increased risk of hostile measures directed at the host countries unless substantial mitigation measures (such as positioning them well out of the range of sensitive sites of the potential adversary) are undertaken.

## ILLUSTRATIONS FROM HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

The results of our five case studies of U.S.-Russian (or U.S.-Soviet) competition provide additional insights into the role of U.S. foreign posture in strategic competition.

**Forward-positioned U.S. forces** appear to have contributed to deterring malign activities in competition with the Soviet Union and later Russia in the cases we examined, although the pattern is complex. In the case of the Iran Crisis of 1946, Moscow initially believed it had considerable freedom of maneuver in a country that bordered the Soviet Union. It used this perceived latitude for action to stoke a proxy conflict in northern Iran—similar, in many respects, to the manner in which Moscow has used so-called frozen conflicts to gain influence over such countries as Georgia and Ukraine in the post-Soviet era. But when the United States signaled that Iranian security was an important U.S. national interest, Soviet fear of U.S. nuclear superiority—including several nuclear-capable air bases near Iran and along the Soviet Union's southern flank—appears to have played a role in causing then-leader Josef Stalin to reverse course and back down.

The so-called Euromissile crisis of the early 1980s was more complex. In this case, the impending presence of U.S. forces—in particular, intermediate-range nuclear missile systems—sparked the crisis. Countries that agreed to host the Euromissiles were targeted for a Soviet-led influence

campaign, including disinformation and covert funding of peace advocacy groups in Western Europe. After the missiles were deployed, the Soviets also engaged in military intimidation—again, with an apparent focus on the states hosting the U.S. weapons. On the other hand, the Soviets appear to have been deterred from more-extreme measures, including efforts to turn anti-nuclear demonstrations violent, despite contemplating such measures and having the capabilities to execute them. In broad terms, these outcomes are consistent with the finding that forward-positioned forces generally deter in the regions in which they are deployed, although the host countries for these forces can become targets of some malign activities.

**U.S. military activities** also generally conformed to the same patterns that we observed in the statistical analysis. Materiel transfers and training appear to have contributed to the pattern of malign activities experienced by Ethiopia during the latter part of the Cold War and Georgia in the post-Soviet era, including competitive arms transfers, economic coercion, military intimidation, and proxy wars. In both cases, U.S. activities seem to have generated third-party dynamics that undermined U.S. national interests. In the Horn of Africa, U.S. military assistance to Ethiopia contributed to an escalating spiral of conflict with Somalia, which was itself emboldened by Soviet arms. U.S. military assistance also appears to have made Addis Ababa less likely to seek a negotiated settlement of the conflicts within its own borders—conflicts that Somalia and the Soviet Union exploited. In Georgia, U.S. military assistance contributed to a shift in the local balance of power between Tbilisi and the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and it might have led Georgian leaders to believe that the United States would come to its support in the event of an armed conflict with Russia. These dynamics, in turn, might have emboldened Tbilisi to take a harder line against both its breakaway republics and Moscow. In both cases, without the deterrent presence of substantial U.S. forces to prevent an escalating spiral of confrontation, these two U.S. partners became targets



*U.S. Army soldiers from 9th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, stand alongside their Polish counterparts during a base visit at the Ziemsko Airfield, Poland, on March 11, 2020.*

of ever-more-aggressive hostile measures (in part because of their own aggressive actions) and eventually armed conflict.

These case studies did not focus on the effects of **U.S. military agreements**, but here again, the patterns were generally consistent with the findings of the quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis suggested that such agreements do not seem to be strongly associated with hostile measures below the level of armed conflict, although defense treaties do appear to be associated with deterrence of conventional aggression and limited uses of force. The U.S. military agreement brokered with Ethiopia in 1952 did not deter either hostile measures or armed conflict in subsequent decades. On the other hand, the United States very specifically had refused the inclusion of any language in that agreement that suggested that the United States had an obligation to defend its partner, so it is perhaps not surprising that the agreement failed to deter Somalia. In the case of Georgia, the United States also had military agreements in place, but at the Bucharest Summit in 2008, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member-states postponed any action on Georgia's potential accession to NATO. Military agreements with Georgia thus also sent only a very weak signal of U.S. (or NATO) commitment, making it unsurprising that such

agreements did not deter either malign activities or, ultimately, armed conflict.

The case studies also generally reinforce our findings about the **intervening role of continuity, proximity, and capability**. As expected, Moscow tended to be most sensitive about U.S. military forces, activities, and agreements near its borders, whether in Iran, Georgia, or the Baltic Sea region. Moscow was also extremely sensitive to military capabilities that posed a threat to its command and control nodes and other critical elements of regime and state security, as demonstrated by the Euromissile crisis. Moscow was particularly sensitive to what it saw as sharp breaks in U.S. policy, such as encroaching on its perceived sphere of influence in Iran in the immediate aftermath of World War II or Georgia in the post-Soviet era.

Overall, the case studies suggest that where the United States had substantial military forces persistently present (such as in the Iran Crisis, the Euromissile Crisis, and later in Northeastern Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine), one of three outcomes predominated: (1) Moscow did not engage in hostile measures at all, (2) it engaged in lower-risk forms of hostile measures (especially information operations and limited military intimidation), or (3) it desisted from more dangerous activities (in particular, proxy warfare in Iran) when the United States

Bulgarian, American, Greek, Albanian, and North Macedonian forces wait to greet 50th Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Metodiev Borisov after conducting an urban warfare and mechanized exercise together on June 12, 2019, at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria as a part of STRIKE BACK 19.



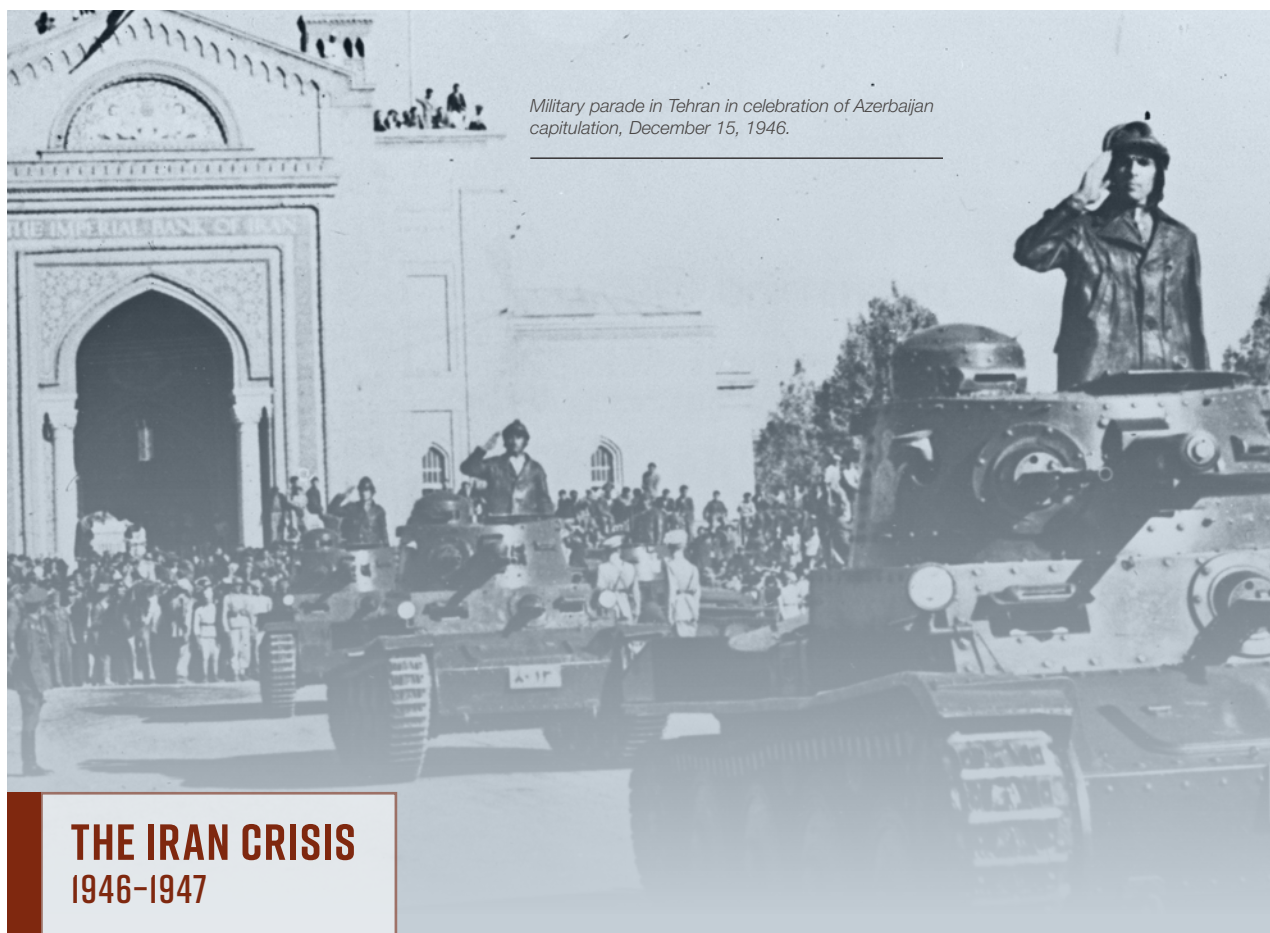
put pressure on it to do so. Where the United States did not have a substantial military presence, Moscow was less constrained, and in some cases, U.S. military activities and limited military agreements contributed to escalating spirals of hostile measures at some level that culminated in outright war (Georgia, Ethiopia).

As the case study on recent posture changes in Northeastern Europe reveals, Russia does not always respond in a straightforward manner to U.S. posture changes. Indeed, **many escalatory consequences are not proximate in space or time.** If Moscow seeks to impose costs on either the United States or a U.S. ally or partner for its close military cooperation with the United States, it might need to wait for a promising opportunity. Alternatively, Moscow might not respond at all in the short term. But U.S. choices that Russia considers to be illegitimate or provocative could feed Russian perceptions of the threat posed by the United States and thus encourage Russia to avoid compromise or act more aggressively

on future occasions. Finally, U.S. actions might not provoke Russia directly, but they could embolden third parties, who in turn might take actions at a later point in time that do provoke Moscow, as arguably occurred in Georgia in the run-up to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Or U.S. actions might threaten third parties, who subsequently turn to Moscow for support.

Critically, where escalation occurs because of an increase in U.S. posture, the consequences of U.S. actions are not immediately apparent. Indeed, they might not be apparent to U.S. observers for years afterwards (if ever). Instead of U.S. actions feeding a clear action-reaction cycle, there appears to be considerable *latency* (long lags before Russian reactions) and considerable opportunity for miscommunication and misunderstanding. These dynamics make it extremely difficult to judge the deterrent or escalatory consequences of U.S. actions, especially in real time.

The next few pages provide overviews of the case studies.



*Military parade in Tehran in celebration of Azerbaijan capitulation, December 15, 1946.*

## THE IRAN CRISIS 1946-1947

Following World War II, the Soviet Union provided covert support to the pro-Soviet leadership of political movements in northern Iran, which used this support to create two breakaway republics, the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan and the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Strong U.S. pressure—made more credible by its forward posture in the region—ultimately induced the Soviet Union to withdraw its support from its proxies and acquiesce to their defeat by the government of Iran. However, over time, this initial success gave way to a much more complex, nuanced outcome and might have represented a turning point in U.S.-Soviet relations.

### U.S. POSTURE

- IN-REGION AIRFIELDS (NUCLEAR-CAPABLE)
- MILITARY ASSISTANCE

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

THE SOVIET UNION WITHDREW SUPPORT FROM PROXY FORCES IN IRAN, A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC VICTORY FOR THE UNITED STATES.

### LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

THE IRAN CRISIS MIGHT HAVE HEIGHTENED SOVIET SUSPICIONS OF AND HOSTILITY TOWARD THE UNITED STATES.



*Ethiopian mortar posts at the alert near Tug Wajaleh, Ethiopia on February 2, 1964. Clashes along the border between Ethiopia and Somalia have brought them to the verge of real war.*

## SPIRALING COMPETITION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA 1962-1974

Strategically located at the mouth of the Red Sea, Ethiopia provided the United States with access for a naval communications and listening post known as Kagnew Station for nearly a quarter-century. As the price for its access agreement, the United States provided millions of dollars in military assistance to Ethiopia annually. This security cooperation, however, touched off an arms race between Ethiopia and Somalia—with support from the Soviets—that led to an intensifying series of conflicts in the Horn of Africa, culminating in the disastrous Ogaden War in 1977.

### U.S. POSTURE

- LISTENING AND COMMUNICATIONS POST (KAGNEW STATION)
- MILITARY ASSISTANCE

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

THE SOVIETS RESPONDED WITH COMPETITIVE ARMS SALES TO SOMALIA.

### LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI DISPUTES SPIRALED INTO THE COLLAPSE OF THE U.S. PARTNER REGIME AND THE OUTBREAK OF THE OGADEN WAR.





*President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev signing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in the East Room of the White House on December 8, 1987.*

## THE “EUROMISSILE” CRISIS 1979-1983

By the late 1970s, both the Soviet Union and the United States were making sizeable increases in their defense capabilities, and the Cold War’s period of détente was in jeopardy. In the midst of these escalating tensions, the NATO alliance committed to the deployment of U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles (Euromissiles) to several countries in Western Europe in response to Soviet modernization of its own intermediate-range missile systems (specifically, the introduction of the SS-20). These actions provoked massive popular discontent in Europe and a period of dangerous confrontation between the two blocs, with the Soviets launching a multi-pronged campaign that included diplomatic efforts, influence campaigns, and attempts at military intimidation. Despite the political turmoil, the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces began as scheduled in 1983, and transatlantic unity held.

### U.S. POSTURE

**INTERMEDIATE-RANGE  
NUCLEAR MISSILE  
DEPLOYMENTS**

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

**THE SOVIETS ENGAGED IN  
LARGE-SCALE INFORMATION  
OPERATIONS AND MILITARY  
INTIMIDATION.**

### LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

**THE SOVIETS NEGOTIATED THE  
INTERMEDIATE-RANGE NUCLEAR  
FORCES TREATY, A MAJOR  
DIPLOMATIC VICTORY FOR THE  
UNITED STATES.**



*Russian tank in South Ossetia in 2008.*

## ESCALATION TO THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR 2001-2008

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War was the culmination of nearly two decades of escalating tensions. Although these tensions began long before the United States had increased its military activities in Georgia and had many sources unrelated to U.S. actions, U.S. military activities were a potentially significant contributor to the spiraling pattern of confrontation between Moscow and Tbilisi. The war indicated that Russia could influence the countries in its periphery and counter U.S. and NATO goals within the region, and Russia's actions in Georgia are frequently viewed as the beginning of Russia's resurgence as a major power.

### U.S. POSTURE

- MILITARY ASSISTANCE
- MILITARY EXERCISES

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

RUSSIA PLACED STEADILY INCREASING PRESSURE ON GEORGIA, ULTIMATELY ENDING IN WAR.

### LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

DEFEAT IN WAR AND ECONOMIC COSTS OF RUSSIAN HOSTILE MEASURES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ELECTORAL DEFEAT OF AN ANTI-RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT IN TBILISI.



*Unmarked forces guard the entrance to a Ukrainian military base in Crimea after being occupied on March 9, 2014.*

## U.S. POSTURE CHANGES IN NORTHEASTERN EUROPE 2010-2019

In March 2014, Russia illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula and started supporting an insurgency in eastern Ukraine. Russia's move was met with broad international condemnation; trade and financial sanctions, which were still in place as of 2020; and a clear response, on the part of the United States, stating that it would deter Russia from undertaking further aggression and reassuring U.S. European allies that it is committed to their defense. This commitment took the form of important changes in U.S. (and NATO) forward posture in northeastern Europe that includes troop deployments; supporting activities (such as prepositioning of supplies); and agreements, exercises, and arms transfers. To date, Russian responses to U.S. and NATO posture changes in the region have been relatively mild, although many potential consequences might be unobservable.

### U.S. POSTURE

INTERMEDIATE-RANGE  
NUCLEAR MISSILE  
DEPLOYMENTS

### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

THE SOVIETS ENGAGED IN  
LARGE-SCALE INFORMATION  
OPERATIONS AND MILITARY  
INTIMIDATION.

### LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

THE SOVIETS NEGOTIATED THE  
INTERMEDIATE-RANGE NUCLEAR  
FORCES TREATY, A MAJOR DIPLO-  
MATIC VICTORY FOR THE UNITED  
STATES.



*U.S. Army paratroopers assigned to 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade quickly move toward an objective during a company-level combined arms live-fire exercise in Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, August 21, 2019.*

## APPLICATION OF THE ANALYSIS TO SPECIFIC POSTURE OPTIONS IN EUROPE

To indicate how our analysis might be applied to future posture decisions, we developed a list of illustrative U.S. posture options throughout Europe and its periphery and formulated expected outcomes of each posture option using the findings from the statistical, case study, and scenario analyses. The full list of posture options and project outcomes is provided in the Illustrative Posture Options table at the end of this report. Here, we discuss the implications of these analyses for several policy debates about U.S. forward posture in Europe.

**Military forces.** First, our research indicates that U.S. forces positioned in Europe are associated with the deterrence of malign activities in competition as well as armed conflict. Drawdowns of U.S. forces could threaten to undermine that deterrent, while a sharp increase in the number of U.S. forces—especially if they are present in substantial numbers and positioned in close proximity to Russia—are likely to provoke hostile measures directed at the host countries, at least in the short term.

Our research also suggests that small numbers of forces positioned in vulnerable states (such as NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence forces) are unlikely by themselves to provoke severe reactions. However, any initiative to reduce or withdraw U.S. forces from these small, tripwire deployments likely would signal decreasing U.S. commitment to the region and thus potentially embolden Moscow.

The capabilities of U.S. forces positioned in Europe also have important implications in the competition space. The U.S. Army is developing long-range precision fires systems, including precision strike missiles; some missiles under consideration have ranges of 1,500 km or more. If such systems were positioned in substantial numbers in Northeastern Europe or if longer-range systems were placed in Western Europe, our research suggests that there is some likelihood that Russia would react by targeting host countries with hostile measures.

**Activities.** The United States frequently uses military activities, including multilateral military exercises and security cooperation (including materiel transfers and accompanying training packages) to signal its willing-

ness to defend allies and partners. Although such activities might help to build allies' and partners' capabilities and assure them of the United States' commitment to their defense, in aggregate, such activities appear to be associated with an increased risk of hostile measures more often than they are associated with deterrence. The overall increase in hostile measures that is associated with U.S. military activities is small, suggesting that, in most cases, these activities provoke little if any observable response. Over time, however, these risks accumulate. The United States can take measures to reduce the risk of escalation, including enhancing the predictability of these activities, limiting the number and size of activities in the immediate vicinity of Russia, and using care in introducing sensitive capabilities into the theater.

Our analysis suggests that the continuation and incremental expansion of ongoing security cooperation activities throughout Europe is unlikely to contribute to increased risk of Russian hostile measures. In fact, when conducted in Central and Western Europe, they likely enhance deterrence. Even when these activities are conducted closer to Russia (such as in the Baltics), moderate investments in many conventional capabilities (such as materiel transfers to and training for infantry units) also pose little risk of escalation, although they also likely do little to deter Russian hostile measures. On the other hand, activities intended to help European allies and partners develop more-advanced capabilities, particularly in the case of the

long-range precision fires systems noted previously, are more sensitive and more likely to provoke a Russian response.

Large-scale multilateral military exercises could pose similar risks. Our findings suggest that military exercises are associated with an increased risk of malign activities in competition more often than they are associated with deterrence of such activities. These risks can be mitigated by planning events well ahead of time and communicating the United States' intentions for the exercises and the capabilities involved, thus enhancing the exercises' predictability. The risks can be further mitigated by conducting them farther from Russian borders or potentially conducting distributed exercises, in which only a portion of the U.S., NATO, and partner forces are operating near Russia at any one time. Risks can also be mitigated by investing in measures that are intended to bolster participating countries' resilience, such as public information campaigns to explain the purpose of such exercises.

**Agreements.** Finally, although the risks borne by countries on a path to NATO accession are well understood, less is known about the implications of lesser military agreements, such as agreements designed to enhance intratheater mobility or logistics and sustainment in the region. Our research suggests that the primary benefits of such agreements are to conventional deterrence. They could, however, have ancillary benefits in the competition space when brokered with states that are farther from Russia's borders.

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*Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment give the "all-clear" to waiting vehicles to move forward and advance on mock enemy positions on November 18, 2017, during the Allied Spirit VII training exercise held in Grafenwoehr, Germany.*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the analyses in this report, we offer the following recommendations.

## ADOPT SPECIFIC AND APPROPRIATELY SCOPED GOALS FOR U.S. FORWARD POSTURE

Our research suggests that U.S. military posture is associated with a wide variety of deterrence and escalatory outcomes in competition, although, for the most part, these relationships tend to be subtle. These outcomes suggest that U.S. decisionmakers should think of U.S. posture primarily as an enabler of a much broader strategy that incorporates the full range of the instruments of national power. Understood in these terms, military posture can be one important contributor to a competition strategy, especially when focused on countering hostile measures for which the military has inherent advantages (such as military intimidation or proxy warfare). But a competition strategy

that weights military instruments heavily is almost certain to disappoint.

U.S. decisionmakers should base U.S. forward posture changes on specific objectives. On balance, a great many posture changes are more often associated with escalation than with deterrence. Without clear goals, it is difficult to weigh whether the escalation risks can be justified.

Despite these cautions, U.S. decisionmakers might well decide that the risk of escalation is warranted in many cases. When making decisions about forward posture, U.S. senior leaders and military planners must balance multiple considerations, many of which were outside the scope of these analyses. Repeatedly accepting such risk, however, could lead to escalating spirals of tit-for-tat measures in the competition space, with the potential for highly costly competition that could tip into armed conflict.

## RETAIN U.S. FORCES CURRENTLY POSITIONED IN EUROPE

U.S. forces that are currently positioned in Europe are broadly associated with increased deterrence—not just deterrence of armed conflict, but also, more subtly, several forms of malign activity. Our research suggests that U.S. forces positioned in Europe, even if distant from the front lines, appear to play a role in making the implicit threat behind these small deployments of U.S. forces much more credible. Not only are U.S. forces positioned near but not in the most vulnerable countries associated with deterrence, but this relationship appears stronger than that between deterrence and troops (beyond the current tripwire forces) closer to the front lines. Forces stationed in vulnerable countries can make the host countries targets for a variety of hostile measures, from military intimidation (with the ever-present risk of inadvertent escalation) to subtler forms of aggression that are

*Paratroopers from C Troop, 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment jump into the Donnelly Drop Zone on February 29, 2020, from a Royal Canadian Air Force C-130 as part of Arctic Edge 2020 at Donnelly Training Area, Alaska.*





*U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook, HH-60, and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters with the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, out of Fort Carson, Colorado, prepare to land at Illersheim Army Airfield, Germany, for the first time in support of Atlantic Resolve on June 22, 2018.*

intended to impose costs on or weaken the will of host countries. Forces positioned in less-vulnerable countries pose fewer threats to the host country but still could be repositioned quickly as needed.

### LIMIT RELIANCE ON DYNAMIC FORCE EMPLOYMENT

Although still an evolving concept, Dynamic Force Employment appears to emphasize short-term deployments and unpredictable military activities over committing to permanent (or at least long-term) forward stationing of U.S. forces. There are many reasons why the concept is attractive in theory and from a fiscal perspective. Nonetheless, our research suggests that there are inherent escalatory risks in relying on military exercises and similar activities to establish deterrence. Some of these risks can be mitigated through manipulation of such factors as proximity, but operational unpredictability implies discontinuity—a factor that was frequently associated with escalation in our analyses. Dynamic Force Employment is best used as a supplement to persistent presence, not a substitute, and only if appropriate measures are taken to mitigate the associated risks.

### PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON RIGOROUS RISK ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

There was often little agreement among the experts and practitioners whom we consulted about what “worked” in competition; a lack of consensus that was also reflected in the scholarly and policy literature we reviewed for this study. Some of the practitioners we consulted emphasized the need for more-rigorous efforts to assess the consequences of U.S. posture decisions.

These consequences can be assessed prospectively through risk assessments and retroactively through evaluations. Both are needed to improve U.S. performance in competition. Particularly for those options shown to be high-risk, the United States should adopt rigorous interagency risk assessment processes. When evaluating the consequences of U.S. posture decisions after the fact, the United States should look not only for immediate reactions but should explore longer-term and indirect dynamics.

## ILLUSTRATIVE POSTURE OPTIONS

To indicate how our analysis might be applied to future posture decisions, we developed a list of illustrative U.S. posture options throughout Europe and its periphery. We derived this list from official U.S. policy documents and debates in the broader U.S. defense community (such as papers and reports from think tanks and U.S. military research institutes). We then formulated expected outcomes of each posture option using the findings from the statistical, case study, and scenario analyses.

Table 2 summarizes these posture options, their values on the key factors in the analytic framework, and the projected outcomes for each decision. Throughout the table, color-coded arrows summarize what the findings of the research suggest about the likely effects of a given posture decision. The projected outcomes in the table represent the direct consequences of a given U.S. posture decision on Russian hostile measures in the competition space using the analysis in this study. A green, downward arrow indicates lower risk of Russian hostile measures (greater deterrent value); a red, upward arrow indicates greater risk of Russian hostile measures (greater escalatory risk); and a gray, horizontal arrow indicates neutral, ambiguous, or mixed implications. The projected outcomes are based on

the interaction of the type of force posture (forces, activities, agreements) with the intervening factors in the framework (proximity, continuity, and capability). For each posture option, each of the intervening factors is described as being more prone to enhance deterrence (distant, continuous, and/or non-sensitive posture) or more prone to escalatory risk (proximate, discontinuous, and/or sensitive). As with the outcomes, these descriptors are color-coded, with more-escalatory values depicted in red and more-deterrent values depicted in green.

The outcomes discussed here are relative; that is, they indicate somewhat higher or somewhat lower degrees of risk or reward. U.S. forward posture is only one factor associated with outcomes; typically, it will be a contributing factor but not decisive. Because U.S. posture changes often carry only a small escalatory risk, in many cases, any single change might not be provocative enough to produce an observable reaction. If the United States repeatedly accepts risk in its posture choices, however, the opportunities for escalation will accumulate. Although consequences might be imperceptible in the short term, over the course of the 15-year time horizon used in this report, such decisions could ultimately trigger Russian hostile measures in the competition space and potentially major crises.

*U.S. soldiers assigned to 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment convoy to Live Fire Range at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Grafenwoehr, Germany, on February 9, 2021. Combined Resolve XV is a Headquarters Department of the Army directed multinational exercise designed to build 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division's readiness and enhance interoperability with allied forces to fight and win against any adversary.*









TABLE 2




## Illustrative Posture Options and Projected Implications for Likelihood of Russian Malign Activities in Competition

Option	Proximity	Discontinuity	Capability	Projected Direct Outcome	Rationale
<b>Forces (Augment)</b>					
Maintain or modestly increase U.S. forces in Western Europe	DISTANT	CONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↓	Existing U.S. forces in Western Europe are associated with deterrence of malign activity and conflict with little escalatory risk.
Augment U.S. forces in Western Europe with precision strike missiles	DISTANT	DISCONTINUOUS	SENSITIVE	↻	Precision-strike missile placement seems to be associated with greater deterrence and escalation risk appears mitigated by stationing to the West but could invite hostile influence operations or worse.
Augment U.S. forces in Northeast Europe (e.g., Poland) to the division-level or higher	PROXIMATE	DISCONTINUOUS	NEUTRAL	↑	Ground forces generally possess fewer sensitive capabilities than air forces, although large numbers could result in outsized Russian reactions.
Deploy long-range precision fires to Northeastern Europe	PROXIMATE	DISCONTINUOUS	SENSITIVE	↑	Deployment of such sensitive capabilities close to Russia would be highly likely to make host countries targets of Russian hostile measures.
<b>Forces (Reduce)</b>					
Modestly reduce U.S. force levels in Western Europe	DISTANT	DISCONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↑	Reductions in U.S. forces would signal, at a minimum, decreasing U.S. commitment to Europe.
Withdraw U.S. forces from the Kosovo Forces agreement	DISTANT	DISCONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↑	Withdrawal of U.S. forces would signal U.S. disengagement and invite potential crises that Russia could exploit.
Downsize Operation Atlantic Resolve	PROXIMATE	DISCONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↑	After years of bolstering defenses, a change in U.S. direction without reciprocal change from Russia could be seen as weakening commitment.
<b>Activities</b>					
Routine materiel transfers and training in Western Europe	DISTANT	CONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↓	Such routine behavior is highly unlikely to provoke Russia and could signal continued U.S. commitment.
Materiel transfers to make Northeastern Europe “hedgehogs” or “poison pills”	PROXIMATE	CONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↻	Activities to make Northeastern European states more-costly targets of conventional aggression are unlikely to be associated with either decreased or increased risk of malign activities.
Transfer of long-range precision fires and training for Western Europe	DISTANT	NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL	↻	Many Western European states have air- and/or naval-launched long-range precision fires; such transfers are less likely to be seen as provocative unless they are long-range (1,000 km+).
Increase in materiel transfers and partnership activity in Southeastern Europe	DISTANT	CONTINUOUS	NEUTRAL	↻	Many such activities appear to be associated with greater deterrence, although others (e.g., offensive capabilities for Serbia) are more likely to be escalatory.
Routine military exercises in Northeastern Europe	PROXIMATE	CONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE	↻	Routine exercises could contribute to an increase in low-level hostile measures, but risks appear low if the United States communicates intent and forces involved and coordinates with allies.

TABLE 2-CONTINUED

Option	Proximity	Discontinuity	Capability	Projected Direct Outcome	Rationale
Repeated exercises in Northeastern Europe, e.g., Trident Juncture-18 or larger	PROXIMATE	DISCONTINUOUS	NEUTRAL		Large-scale exercises in Northeastern Europe run risks of escalation in competition as well as inadvertent conflict.
Transfer of substantial long-range precision fires and training for Northeastern Europe	PROXIMATE	DISCONTINUOUS	SENSITIVE		Small-scale transfers (e.g., JASSM-ER missile sales to Poland) might not be escalatory, but large transfers are likely to increase the risk of hostile measures.
<b>Agreements</b>					
Agreements to enhance border transit and military contracting in Western Europe	DISTANT	CONTINUOUS	NONSENSITIVE		Although predominantly targeted at conventional conflict, such measures can demonstrate U.S. commitment and reduce the likelihood of intimidation.
Agreements to enhance border transit and military contracting in Northeastern Europe	PROXIMATE	NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL		Such agreements represent only incremental change with NATO allies; with Finland or Sweden, there is a higher risk of hostile measures.

**Projected Direct Outcome:** The outcome that the research in this report suggests appears most likely to result from a given change in U.S. posture. These outcomes represent only the apparent direct results of U.S. posture changes; indirect relationships (such as assuring allies and partners or increasing their capabilities) are not evaluated.

-  A given U.S. posture decision is projected to result in a *decrease* in the incidence of a given type of hostile measure (a deterrent relationship).
-  A given U.S. posture decision is projected to result in an *increase* in the incidence of a given type of hostile measure (an escalatory relationship).
-  A given U.S. posture decision is projected to have a neutral or indeterminate relationship with a given type of hostile measure.

**Proximity:** The distance between a given U.S. posture change and Russia.

- DISTANT** U.S. forward posture *not* located in Russia’s immediate environs, including the states of the former Soviet Union and states in Northern and Eastern Europe contiguous or nearly contiguous to Russia; green shading of the word indicates a reduced likelihood of aggressive Russian response.
- PROXIMATE** U.S. forward posture located in Russia’s immediate environs, including the states of the former Soviet Union and states in Northern and Eastern Europe contiguous or nearly contiguous to Russia; red shading of the word indicates an increased likelihood of aggressive Russian response.

**Continuity:** The extent and rapidity of change in U.S. forward posture.

- CONTINUOUS** U.S. forward posture that remains the same or changes only gradually, thus increasing its predictability; green shading of the word indicates a reduced likelihood of aggressive Russian response.
- DISCONTINUOUS** U.S. forward posture that changes rapidly (either qualitatively or quantitatively), thus increasing its unpredictability; red shading of the word indicates an increased likelihood of aggressive Russian response.

**Capability:** The sensitivity of capabilities possessed by forward-positioned U.S. forces or military activities, with *sensitive capabilities* understood as those that Russia perceives as posing a severe threat to state or regime security (especially weapon systems that could theoretically give the United States a debilitating first-strike capability or a large-scale build-up of more-traditional capabilities).

- NONSENSITIVE** U.S. forward posture that does not pose a severe threat to Russian state or regime capability.
- SENSITIVE** U.S. forward posture that Russia perceives as posing a severe threat to Russian state or regime capability.

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of a project entitled *Avoiding Escalation in Competition with Russia and China*, sponsored by U.S. Army Europe. The purpose of the project was to provide insights and actionable recommendations on how to protect and advance U.S. interests in great power competition while mitigating the risk of inadvertent escalation to the level of direct armed conflict.

### RAND ARROYO CENTER

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