

# The Shadow of Exit from NATO

JOHN M. SCHUESSLER  
JOSHUA R. SHIFRINSON

## Abstract

President Donald Trump has not been shy about trying to coerce close allies. This inclination has led to concerns that the president poses a unique threat to American alliances. Theoretically, these concerns are consistent with an influential line of argument pointing to strategic restraint and reassurance—via binding institutions—as what sets American alliances apart. However, the Trump presidency is not the first time that the shadow of exit has hung over the United States’ commitment to Europe. Indeed, a closer look at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) formative period shows that the United States actively considered leaving Europe throughout the 1950s. Even after resigning itself to staying in the early 1960s, the United States used threats of abandonment to put down the Franco-German revolt—the most significant challenge to its preponderant position in the NATO alliance. The primary implication is that American alliance relations have been characterized by more uncertainty—and less restraint and reassurance—than institutionalists have cared to emphasize, which paradoxically suggests that NATO, and the United States’ broader alliance network, is robust enough to survive President Trump’s attempts at coercion.

\*\*\*\*\*

A prominent line of argument points to institutions as what sets American alliances apart. John Ikenberry, in particular, has claimed that the United States has had to engage in strategic restraint to reassure weaker states that it would not dominate or abandon them.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, he notes, they would have incentives to balance against American power. Accordingly, the United States has gone out of its way to restrain itself and build a cooperative framework characterized by binding institutions. Doing so, in turn, has made weaker states—like those in Europe—amenable to American leadership.<sup>2</sup> “American power is made more acceptable to other states because it is institutionalized,” as Ikenberry has argued.<sup>3</sup> As a liberal democracy, the United States has been uniquely well positioned to engage

in strategic restraint and bind itself via institutions; this ability explains the persistence of American-led alliances. “American power,” according to Ikenberry, “is not only unprecedented in its preponderance but it is also unprecedented in the way it is manifest within and through institutions. This helps explain why it has been so durable.”<sup>4</sup>

In direct contradiction to the institutionalist logic, President Trump has not been shy about coercing even close allies. This inclination has led to concerns that the president poses a unique threat to American alliances. The concern is especially acute in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States’ mainstay alliance in Europe. Rather than underline NATO’s value, as his predecessors have done, Trump has embraced the possibility that the United States might exit the alliance at some point to wring concessions on issues of interest such as allied defense spending and terms of trade.<sup>5</sup> Trump’s critics fear that his hardball tactics will drive a wedge between the United States and its European partners, endangering the transatlantic alliance. By signaling such disregard for NATO as an institution, his critics claim, Trump calls into question the institutional commitments that have been at the heart of the American-led order.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is, the Trump presidency is not the first time the shadow of exit has hung over the United States’ commitment to Europe. Indeed, a closer look at NATO’s formative period shows that the United States actively considered leaving Europe throughout the 1950s. Even after resigning itself to staying in the early 1960s, the United States used threats of abandonment to put down the Franco-German revolt—the most significant challenge to its preponderant position in the NATO alliance. The primary implication is that American alliance relations have been characterized by more uncertainty—and less restraint and reassurance—than institutionalists have cared to emphasize. This consequence paradoxically suggests that NATO, and the United States’ broader alliance network, is robust enough to survive President Trump’s attempts at coercion.<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of this article examines NATO’s formative period in more detail, offering a corrective to the institutionalist account. The conclusion underscores an important implication for policy: less reassurance can sometimes be more.

### **The Formative Shadow of Exit**

The institutionalist logic should readily explain NATO’s formative period, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. According to institutionalists, this was a period when “American power was both tied down and bound

to Europe” by way of institutions like NATO. In effect, NATO served to reassure European allies that the United States would neither dominate nor abandon them.<sup>8</sup> However, a shadow of exit hung over the US commitment to Europe during the early Cold War. Throughout the 1950s, under Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, the United States saw its leadership role on the continent as a temporary expedient. As soon as European integration had proceeded far enough for a “third force” to emerge capable of balancing Soviet power on its own, the United States would withdraw from its forward positions and recede into the background. Moreover, the United States was not above threatening its European allies with abandonment when they failed to embrace the integration project with sufficient zeal. Most famous in this regard is the “agonizing reappraisal” that John Foster Dulles, secretary of state under Eisenhower, warned about in December 1953. In fact, an enduring American commitment to Europe was not solidified until the early 1960s, under President John F. Kennedy.<sup>9</sup> Even Kennedy, however, threatened to withdraw all US troops from Europe unless West Germany dialed back on security cooperation with France, which jeopardized the preponderant position that the United States demanded in the NATO alliance as the price for it staying.

### ***The Problem: Abandonment, Not Domination***

Ikenberry, the leading institutionalist, is onto something when he argues that the United States was a “reluctant hegemon” in the post-World War II period.<sup>10</sup> Especially important is his point that prospective allies in Europe worried more about abandonment than domination and worked hard to secure robust American security commitments.<sup>11</sup> Reluctant hegemon, however, does not go far enough: it understates how determined the United States was to leave Europe once the balance of power was restored there. As important, the emphasis on strategic restraint and reassurance glosses over instances in which the United States threatened exit to wrest concessions from its European partners on the terms of its engagement—most crucially in putting down the Franco-German revolt of 1963. “American power,” according to Ikenberry, “was both tied down and bound to Europe” during the early Cold War period.<sup>12</sup> The claim here is that European allies had good reason to doubt the extent to which this was true, doubts that the United States fanned for its own benefit.

### ***The US Commitment to Europe: Permanent or Temporary?***

NATO, to paraphrase its first secretary general, was created in the late 1940s to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans

down.”<sup>13</sup> What is striking is how long it took the United States to reconcile itself to this fact: it was only in the early 1960s that the United States came to see its security commitment to Europe as more than a temporary expedient. This mind-set is a prominent theme in recent Cold War historiography, much of it inspired by Marc Trachtenberg’s path-breaking account *A Constructed Peace*.<sup>14</sup> James McAllister, for one, describes the idea that American military forces would permanently ensure European stability as “unthinkable” in the 1940s and 1950s. The historical record shows, instead, that “American policymakers from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower strenuously tried to avoid having the future of Europe dependent on a permanent U.S. military presence on the continent.”<sup>15</sup> Mark Sheetz concurs, noting, “Postwar American statesmen, such as Kennan, Dulles and Eisenhower, did not want European stability to be permanently dependent on the presence of American forces. They did not want to assume the burden of defending Europe permanently against the Soviet Union, nor did they want to serve permanently as Europe’s protector against a possible resurgence of German power. The purpose of America’s ‘temporary’ intervention in Western Europe was to eliminate the need for ‘permanent’ intervention.”<sup>16</sup> In 1991 Trachtenberg himself observed, “During the crucial formative period in the early 1950s, everyone wanted a permanent American presence in Europe—everyone, that is, except the Americans themselves. It is hard to understand why the intensity and persistence of America’s desire to pull out as soon as she reasonably could has never been recognized, either in the public discussion or in the scholarly literature, because it comes through with unmistakable clarity” in government documents.<sup>17</sup>

If the United States intended its commitment to Europe to be temporary, how did it propose to solve the double containment problem that was at the heart of the Cold War? That is, how did it propose “to keep the Russians out and the Germans down”? The hope was that European integration would yield a third force on the continent, solving the double containment problem and allowing American forces to withdraw. McAllister, again, captures the thrust of US policy: “America’s overarching goal after 1947 was to create a united Western Europe that could contain Germany and balance against the Soviet Union without a permanent U.S. military presence.” For US policy makers, “Western European unity was the ‘skeleton key’ that would permanently end the German problem and enable the region to become a third great center of power able to stand on its own without U.S. military forces continually serving as either a ‘pacifier’ or ‘protector.’”<sup>18</sup> Sheetz reaches similar conclusions. “The Marshall Plan and

NATO,” he argues, “were designed to unify Western Europe, solve the German problem, and restore a rough balance on the European continent. The United States would then be able to relinquish responsibility for European security.”<sup>19</sup> The key point is that the United States was pulled into the NATO system only reluctantly; the goal, at least through the 1950s, was not to stay in Europe but to leave once a third force had emerged.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Agonizing Reappraisal*

No American policy maker was more determined to leave Europe than Eisenhower. The basic concept of Eisenhower’s grand strategy, as Brendan Green relates, was the third force: “The United States would build Western Europe into an independent pole of power that could balance the Soviet Union by itself. The United States would then pass the buck, withdrawing its forces from the continent and positioning itself as the balancer of last resort.”<sup>21</sup> Eisenhower pinned his hopes, in particular, on the European Defense Community (EDC), a treaty integrating the militaries of France, West Germany, and the Benelux states. If successful, the EDC would represent a local solution to the double containment problem, harnessing West German military power against the Soviet threat but with supranational controls to ensure that West Germany did not get too independent or powerful.<sup>22</sup> This strategy in turn would free the United States from having to make a long-term commitment to defend Europe, either from the Soviet Union or from a rearmed West Germany. For Eisenhower, avoiding such a commitment was imperative.<sup>23</sup> In February 1951, newly installed as the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, Eisenhower wrote an associate, “There is no defense for Western Europe that depends exclusively or even materially upon the existence, in Europe, of strong American units. The spirit must be here and the strength must be produced here. We cannot be a modern Rome guarding the far frontiers with our legions if for no other reason than that these are *not*, politically, *our* frontiers. What we must do is to assist these people [to] regain their confidence and get on their own military feet” (emphasis in original).<sup>24</sup> For Eisenhower, the stationing of American troops in Europe was “a temporary expedient,” “a stop-gap operation” meant to bridge the gap until the EDC brought a third force into being.<sup>25</sup>

The problem for Eisenhower was that the Europeans—the French in particular—had strong incentives to drag their feet on the EDC, correctly suspecting that the intended end-state was an American withdrawal that would leave them alone on the continent with the Soviet Union and a rearmed West Germany. For the French, an American military commitment

was more attractive than the EDC. As Sebastian Rosato has argued, “A large American troop presence would protect western Europe from the Soviet Union and also contain the Germans, who could therefore be re-armed to the benefit of the West without threatening France,” all without France having to surrender sovereignty to a supranational institution.<sup>26</sup> Frustrated by French intransigence, Dulles, an outspoken proponent of the EDC, resorted increasingly to threats to break the logjam. Most famous is the warning he delivered to the North Atlantic Council on 14 December 1953 that if the EDC were to fail, “there would be grave doubt whether continental Europe could be made a place of safety,” which “would compel an agonizing reappraisal of basic United States policy.”<sup>27</sup> It was widely understood that such a reappraisal would point toward a withdrawal from Europe. More precisely, the implied threat was that the United States would abandon the forward defense of the continent and adopt instead a peripheral strategy primarily reliant on airpower.<sup>28</sup> As Dulles explained to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a January 1953 meeting, “If the French and Germans should come to see that the military position would be tolerable for us if we could hold Turkey, Spain, etc., that would create pressures on them which would not exist if they think we are so committed that we must carry the entire load in the area.”<sup>29</sup>

Given that the Eisenhower administration never followed through on its threats, it is tempting to write off the agonizing reappraisal as a calculated bluff.<sup>30</sup> After all, the EDC died on 30 August 1954, with the French legislature rejecting the treaty on a procedural vote. Rather than abandon forward defense, the Eisenhower administration assented to an alternative arrangement—pushed by the British—whereby West Germany would join NATO with safeguards. Even factoring in the EDC’s demise, however, the agonizing reappraisal should not be discounted. First, as McAllister has argued, Dulles’s remarks may have been calculated, but they were not a bluff. Rather, they “accurately represented his deepest beliefs about the need for Europe to move on toward greater unity as a sheer matter of self-preservation as well as his fears about what would happen in the event the EDC did not come into being.”<sup>31</sup> Second, the agonizing reappraisal was taken seriously by at least one key audience, the British, prompting them to break with a tradition of nonentanglement and make a long-term commitment to the defense of Europe.<sup>32</sup> The British commitment, in turn, was a crucial ingredient in the NATO system that ultimately substituted for the EDC. Finally, the agonizing reappraisal demonstrates that the United States was willing to threaten withdrawal from Europe even during the most intense phase of the Cold War.

### ***The Franco-German Revolt***

With the benefit of hindsight, it is safe to conclude that Eisenhower overreached in his aspirations for a third force and the withdrawal of American troops from Europe.<sup>33</sup> His successor, Kennedy, was more amenable to a long-term commitment to NATO as the price that had to be paid for an enduring solution to the double containment problem. In return, Kennedy insisted on centralizing control over alliance policy, especially when it came to nuclear weapons, generating conflict with France. Exploiting the shadow of exit, Kennedy threatened to abandon West Germany when it appeared to be following France's lead. These threats were potent enough to put down the Franco-German revolt and lock in the United States' preponderant position in the NATO alliance.

### ***Kennedy's Approach to Europe***

Kennedy, unlike Eisenhower, considered an American military commitment to Europe as inescapable, at least if the double containment problem was to be solved.<sup>34</sup> A third force had not emerged to provide a counterweight to the Soviet Union—and might not be desirable in the first place if it meant a West Germany with too much power and independence. Only the forward presence of American forces on European soil would suffice to check the Soviets while keeping German power limited. In return, Kennedy insisted on centralizing control over alliance policy; especially important was that West Germany not acquire independent control of nuclear weapons.<sup>35</sup> The flexible response doctrine, for example, is best seen as a strategic rationalization for reasserted American control over NATO nuclear weapons, and thus a repudiation of the nuclear sharing policy that had come to characterize Eisenhower's approach to the issue.<sup>36</sup> Kennedy's basic stance, captured by Green, was that "if the United States was going to defend Europe, it was going to call the military and political shots."<sup>37</sup> The United States could not, Kennedy insisted, "accept the notion that we should stay out of all of Europe's affairs while remaining ready to defend her if war should come."<sup>38</sup> The United States would not issue that kind of blank check.

### ***Putting Down the Franco-German Revolt***

Kennedy's warning was directed above all at the French, who were increasingly assertive about voicing their displeasure with the centralizing thrust of American policy. French president Charles de Gaulle, in particular, was attracted to the idea of a "European" Europe led by France. France,

de Gaulle felt, should continue to enjoy the American security guarantee but otherwise should take the lead in settling political questions like the status of Germany. Kennedy, as we have already seen, rejected this way of thinking, setting up a collision with de Gaulle.<sup>39</sup> De Gaulle's intransigence, in turn, emboldened the West Germans to dig in their heels on the nuclear issue, with West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer ruling out a nonnuclear status for West Germany as part of a Berlin settlement.<sup>40</sup>

Matters between Kennedy, on the one hand, and de Gaulle and Adenauer, on the other, came to a head in early 1963. On 14 January 1963, de Gaulle inaugurated an open revolt against the United States, vetoing Britain's admission to the European Economic Community (EEC). De Gaulle's fear was that Britain would act as a Trojan horse for the United States, warning in a press conference that the continental countries would eventually be absorbed into a "colossal Atlantic community dependent on America and under American control" in the event Britain was let into the EEC.<sup>41</sup> Even more provocatively, de Gaulle and Adenauer signed a treaty of friendship one week later, raising the specter of a Franco-German bloc independent of American influence.<sup>42</sup> Kennedy was livid and prepared to believe the worst about de Gaulle, warning his advisers that "we should look now at the possibility that De Gaulle had concluded that he would make a deal with the Russians, break up NATO, and push the U.S. out of Europe."<sup>43</sup>

To preclude this possibility and put down the Franco-German revolt, Kennedy threatened to abandon West Germany unless Adenauer—or a more pliable West German government—sided with the United States over France. "The Germans," as Trachtenberg sums up Kennedy's approach, "had to be told that 'they can't have it both ways.' They had to choose between France and America. If they chose to align themselves with De Gaulle and if they backed the policy of an independent Europe, they could not count on the United States to defend them. If they wanted American protection, they would have to follow the American lead on political and nuclear questions."<sup>44</sup> And, indeed, Kennedy warned Adenauer directly in a February 1963 letter,

I would be less than frank if I did not convey to you my grave concern over the mounting suspicion in the American Congress and public that this Nation's presence and views are no longer welcome in Europe. Those who feel that \$45 billion and 16 years of continuous economic and military assistance have earned us nothing but the hostility of certain European leaders and newspapers are likely to take out their resentment by pressing for a return to restrictive, isolationist concepts that would end



Western unity and, according to our best military judgment, seriously weaken the security of Western Europe as well as the United States.<sup>45</sup>

While Kennedy went on to say that he would do everything in his power to prevent this trend, the meaning was hardly lost on the West Germans, who in early 1963 watered down the Franco-German treaty with a preamble affirming their loyalty to NATO (and thus to the United States).<sup>46</sup>

West Germany's about-face was crucial because Kennedy was only willing to stay in Europe if the United States was calling the political and military shots. The Cuban missile crisis, just a few months before, had underlined the real risk of war between the United States and the Soviet Union. This reality reinforced Kennedy in his insistence that the United States exercise pre-eminent influence in NATO in exchange for defending Europe.

### **Less Reassurance Can Be More**

Even though the United States actively considered leaving Europe throughout the 1950s, it resigned itself to staying in the early 1960s after securing a preponderant position in NATO. In the current moment, the Trump administration has paired a confrontational approach to alliance management with substantial continuity in core American commitments to European defense. An important implication follows: American alliance relations have been characterized by more uncertainty—and less restraint and reassurance—than institutionalists have cared to emphasize, paradoxically suggesting that NATO and the United States' broader alliance network are robust enough to survive the Trump administration's attempts at coercion.<sup>47</sup>

More generally, it is worth underscoring that there is such a thing as *too* much reassurance. One frequently hears the claim that allies need to be reassured sufficiently that they are not tempted to build up their power as a hedge against American abandonment.<sup>48</sup> A felt need to reassure, in turn, has led policy makers to preoccupy themselves with credibility, to the point of treating reputation as if it were a vital interest. Policy makers, notes historian Robert McMahan, "have argued with remarkable consistency, privately as well as publicly, that demonstrating the credibility of American power and American commitments ranked among the most critical of all U.S. foreign policy objectives." He observes that they indeed "have often evinced as much concern for generalized perceptions of power, reputation, and prestige as they have with the preservation of more tangible interests."<sup>49</sup> One could argue that the United States has fought

multiple wars for the sake of its reputation, most prominently in Korea and Vietnam during the Cold War.<sup>50</sup>

Is reputation, in fact, worth fighting for? To a surprising degree, the evidence cuts against the notion that commitments are interdependent and thus that reputation deserves the importance that policy makers have ascribed to it. An exhaustive review of the literature is beyond the scope of this article, but a safe implication to draw from some of its seminal contributions is that reputation has been overvalued.<sup>51</sup>

Ted Hopf, for example, notes how the United States became involved in various Third World conflicts during the Cold War, more to deter the Soviet Union than to protect any specific interest. Hopf highlights the lessons the Soviets learned from their victories and defeats in these conflicts, finding that “not a single Soviet in twenty-five years inferred anything about American credibility” in the core based on events in the periphery.<sup>52</sup> Political scientist Jonathan Mercer leverages insights from social psychology to generate the counterintuitive argument that states are unlikely to get reputations for either lacking resolve among adversaries or for having resolve among allies. Bolstered by an examination of reputation formation in a series of pre-World War I crises, Mercer concludes, “It is wrong to believe that a state’s reputation for resolve is worth fighting for.”<sup>53</sup> Daryl Press, finally, pits the past actions theory, which says that the credibility of a state’s threats depends on its history of keeping or breaking commitments, against the current calculus theory, which privileges the balance of power and interests. To evaluate these competing theories of credibility, Press examines decision-making during three sets of crises—the “appeasement” crises between Nazi Germany and Britain and France before World War II, as well as Cold War crises between the Soviet Union and the United States over Berlin and Cuba. The cases reveal, Press argues, that “the very same leaders who are so concerned about their own country’s credibility that they are loath to back down reflexively ignore the enemy’s history for keeping or breaking commitments.”<sup>54</sup> Press, like Mercer, ends up concluding that states “should not fight wars for the sake of preserving their credibility.”<sup>55</sup>

On the one hand, it is understandable that policy makers take the need for reassurance seriously given the potentially high costs of being seen as an unreliable ally.<sup>56</sup> An overemphasis on reassurance, however, in the form of unduly firm commitments risks entangling the United States in unwanted conflicts. The challenge is to be just reassuring enough that an alliance with the United States remains a desired commodity but not so reassuring that strategic flexibility is eliminated.<sup>57</sup> In other words, policy

makers should balance the natural urge to reassure others about the firmness of American commitments with subtle (and sometimes unsubtle) reminders that exit remains an option, just as they did with NATO in the early Cold War and as the Trump administration is arguably doing now. **ISSQ**

## Notes

1. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 271. See also G. John Ikenberry, "Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order," *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998/99): 43–78
2. Ikenberry, *After Victory*; and Ikenberry, "Institutions."
3. Ikenberry, *After Victory*; and Ikenberry, "Institutions."
4. Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 258.
5. Joshua Shiffrinson, "Sound and Fury, Signifying Something? NATO and the Trump Administration's Second Year," *H-Diplo/ISSF [International Security Studies Forum] Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond*, 15 July 2018, <http://issforum.org/>. See also Joshua Shiffrinson, "Trump and NATO: Old Wine in Gold Bottles," *H-Diplo/ISSF Policy Series: America and the World—2017 and Beyond*, 29 September 2017, <https://issforum.org/>.
6. On 23 July 2018, 42 scholars of international relations published a statement in the *New York Times* condemning Trump's attacks on international institutions like NATO. For context, see David A. Lake and Peter Gourevitch, "Hundreds of Scholars Have Signed a Statement Defending the International Institutions That Trump Has Attacked," Monkey Cage Analysis, *Washington Post*, 14 August 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.
7. Patrick Porter and Paul Staniland both make note of this in their wide-ranging critiques of the concept of "liberal order." See Patrick Porter, "A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order," Cato Institute Policy Analysis, no. 843 (5 June 2018), <https://www.cato.org/>; and Paul Staniland, "Misreading the 'Liberal Order': Why We Need New Thinking in American Foreign Policy," *Lawfare*, a blog dedicated to national security issues, published by the Lawfare Institute in cooperation with the Brookings Institution, 29 July 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/>.
8. Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 265.
9. Making a compelling case that US policy toward Europe shifted from buck-passing under Eisenhower to balancing under Kennedy is Brendan Rittenhouse Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition," *International Security* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 9–43.
10. Ikenberry, "Institutions," 63–65; and Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 200–203.
11. Ikenberry, "Institutions," 71; and Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 165–66, 191–99, and 205–10.
12. Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 265.
13. Quoted in North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO Leaders: Lord Ismay," accessed May 2019, <https://www.nato.int/>.
14. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
15. James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 16.
16. Mark S. Sheetz, "Exit Strategies: American Grand Designs for Postwar European Security," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 27.
17. Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 167.

18. McAllister, *No Exit*, 16, 20. See also Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 164; and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 114.
19. Sheetz, "Exit Strategies," 25.
20. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 119. Trachtenberg, McAllister, and Sheetz push back against those like Melvyn Leffler and Geir Lundestad who argue that the United States did not want to see an independent "third force" emerge in Europe. See Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 17; and Geir Lundestad, "Empire" by Integration: *The United States and European Integration, 1945–1997* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.
21. Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 23–24. On Eisenhower's approach to the Cold War in Europe, see also Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 147–56; and McAllister, *No Exit*, 210–15.
22. On the power politics surrounding the EDC, see Sebastian Rosato, *Europe United: Power Politics and the Making of the European Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), chap. 4.
23. Eisenhower feared that the costs of a long-term commitment would threaten American liberties, turning the United States into a garrison state. See Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty," esp. 27.
24. Quoted in Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 147.
25. Memorandum by the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Cutler) to the Secretary of State, 3 September 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1952–1954, *National Security Affairs*, vol. 2, pt. 1, doc. 87, <https://history.state.gov/>. Quoted in McAllister, *No Exit*, 231.
26. Rosato, *Europe United*, 142–43.
27. Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, *Western European Security*, vol. 5, pt. 1, doc. 462, <https://history.state.gov/>. See also "Remarks Made by Secretary Dulles in Paris," *The New York Times*, 15 December 1953, 14, <https://www.nytimes.com/>. As Brian Duchin argues, Dulles's December threat was far from new. See Brian R. Duchin, "The 'Agonizing Reappraisal': Eisenhower, Dulles, and the European Defense Community," *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 2 (April 1992): 202.
28. On forward defense versus the peripheral strategy, see Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 153–60.
29. Memorandum of Discussion of State—Mutual Security Agency—Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, 28 January 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–54, vol. 5, pt. 1, doc. 374, <https://history.state.gov/>. Quoted in McAllister, *No Exit*, 226. At the same time, Dulles recognized that loose talk of redeploying American troops could jeopardize ratification of the EDC. He thus worked, unsuccessfully, to keep a tight lid on Pentagon proposals along these lines. See McAllister, *No Exit*, 230–35, as well as Sheetz, "Exit Strategies," 34.
30. See Duchin, "The 'Agonizing Reappraisal,'" 212, as well as Kevin Ruane, "Agonizing Reappraisals: Anthony Eden, John Foster Dulles and the Crisis of European Defense, 1953–54," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13, no. 4 (December 2002): 178.
31. McAllister, *No Exit*, 237–38.
32. Ruane, "Agonizing Reappraisals," 152–54, 160, 172–74.
33. See McAllister, *No Exit*, 243–44; and Sheetz, "Exit Strategies," 40. For a more bullish assessment of Eisenhower's buck-passing approach, see Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 41.
34. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 284. For a succinct overview of Kennedy's approach to Europe, see Green, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 31–37. Francis Gavin introduces the important caveat that, however open he was to a long-term commitment to Europe, Kennedy was not convinced that large American conventional forces were needed for its defense—with the exception of the anomalous situation in Berlin. In fact, Kennedy seriously considered plans to withdraw US troops from Europe. See Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–71* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 60, 104–6; and Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 44–46.

35. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 302–15.
36. Trachtenberg, 315–20. Gavin is convincing that flexible response, more rhetorical than real, was targeted at the German problem. See Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, chap. 2, esp. 31, 54–55.
37. Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 37.
38. Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in France, 18 May 1962, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, vol. 13, *Western Europe and Canada*, doc. 251, <https://history.state.gov/>.
39. On the escalating disagreement between Kennedy and de Gaulle over how much independence France (and thus Europe) should enjoy within the NATO alliance, see Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 331–39, as well as Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 126–31; and Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), chap. 3.
40. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 339–42, as well as Gene Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *International Security* 39, no. 4 (Spring 2015): 112–14.
41. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 369.
42. Trachtenberg, 371. On the Franco-German revolt, see also Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, chap. 4.
43. Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting No. 38 (Part II), 25 January 1963, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, vol. 13, *Western Europe and Canada*, doc. 169, <https://history.state.gov/>.
44. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 374.
45. Letter from President Kennedy to Chancellor Adenauer, 1 February 1963, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, vol. 13, doc. 65, <https://history.state.gov/>.
46. Not long after, Adenauer was ousted in favor of the Atlantic-minded Ludwig Erhard. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 377–79; Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, 104–7; and Gerzhoy, “Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint,” 115–16.
47. See especially Porter, “World Imagined.” On NATO’s prospects for weathering the Trump era, see Shiffrin, “Sound and Fury?” 11–15.
48. On the role of assurance in US grand strategy, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91–92.
49. Robert J. McMahon, “Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (October 1991): 455, 458. McMahon concludes the article by asking why the United States became so obsessed with its credibility during the Cold War. Of relevance to the argument here, he says that “a significant part of the American fixation with its credibility can be tied to Washington’s perceived need to prove itself a dependable ally, one that would never abandon its friends.” McMahon, 470.
50. McMahon, 458–60, 466–68.
51. A good primer on the subject is Paul K. Huth, “Reputations and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 72–99. Huth finds weak support in the literature for the strong-interdependence-of-commitments position. See Huth, 91; and Paul K. Huth, “Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 32–34, 41–43.
52. Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965–1990* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 234. Other critiques of Cold War-era interventionism in the Third World include Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Finite Containment: Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1989): 19–22; and Stephen Van Evera, “Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn’t: American Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 2 (June 1990): 15–31, esp. 23–24.
53. Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1. For a thoughtful critique and the author’s reply, see Dale C. Copeland, “Do Reputa-

tions Matter?” *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 33–71; and Jonathan Mercer, “Reputation and Rational Deterrence Theory,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 100–113.

54. Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 6.

55. Press, 160. Critics have objected that crisis diplomacy is not the best place to look for the effects of reputation. As Todd Sechser has put it, “The primary effect of a state’s reputation may be to prevent a crisis that never happens rather than to influence the outcome of one that does.” Reputation, in other words, is most important in the context of general deterrence rather than immediate deterrence. See Todd S. Sechser, “Goliath’s Curse: Coercive Threats and Asymmetric Power,” *International Organization* 64, no. 4 (October 2010): 654. For a large-N test along these lines, which finds that states that have backed down are substantially more likely to face subsequent challenges, see Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, “Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics,” *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (March 2015): 473–95.

56. Gregory Miller, for example, has argued that states perceived to be reliable allies have greater freedom of action in choosing their alliance partners and in the design of their alliances than states perceived to be unreliable allies. See Gregory D. Miller, *The Shadow of the Past: Reputations and Military Alliances before the First World War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); and Mark J. C. Crescenzi, Jacob D. Kathman, Katja B. Kleinberg, and Reed M. Wood, “Reliability, Reputation, and Alliance Formation,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (June 2012): 259–74.

57. This is another way of saying that the alliance security dilemma—the tension between the fear of abandonment and the fear of entrapment—needs to be carefully managed. On the alliance security dilemma, see Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 180–92. Stephen Walt notes that the alliance security dilemma should be least worrisome for a unipolar power like the United States, given that it has less need for allies than great powers in bipolarity and multipolarity. See Stephen M. Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 98–99.

### **John M. Schuessler**

Dr. Schuessler is an associate professor in the Department of International Affairs and academic director of the Albritton Center for Grand Strategy at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University. Previously, he taught at the Air War College. Dr. Schuessler received his PhD in political science from the University of Chicago. He is the author of *Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics, and American Democracy* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

### **Joshua R. Shiffrinon**

Dr. Shiffrinon is an assistant professor of international relations with Boston University’s Pardee School of Global Studies, where his work focuses on US foreign policy, international security, and diplomatic history. A graduate of MIT and Brandeis University, he is the author of *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

### **Disclaimer**

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *SSQ* are those of the authors and are not officially sanctioned by any agency or department of the US government. We encourage you to send comments to [strategicstudiesquarterly@us.af.mil](mailto:strategicstudiesquarterly@us.af.mil).