



PROGRAM ON STRATEGIC STABILITY EVALUATION (POSSE)

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Creating a Framework to Assess Military Transparency

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I. Introduction.

Scholars and practitioners note that transparency will play an important role in “cultivating confidence” on the “road to zero.” But, the conceptual definitions and implied meanings of transparency vary among the many disciplines and communities involved in the study and practice of international security. Moreover, there is little to no consensus on the origins, mechanics, or dynamics of this phenomenon.

Thirty years ago, the expansion of transparency enabled the implementation of bilateral nuclear arms reductions. Today, however, continued nuclear reductions coincide with a decline in certain aspects of nuclear transparency. Under New START, Russia no longer makes public the declarations of its nuclear forces, and instead only exchanges this information with the United States, as their bilateral treaty obligations require.ⁱ Moreover, as it moves to modernize its delivery vehicles, Moscow is also set to discontinue cooperation within the Nunn-Lugar framework next year—a development that worries U.S. observers who have come to rely on (and maybe even take for granted) the transparency complement to arms control monitoring that had been offered by threat reduction projects.ⁱⁱ

These developments suggests that transparency at lower numbers will be difficult and, indeed, there may be less of it, and not more, in the future. Thus, the present time is crucial to working out common definitions of transparency, understanding its sources, and outlining its contours on the “road to zero.” This memo discusses several theories that inform the debates about military transparency. It proposes a draft analytical framework for the expansion and decline of transparency and outlines a mini-case-study approach to examining the phenomenon in the

nuclear and conventional contexts of the U.S.-NATO-Russian (the Euro-Atlantic) security relations.

II. Definitions and Measurement.

“Transparency’s” conceptual definitions and implied meanings vary greatly.¹ Two decades ago, scholars contrasted a “new” transparency involving the voluntary reciprocal disclosures of security information between adversarial and/or competitor states with “old” transparency that relied on the procurement of this information through espionage activities.ⁱⁱⁱ Today, transparency is recognized as having a variety of forms. These include, among others, cooperative (the subject of this study), ambient (provided by mass media, for example), coerced (by weapons inspectors in Iraq, for example), and unilateral (which comes in three types: intelligence, confrontational, and proffered).²

The focus of this memo is on cooperative transparency in the Euro-Atlantic region. For the purposes of this study, transparency is defined as “the systematic provision of information on specific aspects of activities in the military field under informal or formal international arrangements.”^{iv} In addition to traditional cases such as (formal) arms control verification and (informal) military confidence-building, cooperative transparency also may include less structured exchanges of intelligence information. These could revolve around on common threats such as missile proliferation.

¹ In nuclear policy analyses, transparency measures are generally seen as different from (or less formal than) and supplementary to verification efforts. This paper views transparency as encompassing both formal verification and informal transparency measures. This paper steps away from transparency as a function of government disclosures of bilateral information exchanges to the public. It also does not consider transparency as a function of political governance indicators (corruption and democracy).

² Apropos unilateral transparency, (a) intelligence is “state-level intelligence gathering, [b] confrontational is information revealed to coerce or deter during a confrontation, standoff, or competition, while [c] proffered is information offered to de-spiral or reassure.” All definitions from are from Dan Lindley, *Promoting Peace with Information* (Princeton University Press, 2007), pg. 21.

Studies suggest that changes in transparency can be viewed as a function of (1) coverage and (2) reliability.^v Coverage deals with the scope of activities in the information exchange (narrow or wide) and the level of their intrusiveness (shallow or deep). Reliability, in turn, involves accessibility, which is the mechanism used to exchange information, and timeliness, which is both frequency and verifiability (access).^{vi} Transparency is at its greatest when the inclusiveness of coverage (wide/deep) and reliability (timely/accessible) are both high.

Cooperative transparency has several other important aspects. First, it operates primarily through government-to-government channels, which are very sensitive to the disclosure of information to a wider audience. Second, certain transparency measures require the disclosure of proprietary (which is distinctly different from traditionally classified) information about new and emerging military technologies. Such proprietary disclosures, in turn, are impossible without legal agreements facilitating industrial cooperation between governments.^{vii}

III. Theoretical Approaches to Transparency.

Beginning in the 1970s, policy literature that tracked the evolution of military confidence-building measures posited that increases in transparency resulted in security gains for the states involved. Some analysts even held out hopes for the construction of a cooperative security order in the Euro-Atlantic. Subsequently, more careful observations and studies of how it was practiced suggested that transparency could also be costly, coercive, unsatisfying, and fleeting. Today, there is broad agreement that transparency increases can carry positive or negative implications for the states involved in the exchange as well as third parties.^{viii}

The following six questions offer a glimpse of theoretical approaches to understanding the origins, mechanics, and dynamics of transparency. They include normative, realist,

institutionalist, rational choice, technology-based, and policy analysis dimensions. These approaches also provide the structure for the mini-cases in the section of the paper that follows.

1. Is there a transparency norm in this area (and how & when did it emerge)?

The widespread optimism about the power of ideas after the end of the Cold War highlighted *normative explanations* to the expansion of Euro-Atlantic military transparency. Transparency could work as an instrumental norm (to buttress deterrence), as a moral norm (the right thing to do), and as a standard of behavior (a proxy for intentions if a state deviated from it), these explanations posited.^{ix} Thus, a norm-driven spread of transparency in the security realm (via arms control verification mechanisms and military confidence-building measures) began to catch on among states beginning in the 1970s. And, as “both the cause and the consequence of the events leading to the end of the Cold War,” transparency ultimately resulted in an increase in Euro-Atlantic security.^x

2. Is the external threat environment perceived to be benign?

After a re-examination of the conditions under which states assented to transparency, *defensive realism* challenged the causality of normative explanations. Defensive realists posited that the acceptance of transparency by states was “essentially a barometer of external threats rather than a solution to the problem of insecurity.”^{xi} An increase in transparency was the outcome of “the assessments states ma[d]e about external threats based on the offense-defense balance—whether offense or defense is advantaged—and the ‘distinguishability’ of offensive forces from defensive forces—and the strategies states employ to provide for their security.”^{xii} Thus, the degree of transparency depended on the state’s perception of its external threat environment.

3. *Is transparency used as an instrument to coerce or assure third parties?*

In *rationalist approaches*, transparency is a tool employed by states in the context of bargaining and commitment problems.^{xiii} Since the focus of this paper is on cooperative (as opposed to coercive or unilateral) transparency, a useful insight of this literature deals with use of information in coercing or assuring one's adversaries or allies. The demonstration of capabilities and intentions by one state through, for instance, a confidence-building measure with another state may be important for coercing and reassuring other states from taking unilateral security actions.

4. *Do the coordinating institutions promote transparency?*

The focus of *institutionalist* scholars is on the ways in which institutions, as facilitators of information, reduce uncertainty. Toward this end, the nature and the structure of regimes and international organizations can explain shifts in the security strategies of states. Institution-facilitated transparency can reduce transaction costs, increase the shadow of the future, offer a mechanism to resolve collective action problems and improve enforcement, as well as promote path-dependence (and learning).^{xiv} At the same time, however, ineffective or interlocking institutions can frustrate multilateral solutions and promote misunderstandings.^{xv}

5. *Do technological developments promote transparency?*

Technological explanations suggest that transparency originates from developments in information acquisition and processing technology. Simply put, the evolution and innovation of technology (e.g. high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft, satellite observation, computers, social networks) promote transparency in international security.^{xvi} The diffusion of these technologies

also gradually erodes the governments’ traditional monopoly on security information, allowing access to other states, civil society, and international organizations.^{xvii}

6. *Does the policy process promote transparency?*

Finally, *policy analysis* explanations suggest that transparency emerges out of a state’s internal policy process. Transparency proposals arise from the initiative of individuals in the executive branch, the legislative branch, or interest groups. They are adopted as official policy after a lengthy process that includes agenda-setting, a specification of alternatives, and an authoritative choice.^{xviii} The success of any policy is based on decisions made by risk-averse career bureaucrats in security agencies that make decisions on the interagency, managerial, and budgetary aspects of a policy’s implementation.^{xix} Thus, the government actors most immediately involved in a policy’s implementation determine the rise and the fall of transparency in a specific area.

IV. Summary of the Mini-Cases.

Military transparency is best understood as a complex phenomenon with diverse origins and context-based outcomes. The six analytical dimensions laid out in this paper offer at best a very rough attempt at building a comprehensive framework. The table below presents a short summary of the mini-cases offered in the full paper for the POSSE November 2012 workshop.

U.S.-Russia & NATO-	<i>Transpa- rency norm existence</i>	<i>External threat environ. perception</i>	<i>Transpa- rency use for coercion or reassurance</i>	<i>Transpa- rency and coordinating institution(s)</i>	<i>Technology as transpa- rency- enabler</i>	<i>Bureaucrat. attitude twd transpa- rency (U.S.)</i>
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-Russia			<i>of others</i>			
<i>Convention. Forces</i> (increasing coverage and reliability to-date)	Yes 1975 Helsinki 1987 OSI	Varies (Role of force has declined)	Yes	Yes (but OSCE marginalized)	Yes (But facilitated coercion initially – e.g. aerial recon)	Varies (NATO context complicates)
<i>Strategic nuclear forces</i> (increasing coverage and reliability to-date)	Yes 1972 NTM 1987 OSI 1989 NRRC	Benign (but hedging)	Yes	Yes (Consultative Commissions)	Yes (Positive experience with acceptance of NTM)	Overall support (NRRC as implementer)
<i>Missile defense</i> (nearly	No (?)	Varies	Yes	No institutions or vehicles	Maybe (joint radar proposals or fusion	Probably not (?)

nonexistent coverage and reliability)					centers)	
<i>Nuclear weapons complex</i> (medium coverage and reliability to-date, but...)	Maybe 1992 CTR 1988 JVE	Benign (hedging)	No	No institutions (aside from CTR)	Maybe	Overall support (DTRA as implementer)

Sources:

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- ⁱ Hans Kristensen, "New START Data Exchange: Will it Increase or Decrease International Nuclear Transparency?" FAS Blog, March 22, 2012; Pavel Podvig, "Where is the New START Data?" Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces blog, March 28, 2011.
- ⁱⁱ Jeffrey Lewis, "Bar Nunn," Foreign Policy, October 17, 2012.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ann Florini, "Transparency: A New Norm of International Relations," University of California, Los Angeles dissertation, 1995; James Marquardt, "Why Transparency is Not What it Appears to Be: Defensive Realism and the Origins of Institutionalized Openness," University of Chicago dissertation, August 1998.
- ^{iv} This definition is used in Florini, pg. 2. and Marquardt.
- ^v This measurement approach is adopted from Marquardt, pp. 34-35.
- ^{vi} Marquardt, pp. 34-35.
- ^{vii} Legal vehicles such as the 123 Agreement and the Defense Technical Cooperation Agreement.
- ^{viii} See a good summary in Kristin Lord, *The Perils and Promise of Global Transparency: Why the Information Revolution May Not Lead to Security, Democracy, or Peace* (State University of New York Press, 2006).
- ^{ix} Florini, pp. 3-4 and 47-48.
- ^x Florini, pp. 3-4.
- ^{xi} Marquardt, pg. 3.
- ^{xii} Marquardt, pg. 3.
- ^{xiii} See a review of arguments in Lindley, chapter 2.
- ^{xiv} Celeste A. Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies: German-Russian Cooperation after the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 1999).
- ^{xv} Helga Haftendorn, Robert O. Keohane, and Celeste Wallander, editors, *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
- ^{xvi} Rose Gottemoeller, "Arms Control in the Information Age," remarks at Stanford University, October 27, 2011.
- ^{xvii} See Lord.
- ^{xviii} John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Longman, 1984).
- ^{xix} Richard L. Kugler, *Policy Analysis in National Security Affairs* (National Defense University Press, 2006), pg. 7.