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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIGHTING FOR CREDIBILITY
U.S. Reputation and International Politics

By Frank Harvey and John Mitton

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"**FIGHTING FOR CREDIBILITY** is an excellent piece of scholarly research. Frank P. Harvey and John Mitton's arguments are both in-depth and devastating. Their study provides a useful and timely policy corrective in the debate over coercive diplomacy."

– James Fergusson, Director of the Centre for Defence
and Security Studies, University of Manitoba

"**FIGHTING FOR CREDIBILITY** is a useful corrective for the all-too-convenient argument that reputations do not matter. Harvey and Mitton ... make a compelling case that there are indeed conditions under which a state's reputation may be worth fighting for."

– Frank Zagare, UB Distinguished Professor, State University of New York, Buffalo

**NATIONAL SECURITY DEMANDS THAT UNITED STATES'
THREATS BE PERCEIVED AS CREDIBLE**

**New Book Demonstrates Why Reputations
Matter in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy**

How important is it that the U.S. government follows through when it threatens punitive action against other nations? Very important, say international relations experts Frank Harvey and John Mitton. In their new book, **FIGHTING FOR CREDIBILITY: U.S. Reputation and International Politics** (University of Toronto Press; February 2017), they argue that, for the sake of global security, United States threats must be perceived as credible. Moreover, they say that past actions have an impact on that credibility -- despite prominent arguments to the contrary.

As Harvey and Mitton explain, arguments have been made – such as in the wake of Syria's crossing President Barack Obama's "red line" by using chemical weapons – that past actions and reputations have no bearing on an adversary's assessment of credibility; power and

more

interests alone determine whether a threat is believed. However, using a nuanced and sophisticated theory of rational deterrence, the authors contend the opposite: ignoring reputations sidesteps important factors about how adversaries perceive threats.

Focusing on cases of asymmetric U.S. encounters with smaller powers since the end of the Cold War including Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Syria, Harvey and Mitton reveal that reputations matter for credibility in international politics.

The authors addresses such topics as:

- How failing to follow through on threats -- "bluffing" -- in international relations undermines U.S. credibility and potentially harms future attempts at deterrence or coercion
- Why the increasingly prominent argument that credibility is irrelevant, is wrong
- Why President Obama's "red line" in Syria with regard to chemical weapons was not a foreign policy blunder -- despite conventional wisdom
- Why we need a more balanced understanding of when preserving credibility matters, and when it should not be a priority

FIGHTING FOR CREDIBILITY represents the first book-length, systematic, and comprehensive response to the proliferating contention that a nation's reputation for sticking to its guns isn't worth fighting for. This is an extremely important debate. In a world in which U.S. deterrent and coercive capabilities undergird a significant measure of global security, the stakes are incredibly high.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Frank P. Harvey is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Dalhousie University where he also holds the Eric Dennis Chair of Government and Politics.

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