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# Security Assurances: Concept Clarification and Initial Hypotheses

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International Studies Association

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SECURITY ASSURANCES:  
CONCEPT CLARIFICATION AND INITIAL HYPOTHESES

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Military power and the threat to use it can be employed by states not only for expansionist purposes but also as a means to protect national security. Historically, countries that seek security have often depended on threats or the ability to threaten other states to defend their interests and deter challenges. But a threat-based strategy will not always be effective. In some situations, promises to respect or ensure the security of others may be appropriate as a complement or even alternative to the ability to threaten others. Such security assurances, however, have received much less attention from policymakers and scholars than have measures for defense or deterrence.

In practice, the most prominent use of security assurances in international politics has been in conjunction with efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, more commonly called the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), created two classes of states: nuclear weapons states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). The countries required to forswear nuclear weapons have sought to make sure that doing so would not jeopardize their security vis-à-vis NWS. They have requested both negative security assurances, which involve a pledge by NWS not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against NNWS, and positive security assurances, which involve a pledge to

come to the aid of NNWS that are nevertheless subject to such a threat or attack. The NWS have offered such pledges, but not always in forms as strong as the NNWS would like.

Given the vital importance much of the world attaches to the objective of nuclear nonproliferation, it is important to investigate the role that security assurances play in the nonproliferation regime and how to maximize the effectiveness of this nonproliferation tool. The use of security assurances, however, need not be limited to this context. It is also worthwhile considering whether the provision of assurances might help states achieve other security goals as well. Undertaking this task will not be completely straightforward. There have been variations and inconsistencies in the terminology used, with the terms assurance, assurances, and reassurance all in circulation. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they have also been used with different connotations. As a result, clarifying the underlying concepts will be a necessary preliminary to evaluating security assurances.

In order to assess the utility of security assurances, a team of experts has been convened. Overall, this project has three primary objectives:

- to define and clarify the different possible concepts of assurance and how they relate to one another;
- to assess the overall effectiveness of security assurances and, more importantly, to identify the conditions under which assurances are most likely to be effective or ineffective; and
- to ascertain how important a role security assurances play in promoting nonproliferation and how to make them as effective as possible in preventing nuclear proliferation.

This introductory paper proceeds in three sections. First, it establishes that security assurances have been relatively understudied as an influence strategy, and it reviews the modest body of relevant literature that does exist. Second, it reviews the different ways in which relevant terms have been used, and it seeks to clarify and clearly define the relevant concepts. Third, this paper introduces some preliminary hypotheses about the conditions under which security assurances are most likely to be effective. It does so by drawing on and adapting hypotheses from two bodies of literature: research on deterrence and reassurance, and research on the causes of nuclear proliferation.

Other papers for this conference will elaborate more fully some theoretical aspects of reassurance and the history of security assurances in the nonproliferation regime and U.S. policy. The majority of papers involve empirical case studies of individual country's deliberations about nuclear weapons. The focus on nuclear proliferation plays a dual role in this study. First, for the purpose of examining security assurances in general, decisions about nuclear acquisition or restraint are a useful empirical test bed. This is the only policy area in which security assurances have been widely used, creating a ready set of cases that can be selected for study. In addition, because all the cases involve the same type of policy decision, it is easier to compare them. Finally, because decisions about whether or not to obtain nuclear weapons involve the highest possible national security stakes, they pose a hard test for any strategy intended to dissuade states from taking certain actions. If security assurances have some effectiveness in preventing nuclear proliferation, they are likely to have utility in relation to a range of other policy goals as well.

Second, nuclear nonproliferation is a focus in this study due to its intrinsic importance. Stopping the further spread of nuclear weapons remains a high priority for the United States and much of the international community for multiple reasons. The more countries that obtain

nuclear weapons, the more opportunities there will be for non-state terrorist actors to get their hands on a nuclear device. There is also a desire to keep hostile regimes from gaining the means to threaten and intimidate their neighbors. And there is always a risk that any pair of rivals that acquire nuclear weapons could find themselves in a crisis that escalates to a catastrophic nuclear exchange. With the next NPT review conference scheduled to take place in spring 2010, now is an especially timely moment to review and assess the role of security assurances in promoting nonproliferation. The findings of this study could help inform decisionmakers as they seek to maintain and strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

### Assurances as an Understudied Strategy

This project will focus on assurances as a tool of interstate relations, setting aside for the moment any consideration of how they might be used by or directed toward non-state actors. In the simplest terms, assurances are attempts by one state or set of states to convince another state or set of states that the senders either will not cause or will not allow the recipients' security to be harmed. Compared to other strategies employed in international politics, assurances have not been the subject of much empirical research.

For students of international politics, the study of strategy initially focused on strategy in the conduct of war. As the costs of war and desire to avoid it grew, attention also turned to strategies states can employ during peacetime. Some research has focused on grand strategy, which involves a state's overall foreign policy goals and vision for how to achieve them. Another area of interest has been specific measures states can take as part of their defense strategy or national security strategy. Within this domain, coercive strategies such as deterrence and

compellence have received by far the greatest attention. This is no surprise, given the central role assigned to deterrence in preventing a superpower nuclear war during the Cold War.

Coercive strategies such as deterrence can be considered part of a larger family of influence strategies. As traditionally conceived, deterrence and coercive diplomacy rely on military threats or pressure to influence other actors. Other instruments of national power, besides the military, can also be used in efforts to influence others. The use of economic statecraft has been a focus of much research, mainly involving efforts to determine the effectiveness of economic sanctions and to a lesser extent the use of positive incentives. The other two components of the oft-used DIME acronym (for Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economics) have not been as widely studied, but have still received some attention. Some studies have examined the potential of diplomatic strategies like engagement. There have also been sporadic inquiries into informational tools like public diplomacy and strategic communication. In recent years, the idea of “soft power” as a possible basis of influence has also elicited considerable interest.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to all these other influence strategies, there has been no attempt to develop a general theory of security assurances or to conduct systematic empirical research on the effectiveness of assurances. Most discussions of NPT-related assurances focus on policy issues. They typically either address the legal status of existing assurances or offer policy prescriptions for how to strengthen assurances. I am aware of only one prior study that uses empirical research to estimate the effectiveness of NPT-related assurances, a paper by Bruno Tertrais written for a previous DTRA-funded conference organized by NPS.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Tertrais is updating this analysis for

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<sup>1</sup> The literatures on deterrence, compellence, sanctions, incentives, and diplomacy are all so vast that I will make no attempt to reference even the “greatest hits” in a footnote here. The term “soft power” was coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. For a good overview, see his *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Perseus Books, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Over-the-Horizon Threats: WMD Proliferation 2020, Paris, France, 28-29 June, 2007

the present conference. While it is quite valuable as a preliminary survey, because the Tertrais paper examines many cases briefly, it is not able to go into depth on any individual cases. By inviting country specialists to write about several individual cases, I hope that this conference will be able to add greater empirical depth to our knowledge. In addition, the Tertrais analysis is not grounded in any existing body of theoretical literature. By seeking to draw hypotheses out of relevant literatures, I hope in this introductory paper to begin a process of identifying mechanisms through which and conditions under which security assurances can be effective.

The most relevant body of social science literature deals with the concept of reassurance. For reasons that will be explained below, reassurance should be considered one form of assurance. But the range of possible assurance strategies is broader than just reassurance. For this reason, while work on reassurance is helpful for developing a framework for thinking about the effectiveness of assurances, it cannot by itself provide a complete framework. As will also be discussed shortly, the body of empirical research on reassurance is also fairly limited. In short, neither the specific strategy of reassurance nor the more general topic of assurances has received much systematic attention. As a focus for empirical research, security assurances are perhaps the least studied of all influence strategies that can be utilized by states in the pursuit of national security objectives.

### Concept Clarification

In academic literature and government policy documents and discussions, the terms assurance, assurances, and reassurance all appear. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but each has also been defined in ways that differ. Before attempting to develop causal hypotheses or conduct empirical research, therefore, it will be helpful to clarify the



relevant terminology. The goal is to develop a generic, overarching concept of assurances that can cover multiple variants, and to have more precise terms for identifying the distinct variants. The following discussion identifies two distinct meanings of the term assurance (used in the singular), a range of steps that can be taken as part of a strategy of reassurance, and two types of NPT-related assurances (used in the plural).

*Assurance I – A Component of Deterrence:* The earliest use of the term assurance appears to be in the work of Thomas Schelling. In his highly influential writings about deterrence and compellence, Schelling introduced the idea of assurance as a necessary element of a deterrence strategy. If one thinks of deterrence as a threat to impose costs on an actor if it takes an action one wishes to prevent, then logically the strategy entails a promise not to impose those costs as long as the actor refrains from taking the unwanted action. If an actor expects to be punished whether or not it challenges a deterrent commitment, then it has no incentive to avoid challenging and seeking whatever benefits it can obtain from doing so. As Schelling put it, “To say, ‘One more step and I shoot,’ can be a deterrent threat only if accompanied by the implicit assurance, ‘And if you stop I won’t.’”<sup>3</sup> Deterrence can fail when such assurance is not given or is not believed, even when the deterrent threat itself is credible.

Assurance in this first usage is not a separate strategy, but is instead one component of a deterrence strategy. This type of assurance has not generally been a focus of empirical research. As long as one assumes that deterrence requires at least a minimal degree of rational calculation on the part of the target, then the necessity of assurance is true as a matter of logical deduction. As a result, no one has felt a need to conduct empirical research to corroborate Schelling’s proposition. Assuming the validity of the proposition, it might be interesting to investigate

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 74.

whether a lack of credible assurances can account for a significant percentage of deterrence failures, but I am not aware of any study that has attempted to do so.

Because deterrence continues to be an important strategy, it is relevant to keep this usage of assurance in mind. Henceforth, it will be referred to as deterrence-related assurance.

*Assurance II – Alliance Commitments:* A more recent usage of the term assurance emerged in U.S. policy in the George W. Bush administration. In a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) completed in fall 2001, the administration identified four goals of U.S. defense strategy: to assure allies and friends of the U.S. commitment to them, to dissuade other actors from acquiring threatening new military capabilities, to deter aggression, and to decisively defeat those who engage the United States in hostilities. The administration reiterated these goals in the National Security Strategy released a year later.<sup>4</sup> The first objective, assuring allies, becomes a strategy of assurance when phrased as a noun rather than a verb.

In the first usage of assurance, it is a tactic directed toward potential adversaries as part of an effort to deter them. As used by the Bush administration, assurance is a strategy directed at allies, not adversaries. It can also be considered as a stand-alone strategy, rather than being embedded in a larger strategy of deterrence, although the QDR described assurance as something that would help reinforce deterrence and dissuasion. The QDR did not do a good job describing the rationale behind assurance, but it implied that a firm demonstration of U.S. willingness to stand by friends and allies would encourage them to stand firm in their own defense and to cooperate militarily with the United States, both of which would help deter and dissuade potential enemies.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Sept. 30, 2001; President of the United States, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Sept. 2002.

As depicted in the 2001 QDR, assurance can be considered an attempt to deal with one half of what Glenn Snyder has labeled the alliance security dilemma.<sup>5</sup> As Snyder puts it, allies tend to fear both abandonment and entrapment by their partners. The QDR version of assurance seemed intended to convince allies that the United States would not abandon them in a time of need. It did not deal with the possible need to reassure U.S. partners that they would not become entrapped in a conflict due to the actions of their U.S. ally. The relevance of this half of the alliance dilemma became apparent when France and Germany emerged as leading opponents of Bush administration plans for a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. One can envision assurance being applied to concerns about both abandonment and entrapment, but in practice U.S. strategy in the Bush years sought to address only the first of these concerns.

This type of assurance, of the credibility of one's alliance commitments, is analogous to some other well-known concepts, such as security guarantees and extended deterrence. These other concepts have often been associated with the idea of extending a nuclear umbrella to protect friends and allies from nuclear attack, which makes them also relevant to NPT-related positive security assurances (discussed below). But the Bush administration strategy of assurance was not limited to nuclear scenarios; it also implied assurance against conventional and other non-nuclear threats. It also went beyond the provision of extended deterrence to include an implied promise to help allies defend themselves if attacked. In short, it represented an attempt to demonstrate the credibility of all the commitments entailed in defense pacts with allies.

In contrast to the case with respect to the first type of assurance, there are some bodies of empirical research relevant to this second type of assurance. There is an extensive literature on alliances, but very little in this literature explores what makes a state regard the commitment of

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<sup>5</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, 4 (July 1984)

an ally as credible.<sup>6</sup> The workings of extended deterrence have also been a subject of multiple studies. These studies are more pertinent and will be used as a potential source of hypotheses about the conditions that would make security assurances effective.

To distinguish it from the first type of assurance, the second form of assurance will henceforth be called alliance-related assurance.

*Reassurance*: In addition to research on extended deterrence, studies of reassurance are another promising source of potential hypotheses concerning security assurances. Reassurance is a strategy of seeking to persuade another state that one harbors no aggressive intentions toward it. The concept of reassurance emerged from three related strands of literature: early 1960s work on alternatives to the arms race, the third wave in deterrence research, and work on the security dilemma.

First, in the early 1960s, Charles Osgood and Amitai Etzioni argued for the need to move away from hard-line approaches to deterrence, seeing these as fueling an ever-spiraling arms race.<sup>7</sup> Knowing that options such as disarmament or appeasement were unworkable, they sought a middle ground between these and purely competitive policies. Both authors put forward similar ideas, but perhaps because he had a good acronym for his proposal, Osgood's GRIT (graduated and reciprocated initiatives in tension-reduction) has received the most follow-up attention. Osgood was a social psychologist, and he designed GRIT to overcome the mistrust he saw as helping fuel the arms race. GRIT involves taking a series of modest unilateral cooperative initiatives. These are publicly announced in advance, and the other side is invited to reciprocate. If the other side seeks to exploit one's cooperation, GRIT requires retaliating for this, but then

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<sup>6</sup> Instead, most of the literature seeks to explain state alliance choices, i.e. why they join the alliances they do.

<sup>7</sup> Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Amitai Etzioni, *The Hard Way to Peace: A New Strategy* (New York: The Crowell-Collier Press, 1962)

resuming the effort to initiate cooperation. GRIT's persistence is intended to challenge the other side's expectations and change their presumed image of the first side as implacably hostile.

A second source of work on reassurance grew out of the third wave in deterrence research.<sup>8</sup> George and Smoke's landmark study *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* initiated a line of research that emphasized the limitations of deterrence by using case studies to identify the ways in which deterrence could fail.<sup>9</sup> George and Smoke recommended that, due to the problems with relying on deterrence, U.S. strategy make greater use of diplomacy and positive incentives. Subsequent work in the third wave added reassurance to the list of alternatives. As far as I can tell, Lebow and Stein first introduced the term reassurance to the literature on deterrence,<sup>10</sup> and Stein has done more than anyone else to explore the theory behind reassurance.<sup>11</sup> Stein is updating her work on the role of psychological factors in reassurance for this project.

The third source of thinking about reassurance emerged from work on the security dilemma. Robert Jervis's influential distinction between the deterrence and spiral models and subsequent refinements by Charles Glaser were especially important.<sup>12</sup> The security dilemma holds that efforts by one state to increase its security, especially through arms buildups, can make other states insecure, leading them to respond in ways that could lead to a conflict that the first state's efforts were intended to avoid. The dilemma arises because efforts to avoid provoking this escalatory spiral can leave a state vulnerable and be seen as a sign of weakness by

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<sup>8</sup> The identification of three waves comes from Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics* 31, 2 (January 1979)

<sup>9</sup> Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974)

<sup>10</sup> Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Beyond Deterrence," *Journal of Social Issues* 43, 4 (winter 1987)

<sup>11</sup> See esp Janice Stein, "Deterrence and Reassurance," in *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Tetlock et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3; Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," *World Politics* 44, 4 (July 1992)

states that have aggressive intentions. Deterrence is the appropriate policy in the latter case, but is the wrong prescription and likely to be counterproductive in the former case. Implicit in this analysis is the idea that in situations that fit the spiral model, reassurance is the appropriate strategy.

Jervis contended that identifying the right model is a function of the other side's intentions, in particular whether it is a status quo or revisionist state. Lebow, Stein, and Glaser have suggested focusing on motivations rather than intentions. In dealing with states motivated by insecurity, especially those with an acute sense of need or vulnerability, reassurance is the best strategy. In dealing with greedy states, which are likely to take advantage of windows of opportunity to expand their influence, deterrence is the best response. In the case of purely insecure states, reassurance is put forward as an alternative to deterrence. Because states can have mixed motivations, combining greed and insecurity, reassurance and deterrence can also be used together as complementary strategies.

Lebow and Stein have identified five techniques for demonstrating reassurance: unilateral self-restraint, irrevocable commitments (e.g., Sadat's visit to Jerusalem), informal or tacit norms of competition, security regimes, and strategies of reciprocity like tit-for-tat and GRIT. Glaser adds an emphasis on defensive rather than offensive military capabilities (i.e., defensive or non-offensive defense). One could also add arms control and confidence-building measures, but these could also be seen as fitting within the security regime category.

The effectiveness of reassurance in real-world applications in international relations has not been a subject of nearly as much empirical research as has deterrence, but there are some relevant studies. Deborah Larson has explored the role of GRIT in leading to the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, and Janice Stein has elucidated the use of reassurance by both Sadat and

Gorbachev.<sup>13</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery has critiqued reassurance, finding it failed in two out of three case studies he examined. Montgomery explains this in structural terms, arguing that it is rare to find the kind of offense-defense differentiation that would make non-offensive defense a viable means of reassurance.<sup>14</sup> By focusing only on the offense-defense balance, however, Montgomery ignores other mechanisms through which reassurance might work; in particular, he overlooks the psychological approach that views reassurance as a way to overcome cognitive barriers to changing the image of an adversary. Finally, Andrew Kydd has sought to ground reassurance on a purely rational-actor foundation, using game theory to model a reassurance game. He finds signaling that is costly but not too costly to be the key. Reassurance will be effective when there is a signal that is sufficiently costly that only a security-seeking state would be willing to attempt it while an expansionist state would not, but the signal must not be so costly that it leaves the sender vulnerable to attack if the recipient is actually motivated by greed rather than insecurity.<sup>15</sup>

Reassurance is clearly a form of assurance, in that it seeks to assure the other side that one is not out to harm them. But it differs from the two forms of assurance described above. Reassurance can be a completely alternative strategy to deterrence, so it should be distinguished from the use of assurance as an implied element within a deterrence strategy. Reassurance is also a negative form of assurance – a promise by state A not to attack state B – so it should be distinguished from the positive form of assurance implied by a commitment to come to the defense of one’s allies if they are attacked. In this sense, reassurance is narrower than the category of security assurances as a whole, meaning that research on reassurance cannot by itself

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<sup>13</sup> Deborah Welch Larson, “Crisis Prevention and the Austrian State Treaty,” *International Organization* 41,1 (winter 1987); Janice Gross Stein, “Image, Identity, and the Resolution of Violent Conflict,” in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2001)

<sup>14</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma,” *International Security* 31, 2 (fall 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

supply a complete theory of assurance strategies. But in another sense reassurance is broader than NPT-related security assurances, because it applies to the conventional realm as well as the nuclear realm.

*Security Assurances:* The most common use of the term assurances, and the one of most immediate interest for this project, comes from the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Countries that give up nuclear weapons naturally want guarantees that they will not be risking their security as a result. Such guarantees will be labeled NPT-related assurances. The history of NPT-related security assurances will be covered by John Simpson, while Kerry Kartchner will describe current U.S. policy in this area, so this paper will not go into detail on this history. Empirical research on the effectiveness on NPT-related assurances is made complicated, however, by the fact that the status of these assurances is itself somewhat ambiguous.

NNWS have requested two types of assurance. Positive security assurances are promises by NWS to come to the aid of NNWS if they are threatened or attacked by nuclear weapons. Negative security assurances are promises not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against NNWS. The NWS would not agree to include security assurances in the text of the NPT, so existing security assurances have all arisen from commitments made outside the treaty itself. In practice, these assurances have often involved qualifications or caveats, so that they have not been considered satisfactory by all the NNWS. As a result, there have been periodic efforts by some NNWS to have security assurances made universally applicable and legally binding.

U.S. policy after the end of the Cold War, and particularly following 9/11, has been a special source of consternation. Concerns about the spread of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) and the rise of transnational terrorism have led to U.S. hints that nuclear weapons might



be used against CBW or even non-WMD targets and, in the Bush years, to suggestions that they might be used preemptively. These appear to be contrary to earlier negative security assurances, in that the targets might be non-nuclear states. As a result, much of the writing about security assurances in the last 10-15 years has been prescriptive, urging the NWS to re-affirm and strengthen NPT-related assurances.

Empirical research on the effectiveness of NPT assurances is more limited. As noted above, only Tertrais has attempted an overall survey of effectiveness. Empirical studies of the causes of proliferation and of nuclear restraint or renunciation have sometimes touched on the role of security assurances, though none have made this a central object of the study.

Within the proliferation literature, some pertinent evidence can be found in the small number of statistical analyses. These all include defense pacts with NWS as one of their variables. Such alliances with nuclear-armed states can be considered a form of positive security assurance, though one that results from a bilateral relationship rather than a universal commitment. Multivariate analyses by Singh and Way, Jo and Gartzke, and Kroenig all find that a defense pact with a nuclear ally reduces the likelihood of nuclear proliferation, but the finding is not especially strong.<sup>16</sup> All three studies include alternative ways of estimating their model of proliferation, and in each case the variable for a nuclear ally is statistically significant only in some of the estimations but not in others. In all three cases, its impact on proliferation decisions is also much lower than that of some other variables, especially those capturing economic and technical capabilities and the presence or absence of security threats. The statistical studies do not attempt to measure the impact of negative security assurances, nor do they consider other possible types of positive assurance beyond a defense treaty. The fact these studies find a modest

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<sup>16</sup> Sonali Singh and Christopher R. Way, "The Correlates of Nuclear Proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, 6 (Dec. 2004); Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke, "Determinants of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, 1 (Feb. 2007); Matthew Kroenig, "Importing the Bomb: Sensitive Nuclear Assistance and Nuclear Proliferation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, 2 (April 2009)

but not necessarily significant impact for positive assurances might be due to variations across individual cases in the importance of such assurances. If so, case study research might help tease out the factors that make positive assurances more or less important.

The case-study literature on nuclear proliferation and restraint has tended to reach more skeptical conclusions. Much of the recent research has been concerned with challenging traditional realist-oriented security explanations for proliferation. Within a security model of proliferation, the availability of a security guarantee from a nuclear ally would be one explanation for why a state facing security threats nevertheless eschews nuclear weapons. Several studies point out, however, that realist theory itself, given its emphasis on self-help, would not lead to great confidence in the power of security guarantees.<sup>17</sup> Doubts about the credibility of extended deterrence during the Cold War are a vivid illustration of why states might not want to entrust their security to an ally that might be making itself vulnerable to nuclear retaliation if it acts. Etel Solingen points out that the overall record does not suggest a strong correlation. Some states with nuclear allies nevertheless pursued nuclear weapons (Britain, France, North Korea before the fall of the Soviet Union), while other states with no nuclear protectors have changed course (Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Libya).<sup>18</sup> Maria Rost Rublee raises the question of the direction of causality. She suggests that in some cases the decision to strengthen an alliance with an NWS came after a decision to renounce nuclear weapons.<sup>19</sup> And Ariel Levite points to a possible danger of moral hazard. Using the example of

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Jacques E.C. Hymans, "Theories of Nuclear Proliferation: The State of the Field," *Nonproliferation Review* 13, 3 (Nov. 2006), p. 456.

<sup>18</sup> Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

<sup>19</sup> Maria Rost Rublee, *Nonproliferation Norms: Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009)

Italy, he suggests some states might hint at an interest in developing nuclear weapons that they have no intention of pursuing in order to gain stronger ties with an ally.<sup>20</sup>

None of these studies dismiss security guarantees entirely however. Rather, in suggesting that positive security assurances are not always decisive, these studies indicate the need for a differentiated analysis. It is possible that assurances are important to some countries in some circumstances, but less influential in other cases. If so, it will be necessary to develop contingent generalizations, and comparative analysis across cases can help identify the conditions under which security assurances are most likely to be effective. In addition, like the statistical literature, case studies of proliferation decisions have focused on positive assurances in the form of alliance commitments. Negative security assurances have largely been overlooked.<sup>21</sup> The literature on proliferation will be a useful source of hypotheses about assurances, but in its current state it is far from offering an adequate understanding of the effects of assurance strategies.

*Moving Toward Generalizations:* NNWS have sought both positive and negative security assurances, but individual countries can vary in which type of assurance they deem most important. U.S. friends and allies that face potential nuclear rivals in their region are likely to be especially interested in positive assurances. States that wish to maintain a non-aligned posture, especially if they are in a region that contains no nuclear-armed competitors, are likely to place

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<sup>20</sup> Ariel E. Levite, "Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited," *International Security* 27, 3 (winter 2002/03), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> A partial exception is Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who 'Won' Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its Implications for Theory and Policy," *International Security* 30 (winter 2005/06). In a study of the role of coercive diplomacy in convincing Libya to give up its WMD ambitions, they found that the success of the strategy required offering reassurances to Qaddafi that the United States would not seek to impose regime change if he gave up the pursuit of WMD. Their primary focus was coercive diplomacy, however, not assurances. Wyn Bowen's paper for this project will delve more deeply into the role of assurances in the Libya case.

greater weight on negative assurances. This will lead to some hypotheses, described below, about the type of assurance most likely to have an impact.

From the perspective of NWS policy, unfortunately, there can be tension between the steps needed to offer positive and negative assurances. Positive assurances have been most associated with the idea of a nuclear umbrella. The ability to extend nuclear deterrence over friends and allies implies a need to maintain an adequate-sized nuclear arsenal and a posture of readiness to use those weapons. But this same posture can be seen as contrary to the spirit of negative assurances. Promises not to threaten or use nuclear weapons become more convincing if NWS reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons they possess and the missions and roles assigned to those weapons. Arguments that positive security guarantees require maintaining robust nuclear capabilities could make negative assurances appear insincere.

Scott Sagan has observed that there can be trade-offs across different nonproliferation policies because different states can be motivated by different factors in their decisions about whether to seek or abjure nuclear weapons. For states driven by traditional security concerns, positive security assurances might be necessary to dissuade them. But for states more concerned with being good international citizens, prevailing international norms are more important. Negative security assurances, by devaluing nuclear weapons, reinforce nonproliferation norms, but positive assurances, by implying nuclear weapons remain important in world politics, send a more mixed message.<sup>22</sup>

This raises an important question: can such trade-offs be avoided or at least minimized? This might be possible if positive assurances did not require extending a nuclear security guarantee. It is worth exploring whether some combination of conventional military responses,

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<sup>22</sup> Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, 3 (winter 1996/97)

provision of missile defenses, and pledges of non-military assistance would make for an effective positive assurance.

The form in which assurances are delivered might also make a difference. Existing research has mostly focused on bilateral assurances. A defense pact between a nuclear and a non-nuclear state has been taken to imply a positive security guarantee. This is not the only form in which assurances might be offered however; beyond bilateral assurances, there are three other possible formats. If a bilateral pledge involves a one-to-one arrangement, then other alternatives include one-to-all, all-to-one, and all-to-all arrangements. A single state might offer a generalized assurance that applies to all other states. The negative assurances provided by the NWS have basically taken this form. There can also be circumstances in which all the NWS, or some other multilateral coalition or even the international community as whole, make a pledge directed at one individual state. This would seem to be the case with respect to Ukraine after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Finally, there could be assurances that are generalized in terms of both senders and recipients. For example, a UN resolution that required all states, nuclear and non-nuclear, to offer economic, medical, and other assistance to any state that is the victim of a nuclear attack would be a globalized form of positive assurance.<sup>23</sup> These four possible formats for assurances can be referred to as bilateral, generalized individual, focused multilateral, and global (or universal) assurances. This raises the obvious question of whether the format in which an assurance is provided affects its impact. For example, if North Korea can be influenced, is it more likely to respond to a focused multilateral assurance provided through the mechanism of six-party talks or is it only going to be satisfied by a bilateral deal directly with the United States?

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<sup>23</sup> For an argument in favor of the need to move toward such universalized security assurances, see Rebecca Johnson, "Security Assurances for Everyone: A New Approach to Deterring the Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, no. 90 (spring 2009)

To sum up this section, it is important to recognize that security assurances can be thought of in a generic fashion as any attempt to provide assurances about security to another state or states. NPT-related assurances are one form of assurance (or perhaps more accurately one context in which assurances have been employed), but other forms and policy goals for assurances are possible. This raises an interesting question: are NPT assurances likely to be more effective if they are embedded in some broader strategy of assurance or reassurance? Two basic distinctions have emerged as relevant for categorizing assurances. First, assurances might only be a sub-element of a different strategy, as in deterrence-related assurances, or assurances can be a distinct strategy capable of being used in a stand-alone fashion (although this does not preclude using them in combination with other strategies). Second, the NPT-related distinction between positive and negative assurances can easily be generalized. Alliance-related assurance, as described in the Bush administration QDR, is a type of positive assurance. The strategy of reassurance is a type of negative assurance. Generically, assurances cover any attempt by a state or group of states to convince another state or group of states that their security will not be harmed. Negative assurances involve pledges by the sender not to itself threaten or attack the recipient. Positive assurances involve pledges to come to the assistance of the recipient if some third party threatens or attacks it. Where assurances pertain to nuclear weapons and are intended to dissuade recipients from nuclear acquisition, they are NPT-related. But assurances can also be used in other contexts, such as efforts to assuage recipient fears of conventional attack or possible abandonment by an ally. It is important to learn more about security assurances both as a nonproliferation tool and as a more general instrument of statecraft.

### Preliminary Hypotheses

One goal of this project is to develop some contingent generalizations about the circumstances under which security assurances are more or less likely to be effective. Because there has not previously been much of an attempt to develop an empirical theory of assurances, the development of generalizations will arise in part from inductive methods. Participants in this project will examine individual cases, and by comparing the lessons of those cases it is possible some generalizations will emerge. The investigation of cases may be assisted, however, if some initial ideas that can be explored by case study authors are available beforehand. This section of the introductory paper hence tries to derive some plausible hypotheses from other bodies of theory that are most relevant to thinking about security assurances. The two most relevant literatures are those on deterrence (and to a lesser extent coercive diplomacy and reassurance) and on the causes of nuclear proliferation and restraint. One rather obvious hypothesis leaps out from both literatures and is presented first, then additional hypotheses are derived separately from discussions of deterrence and proliferation, respectively.

*Hypothesis 1: Assurances are more likely to be effective when a target state's interest in nuclear weapons is driven to some significant degree by security concerns.*

This hypothesis is basically common sense. Efforts to assure a state about its security will be most relevant when a state is in fact concerned about security. This hypothesis also follows from the primary condition that affects whether reassurance or deterrence is the most appropriate strategy. Reassurance strategies, and by implication assurances in general, are most likely to be effective when dealing with an insecure state. With respect to a greedy state, or a state with offensive motivations, assurances may be beside the point. The proliferation literature also

suggests this is a meaningful hypothesis. Traditionally, security concerns have been the primary explanation given for decisions to develop nuclear weapons. Increasingly, however, this literature has identified other explanations for some decisions about nuclear programs, ranging from concerns about prestige to a variety of internally-driven factors. Hypotheses suggested by these alternative explanations will be discussed below. The point here is that if not all proliferation decisions result from security concerns, then it may be harder to use assurances effectively in the cases driven by non-security considerations.

### Hypotheses from Deterrence Theory

Factors that make deterrence work or fail have been extensively studied. Because deterrence and assurance are both influence strategies, some findings about deterrence might, with appropriate adaptation, also apply to assurances. There is not a unified theory of deterrence, but rather three partly overlapping, partly competitive schools of thought. Rational deterrence theory (RDT), derived from neo-realist theories of international relations, is the mainstream approach. Proponents of a strategic culture approach have rejected the assumption of a generic or universal rational actor, leading them to recommend a strategy that in recent U.S. policy has been labeled “tailored deterrence.” Finally, a decision-making approach, characteristic of much of the third wave in deterrence theory, stresses domestic, organizational, and especially psychological constraints on rationality. This paper will not take a position on which approach is right, but rather will mine all three for potentially applicable hypotheses.

The primary emphasis in RDT is on credibility. This approach does not dwell on internal factors in the recipient that might complicate the use of deterrence, but instead highlights what



the sender needs to do to make deterrence credible. Credibility is taken to be a function of four factors: formulating a commitment, communicating the commitment, having the capability to back it up, and demonstrating the intent to back it up. The first step, formulating a commitment, will be taken for granted here, as the NWS have said they accept the need to offer certain security assurances, but the other three factors suggest possible hypotheses. Two hypotheses come from the recognition that it is important to communicate assurances.

*Hypothesis 2: Public declarations of security assurances increase their effectiveness.*

It is possible to communicate assurances through unpublicized diplomatic channels, but announcing assurances publicly might make them more credible. A public declaration commits a state in the eyes of other states and its own public. Failure to follow through could damage the state's reputation and its government's standing with domestic constituencies. The audience costs associated with public declarations have been found to make deterrent threats more effective,<sup>24</sup> and the same may be true with respect to assurances. With respect to negative assurances, this hypothesis suggests that the public declarations the NWS made in 1978 might have made these assurances more effective than they were previously.

*Hypothesis 3: Legally binding mechanisms will increase the effectiveness of assurances.*

This hypothesis is not derived directly from the deterrence literature, but is suggested by the history of policy debates about NPT-related security assurances. NNWS have often sought

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<sup>24</sup> James D. Fearon, "Domestic Audience Costs and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994)

legally binding assurances, which suggests they would find such assurances more credible. Neo-liberal institutionalism, which identifies several mechanisms through which international institutions can make future cooperation more likely, provides a theoretical underpinning for this hypothesis. There are two variants that could be explored. First, as suggested by existing research on proliferation, a formal defense treaty might make bilateral positive assurances more effective relative to a mere verbal declaration. Second, an international treaty or the equivalent binding the NWS collectively to either negative or positive assurances might also be more effective than purely verbal declarations. Because no such global treaty exists, this hypothesis might be a possible explanation if negative assurances are found to be of limited effectiveness. There are some regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties in which the NWS have formally obligated themselves to negative assurances. This suggests it would be worthwhile to explore whether negative security pledges have played a role in getting regional states to join NWFZs.

Most discussion of credibility has focused on the final two conditions: having adequate capabilities and the will to use them. As with formulating a commitment, the existence of relevant capabilities can be taken for granted here. The NWS have nuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems, so they have the ability to extend a nuclear umbrella over other parties if they choose to, and the NWS also have the ability to refrain from using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons. Capabilities might prove relevant, however, if they affect the other side's perception of a state's willingness to use them. Some hypotheses involving capabilities will be introduced, therefore, in connection with hypotheses involving the intent to follow through on assurance commitments.

Just as resolve is often seen as the key ingredient in deterrence, this might also be the case with respect to assurances. In RDT, estimates of resolve have been connected to three factors: intrinsic interests at stake, a state's reputation based on past behavior, and the use of commitment tactics (such as Schelling's famous example of throwing your car's steering wheel out the window in a game of chicken).<sup>25</sup> All three factors suggest possible hypotheses relevant to assurances.

*Hypothesis 4: The greater the political and economic ties between sender and recipient, the more effective security assurances will be.*

Statistical studies of extended deterrence have found that political and economic connections between a deterrer and its protégé are a good indicator of the interests at stake for the deterring state. The greater these ties, the more likely extended deterrence is to succeed.<sup>26</sup> Because extended deterrence is a major element of positive assurances, the same finding is likely to apply to security assurances. This provides another reason why a bilateral defense pact might be helpful for making positive assurances effective. Importantly, this hypothesis does not rest on the threat of nuclear retaliation *per se*, but rather on the fact the client is so important to the defender that the latter is likely to come to the client's aid, whether this be through nuclear or conventional means.

*Hypothesis 5: A reputation for keeping past nonproliferation or alliance commitments will increase the effectiveness of assurances.*

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?" *World Politics* 36 (July 1984)

The importance of a reputation for resolve based on past behavior has been an issue of considerable debate in deterrence research.<sup>27</sup> To the extent such a reputation matters, it suggests that a record of making good on alliance commitments will increase the credibility of positive security assurances. A different kind of reputation, for honesty in one's diplomatic dealings, has been found to be important by Anne Sartori.<sup>28</sup> This suggests keeping one's promises to cooperate is at least as important as following through on one's threats to punish those who challenge deterrent commitments. If this is true, then the NWS's record of compliance with other nonproliferation obligations is likely to affect the credibility of negative security assurances. For example, to the extent that NWS are seen as not fulfilling their NPT Article VI pledge to pursue nuclear disarmament, this might reduce the extent to which their negative security assurances are believed.

Capabilities and resolve come together in the realm of commitment tactics. In the Cold War, once the Soviet Union achieved the ability to strike the U.S. homeland, this led some to question the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. As de Gaulle famously asked, would the United States trade Chicago for Paris? Measures that have been taken previously to make extended deterrence commitments more credible might also be relevant to positive security assurances.

*Hypothesis 6: Forward-deployed troops will increase the effectiveness of security assurances.*

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<sup>27</sup> For a recent challenge to the importance of a state's past behavior for how other states perceive the credibility of its threats, see Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007)

<sup>28</sup> Anne E. Sartori, *Deterrence by Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)

This was the primary commitment tactic employed by the United States during the Cold War. U.S. troops stationed in West Germany and South Korea were intended to function as a trip-wire that, by requiring an invading army to engage U.S. personnel, would place great pressure on the United States to respond to an invasion by Warsaw Pact or North Korean forces. If the recipient of positive security assurances is willing to accept U.S. troops on its soil, such forward deployments might serve as a signal that makes such assurances more credible.

*Hypothesis 7: Missile defenses have mixed implications: they will increase the effectiveness of positive security assurances, but national missile defenses will decrease the credibility of negative assurances.*

Offering theater missile defenses to states facing a potential nuclear threat could be an important positive assurance that will reduce the pressure they feel to develop an independent deterrent. National missile defenses have mixed implications however. By potentially reducing U.S. vulnerability to retaliation by others, they might make U.S. positive assurances more credible, because the United States might not have to trade Los Angeles for Seoul or Tokyo. But measures to reduce U.S. vulnerability also make negative assurances less credible. According to the familiar logic of stability derived from RDT, if the United States thought it could intercept a ragged, retaliatory second strike, it might feel emboldened to launch a preventive or preemptive first strike. Potential targets of a U.S. preemptive attack might be less likely to believe negative security assurances if the United States deploys a national missile defense.

A second tradition of thinking about deterrence is critical of the generic rational-actor model used in RDT. It argues that countries with different histories, political systems, and strategic cultures will have different value systems, meaning that a threat that would deter the United States might not deter other countries that prioritize different values. To make deterrence effective, this tradition holds, it is important to ascertain and hold at risk what the other side's leaders value most. This suggests an analogous hypothesis regarding assurances.

*Hypothesis 8: Assurances will be most effective if they are tailored to take account of unique features of the target state's culture, decision-making procedures, and leadership concerns.*

In short, just as deterrence can be tailored to individual cases, so too can assurances. This hypothesis implies that bilateral and focused multilateral assurances are more likely to be effective than generalized and global assurances. It also follows from this hypothesis that, if a target of assurances is exceptionally paranoid, then assurances may have to be repeated often and made particularly strong in order to be effective. This observation is also consistent with a decision-making approach to deterrence theory. A decision-making approach, which emphasizes domestic, organizational, and psychological constraints on rationality, suggests a couple further hypotheses as well.

*Hypothesis 9: Assurances are more likely to be effective when the recipient has strong government control over the military and the nuclear sector, and less likely to be effective when the military or nuclear establishment has autonomy.*

This hypothesis follows from Scott Sagan's work on the stability of deterrence.<sup>29</sup> Sagan observes that organizational cultures tend to contain certain biases. In the case of military organizations (and I would add nuclear weapons labs), these biases are likely to include greater suspicions of potential adversaries and a belief that greater military capabilities are the only effective path to security. If this is so, countries in which the military or nuclear establishment dominates policymaking on nuclear issues are more likely to discount security assurances. Countries with strong civilian control are more likely to be receptive.

*Hypothesis 10: Assurances will have to be strong enough to overcome cognitive biases in order to be effective. Embedding them in a larger strategy may be one way to do this.*

This is the main hypothesis suggested by decision-making research on deterrence and reassurance. Research in psychology shows that once individuals form an image of another actor, they look for confirming information and discount potentially disconfirming evidence. It is thus hard – but not impossible – to change an established image. To do so requires going above and beyond what a rational-actor analysis would imply is necessary. Repeated actions, or actions so large and surprising they cannot be ignored, may be needed to overcome cognitive biases. One way to do this may be to supplement negative NPT assurances with a broader strategy of reassurance, or to combine positive NPT assurances with a broader alliance-related assurance strategy. Taking additional steps that fall outside the realm of nuclear policy may be a way to challenge a target's skepticism about purely nuclear-related assurances.

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<sup>29</sup> Scott D. Sagan, "The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons," *International Security* 18, 4 (spring 1994)

## Hypotheses from Proliferation Theory

To ascertain the effectiveness of security assurances as a nonproliferation tool, it is important to think about how assurances relate to the general factors that lead states to seek or renounce nuclear weapons. For this reason, research on the causes of proliferation and restraint represents the most directly relevant literature for identifying possible hypotheses about assurance.

Early thinking about proliferation had a technological determinist flavor. It was often assumed that any state that achieved the technical capability to build the bomb would do so. Over time, it became clear that this is not the case, as more and more countries with the requisite ability either abandoned or rejected bomb programs. The focus in theory therefore shifted from the supply, or technology, side to the demand, or motivational, side.<sup>30</sup> Security threats emerged as the primary explanation for proliferation. States facing an existential threat, arising either from a nuclear-armed state or from adversaries with significant conventional superiority, would do whatever they had to to acquire nuclear weapons, while other states would not. This perspective was reflected in the hypotheses introduced above. To the extent proliferation is driven at least partly by security concerns, assurances become relevant. But given the reasons why states may not want to count on others for their security, additional factors may be important determining whether or not a security guarantee is deemed credible.

If non-security considerations are at work, using assurances becomes more difficult, but not necessarily impossible. The worst case would be a state that has purely offensive motivations for seeking nuclear weapons. Interestingly, the proliferation literature has largely ignored this as a possible explanation, and in practice this motivation for a bomb program appears to be very

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<sup>30</sup> But see Kroenig, "Importing the Bomb," for a new argument for giving primacy to the supply side.



rare historically. Perhaps only Iraq under Saddam Hussein had primarily expansionist reasons for seeking nuclear weapons. An Iraqi nuclear arsenal might have appeared promising as a shield to deter outside powers, so that Saddam could pursue aggression against regional neighbors, as he did in the invasion of Kuwait. Other rogue regimes, such as Iran or North Korea, might plausibly have mixed motivations, but one can make a strong case that these states have good reasons to want nuclear weapons as a deterrent. If so, security assurances become potentially more relevant. Looking beyond states, it is also widely assumed that non-state terrorist organizations are seeking to acquire a nuclear device in order to actually use it. For terrorists, deterrence and prevention appear to be the most important strategies, and the potential use of assurances in dealing with non-state actors will not be considered by this project.

A lot of recent proliferation literature has questioned the adequacy of the security explanation by introducing other variables that fall outside the traditional realist focus on defensive or offensive motivations. From fairly early in the nuclear age, it was recognized that prestige and the desire for great power status could be an important factor for some states. More recently, some theorists drawing on social constructivism have argued that the norms associated with nuclear weapons can be changed. If the nonproliferation regime successfully delegitimizes nuclear weapons, then pursuing them becomes a symbol of rogue or outlaw status, not of prestige, and states concerned about their standing in the international community will reject nuclear programs.<sup>31</sup>

Other theorists have turned to internal factors. Nuclear weapons programs may serve the parochial interests of some politicians, military actors, or nuclear scientists. If these actors become a sufficiently powerful domestic lobby for the bomb, developments in a state's external environment may become less relevant to its decisions about nuclear acquisition. Etel Solingen

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<sup>31</sup> Sagan, "Why Do States Build"; Rublee, *Nonproliferation Norms*

has advanced a more general coalitional theory of proliferation, based on how a state's ruling coalition relates to the international economy.<sup>32</sup> Outward-looking, liberalizing coalitions seek to participate in the globalization process. They will renounce nuclear weapons, fearing that a bomb program will lead their state to be cut off from access to technology, foreign investment, trade opportunities, and membership in international organizations. In contrast, inward-looking coalitions, especially if motivated by nationalism or religious fundamentalism, will be interested in nuclear weapons as a symbol of defiance and national pride. Jacques Hymans has put forward another theory that makes similar predictions, but based at the individual rather than domestic level of analysis.<sup>33</sup> Hymans focuses on the state leader's conception of national identity. Leaders with what he calls an "oppositional nationalist" image are the ones who will push for nuclear weapons. Such leaders are both highly nationalistic and see their state as having confrontational relations with the outside world. Leaders who are less nationalistic or more open to cooperation, in contrast, will not be interested in acquiring nuclear weapons. In practice, the predictions of Hymans and Solingen are likely to overlap, because oppositional nationalist leaders will typically be found at the head of inward-looking, radically nationalist or sectarian coalitions. Taken as a whole, the literature on proliferation suggests several additional hypotheses beyond hypothesis one presented above.

*Hypothesis 11: States with regional security concerns will be most interested in positive security assurances; states without such concerns will be most interested in negative assurances.*

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<sup>32</sup> Solingen, *Nuclear Logics*

<sup>33</sup> Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

T.V. Paul has sought to integrate realist and liberal theories of proliferation. On the realist side, he confirms that security is still a good explanation for many cases, but concludes the focus has to be on the regional environment.<sup>34</sup> Most cases of proliferation, he believes, have derived from regional threats, not from concerns about the two Cold War nuclear superpowers. If this is true, countries in dangerous regional neighborhoods represent the cases in which positive assurances are most likely to be effective. This suggests the role of positive assurances will merit special scrutiny in regions like Northeast Asia and the Middle East.

The logical flip side of this analysis is that negative assurances will be more relevant in other cases. This includes countries that, for whatever reason, do view an NPT nuclear weapon state as a direct threat. But it also includes countries that are not directly threatened. States that want to remain non-aligned and states that hope to keep their region nuclear free will be most concerned about NWS behavior that could destabilize the situation in their region. Efforts by NWS to use nuclear threats against another state in the region or to deploy nuclear weapons elsewhere in the region might set off a chain of events that lead to proliferation efforts in the region or that force non-aligned states to choose a side. Such states will press for negative security assurances as a way to reduce the chances of such a scenario developing. Combining this observation with hypothesis 3 above suggests that regional nuclear-weapon-free zones may be an especially valuable tool for making negative security assurances effective.

*Hypothesis 12: The impact of assurances will depend in part on how they affect the perceived prestige and appropriateness of nuclear status. To the extent that norms matter, negative assurances are likely to be more important overall than positive assurances.*

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<sup>34</sup> T.V. Paul, *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000)

States sometimes imitate other states. In order to demonstrate their status, they will try to follow what is considered normal behavior for the type of state they want to be; if nuclear weapon possession connotes great power status, aspiring great powers will seek nuclear weapons. If states care about maintaining good standing in the international community, then they also want to act in ways that are considered legitimate. Anything that increases the prestige or status associated with nuclear weapons, or that makes such weapons appear a normal and appropriate means of pursuing national security goals, will make proliferation more attractive. Anything that lowers the prestige, perceived utility, or legitimacy of nuclear weapons reinforces nonproliferation norms. Positive security assurances, because they imply nuclear weapons have continued value, tend not to bolster norms against nuclear weapons acquisition (though they might not weaken them). Negative assurances, because they imply nuclear weapons should play a strictly limited role, are more easily compatible with efforts to delegitimize nuclear weapons. This implies negative assurances should have a greater impact on strengthening nonproliferation norms. To the extent state decisions are influenced by prevailing norms, negative assurances are likely to be more effective than positive assurances in restraining proliferation.

This hypothesis also has implications for NWS nuclear postures more generally. Efforts to make nuclear weapons appear more usable or effective, or to broadcast willingness to use nuclear weapons, are compatible with positive security assurances but not negative ones. Loosening the inhibitions on nuclear use could be interpreted as a way to make extended deterrence commitments more credible, which would strengthen positive assurances. This is where positive and negative assurances come most directly into tension, because these same types of measures tend to undermine negative security assurances. Hence, the U.S. nuclear

posture review and other developments in U.S. nuclear policy, and similar policy decisions in other NWS, have implications for the use of security assurances. Any decision to develop new nuclear weapons, resume nuclear testing, or to broaden the roles and missions assigned to nuclear forces would make negative assurances less credible. Such policies would also tend to make nuclear weapons appear to be more valuable and appropriate as a tool of security policy. It is hence worth considering the nonproliferation implications of other aspects of nuclear strategy, including how NWS nuclear postures could affect NNWS expectations about whether the NWS will live up to their pledges regarding negative security assurances.

*Hypothesis 13: Assurances will be more effective if they can be utilized in a way that alters internal debates in the target in a favorable direction.*

This hypothesis is implied by the work that highlights domestic determinants of some proliferation decisions. At first glance, this theory of proliferation leads to pessimistic inferences about assurances. If nuclear programs are driven by internal factors, then the actions of external actors may make no difference to calculations about whether or not to continue those programs. But work by Jack Snyder suggests that international influence depends on whether or not a particular domestic faction has fully established its control over policy.<sup>35</sup> If there is still debate inside the ruling coalition, or if the ruling regime has not institutionalized its power fully enough to preclude domestic opposition, then external developments still have the potential to alter the course of internal debates.

Combining Snyder's approach with insights from the literatures on bureaucratic politics and two-level games yields some simple rules of thumb for influencing internal politics in

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<sup>35</sup> Jack Snyder, "International Leverage on Soviet Domestic Change," *World Politics* 42, 1 (Oct. 1989)

another country. The influence strategy should aim to strengthen or at least not undermine the position of moderates, which in this case means those who favor participation in the nonproliferation regime and oppose indigenous nuclear weapons development. At the same time, the strategy should aim to weaken or at least not bolster the position of hard-liners, which in this case means advocates of a nuclear weapons program. Security assurances might be crafted to do this, in two ways.

Negative security assurances are most directly relevant here. A well-timed statement of negative assurances can be used to bolster the position of moderates. Even if the underlying reasons why a country is pursuing nuclear weapons are found in the parochial interests or belief systems of certain domestic actors, the advocates of nuclear weapons development are likely to justify the program in domestic debates by arguing that it is needed for security against external threats – Peter Lavoy has described this as a process of using “nuclear myths” to pave the way for proliferation.<sup>36</sup> A forceful, public commitment to negative security assurances by the state or states being portrayed as the source of a security threat can undermine the main rationale for a nuclear program being offered by its advocates. By refuting the rhetoric of hard-liners and providing evidence in support of moderates’ claims that the state’s security needs can be met without nuclear arms, well-timed negative assurances might tilt the balance in domestic debates in favor of nonproliferation.

Positive assurances offer a second possible mechanism for influencing internal debates. In this case, the best use of positive assurances is indirect. An offer of positive security guarantees by a country that is being depicted as the threat is unlikely to make much difference in internal debates in the target state. If one’s state is viewed as the enemy, an offer to help a state if it is attacked by some other party is largely beside the point. But positive assurances

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<sup>36</sup> Peter R. Lavoy, “Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation,” *Security Studies* 2, 3/4 (Sept. 1993)

might make a difference if they can be used in way that undermines the arguments of hard-liners that nuclear weapons development will improve the state's security. It might be possible to do this indirectly, by offering positive security assurances to the state's regional rivals, or by re-committing to and strengthening such assurances if they already exist. If moderates can claim that their country's nuclear program has led to a deepening of ties and military cooperation among the state's potential adversaries, this might provide them with ammunition in domestic debates to argue against hard-liners' claims that nuclear weapons are good for security. If there is an opening for domestic opponents of nuclear acquisition to show that a nuclear program is only leading to balancing against their country and its self-encirclement, this might give them leverage to push for a change of course. To give an example, if there is any kind of internal debate in North Korea, this strategy suggests the best response to North Korea's nuclear and missile tests would be to visibly increase U.S. military cooperation with South Korea and Japan. But if hard-liners have absolute control, then this strategy less likely to work and might even backfire by reinforcing the fears for regime survival of North Korea's rulers.

*Hypothesis 14: Assurances will be more effective if they are packaged with positive incentives.*

This hypothesis follows from Solingen's coalitional analysis and the previous hypothesis. If there is a political competition between outward-looking and inward-looking coalitions in the target state, then the goal of an influence strategy should be to strengthen the outward-looking coalition. If Solingen is right, the central issue in the domestic debate will be different views of participation in the global economy, and not the nuclear weapons program *per se*. It will hence be important to validate the arguments of the outward-looking coalition that openness to the

outside world will lead to economic benefits and opportunities. Offers to open markets, provide foreign investment funds, or support membership in multilateral economic institutions would all be valuable incentives to proceed down the path favored by outward-looking forces. Threats to impose economic sanctions would also motivate a liberalizing coalition to turn away from nuclear weapons development, but such threats would also tend to strengthen the inward-looking coalition. Sanctions would simply validate their claims that the outside world is hostile and reinforce their arguments for turning inward and becoming more self-reliant. Because sanctions tend to undermine outward-looking forces and strengthen inward-looking coalitions, it is better to use positive incentives in combination with security assurances.

### Conclusions

Security assurances are an integral component of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. But a strategy of seeking to assure other states about their security could be much more widely applicable in international politics. In contrast to the sizable literatures on other tools for influencing state behavior, such as deterrence and economic sanctions, there is almost no empirical research on the effectiveness of security assurances. This project aims to initiate a research program on this question. Because assurances are unlikely to be uniformly effective in all cases, this introductory paper has suggested a need to develop conditional generalizations. Identifying the conditions that affect the prospects for assurances will help policymakers recognize when assurances are an appropriate strategy and provide some guidance for how to craft assurances to maximize their impact.

This paper has canvassed relevant literatures to identify some initial hypotheses that might apply to the nonproliferation realm. The most basic observation is that assurances are most



likely to be effective when a target state's potential interest in nuclear weapons is at least partly driven by security concerns. But the mere fact that a target state has security concerns does not guarantee that assurances will be effective. The success of assurances is likely to depend on a number of other factors as well.

To start with, as with any influence strategy, an offer of assurances must be seen as credible by the recipient. Efforts to institutionalize assurances may enhance credibility. Possible institutional mechanisms include alliances, nuclear-weapon-free zones, and perhaps a new, legally-binding agreement involving the five NPT NWS.

While general assurance postures that apply universally provide an important foundation for assurances, it may also be necessary to take account of the particular circumstances and concerns of individual target countries. States most concerned about regional threats are more likely to be influenced by positive security guarantees. States hoping to keep their region nuclear free and non-aligned are likely to care more about negative assurances. In other cases, assurances may have to be individually tailored to respond to the unique preoccupations of a state's leadership.

It is also important to take account of possible internal debates in target countries as well as well-known constraints on rationality. To deal with such factors, it may be important not to let NPT-related assurances stand on their own. NPT assurances may be more effective when packaged with other, related strategies. Positive assurances can be enhanced if they are supplemented by a broader effort at alliance-related assurance. And negative assurances can be strengthened if they are incorporated in a broader reassurance strategy or combined with positive incentives.

Although both positive and negative assurances are likely to be important, there can unfortunately be trade-offs between the two. Research on proliferation and actual U.S. policy have both tended to give the primary emphasis to positive assurances, but some of the hypotheses identified here suggest that negative assurances may turn out to be the more valuable nonproliferation tool. If so, it will be important to look for ways to gain the benefits of positive assurances without undermining negative assurances. One way to do this might be to see if positive assurances can be made effective without being based on the idea of a nuclear umbrella. If offers to respond to nuclear threats or attacks with conventional military campaigns, the provision of theater missile defenses, and various non-military forms of assistance would create sufficient positive assurance, some of the tensions between positive and negative assurances could be avoided. With almost no empirical knowledge base to draw on, all these suggestions are necessarily speculative. The most important goal of this project, therefore, is simply to expand our empirical understanding of how security assurances have worked as a nonproliferation tool in the past.