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Introduction

Jeffrey W. Knopf

In the pursuit of national security, states often rely on the threat or use of military force to defend their interests and deter challenges. Yet threat-based strategies are not always the best option. In some cases, a state may be better off seeking to give others a greater sense of security, rather than by holding their security at risk. Efforts to alleviate insecurity can be important not only in dealing with potential adversaries, but in relations with allies as well. Despite their possible value, however, security assurances—which can be defined as promises to respect or ensure the security of others—have received much less attention from policymakers and scholars than have measures for defense or deterrence.

The most prominent use of security assurances in international politics has been in conjunction with efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, more commonly called the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), created two classes of states: nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. Only the five states that had tested nuclear weapons before the treaty was opened for signature (the United States, Russia, China, Britain, and France) could join as nuclear weapon states, while all other states were expected to join as non-nuclear weapon states. Those countries required to forswear nuclear weapons have sought to make sure that doing so would not jeopardize their security vis-à-vis nuclear-armed states. They have requested both negative security assurances, which involve a pledge by nuclear weapon states not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states, and positive security assurances, which involve a pledge to come to the aid of non-nuclear weapon states that are

nevertheless subject to such a threat or attack. The nuclear weapon states have offered such pledges, but not always in forms as strong as most non-nuclear weapon states would like. In addition to assurances directly associated with the nonproliferation regime, some nuclear weapon states (especially the United States) have offered positive security assurances in a bilateral format. These generally rely on extended deterrence commitments, more colloquially referred to as a nuclear umbrella.

From time to time, policymakers rediscover security assurances as a potential nonproliferation tool. Commenting on Iran's progress toward a nuclear weapon capability, U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton suggested in July 2009 that the United States might respond by extending "a defense umbrella over the [Persian Gulf] region." The statement was widely interpreted as an attempt to signal to Iran's Arab neighbors that they would not need to react to an Iranian bomb with nuclear weapons development efforts of their own because, if they wanted U.S. assistance, the United States would help defend them against a possible Iranian threat.¹ We have little knowledge, however, about whether such an assurance would be effective.

The goal of this volume is to investigate the potential utility of security assurances both as a nonproliferation tool and more generally. The first three essays in the volume identify and define different concepts of assurance, mine relevant bodies of theory to develop initial hypotheses about the impact of assurances, and summarize the history of assurances in the nonproliferation regime. The next seven chapters assess the role of security assurances in a number of cases of nuclear proliferation and restraint. These empirical chapters seek to evaluate the overall impact of assurances as well as to identify conditions under which security assurances are more or less likely to be effective. Based on the research findings, the concluding chapter offers practical pointers on how to make security assurances as effective as possible in preventing nuclear proliferation.

The focus on nuclear proliferation plays a dual role in this study. First, for the purpose of examining assurance strategies 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 decisions about whether or not to obtain nuclear weapons involve the highest possible national security stakes, they pose a hard test for a hypothesis that assurances can influence state behavior. If security assurances have some effectiveness in prevent-

ing nuclear proliferation, this will permit confidence in an inference that they could be effective more broadly.

Second, nuclear nonproliferation is a focus in this study due to its intrinsic importance. Efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons have long been intended to forestall the possibility that regional rivals could end up in a nuclear war. More recently, the potential that nonstate terrorist actors or aggressive regimes could get their hands on a nuclear device has added urgency to nonproliferation efforts. While nonproliferation policy discussions often cite security assurances as a potentially relevant tool,² there has been almost no empirical research that assesses the effectiveness of the range of available assurance strategies, including both positive and negative assurances. This volume represents the first study to use systematic empirical research to produce generalizations about the effectiveness of security assurances.

ASSURANCE AS AN UNDERSTUDIED STRATEGY

Assurances are promises. They involve declarations or signals meant to convey a commitment to take or refrain from taking certain actions in the future. Specifically, assurances can be defined as 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 with other strategies employed in international politics, assurances have not been the subject of much empirical research. Coercive strategies such as deterrence and compellence have received by far the greatest attention when it comes to assessing the ways states attempt to influence the behavior of other states.³ In addition to the manipulation of military threats, the use of economic statecraft has been a focus of much research, including efforts to determine the effectiveness of economic sanctions and to a lesser extent the usefulness of positive incentives.⁴ In recent years, the idea of "soft power" as a possible basis of influence has also elicited considerable interest.⁵

In contrast, there has been little effort to develop a general theory of security assurances or to conduct systematic empirical research on the effectiveness of assurances. Most discussions of nonproliferation-related assurances focus on policy issues. Those that discuss assurances associated with the NPT typically either address the legal status of existing assurances or offer policy prescriptions for how to strengthen them.⁶ Since 2008, several studies have addressed the assurance implications of extended nuclear deterrence, but again these focus mostly on contemporary policy debates rather than empirical analysis

of the impact of assurances.⁷ Only one published study has involved empirical research on the effectiveness of the full range of nonproliferation-related assurances. In it, Bruno Tertrais surveyed a number of past cases, finding in general that positive assurances conveyed by bilateral defense treaties have a greater impact than other types of assurances.⁸ The present volume seeks to go deeper by exploring the conditions under which different types of assurance are more or less likely to be effective.

Some research on the causes of proliferation, which is discussed more fully in the next chapter, also analyzes security assurances. In nearly all cases, the studies consider only assurances conveyed by bilateral defense pacts and not the wider set of assurances associated with the nonproliferation regime. In addition, the findings in this literature regarding the impact of assurances have been highly contradictory, suggesting that more research is needed in any case.⁹

The most relevant body of social science literature concerns the concept of reassurance.¹⁰ Reassurance, which involves seeking to convince another state that one harbors no hostile intentions toward that state, is a form of assurance. But the range of possible assurance strategies is broader than just reassurance. In some situations, assurance is more likely to take the form of a security guarantee to an ally than a nonaggression pledge to an adversary. Because assurance can take other forms besides reassurance, work on reassurance cannot by itself provide a complete theoretical framework for examining the effectiveness of security assurances. In addition, the body of empirical research on reassurance is also limited,¹¹ and it has not to date focused on the possible role of reassurance in combating proliferation.

In sum, as a focus for empirical research, security assurances are perhaps the least studied of all the strategies that states can utilize in efforts to influence other actors in world politics. This volume seeks to rectify that neglect.

OUTLINE OF THE VOLUME

Part I of this study covers relevant theory and history. The next two chapters deal with the theory of security assurances. In Chapter 2, Knopf first reviews the different terminology used in relation to assurance in an effort to clarify definitions and show how different concepts of assurance relate to one another. This initial theory chapter then derives from relevant existing bodies of research more than a dozen hypotheses about the conditions that might affect the effectiveness of assurances. These hypotheses are investigated in the case study chapters in the volume.

The next chapter is by Janice Stein, one of the leading authorities on reassurance. In it, Stein summarizes recent psychological research, especially concerning the role of emotions, to update her previous work on how psychological factors affect the use of assurance strategies. Then, in Chapter 4, John Simpson provides a history of NPT-related assurances. Simpson, who has been personally involved in NPT-related activities for many years, reviews the evolution of both positive and negative assurances in the nonproliferation regime and ongoing debates about how to strengthen such assurances.

Following the reviews of theory and history, Part II of the volume contains case studies that evaluate the impact of assurances on seven specific countries. The research design for this part of the volume follows the method of “structured, focused comparison” developed by Alexander George.¹² The case-study authors were each provided in advance with a standardized list of questions about assurances and other factors to investigate in their cases. The case-study authors were also given a draft list of the hypotheses from the initial theory chapter for their consideration.

The cases were selected to include both apparent nonproliferation successes and failures as well as cases where both positive and negative assurances were more relevant. There is also variation within several of the cases, with assurances being available in some time periods but not others. The emphasis was on the regions of greatest contemporary proliferation concern—the Middle East and East Asia—supplemented by some cases in which assurances have long been assumed to have played an important role. The Middle East part of the study involves chapters by Wyn Bowen on Libya and James Walsh on Iran. For Libya and Iran, negative assurances were more relevant than positive assurances, with the difference that Libya appears to be a nonproliferation success story while Iran does not. Three cases from Northeast Asia follow next: Yuki Tatsumi on Japan, Scott Snyder and Joyce Lee on South Korea, and John Park on North Korea. Japan and South Korea represent cases where positive assurances have been more relevant and apparently successful. For North Korea, like Iran, negative assurances have emerged as most relevant but to date without apparent success. The final two case studies involve analyses of Sweden by Thomas Jonter and of Ukraine by Sherman Garnett. In these cases, it has generally been assumed that assurances—primarily positive in the case of Sweden and negative in the case of Ukraine—helped to convince both countries to renounce nuclear weapons; the chapters here explore whether these assumptions are well founded.

The volume ends with a concluding chapter by James Wirtz that summarizes the case findings and the policy lessons they hold. As this project progressed, it became clear that the findings might reflect selection effects due to the cases chosen for study. First, the cases all involve countries that were at some point deemed serious proliferation risks. As a consequence, the cases nearly all involve special, country-specific assurances beyond the generalized assurances associated with the NPT. The volume may therefore underestimate the impact of NPT-related assurances because the countries willing to be satisfied by those assurances did not become part of the case sample. Second, the case selection is likely to lead to clearer conclusions concerning positive than negative assurances. There are more cases in which positive assurances were more relevant, and the negative assurance cases may overweight the rate of failure given that two of the cases (Iran and North Korea) have been among the most challenging cases for finding any effective policy tool. Future research on countries from relatively nonaligned regions, such as South America or sub-Saharan Africa, would provide a more fully representative sample from which to evaluate the assurances most closely associated with the nonproliferation regime, especially negative security assurances. Still, the cases in this volume make it possible to offer assessments about whether assurances can be effective in curbing proliferation and, if so, the conditions that affect the likelihood of success.

The case study authors find that security assurances had an impact in most but not all of the cases. The success rate is greater in the cases of positive assurances, but to some degree the Libya and Ukraine cases show that negative assurances can be an important nonproliferation tool as well. The impact of assurances is typically modest rather than decisive, suggesting that they are no silver bullet. Assurances appear to be most effective when they are embedded in a larger strategy that also involves positive incentives, broader efforts at reassurance, or other measures. Domestic politics in both the recipients and senders of assurance are also important. Finally, the credibility of assurances is important and far from automatic, but the factors that produce credibility tend to be highly context dependent, although opportunities for defense cooperation or consultation often show up as an important factor.

The findings in the volume lend support to the conventional wisdom that bilateral security guarantees have important advantages in dissuading proliferation. The details of the cases also reveal, however, that the influence of positive assurances rests to an important degree on the normative delegitimizing of nuclear weapons associated with the NPT. In addition, both the theory and

case chapters reveal important tensions between positive and negative forms of assurance. Extended nuclear deterrence commitments associated with some forms of positive security assurance encourage nuclear weapon states to maintain robust nuclear arsenals and a readiness to use these weapons. Such a posture can make promises not to threaten the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states appear insincere. Hence, the findings in this volume point to a policy dilemma: it may be difficult to gain the benefits of both positive and negative security assurances simultaneously. This makes it important to explore possible non-nuclear options for providing positive security assurances. These might include the use of conventional forces for deterrence, arms exports to bolster the recipient's defense capabilities, provision of missile defenses, or nonmilitary forms of assistance. The research findings in this volume also suggest that finding effective non-nuclear forms of positive security assurance will not be easy.

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. It could help a state that is seeking to reduce the chances of conflict with a rival; to restrain its allies from provocative behavior or encourage them to stand fast; or to elicit cooperation from others in dealing with a variety of security problems, such as terrorism, piracy, or communal conflicts. When states do not believe they are risking their security, they may be more likely to adjust their policies and behavior in directions favored by an assurance provider. In contrast to the sizable literatures on other tools for influencing state behavior, such as deterrence and economic sanctions, there is little empirical research on the effectiveness of security assurances. This volume aims to advance the state of knowledge on this question. Because assurances are unlikely to be uniformly effective in all cases, this volume aims in particular to develop conditional generalizations about when assurances are most likely to have an impact.

NOTES

1. Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, "Clinton Speaks of Shielding Mideast from Iran," *New York Times*, July 23, 2009, A1.
2. For a brief history and analysis of different forms of security assurance, see Michael O. Wheeler, *Positive and Negative Security Assurances*, Project on Rethinking Arms

Control (PRAC) Paper No. 9 (College Park: University of Maryland, Center for International and Security Studies, February 1994).

3. For good reviews of the vast literature on deterrence, see Paul K. Huth, "Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999); and Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For research on coercive diplomacy that also summarizes earlier research, see Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2003).

4. For contrasting views on sanctions, compare Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, Kimberly Ann Elliott, and Barbara Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd edition (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007); and Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1997). An important study of positive incentives that explicitly focuses on non-proliferation cases is Thomas Bernauer and Dieter Ruloff, eds., *The Politics of Positive Incentives in Arms Control* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

5. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Perseus Books, 2004).

6. George Bunn and Roland Timerbaev, "Security Assurances to Non-Nuclear-Weapon States: Possible Options for Change," Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation (PPNN), Issue Review no. 7, September 1996; Bunn, "The Legal Status of U.S. Negative Security Assurances to Non-Nuclear-Weapon States," *Nonproliferation Review* 4, no. 3 (Spring–Summer 1997); Rebecca Johnson, "Security Assurances for Everyone: A New Approach to Deterring the Use of Nuclear Weapons," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, no. 90 (Spring 2009).

7. Victor Utgoff and David Adesnik, *On Strengthening and Expanding the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella to Dissuade Nuclear Proliferation*, IDA Paper P-4356 (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, July 2008); David S. Yost, "Assurance and U.S. Extended Deterrence in NATO," *International Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July 2009); Clark A. Murdock and Jessica M. Yeats, *Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], November 2009).

8. Bruno Tertrais, "Security Assurances and the Future of Proliferation," in *Over the Horizon Proliferation Threats*, ed. James J. Wirtz and Peter R. Lavoy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). A paper from a set of conference papers available on-line also discusses the NPT and U.S. security guarantees, finding that both have some impact on limiting proliferation, but the latter has been the stronger measure. Although the paper does not provide detailed empirical evidence to support its conclusions and does not consider the possible impact of negative security assurances, it is still noteworthy for being one of the very rare studies to attempt an empirical assessment of the impact

of assurances. See Sara Z. Kutchesfahani, “The Relevance of Historical Experience to Current Nuclear Proliferation Challenges,” in *A Collection of Papers from the 2009 PONI Conference Series* (Washington, DC: Project on Nuclear Issues, CSIS, 2010), CSIS.org/images/stories/poni/100728_collection_of_conference_papers_2009.pdf.

9. The studies referred to in this paragraph are discussed more fully in the next chapter. For citations, see Chapter 2, notes 17–23.

10. Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Beyond Deterrence,” *Journal of Social Issues* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1987).

11. This research is discussed in the next chapter. For citations, see Chapter 2, n. 12.

12. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).