

ATOMIC ASSURANCE:
THE POLITICS OF EXTENDED DETERRENCE

ALEXANDER LANOSZKA
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
ALEXANDER.LANOSZKA@CITY.AC.UK

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INTRODUCTION

Some observers of international politics fear that, unlike in the Cold War, the prevention of nuclear wars no longer depends on the superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—managing their competition rationally. Rather, a multipolar nuclear order beckons as states in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia increasingly see nuclear weapons as essential tools of diplomacy.¹ For the United States, much is at stake since it has long sought to limit the number of states with nuclear weapons. The nonproliferation mission could become harder to undertake if predictions of American decline are true.

One tool that the United States has traditionally used for curbing nuclear proliferation is its system of alliances. Since their formation at the beginning of the Cold War, many experts agree that alliances have enabled the United States to manage local conflicts, to prevent arms races, and to reassure partners that the United States will defend them in a military crisis that involves a shared adversary. The result is that recipients of these security guarantees feel less need to acquire their own nuclear weapons. When allies have pursued nuclear weapons development, the United States has coerced them into halting their ambitions. If standard accounts of the Cold War are any guide, the United States might fulfill its nonproliferation mission in the emerging multipolar order so long as it retains its superior military capabilities and preserves its alliances. Such is the emerging narrative of the American experience of the nuclear era: that alliances are effective nonproliferation tools, that the Cold War is largely a story of American nonproliferation success, and that the future is perilous for the global nonproliferation regime.

This book will challenge each of these notions by making three related claims. First, many smaller states during the Cold War saw enough value in nuclear weapons that they made efforts to acquire them. If the distinguishing feature of the emerging multipolar nuclear order is the nuclear activity of smaller states, then we are misreading

¹ See Paul J. Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics* (New York, NY: Times Books, 2012): 2.

history. The present resembles the past more than it does not.² Second, military alliances might be important tools for thwarting nuclear proliferation, but they are more susceptible to breakdown and credibility concerns than some accounts in the international relations literature presume. Indeed, why alliances should ever be a viable solution for nuclear proliferation is puzzling since international agreements ought to be fundamentally unbelievable in the absence of a world government that can enforce them. Even if we accept that strong commitments are possible, those very commitments risk emboldening those allies to undertake aggressive foreign policies that are contrary to the interests of the United States. Third, and finally, although the United States has played an important role in enforcing the nuclear nonproliferation regime, we should be careful not to attribute too much success to the United States. It encountered severe difficulties in curbing suspect nuclear behaviors of key allies like West Germany and Japan, to say nothing of Great Britain and France—allies that feared American abandonment, yet succeeded in acquiring nuclear weapons. South Korea often serves as an example of the effectiveness of American coercion, but the state of its nuclear program made it an easy target at a time when the United States wanted to demonstrate its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation. Put together, from the perspective of Washington, it is easier to deter the onset of nuclear weapons programs than to stop a program once it has started.

The goal of this book is to expand upon each of these arguments by investigating the link between alliances and nuclear proliferation using a series of case studies drawn from the Cold War. I consider two main questions. The first question is: how do alliances prevent nuclear proliferation? To answer it, I examine why some states that received security guarantees have tried to acquire nuclear weapons and why many of them ultimately renounced such efforts by making nonproliferation commitments. Both France and Great Britain successfully acquired nuclear weapons, but France does not need technological support from the United States to keep them. Japan and West Germany do not have nuclear weapons but have enrichment and reprocessing capabilities. South Korea has agreements with the United States that forbid it from having reprocessing capabilities to this day. We thus arrive at the second question: what was the role of the

² For a similar argument, see Francis J. Gavin, “Same As It Ever Was: Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War,” *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2010): 7-37.

United States in its allies' decisions to renounce nuclear weapons? To motivate these questions even further, it is worth clarifying the puzzle of nuclear proliferation from an alliance perspective.

The Puzzle of Alliances and Nuclear Proliferation

The standard view among international security experts is that guarantors like the United States face a conundrum when designing alliances. The so-called alliance dilemma is as follows. By offering a strong commitment, the guarantor demonstrates that it will back its ally in the event of a militarized crisis that involves a shared adversary. However, the ally might exploit this favorable situation by pressing its claims against the adversary harder than it otherwise would, thereby raising the likelihood of starting a war that the guarantor does not want. Because the guarantor wishes to protect its reputation for upholding its commitments, it might have to intervene in this war to support its ally. All things equal, the risk of entrapment—that is, of being dragged into an undesirable war—increases with the strength of the alliance commitment.³ Yet weakening the alliance commitment to lessen entrapment risks introduces new problems. The ally might fear abandonment when it starts to doubt the credibility of the guarantor and its security pledges. A weakened commitment might tempt the adversary to attack the ally, which may thus feel compelled to launch destabilizing pre-emptive measures.⁴

As a tool for preventing nuclear proliferation, the alliance commitment must be strong enough for the ally to view it as a credible deterrent against the adversary. Otherwise, doubts about the guarantor's stated pledges would lead the ally to discount the military value of the alliance and to reconsider its own armament choices. For the guarantor, the policy challenge becomes acute: how does one craft a security commitment that at once resolves the alliance dilemma and discourages nuclear proliferation-related behavior?

³ On alliances and moral hazard, see Brett V. Benson, *Constructing International Security: Alliance, Deterrence, and Moral Hazard* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ On the alliance dilemma, see Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997): 187-188. The alliance dilemma should not be confused with the alliance security dilemma, described in Glenn Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1984): 461-495.

The difficulty of this policy challenge has led scholars to adopt conflicting positions regarding the relationship between alliances and nuclear proliferation. Some scholars downplay the alliance dilemma and emphasize the stabilizing impact alliances have for international politics. These scholars see formal defense alliances as credible and thus the most desirable security institutions states can have. Because formal alliance treaties are public and thus known to all other states, guarantors incur high reputation costs for violating them.⁵ These alliances are the best for deterring adversaries and reassuring allies. Democratic states like the United States are especially good allies: the transparency of their institutions make them more predictable and the difficulties of shepherding alliance treaties through domestic ratification processes make their commitment choices stronger and more selective.⁶ Entrapment concerns are overstated since guarantors can attach conditions and specify the terms in which the alliance would be activated.⁷ Accordingly, written and public security guarantees (particularly those issued by democratic countries) are credible, allay abandonment fears, and reduce incentives for nuclear proliferation. Yet other scholars see abandonment concerns as a pervasive feature of alliance politics, no matter what type of state dominates the alliance. They argue that such concerns encourage states to seek nuclear weapons in order to deter adversaries on their own.⁸

The problem with many existing alliance-based arguments is that they expect either too little or too much nuclear proliferation. Scholars who see democratically-led alliances as free of pathologies have trouble explaining why American alliances have been so prone to nuclear proliferation. Of the thirty or so states that at least considered getting nuclear weapons at one point since 1945, over half of them were aligned with the

⁵ James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 3 (2000): 63–83.

⁶ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and The Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷ Tongfi Kim, "Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States," *Security Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2011): 350–377; and Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of US Defense Pacts," *International Security*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2015): 7-48.

⁸ Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1996-1997): 54–86; Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Proliferation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press); Nuno P. Monteiro and Alexandre Debs, "The Strategic Logic of Nuclear Proliferation," *International Security*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2014): 7–51; and T.V. Paul, *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

United States.⁹ Only three nuclear proliferators had defensive alliances with the Soviet Union: China, North Korea, and Romania. Whereas five of fourteen NATO allies at least considered getting nuclear weapons by the 1970s, only one out of seven Warsaw Pact allies committed the same offense. Scholars who see alliances as inherently problematic face a different challenge. If abandonment concerns are so acute, then why do allies only seldom move to acquire nuclear weapons? Unfortunately, we are yet to have an account that specifies the precise conditions under which states *sufficiently* fear abandonment that they begin desiring nuclear weapons.

Many allies ultimately renounced their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, but to what extent were such reversals the result of alliance politics? The academic literature is also divided on this question. Some scholars dismiss security explanations of nuclear proliferation altogether, emphasizing instead such variables as leaders' beliefs or economic growth strategies.¹⁰ However, a school of thought has recently emerged—one that stresses the restraining role of American alliances when it comes to nuclear proliferation. Nicholas Miller claims that the threat of American sanctions has deterred nuclear proliferation, especially after the United States demonstrated its commitment to nonproliferation by suppressing South Korean and Taiwanese nuclear activities in the 1970s.¹¹ Gene Gerzhoy similarly maintains that threats of alliance abandonment—meted out by the United States—have curbed proliferation risks, whereas Francis J. Gavin concludes that nonproliferation has been as much a pillar of American grand strategy as containment (in the Cold War) and openness (since 1945).¹² Yet close scrutiny reveals important shortcomings in these claims. American nonproliferation efforts against South Korea and Taiwan were done quietly so as not to alarm China and Japan, making it

⁹ Philipp C. Bleek, *When Did and (Didn't) States Proliferate: Chronicling the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2017).

¹⁰ Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹¹ Nicholas L. Miller, "The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions," *International Organization*, vol. 68, no. 4 (2014): 913–944.

¹² Gene Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions," *International Security*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2015): 91–129; and Francis J. Gavin, "Strategies of Inhibition: US Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation," *International Security*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2015): 9–46. See also Or Rabinowitz and Nicholas L. Miller, "Keeping the Bombs in the Basement: US Nonproliferation Policy toward Israel, South Africa, and Pakistan," *International Security*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2015): 47–86.

debatable as to whether those efforts signaled American nonproliferation interests widely and clearly. Those states have also relapsed into nuclear proliferation-related behavior after having been sanctioned. Moreover, if abandonment fears provoke nuclear interest, then how can credible threats to abandon an alliance altogether reverse that interest? Finally, nuclear nonproliferation may have been a by-product of American foreign policy, rather than a core aim of it. Ridding South Korea of nuclear weapons helped ensure stability on the Korean peninsula when the United States pursued rapprochement with China. For diplomatic and possibly economic reasons, the Ford administration did not push Japan as hard as they could have for it to make clear nonproliferation pledges. Whether nuclear reversals resulted from alliance politics remains an open empirical question.

The Argument

How do guarantors like the United States design commitments that manage the alliance dilemma and at the same time reduce nuclear proliferation risks? To what extent alliances are responsible for curbing the efforts of those states interested in acquiring nuclear weapons? I advance a new theoretical framework in Chapter 1 that begins with the observation that nuclear security guarantees contain much ambiguity despite involving existential stakes. The recipients of these guarantees have good reason to worry of abandonment: no world government exists to ensure that their received commitments would be honored, and the written commitments that they receive are often vague. Consequently, as much as allies pay attention to the foreign policy doctrines of their guarantors, they desire more than simple pledges of support.

Allies thus tend to believe that in-theater conventional military deployments are necessary for bolstering commitments to extend deterrence. These deployments are not just ‘trip-wires’ that help deter an adversary by threatening the involvement of the guarantor should its ally be attacked. They have war-fighting capabilities and are tangible representations of the nuclear security guarantees that these states receive.¹³ States see the credibility of their security guarantees tied to such deployments as troops more so than

¹³ Michael A. Hunzeker and Alexander Lanoszka, “Landpower and American Credibility,” *Parameters*. Vol. 45, no. 4 (2015-2016): 17-26.

even tactical nuclear deployments despite how the latter matters for extended nuclear deterrence. So long as these commitments appear stable, abandonment fears will not intensify and the temptation to develop nuclear weapons will be limited. Moreover, these troops have the added benefit of helping to restrain the ally's foreign policy. For example, their participation in joint military planning with the ally's own armed forces reduces entrapment risks. And so alliances are useful for deterring nuclear proliferation. However, if allies anticipate or suddenly experience unfavorable conventional redeployments (i.e., large, unilateral troop withdrawals), then their abandonment concerns rise to a level much higher than normal. They begin to doubt their security guarantees *enough* to embark upon a set of behaviors related to nuclear proliferation, which range from hedging strategies to the active pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability.

Unfortunately, the guarantor will experience severe challenges in its efforts to reverse the nuclear proliferation-related behavior of its ally. To begin with, the guarantor needs to repair the security guarantee that the ally now perceives as sufficiently broken to warrant nuclear weapons pursuit. To reassert its security guarantees and to soothe intensified abandonment fears, new agreements that credibly restore or preserve troop levels are necessary. Yet these agreements are difficult to forge if the underlying circumstances that broke the security guarantee in the first place still exist. Other diplomatic levers have limited efficacy and could be counterproductive: threatening the withdrawal of more troops or the termination of the alliance altogether so as to isolate the ally will only exacerbate abandonment concerns. I thus argue that the best possible recourse available to the guarantor is its economic and technological power over the ally. If the ally depends on those non-military goods from the guarantor, then the ally might have to reconsider its nuclear activities in the interest of its own welfare. Absent such leverage, the guarantor will have trouble getting the ally to renounce nuclear weapons credibly. In the event that the ally decides to reverse its nuclear behavior, it may do so for reasons that have little to do with the coercion—threatened or applied—by its guarantor.

In going about these nonproliferation efforts, the guarantor must have a clear and strong interest in preventing nuclear proliferation and perhaps even in preserving its security guarantees. At first glance, an eagerness to limit the spread of nuclear weapons

seems to dominate American foreign policy. The United States withheld major atomic secrets from its biggest coalition partner in the Second World War and the Manhattan Project, Great Britain. In 1946, Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act so as to restrict other countries' access to nuclear information possessed by the United States. A later amendment to this act still reiterated its nonproliferation principles, thus becoming a source of frustration to some Presidents who contemplated nuclear-sharing arrangements with other countries. Indeed, Congress has reasserted itself by passing laws like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978 and the Pressler Amendment to advance nonproliferation objectives. Nevertheless, I contend that American interest in nonproliferation is variable. Although American decision-makers may agree in principle that nuclear proliferation is highly objectionable, the desire to satisfy other foreign policy interests could have the potential to undercut nonproliferation efforts. As the American campaign against Taiwan's nuclear weapons program indicates, sometimes narrow foreign policy interests—in this case, improving relations with China to exploit the Sino-Soviet split—can even assist nonproliferation efforts.

To evaluate my argument, I use a qualitative research design that I elaborate towards the end of Chapter 1. The empirical bulk comprises three intensive case studies on West Germany, Japan, and South Korea. These three American allies also represent most-likely cases for when an alliance with the United States inhibited nuclear interest. For each of these cases, I rely on deep archival research that I have conducted at various national repositories located around the world. The primary documents I collected and discovered serve as process tracing evidence. They allow me to test the causal mechanism and the implications of my theory against several leading alternative arguments that prioritize adversarial threats, domestic politics, and the prestige that states might see in nuclear weapons. Because I am skeptical of the role that alliances can play in halting nuclear weapons activities definitively, I allow for the possibility that these other causal processes can affect a state's decision to cease its proliferation-related behavior.

Chapter 2 sets up the main case studies of this book by reviewing the history of American security guarantees during much of the Cold War. I show how and why

American presidents between Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter designed their alliance commitments and implemented their strategic doctrinal visions. Of interest in this chapter is President Dwight Eisenhower's adoption of the New Look, the stated emphasis of 'flexible response' in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and President Richard Nixon's articulation of the Nixon Doctrine. American presidents consistently preferred a military strategy whereby the United States provides the 'nuclear sword' and allies supply the 'conventional shield.' Nevertheless, the implementation of this strategy varied over time and in intensity between Western Europe and East Asia. We thus have variation in how allies might assess the security guarantees they receive.

Chapters 3 and 4 together form a controlled case comparison of West Germany and Japan. Both countries are similar along several key dimensions: their roles in the Second World War, liberal democratic political regimes, spectacular economic reconstruction and growth in the post-war period, and hosting of a large-scale American military presence. Despite these similarities, West Germany began considering nuclear weapons development in the mid-1950s. Japan started its nuclear hedging behavior about a decade later. Differences in their strategic situations led those two allies to vary in how they perceived changes in their security guarantees.

Chapter 3 shows that, as a mostly land-locked country, West Germany was affected by Eisenhower's stated objectives of relying more on nuclear weapons at the expense of such conventional military deployments as ground power. Its abandonment fears intensified when news reports appeared in the United States that suggested large-scale troop withdrawals from West Germany and Europe were being planned. Shortly thereafter West Germany entered a short-lived trilateral initiative with France and Italy to develop nuclear weapons. Because the policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations exhibited important continuities from the Eisenhower administration, West Germany had little motivation to renounce nuclear weapons fully. I show that the United States attempted various alliance solutions to little avail and had difficulty leveraging its economic power to secure various agreements from West Germany during the 1960s. I provide evidence that alliance coercion might not have been so decisive in curbing West German behavior as now presumed. Explanations that emphasize domestic

politics better account for West German decisions regarding the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Chapter 4 demonstrates that Japan was attuned to Eisenhower's New Look because of its geography. Indeed, Japan remained quiescent until China's first nuclear detonation in 1964—an event that shook the Japanese leadership and forced them to attend more carefully to American security guarantees. As the American military involvement in Vietnam slowly unraveled, Japanese leaders became apprehensive of American alliance support and began to ratchet up their nuclear activities, giving national priority to a centrifuge program. Though Japan relied on the United States for the development of its civilian nuclear program, such dependency was not enough to eliminate American unease regarding its nuclear policy. Like West Germany, Japan ratified the NPT because of domestic politics and an international safeguards agreement that it was able to secure.

Chapter 5 addresses South Korea, a *critical* case for my theory because the American government initiated plans for major troop withdrawals from the peninsula on several separate occasions. In fact, the United States barely consulted with the South Korea when it openly sought troop withdrawals in 1970 and 1977. Moreover, the first of these troop withdrawals reflected the Nixon Doctrine—an important shift in American defense policy. The magnitude of these unwanted redeployments should have provoked a response from South Korea. Therefore, my theoretical framework must have empirical validity in this case. I demonstrate that South Korea's nuclear efforts are comprehensible only from the perspective of its alliance with the United States. That is, South Korea first explored and later began a nuclear weapons program in reaction to Nixon's troop withdrawals from its territory. South Korea tried to operate this program secretly. Yet once Washington discovered it, it pressured Seoul to cancel the primitive nuclear weapons program. South Korea's non-military dependence on the United States contributed to this result. Underscoring the difficulties of mounting a nonproliferation campaign, the story does not end there. Carter sought to withdraw all American forces from South Korea—a move that some observers speculate incited further efforts to develop nuclear weapons secretly. Safeguard violations persisted into the early 1980s.

Chapter 6 reviews a set of smaller case studies to expand the variation of my study. These cases are Great Britain, France, Norway, Australia, and Taiwan. I argue that my theory can illuminate why both Great Britain and France sought nuclear weapons and why only France succeeded in acquiring an *independent* nuclear deterrent capability. I show that Norway largely abstained from nuclear proliferation-related behavior for domestic political reasons. For its part, Australia was alarmed that its received security commitments were not backed by military power. It subsequently tried to acquire nuclear weapons, only to cancel the project when the Labor Party came to power. Taiwan feared abandonment due to the prospect of Sino-American rapprochement and the waning of its received military commitment from the United States. I highlight how Taiwan evaded many coercive efforts by the United States to shut down its nuclear weapons program.

Chapter 7 summarizes the main argument and discusses the broader implications of this study for both international theory and policy. The core message of this book is that alliances are more effective in deterring *potential* nuclear proliferation than in curbing *actual* cases of nuclear proliferation. This book thus has implications for how we think about such topics in international relations theory as credibility, coercion, American primacy, and the great power management of weaker states, more generally. For policy-makers and practitioners, the findings demonstrate that the retraction of such military assets as troops can provoke intense abandonment fears even if the nuclear basis of extended deterrence remains unchanged. As a tool for curbing actual nuclear activities, however, the record of alliance is even more mixed. Much depends on the economic and technological leverage that the United States might have over the proliferating ally. If its relative global position continues to erode, Washington will experience greater difficulties in reversing the nuclear undertakings of its allies. If they continue to value the nonproliferation mission, American policy-makers will face a more urgent need to craft defense policies in ways that already anticipate the likely reactions of their allies.