

Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows Seminar

PANEL 4: Arms Control

1. Brendan Green, MIT

Nuclear Weapons and Politico-Military Rivalry

Project Objectives

My project examines the dynamics of long-term politico-military competition between nuclear-armed states. I seek to understand the causes and conditions of such competitions, given a nuclear environment that would appear to discourage them; to uncover potential patterns in their conduct and likely course; and to analyze their consequences with a view towards improving future American foreign policy in the Pacific. To achieve these goals, I develop a number of hypotheses and assess their power for explaining a critical and puzzling case: the late Cold War nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Overview

The late Cold War arms race presents a major puzzle for international relations theory. According to the widely accepted theory of the nuclear revolution, once both sides possess second-strike forces secure against disarming attack, any nuclear exchange will be mutually catastrophic. Improvements to a state's nuclear forces are redundant: they do not provide additional increments of military strength, and therefore cannot produce political leverage. Yet during the final fifteen years of the Cold War, when most believe both sides had secure second strike arsenals, the United States and the Soviet Union poured enormous resources into the strategic arms race, accepting considerable risks and nuclear dangers in doing so. The most common explanation for this anomaly is that these efforts were founded on misperception and fomented by domestic political pathologies, amounting to "arsenals of folly."

However, a recent line of research suggests that technological innovations that began during the late Cold War are undermining the security of nuclear arsenals. Lieber and Press have demonstrated that a revolution in missile accuracy makes the destruction of even super-hardened fixed targets achievable. Likewise, Long and Green argue that targeting mobile weapons is much more plausible than commonly believed. The U.S. constructed a tremendous but often ignored Cold War capability for tracking and targeting Soviet ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), even in their "bastions" close to Soviet home waters. The United States now deploys a network of sophisticated sensors in the air, space, and on the ground, for tracking mobile ICBMs. Innovation has markedly increased capabilities for electronic and cyber warfare against enemy command and control (C2). All of these developments had their roots in the late Cold War arms race; they will all characterize the technological context of any future military competition in the Pacific.

I aim to develop a new model of how changing technology might impact the incentives for arms competition, even in a world of nuclear plenty. Technologies that facilitate counterforce nuclear strategies can create considerable uncertainty about the future state of the nuclear balance. Such technologies are highly clandestine and closely held, meaning states may worry that a tipping point in the nuclear balance is approaching. Perhaps nuclear stalemate will obviously persist in the short term. But what about a few years down the road, as the technologies for nuclear attack further develop? Arms races might therefore have their root in rational incentives to reveal and credibly communicate information about an uncertain military balance, through at least three mechanisms.

First, the process of technological innovation and military experimentation will teach states about the most salient aspects of military technology and doctrine, allowing them to learn by their own trial and error what is technically possible, operationally effective, and militarily likely. This knowledge facilitates projections of the future nuclear balance under different combinations of measures and countermeasures, helping states identify possible trends, opportunities, and risks.

Second, such arms races can provide information about their likely future course, demonstrating the relative “constitutional fitness” of each state for preserving or improving the future military balance. Arms races could help states learn about the ability of their economy to provide the necessary resources for competition; the administrative capacity of their institutions to extract those resources; the capability of their military-industrial complex to convert those resources into military power; and the capacity of their political regime to make adjustments and maintain these exertions over time.

Third, arms competitions provide built in tools for communicating and bargaining about the military balance and broader political stakes. For instance, arms races spawn intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities that are a credible means of finding and communicating military information. In a very secretive military environment, productive intelligence sources are likely to become trusted and given outsized importance in state thinking. For this reason, these same channels might be used for counter intelligence operations designed to show adversaries important military information without revealing details that allow for countermeasures to be taken. For instance, military exercises can allow states to demonstrate their operational capabilities in front of enemy “eyes” without revealing the specific sources of these capabilities.

Arms control negotiations can play a similar role, as they provide an arena for signaling about the nuclear balance and comparative constitutional fitness for arms racing. They also provide a forum for bargaining, both about the state of the military competition and over political stakes writ large. As rivals come to a common understanding about the future of the nuclear balance, arms control positions can be linked to alliance politics, diplomatic initiatives, and other political understandings, creating an interlocking web of bargains that would have been difficult to envision without the original competition.

In sum, arms racing might help reduce technological and political uncertainty. An arms race could demonstrate that the future nuclear balance was fluid, and that one side was making more progress than the other, even if it was not clear that a disarming or damage limiting capability was in sight. Political adjustments might be conceded to the stronger state even in this situation. Realist theories

suggest that the weaker state will be unlikely to trust in the rational forbearance of its stronger opponent, given clear power trends and remaining uncertainty about the exact state of the nuclear balance. Digging in one's heels is risky behavior, especially in a nuclear environment. Bargaining models imply that weaker states should be willing to pay something to avoid getting anywhere near a serious political crisis or dangerous confrontation—if demands are not outlandish, political adjustments should “select” such crises out of existence.

To be perfectly clear, such a “rationalist” explanation does not imply that arms races are wise or counterforce strategies optimal policy. It merely suggests that we might explain these phenomena without recourse to domestic political pathology. Arms races can possess a logic that appears powerful to statesmen, especially those highly socialized to the more violent aspects of international anarchy, even if there are better options available.

Research Design and Expected Results

I propose to develop this perspective into specific predictions about the late Cold War arms race and then test it against the more familiar domestic political explanations of military competition after the nuclear revolution. I ask whether American and Soviet decision makers were genuinely worried about the balance of nuclear power and uncertain about its future, or whether their nuclear policy was a product of domestic coalition building driven by military pathologies, hawkish ideology, and economic interests. In either event, how did perceptions of the nuclear balance influence the broader political trajectory and strategic interactions of the late Cold War? How did information about the military balance get communicated and impact superpower bargaining?

Fortuitously, past limitations in studying Soviet perceptions of the nuclear balance are being overcome by new documentary releases. Examples include a series of in depth interviews of Soviet nuclear policy-makers just after the USSR collapsed; the recently opened papers of a Soviet official who oversaw nuclear doctrine and procurement; and East German records pertaining to a decade long Soviet nuclear intelligence effort. Early findings suggest that Soviet policymakers were quite concerned about the future of the nuclear balance even in a supposedly MAD world. They followed U.S. nuclear capabilities carefully and reacted with alarm to new counterforce programs. Russian planners struggled mightily to maintain a secure second strike capability, rather than seriously pursue a more organizationally and politically attractive counterforce strategy of their own, as domestic political explanations might predict. *Pace* the nuclear revolution, they were not confident that they could keep up with American innovations over the long haul. Indeed, they believed their country's lack constitutional fitness for arms racing was thrown into bold relief by its repeated failures in developing technology designed to keep the pace with American nuclear offense.

On the American side, I intend to exploit a wealth of new documentary evidence on U.S. nuclear policy from the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidential libraries, and from the archival collections at the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Early returns illustrate the importance of the overwhelming demand signal American decision-makers perceived for some means of nuclear superiority during the late Cold War, absent which they doubted Europe could be credibly defended.

Counterforce provided an obvious potential solution, though decision-makers were uncertain what capabilities were possible and divided about the mechanism through which they might have their influence. In contrast, bureaucratic interests and congressional pressures were most often an obstacle to the development of new capabilities for nuclear attack, rather than their origin as many domestic explanations suggest.

Target Audience and Contribution to the Policy Process

I intend for my research to reach both academics and the broader policy-making community. I therefore hope to publish my findings in scholarly journals like *International Security* as well as more popular policy outlets such as *Foreign Affairs*.

For international relations theorists, my work challenges some of the stronger claims of the nuclear revolution. While there is no question that nuclear weapons are an excellent deterrent that increases the caution with which statesmen approach the use of force, claims for their transformational potential have often been overplayed. The theory of the nuclear revolution was most explicitly developed by academics who were trying to explain why late Cold War nuclear policy was irrational and dangerous; theories of pathological domestic politics gained their currency as an obvious alternative explanation for this kind of behavior. But if both sides perceived the nuclear balance as meaningful even under MAD—and struggled to change it against the domestic political impediments—perhaps it was the academics and not the statesmen who were missing something. But even if such speculation turns out to be too strong, a better understanding of the dynamics of long-term military competitions like the late Cold War should help the broader scholarly community amend and refine its theories of nuclear weapons.

The research will also have immediate practical significance for policymakers. International politics in East Asia appears to be developing in an unsettlingly familiar direction: towards a bipolar rivalry between a pair of superpowers. During the Cold War, this kind of rivalry resulted in an intense nuclear arms race. Should recent friction in the Pacific expand into a full-blown security competition, how should we expect nuclear weapons to shape its dynamics? Is a new nuclear arms race likely? How dangerous would such an arms race be? What are the major sources of risk, and the best policies for managing them? The lessons of the late Cold War can help policymakers anticipate future nuclear challenges, while appreciating the differences between the superpower rivalry and contemporary politics may prove just as important.

2. Carrie A. Lee, RAND

The Politics of Arms Control Negotiations and Treaty Ratification

Objectives

This project seeks to understand the role that electoral politics play in treaty negotiation and ratification. The research uses a principal-agent framework to identify a dilemma that elected leaders face when engaging in arms control negotiations: the need to refrain from incurring short-term costs in order to retain popular support in the lead up to an election at the expense of long-term security assurances that require concessions by all states. Using historical evidence from the archives and interviews, I develop both academic theory and policy-relevant implications for future negotiations and agreements about arms controls issues and proliferation. This project will fill an important gap in a literature that currently pays little attention to the influence of domestic political incentives on arms control behavior.

Overview

Arms control agreements and non-proliferation treaties profoundly affect state security outcomes and bilateral relationships between great powers. They are meant to mitigate security dilemmas, halt arms races, and provide assurances to other nations that nuclear states are behaving responsibly with regards to their arsenal of weapons. Each agreement is inherently a set of trade-offs between long-term security assurances and short-term concessions that compromise some aspect of autonomy or secrecy. Because each state prioritizes these tradeoffs differently, negotiations often take years and are meant to accords that are durable and lasting. The “sticky” institutions of arms agreements therefore not only have important, but lasting impacts on a state’s capabilities regarding weapons development, acquisition, and modernization. However, while current thinking emphasizes the importance of negotiating tactics found in business such as linkage, it misses a critically important factor that differentiates game-theoretic negotiation from international agreements: the political incentives associated with international agreements of any kind.

Despite the obvious and intuitive importance of domestic political factors in influencing arms control agreements and proliferation issues, there is currently no body of scholarly work that systematically evaluates the politics of arms control agreements, or even identifies domestic politics as an explanatory factor in a meaningful way.¹ Yet we know that elected leaders are acutely aware of the importance of pleasing the electorate, and consistently refer to their own domestic audiences in negotiations with other states in an attempt to either illuminate the political process or gain a more favorable negotiating position. Such an interplay between domestic politics and nuclear agreements has been on display in

¹ There is some scholarship on the domestic politics of foreign nations, but little on U.S. domestic interests. See, for example, Llewelyn Hughes, “Why Japan Won’t Go Nuclear (Yet),” *International Security* 31:4 (2007): 67-96; Jacque Hymans, “Veto Players, Nuclear Energy, and Nonproliferation: Domestic Institutional Barriers to a Japanese Bomb,” *International Security* 36:2 (2012): 154-189. Some more generalized examples are: Morton Halperin and Pricilla Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006; Jeffrey Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998

just the last three years: President Obama was famously caught on microphone in March of 2012 telling Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that he needed “space” on missile defense negotiations until after the November election; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave a speech to a joint session of Congress to argue against a proliferation deal with Iran just two weeks before his own domestic election; and 47 Republican senators penned a letter to leaders in Tehran last March in an unprecedented attempt to sabotage negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program. Using both historical and quantitative analysis, this project seeks to understand this connection and offer relevant policy implications for current and future negotiations.

We know from such recent events as well as historical studies that commanders-in-chief regularly take public opinion and electoral politics into consideration when making decisions about international affairs, including treaty negotiations. Presidents face at least three competing demands when negotiating agreements with other states:

1. The need to satisfy the voters and maintain popular support for the president and/or his party.
2. The need to ensure ratification by the legislative branch, which may or may not be of the president’s party.
3. The need to protect the national interest and ensure state security.

It is clear that many times, conflicts arise between these three demands, and presidents are forced to make tradeoffs in the process of negotiating agreements. During election seasons, those tensions tend to have a predictable effect: U.S. leaders are rewarded for appearing “tough” and “strong” on issues of national security. Voters are more likely to favor candidates who prioritize U.S. interests above cooperation and who assert their abilities to increase security without making concessions. This results in considerably more hawkish rhetoric during election seasons by presidential candidates as they vie for electoral support, even when the candidate is the incumbent.² Scholarship suggests that this may result in a host of perverse incentives leading up to an election as rally effects can increase approval ratings significantly, from simple policy manipulation to diversionary war.³ Leaders then may be punished at the polls for making concessions, particularly in the months immediately before an election when they are less able to shape public opinion.⁴ Further, Congress may also be less likely to ratify a treaty as Senators run for reelection and must also appear more hawkish than their true preferences, forcing the United States to either negotiate differently or walk away from deals that would have required visible short-term concessions, even at the expense of security assurances that would protect U.S. interests in the long-term.

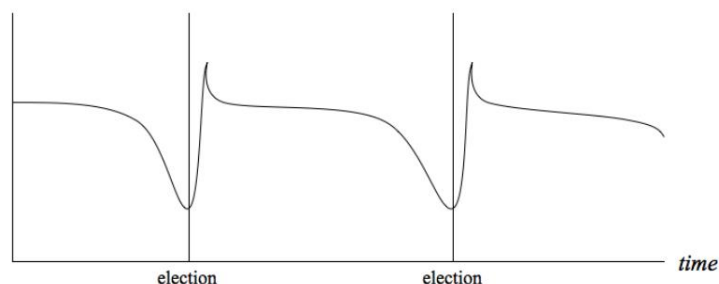
² Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies,” *World Politics* 43:4 (1991): 479-512. Matthew Baum, “Going Private: Public Opinion, Presidential Rhetoric, and the Domestic Politics of Audience Costs in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48:5 (2004): 603-31.

³ For a thorough review of this literature, see Bruce Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1991. Chapter 2: “Bashing the Foreigners”

⁴ John Zaller. “Elite Leadership of Public Opinion” in *Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, edited by W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1994. See also Zaller, “Floating Voters in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1948-2000” UCLA Working Paper.

Given the theoretical hypotheses and historical cases described above, I can then generate a *preliminary* set of expectations around treaty negotiations that vary temporally with election cycles and is based upon a logic of electoral politics. Because presidents are more likely to be punished for concessions made during arms control negotiations in the immediate lead up to an election, I expect fewer treaties to be signed during election years due to concerns over reelection and public opinion. Naturally, a closer evaluation of public attitudes is necessary through a deeper probe into the specific political contexts that exist: this kind of evaluation can only be done through historical case study.

Figure 1: Expected Treaty Negotiation over Time



Research Design

The logic of electoral politics therefore leads to the tentative hypothesis that we should observe markedly different behavior by elected leaders in the run-up to an election. However, depending on the specific context and factors at work, the shape of this effect might differ substantially. This project will develop a theoretical framework to better understand when the institutions peculiar to the United States will help and/or hinder the process and timing of treaty negotiations. Given a set of assumptions about actor rationality, voter behavior, and relative benefits of security cooperation, I will then assess the potential for a general model that would predict actors' behavior in the months leading up to an election, and test whether this hypothesis is valid.

The predominant method of research in this project will be through a series of historical case studies that will both illuminate the mechanisms at play as well as test the general trends that we expect to observe from a theory of electoral politics, and thus provide the factors to allow the construction of a comparative framework. In particular, I plan to do a reevaluation of the political influences on the following treaties signed over the last four decades:

Table 1: Historical Treaties in Perspective

Treaty	Signed	Ratified
Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I	May 1972	August 1972
Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II	June 1979	Never Ratified
Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I	July 1991	October 1992
Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) II	January 1993	Never Ratified
Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) III	Never Signed	Never Ratified
New START	April 2010	December 2010

There exists considerable variation amongst the six cases listed above in terms of how successful the parties were in coming to an agreement as well as ratification by the U.S. Senate. By introducing this variation on both of the dependent variables, I will be able to explain why some agreements were finalized and signed while others abandoned, as well as understand the causes of (non)ratification. I plan to evaluate these treaties through both archival research on declassified materials, use of the secondary literature, and finally through interviews with parties involved in the more recent negotiations.

Target Audience and Expected Contribution

Over the course of the fellowship, I intend to produce work for publication in academic journals that evaluate the treaties above side-by-side. However, in addition to theoretical work, I plan to develop a series of “lessons learned,” where leaders were able to overcome domestic political pressure in order to enhance their bargaining position. Further, by outlining the specific domestic pressures and incentives that impact arms control agreements, I can deduce potential strategies for U.S. policy-makers that may mitigate those impacts in the midst of important negotiations. In sum, my research will bridge the gap between academic theory and policy, applying sophisticated qualitative and quantitative methods to historical and modern-day issues. Understanding how and why states negotiate over their nuclear programs has direct relevance to how the United States conducts talks with other states, and as arms control re-emerges as a critical issue in an increasingly multi-polar world, understanding the role of public opinion and electoral politics is crucial to scholarship on deterrence and strategy.

3. Amy Nelson, CFR

Improving the Efficacy of Arms Control: A Project for 21st Century Security

Research Objective

The goals negotiators set for or pursue during negotiations can affect whether an agreement is reached and the resulting agreement durable. While policy practitioners make and execute guidance for arms control negotiations all the time, they often do so absent comprehensive information about what goals have proven successful in the past. Moreover, they do not account for the impact of missing information on the process of setting these goals. This project provides an empirical basis for goal-setting in the realm of arms control by using a unique dataset that reveals: 1) what kinds of goals for treaty terms have proven successful under which conditions; 2) the ways in which missing information affects the process of goal-setting; and 3) the kinds of treaty terms that produce robust, durable agreements capable of managing uncertainty in the long run. I offer policy recommendations—best practices for arms control—based on these findings.

Project Overview and Preliminary Findings

The international community relies heavily on the long-term stability provided by existing arms control agreements. Arms control regimes have also historically been the single best method for obtaining transparency about the arsenals of states. Given that diplomatic disarmament efforts will likely continue to serve as a significant tool for augmenting national security, it is surprising, first, that best practices for arms control that were relevant during the Cold War still inform thinking about the use of arms control today⁵, and, second, how little we know—empirically—about what makes arms control negotiations and agreements successful.

In order to engage in meaningful negotiations that produce agreements that lower uncertainty, increase security, and stand the test of time, we ought to rely on information from past negotiations to inform our best practices, or the goals we set for negotiating treaty terms. Factors like the scope and scale of limitations sought and the breadth of transparency measures pursued are critical determinants of negotiation and agreement success. Moreover, missing information—or uncertainty—systematically affects goal setting for arms control negotiations, which can in turn affect the ability to reach an agreement and the durability of the agreements that result. I have assembled a dataset that sheds light on the kinds of treaty terms we can expect to find in particular kinds of successfully negotiated agreements. The dataset reveals, for example, that most nuclear agreements are established with a finite duration and clauses for renewal or renegotiation, though conventional arms control agreements seldom have finite durations or expiration provisions. During my fellowship year, I plan to build upon these and other findings.

This project also explores how various preexisting arms control frameworks and negotiation strategies, as well as cognitive biases affect the process of setting goals for arms control negotiations, and how

⁵ See: Steven Pifer and Michael O'Hanlon's *The Opportunity* (2012), Brookings Institution Press.

these predilections and biases can be overcome. My research has revealed that decision-makers employ a number of strategies for setting goals for arms control. They frequently establish goals for negotiations based on prior agreements or what they think they can get from other negotiating parties. Neither strategy is a particularly rigorous one, nor does either rely on any kind of systematic analysis of data on what has been successful. Setting goals based on prior agreements actually results in agendas predicated on outdated security requirements and, thus, agreements that are not well suited to addressing post-Cold War security concerns. Further, although the majority of arms control negotiations once consisted of formal bilateral negotiations to produce legally binding agreements between nuclear superpowers, U.S.-Russian nuclear conflict is no longer the single most pressing security concern. The buildup of Iran's nuclear program and growing tensions between India and Pakistan pose greater threats today. Addressing the issue of how the U.S. can bring China to the negotiation table for three-party talks is also long overdue. This means that setting an agenda for a follow-on agreement to New START, for example, is perhaps neither the most efficient use of resources, nor the best way to lower uncertainty and increase security in the long run.

Not only do frameworks for arms control tend to be outdated, leaders are also subject to biases when they set goals for negotiations due to the high uncertainty conditions under which they operate. While the academic literature is full of discussion about the significant effects of missing information on the behavior of states and decision-makers, little work has been done to identify these effects for arms control negotiations. This, too, is surprising, given that arms control is all about missing information. President Reagan's experiences illustrate this point well. When Reagan entered office, he was neither overly interested in security matters nor was he a particular fan of disarmament. But after watching the film *The Day After*, which depicted a fictional nuclear war on U.S. soil, he became so frightened of nuclear weapons and their potential for destruction, that he arrived in Reykjavik in 1986 ready to eliminate them entirely. Reagan's reaction, it turns out, is rather common: leaders often set goals for arms control negotiations based on worst-case scenario (doomsday) thinking. When they do this, they tend to set goals consistent with the desire to eliminate potential losses by decreasing or eliminating weapons in their arsenals. While this constitutes a strategy for setting goals under uncertainty about what will happen in the future, I have found that these kinds of loss-elimination goals do not produce the optimal conditions for negotiations, nor do they result in the most durable arms control agreements.

Despite the intense speculation on the part of advisors and armchair arms control aficionados, there is no consensus on whether Reagan's was a good or bad idea—whether such an expansive goal doomed the negotiations from the outset by potentially forcing the U.S. and Soviet Union to tie their hands, or whether an agreement based on this proposal would have augmented security had it been successfully reached. The inability to ascribe a cause to the negotiation's failure is because, to date, there has been no analysis of the wealth of data generated by previous arms control negotiations and agreements already in existence. There is still a lot to be learned about how states have historically set goals for arms control, and the factors that affect that process.

My analysis, which draws on decision-theory, has revealed that Reagan's position was a response to high uncertainty about security in the future state of the world. My work also shows how narrowing the agenda of nuclear arms control negotiations (as Reagan did) actually lowers the likelihood of reaching an

agreement. Furthermore, nuclear arms control negotiations are most successful when proposed agreements are for a finite duration, commonly with an expiration date. With this provision, states do not tie their hands indefinitely. The total elimination of nuclear weapons would have been a permanent commitment. Moreover, the elimination of whole categories of nuclear weapons does not necessarily augment security, and it doesn't eliminate uncertainty about security in the long run. Broader agreements that extend beyond reductions tend to be more durable for this reason. Indeed, I have found that intrusive confidence- and security-building measures can increase transparency in a way that is conducive to the effective management of uncertainty over time, which makes states less likely to withdraw before the agreements expire.

Research Design and Expected Findings

By identifying the factors associated with successful outcomes across all types of arms control negotiations under a variety of conditions, I plan to provide a well-informed set of best practices for future arms control negotiations. My book project explores these questions: What factors tend to make arms control negotiations successful? And what makes the resulting agreements good one, which is to say capable of lowering uncertainty and increasing security in the long run? How can these successes be measured? In the consideration of these questions, I examine how individual and systematic biases affect the process of goal-setting, and discuss what policy practitioners can do to overcome them to set goals for arms control by pursuing effective treaty terms. I also plan to show how the data illuminate trends in arms control over time and anticipate proposing a shift in the frameworks employed in these processes based on the data collected.

This project uses on my dataset that includes over 40 nuclear, conventional, biological and chemical weapons arms control negotiations and agreements from 1945 to 2010 to provide empirical justification for negotiation agenda-setting setting and inform best practices for arms control that can augment security in a constantly changing environment. I also employ case studies of successful and unsuccessful nuclear and conventional arms control negotiations and agreements, including that first Strategic Arms Limitations Talks and the Reykjavik Summit, to evaluate the processes states use when setting goals for arms control under varying conditions of uncertainty. This project serves to broaden the scope of existing analysis by factoring in the effect of missing information on the negotiation of arms control agreements and considering the ability of agreements to manage uncertainty in the long run.

Target Audience and Contribution to the Policy Process

Arms control continues to play a vital role in the security of states. While some may think of the heyday of arms control as having passed, the international community today relies on the stability, transparency and security arms control regimes provide. Until now, it has been impossible to answer with confidence the question of what makes arms control negotiations and agreements successful. In addition, the project bridges the gap between the academic literature on the effect of missing information on state and human behavior and the conditions of missing information that pervade arms control negotiations. The project's findings are relevant both to scholars and practitioners of foreign policy. This new data-driven approach is intended to facilitate policy recommendations that are consistent with emerging

security needs as well as political constraints. It is my hope that scholars will find the dataset a helpful source of information for asking and answering related questions.

4. Elizabeth Saunders, CFR

The Domestic Politics of Nuclear Security

Objective

This project aims to develop a theory of when and how domestic politics matter for nuclear security. The project investigates how domestic political factors—particularly constraints generated by elites, including legislators, military leaders, and high-ranking bureaucratic officials—influence nuclear policy in established nuclear powers, focusing on democracies and on the United States in particular. Domestic politics are often downplayed in scholarship on nuclear security, yet domestic factors have shaped decisions that affect not only U.S. nuclear forces but also U.S. nuclear agreements with other countries.

Overview

The 2010 debate over ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the recent Congressional maneuvering on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran have brought nuclear weapons back to the forefront of U.S. domestic politics. Yet even in the post–Cold War era, domestic political factors—especially at the level of elite politics—have remained crucial to decisions about nuclear security. This project will investigate the domestic politics of nuclear policy in established nuclear powers. It will identify the conditions under which domestic politics are most likely to affect nuclear policy, including arms control, countering proliferation, and the maintenance and posture of nuclear forces, with a focus on domestic politics within democracies. Recently, there has been a surge of scholarly interest in domestic factors shaping nuclear policies in authoritarian regimes and in developing countries contemplating proliferation.⁶ There remains relatively little recent work, however, that examines the domestic politics of nuclear policy in democracies, including the United States.⁷ Yet democracies remain central to international nuclear developments given the number of nuclear weapons that democratic countries currently possess, the global impact of U.S. nuclear strategies and policies, and the leading role of democracies in combating nuclear proliferation.

The project will consist of several papers exploring domestic politics and nuclear security. The first will address the partisan dynamics of arms control agreements.⁸ In 2010, President Barack Obama—who initially made nuclear disarmament a central feature of his foreign policy—agreed to fund a major modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The *New York Times* called the modernization program a “Faustian bargain” that Obama had to strike in order to win ratification of the New START treaty.⁹ But

⁶ See, for example, Christopher Way and Jessica L.P. Weeks, “Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 2014); Jacques E.C. Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷ There are, of course, some recent exceptions; see, for example, Rachel E. Whitlark, “All Options on the Table? Nuclear Proliferation, Preventive War, and a Leader’s Decision to Intervene” (Ph.D. Dissertation, George Washington University, 2014).

⁸ This paper is co-authored with Sarah Kreps, former Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

⁹ “Throwing Money at Nukes,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2013. See also “Backsliding on Nuclear Promises,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2014.

would a Republican president have had to make such a bargain? Indeed, when Ronald Reagan concluded the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty during the tense moments of the late Cold War, no such offsetting investment occurred. Does it take a Nixon to go to China when it comes to arms control?

The paper posits that domestic politics will have different effects on leaders depending on their reputations or party affiliations.¹⁰ Leaders with reputations for hawkishness will face fewer domestic constraints than those with more dovish reputations. But contrary to the “Nixon-to-China” thesis, dovish leaders can make nuclear deals—they must simply pay a higher domestic political price to do so. Indeed, in the U.S. case, both Democratic and Republican presidents have been able to conclude arms control agreements and make substantial reductions to the nuclear arsenal. But arsenal size and ratified agreements tell only a partial story and obscure the domestic bargains and negotiations that play out behind the scenes. The working hypothesis is thus that Democratic presidents make larger side payments at the domestic level than Republican presidents. These side payments may include augmentations to the nuclear arsenal—as the modernization program illustrates—or additions to the defense posture more broadly. These domestic-level bargains are important for understanding the role of domestic politics in arms control and the effect of arms control agreements on a state’s overall force structure.

In the longer term, the project aims to develop a theoretical framework to understand how domestic politics shape nuclear security, identifying the conditions under which nuclear issues are likely to become politicized, when public opinion matters (and when it remains in the background), and how elite bargaining affects nuclear issues.

Research Design and Expected Final Product

A significant question concerns the level at which we should analyze domestic politics in democracies. Much of the existing research on the domestic politics of national security (including some research on nuclear policy) has placed voters front and center.¹¹ Yet voters often know little about foreign policy, and tend to take their cues on foreign policy from elites. Nuclear policy often involves nuance that the public is likely to delegate to those inside the Beltway. In the case of the New START treaty, a Pew survey in December 2010, just before the ratification vote, found that a majority of Americans

¹⁰ This argument follows much recent research that finds that Democratic and Republican presidents face different political incentives. Most of this research has focused on the use of military force or making peace with longstanding adversaries: see, for example, Kenneth A. Schultz, “The Politics of Risking Peace: Do Hawks or Doves Deliver the Olive Branch?” *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Winter 2005); Robert F. Trager and Lynn Vavreck, “The Political Costs of Crisis Bargaining: Presidential Rhetoric and the Role of Party,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July 2011). To my knowledge, these asymmetric partisan dynamics have not been applied to nuclear issues.

¹¹ See, for example, Daryl G. Press, Scott D. Sagan, and Benjamin A. Valentino, “Atomic Aversion: Experimental Evidence on Taboos, Traditions, and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (February 2013).

supported the agreement. Yet only 16 percent said they had heard “a lot” about the treaty (52 percent reported that they had heard “a little” and 31 percent that they had heard “nothing at all”).¹²

My research design thus starts from the assumption that nuclear politics are largely the domain of elites. I will explore how presidents build coalitions for nuclear policy in ways that pull policy in surprising directions. This bargaining process includes not only members of the opposition, but also those who would normally be expected to be inside the president’s coalition, given that many of the fault lines in nuclear debates occur within parties or even within administrations.

If leaders act strategically when crafting nuclear bargains, then a useful approach is to trace this strategic behavior in case studies.¹³ My research methods will thus be primarily qualitative and will draw on the large body of published primary sources (including the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series), archival research, and interviews for more recent cases.

A significant challenge in studying bargains and side payments is making a counterfactual comparison. We cannot know what political price a president of the opposite party would have had to pay to achieve a given arms control deal. As an alternative strategy, I plan to trace similar arms control agreements over time (for example, the debates over the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) across successive administrations), although this approach encounters similar pitfalls. How do we compare the magnitude of a “payment” such as the modernization program to which Obama agreed, for example, to a weapons system that another president had to promise in a different case? The historical research and interviews will thus concentrate on painting an overall picture of how hard presidents from different parties had to work in terms of domestic politics when making nuclear agreements. To test the alternative explanation that the international environment drives the need for a side payment (perhaps because nuclear policy was more salient during the Cold War), the paper will include a brief comparison of at least one case from the Cold War and one from the post-Cold War, under presidents from the same party.

Target Audience and Contribution to the Policy Process

I anticipate that this project will culminate in at least one, and likely two or more, papers that will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals. I also plan to write shorter pieces for policy-oriented outlets.

A better understanding of how democracies make nuclear policy in the shadow of domestic politics has significant policy implications. Identifying domestic political constraints on U.S. nuclear policy will be important for understanding the trajectory of U.S.-Iranian interactions, as well as potential U.S.-China nuclear competition. Indeed, during the recent U.S.-Iran negotiations, several commentators noted that both countries faced similar domestic political constraints. That nuclear politics are elite politics even in a democracy like the United States suggests we should not be surprised that these domestic constraints have some similar features despite the obvious differences in the two countries’ domestic institutions. Furthermore, the bargaining that resulted in the nuclear infrastructure modernization program in return for the ratification of the New START treaty suggests that the nature of the American nuclear arsenal

¹² “Public’s Views on Lame-Duck Issues,” Pew Research Center, December 7, 2010, p. 7.

¹³ Kenneth Schultz has made this argument in the context of research on crisis bargaining. See Kenneth A. Schultz, “Looking for Audience Costs,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (February 2001).

itself is in part the product of domestic elite politics that vary across administrations. As debates about the appropriate size, posture, and maintenance of the U.S. arsenal proceed, it will be critical to understand how domestic political forces shape the very weapons available to the United States to make nuclear policy at the international level. Given the ongoing challenge of the Iranian nuclear program, as well as continuing debate about military priorities in a time of austerity, it is a particularly important and opportune time to study the domestic sources of U.S. nuclear policy.