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Trends. The Nature of Security Agreements: An Example from the Nuclear Weapons Arena

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Significant controversy continues about United State Government (USG) policy towards offensive and defensive nuclear weapons capabilities. One often overlooked part of the controversy is the very nature of security agreements--such agreements being an important component of the various correlations of military might, political power, and context in which political conflict is played out.

One school of thought is that the content of formal security agreements that are signed and ratified dictate the present and future. If stated in the agreement, proliferation will not occur, limitations and reductions will be respected, and ballistic missile defenses will only be used in certain scenarios.

Another school of thought is that informal agreements better dictate the present and future. The informality of these agreements allegedly allows for quicker modifications or quicker resolutions to avoid modifications as deemed necessary by all relevant parties.

Yet another school of agreement is that neither formal nor informal agreements are in the interest of security. Such agreements needlessly constrain action, are too slow to contend with changes in the security environment, are too easily exploited for propaganda purposes, and can never be adequately verified.

Still another school of thought is that formal and/or informal agreements may foster security--but only in areas tangential or unrelated to the agreements' contents. In this sense, it is the symbol and sign properties of agreements that are crucial to benign security consequences.

So, the current controversy towards USG security-related policy may be viewed as significantly founded on various belief systems about agreements. These belief systems, in turn, are founded on cognitive heuristics and psychodynamic stances that rarely become explicit in planning and negotiation. Is it any wonder that policy supporters and opponents--intranational, international, a-national, transnational, and supranational--so often talk around, above, below, and through each other? Is it any wonder that nuclear weapons policies so often seem based on projections of the sacred, secular, and the profane? (See Dao, J. (May 9, 2001). Rumsfeld plan skirts call for stationing arms in space. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Hart, S. (1987). Christian faith and nuclear weapons: Rank-and-file opinions. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26, 38-62; Mack, J.E. (1986). Nuclear weapons and the dark side of humankind. *Political Psychology*, 7, 223-233; Nelson, L., & Beardsley, G. L. (1987). Toward an interdisciplinary model of barriers to nuclear arms control. *Social Science Journal*, 24, 375-388; Steiner, P.P. (1989). In collusion with the nation: A case study of group dynamics at a strategic nuclear policymaking meeting. *Political Psychology*, 10, 647-673.) (Keywords: Nuclear Weapons, Security Agreements.)