Nuclear Nonproliferation within the Context of U.S. Alliances – Protection, Status, and the Psychology of West Germany’s Nuclear Reversal

Jonas Schneider
Junior Researcher & Lecturer/ PhD Candidate
Department of Political Science
University of Kiel, Germany
jschneider@politik.uni-kiel.de

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ABSTRACT

The majority of pundits and scholars working on nuclear proliferation assert that the protection provided by an alliance with the United States constitutes an effective instrument to make allies abandon existing nuclear weapons activities. However, previous studies have failed to explain why in those US-allied nations where the government decided to give up all nuclear weapons activities, typically some leaders steadfastly refused to support this course of action. This paper undertakes an in-depth case study of West Germany, examining why some of its political leaders in the early 1970s decided to abandon their nation’s nuclear weapons activities, while other German politicians consistently rejected this course reversal. I explain the different propensities among German leaders to commit to a non-nuclear posture by testing a set of hypotheses derived from IR and social psychology. Results demonstrate that although military protection through NATO was important, what did finally make some German leaders give up all nuclear weapons activities, and others resist, were two variables that reflect the psychological forces at work within U.S. alliances: first, the concerted social, as opposed to material, pressure from NATO allies; and second, German leaders’ individual intuitive conception of how high their nation ranks vis-à-vis its American protector.
Introduction

The vast majority of politicians, pundits, and academic scholars working on nuclear proliferation assert that the protection provided by an alliance with the United States constitutes a particularly effective instrument to make U.S. allies abandon their existing nuclear weapons activities. Entertaining an alliance relationship with the United States, or so the argument goes, implies a “nuclear umbrella” for American allies, as the superior U.S. military capabilities in general, and its nuclear arsenal in particular, deter attacks not only against the American homeland, but also against the territory of Washington’s alliance partners. For American allies, this mechanism of extended deterrence works—implicitly or explicitly—as a security guarantee, which in turn obviates their need for an indigenous nuclear defense capability. According to this narrative, the nonproliferation-related effectiveness of U.S. alliances has—despite the political and scholarly debates over the reliability of American security guarantees—been proven quite spectacularly throughout the nuclear age: Under the shelter of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, the political leaders of numerous severely threatened U.S. allies (e.g. West Germany, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Italy, Norway, and Canada) consented to the abandonment of their nations’ existing nuclear weapons activities—a behavior that the literature calls “nuclear reversal.”

1 The research for this paper was made possible by generous funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Foundation Science and Democracy, and the Michael Freund Foundation for Political Research. I would also like to thank Mario Carranza, Audrey Faber, Sven-Erik Fikenscher, Joachim Krause, Andreas Lutsch, Oliver Meier, Christian Patz, Bernd Simon, and Reinhard Wolf for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
3 Conversely, a weakening or abrogation of major U.S. alliances is feared as potentially leading these partners to reconsider their nuclear choices, thereby raising the specter of a re-nuclearization of externally threatened U.S.
However, neither pundits nor scholars have been able to explain why in those U.S.-allied nations where the government decided to give up all nuclear weapons activities, typically some political leaders steadfastly refused to support this course of action. That is, the above-mentioned assurance-based explanation of nuclear reversal of U.S. allies can account for the *proliferation behavior* of the respective *states*, yet not—or at least not sufficiently—for the *attitudes of political leaders* in these states toward their nation’s nuclear reversal. To be sure, this within-case variation in political leaders’ attitudes does not imply that the assurance effect of American alliances had no role in convincing the foreign policy elites of U.S. allies to give up their nation’s nuclear weapons activities. Case study research has demonstrated beyond doubt that it did play a role.\(^4\) What the within-case variation in political leaders’ attitudes shows, however, is that the protection provided by an alliance with the United States is not sufficient for obtaining the agreement of the leaders of U.S.-allied nations to a nuclear reversal. In other words, if we are to understand why the political leaders of U.S. allies approved the abandonment of their nation’s nuclear weapons activities, we need to go beyond the assurance effect of U.S. alliances and consider additional variables. Over the last fifteen years, proliferation experts have repeatedly alluded to this urgent task for scholars of nuclear reversals:

> “Although there is substantial merit in alliance-based arguments [of nuclear restraint], they need to be further specified and made conditional if their validity is to be established beyond doubt.”\(^5\)

(T.V. Paul)

> “[Recent works on nuclear weapons acquisition and renunciation] suggest the need to examine more closely a number of often asserted but infrequently tested causal relationships involving the impact of alliances on nuclear weapons restraint.”\(^6\)

(William C. Potter & Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova)

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“[W]hat is clear, however, is that the causal relationship [between alliance protection and nuclear reversal] is not as straightforward as often suggested. Alliance alone is not a sufficient condition; and additional reinforcing factors are needed […].”
(Harald Müller & Andreas Schmidt)

The paper offers a first step toward this longed-for advancement of assurance-based explanations of nuclear reversal. Focusing on the example of the nuclear reversal of West Germany in the early 1970s, the paper examines the following question: Why have some political leaders in Bonn consented to the abandonment of their nation’s nuclear weapons activities, while other West German leaders have consistently rejected this course reversal?

Although there are other cases of U.S. allies where not all political leaders supported the government’s policy of giving up all nuclear weapons activities, studying West Germany’s nuclear reversal is particularly important for advancing assurance-based explanations of nuclear reversal. This is because until the early 1960s, foreign experts on nuclear proliferation had considered it highly unlikely and quite extraordinary that the young Federal Republic—a technologically capable, fast-rising regional power which had a tradition as a great power and was facing a severe security threat from Soviet troops stationed right behind the “Iron Curtain”—would commit itself to a non-nuclear security posture. As a result of these earlier expectations, later proponents of assurance-based accounts of nuclear reversal have typically referred to the West German example as major supporting evidence for their argument: If even West German political leaders, in this “least-likely” case of nuclear reversal, were able to give up all nuclear weapons activities, or so the argument goes, then the effect of U.S. alliances on allies’ nuclear restraint is beyond any reasonable doubt. Thanks to this role of West Germany’s nuclear reversal as a prime example, studying the German case offers particularly valuable insights for advancing assurance-based explanations of nuclear reversal.

Existing accounts of why West German political leaders agreed to abandon all nuclear weapons activities and committed to a non-nuclear posture have complemented the assurance effect of U.S. protection with one of the following explanatory variables: (1) a coercive threat

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of U.S. materialist pressure on Bonn,\(^{11}\) (2) increased NATO integration (namely the creation of NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group) as the “solution” to West German doubts about U.S. reliability,\(^{12}\) (3) growing social pressure on Bonn from its NATO allies to permanently renounce nuclear weapons,\(^{13}\) or (4) anti-nuclear sentiment among a new generation of West German political leaders and the public at large.\(^{14}\) However, from among these accounts, I find evidence only for the impact of the mounting social pressure on Germany within NATO to commit to a non-nuclear posture. Yet, even this explanation for West Germany’s nuclear reversal is obviously insufficient since it fails to account for why only some—but not all—political leaders in Bonn responded to this social pressure from their allies and thus consented to give up all nuclear weapons activities.

I explain the different propensities among West German leaders to agree to their nation’s nuclear reversal with the interaction of two variables that draw on insights from social and cognitive psychology, respectively: first, the concerted social pressure of Bonn’s allies to permanently renounce nuclear weapons, which left German elites isolated within NATO, and second, German leaders’ individual intuitive conception of how high their nation ranks vis-à-vis its American protector—a status belief that promoted different risk propensities under this condition of social isolation. In a nutshell, I argue that German leaders’ individual conception of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States determined whether they could stand the risk of confronting their crucial U.S. ally over the nuclear reversal without any support from other NATO countries. I find that those leaders who conceived of Germany as a divided and weak country that was little more than a second-class power if compared to the United States resisted U.S. demands that Germany give up all nuclear weapons activities only as long as Bonn’s stance enjoyed at least some political backing from other European NATO states. Once this support was gone, these elites considered the ensuing isolation of Germany in its nuclear reversal dispute with Washington as unacceptably risky and dangerous and, as a result, decided to back down: The fear of West Germany ending up as the lone dissenter against a legitimate


authority (i.e. the higher-ranked U.S. protector) had changed these leaders’ attitude—a typical reaction which social psychologists have studied extensively as “obedience to authority.”

In contrast, those leaders who envisioned Germany as an important European (great) power that despite its narrow power base enjoyed, just like France, a status on par with the United States, did not bend to U.S. demands for a nuclear reversal even after becoming completely isolated within NATO. As in their worldview there was no legitimate authority above major powers like Germany (i.e. no higher-ranked U.S. protector), Bonn would just not obey orders from Washington without resistance as if it were a subordinate entity, and least of all if these orders infringed on Germany’s sovereign right to possess the weapons it needed to defend itself. Thus, when Bonn was asked to obey just such an order from the United States and permanently renounce nuclear weapons, these German leaders considered the U.S. request as disrespectful overreaching. As a result, they were willing to take the risk of standing up to their crucial U.S. ally even if this meant being the lone dissenter, since in their defiant view, major powers like Germany needed no “applause” for their policies from other nations. Confronted with an order from an illegitimate authority (i.e. a merely equal-ranked U.S. ally), these German elites refused to back down easily and, hence, rejected the nuclear reversal.

Interestingly, statements behind closed doors reveal that these disobedient German leaders knew perfectly well that they would have to acquiesce into West Germany’s nuclear reversal if—a big if—Washington would take the gloves off and actually exert material pressure on Bonn to comply. However, they were willing to confront the U.S. government in a contest of will, sensing that U.S. leaders would not go so far as to punish a critically important ally “only” to get it to permanently renounce nuclear weapons.

To explain the divergent risk-propensity among the two groups of West German political leaders, I draw on the mediating role of emotions in human judgment and decision making. I argue that an individual leader’s conception of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States determined whether the U.S. demand to give up all nuclear weapons activities made these German leaders feel either sad or angry. As the emotions of sadness and anger are well-known to generate risk-averse and risk-prone behavior, respectively, this emotional response affected if German leaders would choose the risky path of confronting their crucial U.S. ally over the nuclear reversal without enjoying any diplomatic backing from other NATO partners.

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16 References on the effect of anger and sadness on risk-taking are provided in the next section of this paper.
To sum up this part of the argument, for those German elites that finally agreed to the nation’s nuclear reversal, the combination of concerted social pressure from NATO allies and a status conception that ranked Germany as inferior to the United States was a prerequisite for their consent to ending all nuclear weapons activities. As this combination of variables was absent for the remaining German leaders—they faced the same social pressure, but lacked the inferior status conception vis-à-vis the United States—these political leaders consistently rejected a nuclear reversal. To obtain the approval of these defiant German leaders to a nuclear reversal, their conception of an equal status of Germany vis-à-vis the United States would have had to be combined with material U.S. pressure on Bonn—which did not happen.

However, while the interaction of concerted social pressure with an inferior national status conception should be considered a necessary condition for why the majority of West German leaders approved the nuclear reversal, this combination must not be regarded as a sufficient condition for this outcome to occur. A sufficient explanation for the approval of the nuclear reversal needs to add three additional variables that reflected the foundation on which Washington’s influence over its West German allies ultimately rested. To put it simple, that the United States as a higher-ranked authority was able to generate obedience on the part of German leaders was only possible because the latter viewed Germany and the United States as members of the same group—call it “the Atlantic community,” or “the NATO family”—to which they attached great importance: Only actors with whom we share at least one such identity, and whose opinion and interests we therefore hold in high regard, make us defer to their authority voluntarily. A common identity includes shared beliefs and values, and it finds expression in social organization and perceived self-interests. In the case of Bonn’s nuclear reversal, three such expressions were essential to maintain the West German view of a shared U.S.-German identity and, thus, Washington’s influence as an authority: first, the belief that preventing the West German industrial potential from falling into Soviet hands was in the security self-interest of the United States; second, the formalization of the alliance as a reflection of its durability and purpose; and third, the belief that obstructing Germany’s economic development was not in the U.S. interest. In U.S.-German exchanges over the nuclear reversal, these expressions of their shared identity were translated into minimum requirements that had to be fulfilled if leaders in Bonn were to open themselves to the demands of the Unit-


ed States as a higher-ranked authority: first, a guarantee that the nuclear reversal would not negatively impact the West German economy; second, preservation of the treaty-based nature of the U.S.-German alliance; and third, the high value of West Germany’s freedom for Washington’s sense of security (i.e. West Germany’s high “intrinsic” importance to the United States). These three variables in conjunction with the above-mentioned combination of social pressure and an inferior status conception vis-à-vis the United States produced a sufficient condition for the consent of the majority of German leaders to their nation’s nuclear reversal.

Moreover, I argue that these same three variables would even have had to be present if the above-mentioned counterfactual combination of the view of an equal German status vis-à-vis the United States and material U.S. pressure were to make the disobedient German leaders agree to the nuclear reversal. Because from an identity perspective, absent the three conditions that reflected the essentials of the shared U.S-German identity, their approval of the nuclear reversal would result in an alliance no longer worth its name in addition to the defeat in the reversal dispute. In contrast, though rejecting the nuclear reversal could trigger painful material U.S pressure and might thus as well cripple the alliance, such a defiant line would at least avoid the public defeat in the struggle over the reversal—and would therefore be preferred by these status-conscious German leaders (as long as the three conditions reflecting the shared identity are not fulfilled). Figure 1 illustrates the two combinations of causal sufficiency.

*Figure 1: Two combinations that are sufficient for the approval of West Germany’s nuclear reversal*

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My status-based explanation of Germany’s nuclear reversal is inspired by, yet distinct from Jacques Hymans’ psychological theory of nuclear proliferation.19 To be sure, Hymans’ key explanatory variable—the national identity conception (NIC) of a nation’s political leader—closely resembles my focus on leaders’ status conception vis-à-vis the United States. For one key dimension of Hymans’ concept of an NIC concerns the leader’s view of his nation’s in-

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ternational status. Moreover, for the microfoundations of our arguments, we both rely on the role of emotions in human judgment and decision-making. However, there are three key differences between our theories: First, in the case of U.S. allies, the main external reference point to which, according to Hymans, leaders compare their nation in terms of status is most likely not the United States. Rather, their nation’s chief rival will occupy that role. (After all, this foe was probably the reason why the nation became a U.S. ally in the first place.) In contrast, my theory focuses exclusively on leaders’ views of their nation’s status vis-à-vis the United States. Second, Hymans draws on the emotions of fear and pride to account for nuclear choices, whereas I draw on anger and sadness to make sense of leaders’ attitudes. Finally, and crucially, the two theories aim at different phenomena. Hymans’ dependent variable is the final decision to manufacture a nuclear arsenal. In contrast, I explain leaders’ decision to terminate their nation’s last remaining nuclear weapons activity. Hence, on a spectrum of nuclear weapons activities short of the actual possession of the bomb, each of the two phenomena is located at one end. Accordingly, the two theories are complementary to one another.

The next section of this paper offers the theoretical underpinnings of my claim that differing individual conceptions of a nation’s status trigger specific emotional responses which lead to diverging levels of risk-propensity among political leaders. Following this, I define, specify, and discuss my dependent variable. Next I test my argument against the empirical evidence, using congruence tests and process tracing. I then evaluate alternative explanations for West Germany’s nuclear reversal. Finally, I discuss the implications of my results.

The Feeling of Nuclear Reversal: Inferior Status, Sadness, and Obedience to Authority

I assert that the different conceptions held by West German leaders of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States led to diverging levels of risk-propensity among these elites. But why is this supposed to happen? And how does this mechanism play out? Here, I draw on insights from neuroscience on the crucial role of emotions in human judgment and decision-making:

Simply put, when confronted with a decision problem, humans do not soberly calculate the advantages, disadvantages, and probabilities of all possible responses and subsequently choose the one option that maximizes their subjective expected utility as conventional wisdom (i.e. rational models of decision-making) presumes. Rather, when humans face a decision problem, the content of this problem automatically and instantaneously triggers an emotional

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response in their brain. And this emotional response strongly shapes the final choice by influencing which events (that are relevant to the choice) are recalled, how these recalled events are judged, and what conclusions are drawn from these experiences for the decision problem at hand. This process can result in a choice that perfectly matches with what rational models would have predicted. Depending on the specific emotional reaction, however, the final choice might also deviate considerably from rationalist expectations. In short, emotions act as intervening variables that exert a conditioning effect on judgment and decision-making.

Now, how does the issue of a nuclear reversal trigger specific emotions in the brains of German leaders, and which particular emotions does it produce? Drawing on cognitive psychology, I argue that when German leaders were being asked by U.S. diplomats to permanently renounce nuclear weapons, their mind responded with what Daniel Kahneman calls “substitution.” Substitution is a very common mechanism which the human mind employs to cope with a complex reality. It basically means “answering an easier question” in case that the original question one is confronted with is too complex to immediately come up with an answer. Importantly, substitution happens automatically and unconsciously. Humans are not aware of the fact that they answer a different (though related) question than they were asked, but believe they answer the original question. Coming back to Bonn, I posit that German leaders, when being requested by U.S. diplomats to agree to Germany’s nuclear reversal, substituted the complex question “Should West Germany permanently renounce nuclear weapons?” with the far easier one “Can the United States issue foreign policy orders toward Germany?” That German leaders very likely engaged in this specific substitution is suggested by experimental research indicating that when humans are being asked to evaluate the content of a request or proposal, they instead typically judge the process through which it was voiced.

I propose further that leaders in Bonn answered the easy process-related question “Can the United States issue foreign policy orders toward Germany?” by unconsciously drawing on their individual conception of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States. First, this claim is grounded in the fact that this specific bilateral status conception provides a clear-cut answer to the process-related question. Second, it is based on the assumption that the leaders of a U.S. ally have an intuitive idea of how high their nation ranks vis-à-vis this partner due to frequent

interactions. This assumption receives strong support from social identity theory.\textsuperscript{23} Third, the claim is supported by a plethora of cognitive psychological research suggesting that our mind privileges answers that are readily available—regardless of their validity.\textsuperscript{24} Hence, combining the process-related question with German leaders’ national status conceptions, I posit that leaders in Bonn who conceived of Germany as a nation with an inferior status compared to the United States responded affirmatively to the process-related question. In contrast, leaders who envisioned Germany as enjoying a status on par with the United States instinctively denied that Washington could issue foreign policy orders that Bonn would have to obey.

Next, I argue that the process of arriving at these positive or negative conclusions triggered specific corresponding emotional responses among the involved German leaders. From among the five basic emotions that neuroscientists distinguish (love, happiness, sadness, fear, and anger), two are particularly relevant for studying the unpleasant choice of whether or not to obey an order: sadness and anger.\textsuperscript{25} I propose that those German leaders who agreed that the United States could issue foreign policy orders toward Germany experienced sadness when reaching this conclusion. Since their status conception portrayed the United States as a higher-ranked and, therefore, legitimate authority, these elites considered disobeying U.S. orders not as a humiliating loss. Instead, for them obeying U.S. orders meant a loss that was inevitable given the prevailing status hierarchy. And psychological experiments have demonstrated that losing due to circumstances beyond one’s control induces sadness.\textsuperscript{26} In contrast, I posit that those German leaders who opposed the notion that Washington could issue orders toward Bonn experienced anger when arriving at this response. Since their worldview envisioned the United States merely as an equally-ranked and, thus, illegitimate authority, being confronted with a U.S. order meant that Germany was treated disrespectfully and not accorded the equal status that it deserved. And status dissatisfaction has been shown to strongly induce anger.\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{24} For a good overview, see Daniel Kahneman, “A Perspective on Judgment and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality,” \textit{American Psychologist}, Vol. 58, No. 9 (September 2003), pp. 697-702.


Then, in order to link these emotions with German elites’ different risk-propensities, I draw on the cognitive and behavioral effects of sadness and anger. The main effects of sadness on human judgment and decision-making are to instill moderate uncertainty about one’s own judgment, a strongly reduced sense of individual control over the situation, and openness toward careful processing of information and arguments, all of which leads to (at least moderately) risk-averse behavior. On the other hand, anger has been shown to induce a high degree of certainty in one’s own judgment, instill an overstated sense of individual control over the situation, and reduce scrutiny of arguments and demand for information, all of which promotes decidedly risk-prone behavior. Notably, though most of these results were derived from the individual emotional experiences of private persons, more recent research strongly supports my claim that emotions and their effects are felt in the same way by political leaders as a result of how their nation is treated—rather than they themselves—by another state.

Finally, I argue that these different risk-propensities were decisive when Germany became the lone dissenter within NATO against U.S. nonproliferation efforts. For being the lone dissenter is particularly risky, and experiments have shown this isolated situation to be the most effective factor for inducing obedience to a legitimate authority. Hence, I argue that German leaders who experienced sadness when asked to approve West Germany’s nuclear reversal could not stand the high risk of being the lone dissenter against their U.S. protector because their sadness made them risk-averse. Thus, they obeyed the U.S. order and agreed to the nuclear reversal. In contrast, those elites who experienced anger were able to take the risk of confronting Washington as a lone dissenter because their anger made them more risk accepting. As a consequence, they disobeyed the U.S. order and rejected the nuclear reversal.


The Dependent Variable

My dependent variable is the *individual attitudes of West German political leaders toward their nation’s nuclear reversal*. Before I discuss the variation in this variable in the West German case, I will explain how I define and specify my dependent variable.

My dependent variable includes three concepts that I need to define: (1) nuclear reversal, (2) political leader, and (3) attitude. First, I define nuclear reversal as the abandonment of a nation’s nuclear weapons activities. This definition focuses on observable behavior, as opposed to intentions, regarding nuclear weapons. Hence, a state’s nuclear reversal might go hand in hand with the abandonment of its (i.e. the government’s) nuclear weapons ambitions. However, this need not be the case. Ariel Levite’s often-cited definition of nuclear reversal captures this behavior-centric understanding of the concept quite nicely. According to Levite,

“Nuclear reversal refers to the phenomenon in which states embark on a path leading to nuclear weapons acquisition but subsequently reverse course, though not necessarily abandoning altogether their nuclear ambitions. [...] At the core of this definition is the distinction between states that have launched (indigenously or with external assistance) a nuclear weapons program and then abandoned it and those that never had such a program in the first place.”

Furthermore, for an abandonment of all nuclear weapons activities to count as a nuclear reversal, the nuclear weapons activities must have been authorized by the respective state’s political leadership. An explicit decision “to build the bomb” is not required, though. Consequently, this definition of nuclear reversal excludes the abandonment of nuclear weapons activities that had been conducted without authorization from the nation’s political leadership.

Now, what are the types of observable behavior which indicate that a state has embarked upon the path toward nuclear weapons and which therefore qualify as “nuclear weapons activities”? Borrowing from Harald Müller and Andreas Schmidt, I define a state that conducts nuclear weapons activities as a state whose behavior includes at least one activity from any of the following five categories:

1. “Ambiguous activities (nuclear facilities not under safeguards, no clear commitment to renounce nuclear weapons)
2. Serious consideration of [nuclear] weapons program (repeated statements by political or military leaders, studies on utility and feasibility of nuclear weapons acquisition)
3. [Nuclear] weapons program (construction of facilities, studies on weaponization, test)

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33 Ibid., p. 67.
(4) Nuclear weapon [state] status (actual possession of nuclear explosive devices)

(5) Inheritance (nuclear weapons on territory inherited from former empire or occupation forces)."

Importantly, according to this definition, merely operating dual-use facilities—even plants for enriching uranium to above reactor-grade level or reprocessing of plutonium from spent fuel rods—does not qualify as a nuclear weapons activity as long as these plants are covered by safeguards. Only unsafeguarded dual-use facilities are considered nuclear weapons activities. Furthermore, it bears emphasizing that even the termination of rather low-level, and thus less-disturbing, nuclear weapons activities—i.e. actions listed under the categories of “ambiguous activities” and “serious consideration of a nuclear weapons program”—perfectly qualifies as nuclear reversal (provided no other weapons activities are continued). Thus, it is misleading to conceive of nuclear reversal as the mirror image of the decision to build the bomb. Rather, the two phenomena are located at different points on the spectrum of nuclear weapons activities.

Second, who qualifies as a political leader? In the context of this paper, I define a political leader as a person who, because of his role as a member of the parliament or the government of his nation, exerts a major influence on the political decision over the nation’s nuclear reversal. This definition includes cabinet members, officials at the state secretary and head of department level of the relevant ministries, but also the chairmen as well as the foreign policy and defense experts of the parliamentary groups of political parties. The definition excludes opinion makers from the media sector, think tanks and the academic world.

Third, what is my definition of a political leader’s attitude? I define a leader’s attitude as his personal stance toward a specific policy issue. The attitude of a leader thus precedes not only the behavior of the state on the issue at hand, but also the pressures for consensus within his political party, parliamentary group or coalition government, each of which might lead the leader to modify his position. However, while my definition of a leader’s attitude excludes constraints from party and coalition politics, it includes all constraints from the international sphere: Simply put, a leader’s attitude is his answer to the question of “How would I decide if I were the only political voice in my country?” To gauge these attitudes, I draw on explicit statements in private letters, internal memos, and unedited minutes of closed meetings.

Finally, how do I specify my dependent variable? I have chosen a dichotomous specification. Thus, when I measure an individual political leader’s attitude toward his nation’s nuclear reversal, I distinguish only between “approval” and “non-approval”, or rejection, of

34 Müller and Schmidt, “The Little-Known Story of De-Proliferation,” p. 158.
the reversal. As far as my dependent variable is concerned, I therefore study only two types of political leaders: Type A covers those leaders who changed their attitudes toward their nation’s nuclear reversal from “non-approval” to “approval.” Type B comprises those elites whose attitude of “non-approval” of the nation’s nuclear reversal remained constant.35

Having defined and specified my dependent variable in general terms, what kind of nuclear weapons activity did the West German nuclear reversal stop? And which West German political leaders acted as Type-A leaders and which as Type-B leaders?

The West German nuclear reversal took place in 1974 and concerned the termination of nuclear weapons activities falling under the above-mentioned types of behavior of “no clear commitment to renounce nuclear weapons” (category 1 activity) and “repeated statements by political and military leaders” (category 2 activity) in favor of German control over nuclear weapons. Since I am only interested in why German leaders decided to give up their nation’s last nuclear weapons activity, and not in how all West German nuclear weapons activities evolved over time, I will confine the following analysis to the ten year or so period prior to Bonn’s nuclear reversal: After West Germany in 1954 had committed itself vis-à-vis its Western allies not to produce nuclear arms on its own territory, and after plans in 1957/58 to produce nuclear weapons together with France and Italy on French soil had been scrapped by newly-elected French President de Gaulle, Bonn’s nuclear weapons ambitions had turned to securing a share for Germany in the control over an integrated multilateral nuclear force within either NATO or the European Communities (EC).36 That is, West Germany aspired to become the co-owner of formerly American or French nuclear arms. These desires were more than hypothetical, though, as Washington in the early 1960s had put forward several proposals for such a multilateral nuclear force with German participation. Moreover, as late as 1964 all major political parties in Germany called for the creation of such a force with either the United States or France.37 However, when the White House dropped all multilateral nuclear ideas in late 1964 and Washington and Moscow in fall 1966 agreed on their first joint draft of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which required Bonn to permanently renounce even participation in multilateral nuclear forces, Bonn’s nuclear ambitions shifted toward a more passive agenda. This limited agenda aimed at preventing or at least modifying the NPT, so as

35 Beyond these two types, I am interested neither in elites who have never disapproved of the nuclear reversal nor in leaders whose attitude changed from approval to rejection of a nuclear reversal (and not the other way around). Both these attitude evolutions go beyond the research question I am tackling here.


37 Küntzel, Bonn und die Bombe, p. 77.
to keep open the option of future West German participation in a multilateral nuclear force. Hence, German leaders’ failure to undertake a clear commitment to renounce nuclear arms (category 1 activity) and the repeated statements of some German leaders that Bonn needed a share in the control over Western nuclear forces (category 2 activity) expressed themselves in political leaders’ refusal to approve of West German membership in the NPT. Notably, membership does not mean Bonn’s signing of the NPT, which took place in November 1969 but was not legally-binding. Rather, NPT membership refers to the binding ratification of the treaty by the Bundestag and the Bundesrat in February and March 1974, respectively. Furthermore, and even more important, it is only because NPT accession had the effect of putting an end to Germany’s last nuclear weapons activities that joining the NPT constituted the nuclear reversal in the West German case. If German leaders had ceased their pro-nuclear weapons statements earlier and clearly committed Bonn to the renunciation of nuclear arms before the NPT negotiations started, then West Germany’s nuclear reversal would have ensued earlier.

Against this historical background, my dichotomous dependent variable measures if an individual West German political leader gave his approval for West Germany’s accession to the NPT or if he refused to endorse this treaty commitment. Some might argue that defending the mere option of a future share in a multilateral nuclear force should not be considered a nuclear weapons activity and that, therefore, the date of West Germany’s nuclear reversal should be set in 1958, when actual plans for joint manufacture of nuclear weapons with Italy and France died. I disagree, though, because seeking participation in a multilateral nuclear force clearly violates the NPT and would thus today be unanimously regarded as pursuit of nuclear weapons. Besides, “merely” closing the option of future German participation in a multilateral nuclear force in fact meant a lot to all involved actors at the time: Moscow was singularly fixated on West German accession to the NPT, the United States pushed through some 25 changes to the text of the NPT only to make it more agreeable to Bonn, most other European countries also had strong feelings in favor of Germany joining the treaty, and at least some German leaders were ready to take high risks to keep the nuclear option open.

38 Hoppe, Zwischen Teilhabe und Mitsprache, pp. 329-332.
39 West Germany’s formal accession to the NPT was undertaken concurrently with the other non-nuclear EC states, which delayed this step until May 1975.
As regards which German elites finally came out in favor of West German NPT membership, and which leaders refused to support this course until the end, it is useful to distinguish between three groups of elites. For the sake of simplicity I will label these three groups NPT supporters, NPT critics, and NPT opponents. As for the supporters of the NPT, it is important to note that even these leaders were not at all enthusiastic about the NPT and Germany’s accession to the treaty. Yet within West Germany these political leaders had arguably the smallest concerns with joining the NPT, not the least because they had never been passionate supporters of the multilateral force idea in the early 1960s. Nonetheless, the NPT supporters’ unreserved approval of German NPT membership came about only in April 1973. All of these elites were either members or affiliates of the Social Democrats (SPD) or the Free Democrats (FDP), and Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr, and Walter Scheel acted as the leading voices. Table 1 lists some representatives of all three groups as well as their positions at the time.

Members of the second group, whom I label NPT critics, objected to the treaty on several grounds, and these political leaders made serious efforts to avoid West German accession to the NPT by playing for time during the treaty negotiations while hoping that the entire NPT project would unravel. However, these leaders made clear that they would acquiesce into joining the NPT if certain improvements in the text of the treaty were achieved and if a particular international climate were to evolve. They finally agreed to West Germany’s NPT membership in September 1973. This group encompassed the moderate wing of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) as well as a few Social Democrats, and it included Kurt Georg Kiesinger, Kurt Birrenbach, Karl Carstens, Gerhard Schröder (from the CDU), and Helmut Schmidt.

Finally, the NPT opponents rejected a German NPT membership as a matter of principle. These leaders were not at all concerned with improving the text of the treaty, and they avowed repeatedly in public as well as private settings that they would actually fight against the NPT. Needless to say, these were the leaders that did not approve West Germany’s NPT accession. All of them were either members of or affiliated with the conservative wing of the Christian Democrats. Franz Josef Strauss, Konrad Adenauer, Swidbert Schnippenkötter, Alois Mertes and Wilhelm Grewe were the most active voices among these NPT foes.

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42 For example, Brand declared in a closed meeting in 1969 that “he had never said that the treaty was good.” Quoted in “Summary of a meeting of Foreign Minister Brandt with the leaders of the CDU/CSU regarding the NPT, April 29, 1969,” p. 13, Records of the German Chancellery (B 136), Vol. 6904, German National Archives Koblenz [hereafter BAK].

Table 1: NPT supporters, critics, and opponents among West Germany’s political leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>POSITION DURING THE NPT DEBATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPT supporters</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Scheel (FDP)</td>
<td>Foreign Minister (1969-1974); FDP chairman (1968-1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz</td>
<td>State Secretary, Foreign Office (1967-1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Frank</td>
<td>State Secretary, Foreign Office (1970-1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl Moersch (FDP)</td>
<td>Parliamentary State Secretary, Foreign Office (1970-1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPT critics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt Birrenbach (CDU)</td>
<td>Head of CDU/CSU working group on NPT (1967-1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerhard Schröder (CDU)</td>
<td>Foreign Minister (1961-1965); Defense Minister (1966-1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerhard Stoltenberg (CDU)</td>
<td>Minister for Research and Technology (1966-1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainer Barzel (CDU)</td>
<td>Chairman, CDU/CSU parliamentary group (1964-1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner Marx (CDU)</td>
<td>Foreign policy expert, CDU/CSU parliamentary group (1971-1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heinrich Knappstein</td>
<td>Ambassador to the United States (1962-1968)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fritz Erler (SPD)</td>
<td>Chairman, SPD parliamentary group (1964-1966)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NPT opponents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konrad Adenauer (CDU)</td>
<td>Federal Chancellor (1949-1963); CDU chairman (1949-1965)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelm Grewe</td>
<td>Ambassador to NATO (1962-1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alois Mertes (CDU)</td>
<td>Foreign policy expert, CDU/CSU parliamentary group (1972-1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Becher (CSU)</td>
<td>Foreign policy expert, CDU/CSU parliamentary group (1965-1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedrich Zimmermann (CSU)</td>
<td>Defense expert, CDU/CSU parliamentary group (1957-1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcel Hepp (CSU)</td>
<td>Personal assistant of Franz Josef Strauss (1965-1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilhelm Hartlieb</td>
<td>Consul General in Nancy (1968-1970)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Testing the Argument

To test my argument, I start with those three variables whose presence served as a necessary condition for the (factual or counterfactual) consent to the West German NPT membership of
all three groups of political leaders in Bonn. These are (1) the high importance of Germany’s freedom for U.S. security, (2) preservation of the treaty-based character of the U.S.-German alliance, and (3) protection of the West German economy. Then, I evaluate those two variables that did not have an effect on all West German leaders and, thus, determined the variation in German leaders’ approval of the NPT: (1) the international social pressure on Bonn to join the NPT, and (2) leaders’ conception of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States.

Causal necessity means that a particular independent variable X has to be present for the outcome under study Y to occur. At the same time, the presence of X is no guarantee—that is, no sufficient condition—for the occurrence of Y, but merely one of several (and potentially many) prerequisites for Y. Importantly, every assertion of causal necessity automatically implies a counterfactual claim that if X had been absent, Y would not have occurred.44

(1) West Germany’s high intrinsic importance for U.S. security

The theoretical argument that is normally invoked in support of this variable holds that, first, the leaders of U.S. allies only consent to their nation’s nuclear reversal if they fully trust U.S. pledges of protection and, second, that U.S. alliance protection is only dependable under bipolarity. For only in a bipolar environment does U.S. preoccupation with the global balance of power make Washington sensitive to losing allies that are geographically and economically important and, thus, accorded a high intrinsic value for U.S. security.45 However, in my psychological account, which I will test here, the theory behind this variable is different: I claim that for leaders in Bonn to agree to a nuclear reversal, holding significant doubts in their U.S. protector was not a showstopper as long as they had at least some trust in U.S. reliability. This partial trust was predicated on the belief that the United States was committed to the essentials of the shared U.S.-German identity.46 Hence, it was not full trust in U.S. reliability that was a prerequisite for German consent to a nuclear reversal, but the partial trust that resulted from the U.S. commitment to the shared identity. And one of the essentials of this common identity

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consisted in the view that Washington accords German freedom a high intrinsic importance. Finally, I hold that the U.S. concern with Germany’s intrinsic value resulted from bipolarity.

Since the intrinsic value of Germany is attributed to bipolarity, the congruence test can focus straight on global polarity. Thus, when testing for necessity, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for a particular German leader if the world exhibited a bipolar structure on the eve of the leader’s approval of West German NPT membership. Since bipolarity was evident in spring and fall 1973, when the NPT supporters and NPT critics in Bonn respectively agreed to join the treaty, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for these two groups. Besides, the hypothesis also passes the test for the group of NPT opponents, because the existence of bipolarity is congruent with these elites’ rejection of German NPT accession as long as bipolarity is tested as a necessary (and not a sufficient) condition for the approval of NPT accession.47

After the congruence test the analysis now turns to process-tracing tests. Again testing for necessity, the hypothesis passes the process-tracing test for a particular political leader if the leader had at some point stated his belief that the United States accorded Germany’s freedom a high intrinsic value and, ideally, that this U.S. view constituted a constant and essential element of the U.S.-German relationship. Beyond this point, though, the process tracing encounters the challenge that leaders’ inclination to voice their trust in the United States varies with the intensity of this trust: Leaders who have full trust in their U.S. ally will say so openly and even mention it as a source of their approval of NPT membership—and ideally link their decision to join the NPT explicitly to the belief that Washington regards Germany’s freedom as in the U.S. self-interest. In contrast, leaders whose trust in the United States is incomplete will typically voice only their mistrust while keeping quiet on their remaining partial trust—probably to induce their U.S. ally to become more trustworthy. I will try to solve this problem by looking for evidence that only parts of the U.S. protection pledge were viewed as untrustworthy, thus indicating partial trust in U.S. reliability. However, it is most unlikely that these German leaders mentioned their partial trust as a cause of their consent to NPT accession.

Starting with the group of NPT supporters in Bonn, I find strong evidence in support of my theory. During the entire German NPT debate, the treaty supporters had never doubted the U.S. commitment to defend West Germany against Soviet aggression. For evidence from the years surrounding Bonn’s NPT accession, Paul Frank and Karl Moersch made their views known during the Bundestag hearings on the NPT in 1973 and 1974: After repeating recent U.S. pledges of protection, Frank testified that “the Federal Government has no reason to

47 Jason Seawright, “Testing for Necessary and/or Sufficient Causation: Which Cases are Relevant?” Political Analysis, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 2002).
doubt these American assurances." One week later, Moersch likewise testified that he and
the SPD/FDP coalition government placed strong trust in U.S. protection for West Germany.49

Notably, over the preceding years, the NPT supporters had explicitly tied their trust in
the U.S. protector to West Germany’s high intrinsic value for U.S. security. For example, in a
1969 letter to Brandt, Egon Bahr had explained that U.S. protection of Germany was guaran-
teed even in the post-Vietnam era because West German security belonged to “the vital U.S.
foreign policy interests” that Washington would defend under any circumstances.50 Or as
Bahr had concluded earlier in 1969: “The American interest in Europe’s freedom” was “un-
deniably the one constant in U.S. policy” toward Europe.51 Starting as early as the late 1940s,
Brandt had also frequently stressed the overlap of U.S. strategic interests and German national
security interests as well as the resulting reliability of U.S. protection.52 Looking back on the
1960s in his memoirs, Paul Frank made this point even clearer: “If West Germany as the
shield of West European defense sinks, the encirclement of the ‘Fortress America’ will follow
regardless of its strategic nuclear forces.”53 Consequently, U.S. protection was trustworthy.

Finally, the NPT supporters based their approval of West German NPT accession on
the reliability of U.S. protection that they derived from Germany’s intrinsic importance to the
United States. To give just one example, in a confidential meeting with NPT critics in April
1969, Brandt responded to doubts that NATO might fall apart after Bonn acceded to the NPT
with a strong statement of U.S. reliability, asserting that even in this unlikely case “U.S. self-
interest in maintaining the nuclear guarantee [for West Germany] will be strong enough.”54
Therefore, Brandt argued, U.S. reliability could be no hurdle for Bonn’s joining the NPT.

As for the group of West German NPT critics, these leaders also constantly placed full
trust in U.S. pledges of protection against Soviet aggression. Moreover, in the months sur-
rounding these leaders’ final approval of West Germany’s NPT membership, their confidence
in the U.S. protector remained high. For instance, Kurt Birrenbach, the Christian Democrats’
foremost NPT expert, declared in a confidential presentation before his party’s parliamentary

48 Quoted in Wolfgang Höscher and Joachim Wintzer, eds., Der Auswärtige Ausschuss des Deutschen Bundes-
50 "Doc. 296: Memorandum from Bahr, September 21, 1969," in Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepub-
52 Judith Michel, Willy Brandts Amerikabild und -politik 1933-1992 (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2010), pp. 84-
85, 151-152; Egon Bahr, „Das musst du erzählen:“ Erinnerungen an Willy Brandt (Berlin: Propyläen, 2013),
pp. 182-183.
54 Quoted in “Summary of a meeting of Foreign Minister Brandt with the leaders of the CDU/CSU regarding the
group in September 1973 that U.S. guarantees were definitely reliable. While other NPT critics thereafter frequently stressed the key U.S. role for West German security, not even behind closed doors did any of them voice doubts over the reliability of U.S. protection.

Besides, like the NPT supporters, the critics likewise linked their trust in the United States to the shared U.S.-German interest in the freedom of West Germany from Soviet domination: In the above-mentioned presentation, Birrenbach based his claim of U.S. reliability on the assertion that “the loss of Europe [to the Soviets] would be a catastrophé for the United States in many ways.” And at least since 1962, Birrenbach had related this belief that Washington accorded Germany a high intrinsic value to the nature of “the world of today”, meaning bipolarity. As early as 1962, Gerhard Schröder had similarly argued that there was “far-reaching overlap of the interests of both countries [i.e. West Germany and the United States] in defending the free world against Soviet expansionism. If one takes this basic fact into account, one won’t feel a constant need to receive U.S. assurances of protection on a daily basis […]”. Ludwig Erhard had even gone so far as to call his trust in the United States a political “statement of faith”, lecturing the wary de Gaulle that “America knows that if it loses Europe, world dominance will come into the Soviet Union’s reach.” Ambassador Knappstein likewise explained in spring 1968 at an intimate gathering that “the United States cannot afford to pull back from European affairs, because in doing so it would lose its role as the leading Western power and hand over Europe’s tremendous industrial potential to the enemy.”

In the end, the NPT critics in Bonn drew on this intrinsic interest account of U.S. reliability to justify their decision to approve West Germany’s NPT ratification. As the official spokesman for those CDU deputies that acquiesced to the treaty—i.e. the NPT critics—, Birrenbach stated in his final report on the NPT to the Bundestag in February 1974 that “the full and recently demonstrated readiness of the United States to stand by its alliance commit-

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55 “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on German ties with the United States, September 19, 1973,” p. 55-56, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 23, BAK.
56 See “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 24, BAK.
57 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on German ties with the United States,” p. 55.
59 Quoted in „Interview of Foreign Minister Schröder with the ‚Kölische Rundschau‘, April 30, 1962,“ in Dokumente zur Deutschlandspolitis (Frankfurt am Main: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1977), p. 473.
ments” formed a “decisive political pillar for an application of the treaty [i.e. the NPT] that guarantees the security of alliance members […]”.\textsuperscript{62} The justification for joining the NPT that Birrenbach had given one week earlier at a closed meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group had also stressed that West German security was assured through the alliance with the United States and that preservation of this alliance was certain because “for the United States the protection of its strategic forefront in Europe is still a vital interest.”\textsuperscript{63} For the NPT critics, hence, Germany’s intrinsic value had the effect of a necessary condition for joining the NPT.

Unlike the critics and the supporters of the NPT, German leaders belonging to the group of NPT opponents held considerable doubts if the United States would defend West Germany against Soviet aggression. Ever since the Kennedy administration had shifted U.S. strategic policy toward détente, conservative political leaders like Adenauer and Strauss had sensed that Washington was tempted to sacrifice its German ally for the sake of superpower cooperation.\textsuperscript{64} These suspicions remained very much alive in the first half of the 1970s. At the same time, though, the NPT opponents continued to place partial trust in U.S. pledges of protection. That is, the NPT opponents’ trust in their U.S. ally covered many, yet not all conceivable conflict scenarios with Moscow: Thus, during a closed meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in September 1973, Strauss denied that the United States was still prepared to use decisive nuclear force, including U.S. nuclear arms deployed in West Germany, to save its ally in Bonn.\textsuperscript{65} In the same vein, Manfred Wörner complained privately in February 1974 that he was not sure at all “what U.S. strategic nuclear protection [for West Germany] […] will look like in 10, 15 or 20 years.”\textsuperscript{66} Hence, Strauss and Wörner questioned the U.S. willingness to escalate a conflict in Europe into an intercontinental nuclear exchange, while they did not doubt that Washington would defend Germany with conventional forces. Strauss, in fact, conceded that a conventional U.S. response would be forthcoming.\textsuperscript{67} Other NPT opponents like Mertes remained convinced that in case of Soviet military aggression the United States would still come to West Germany’s defense, even with nuclear forces. However, he was far less certain that Washington would provide strong allied support in case of the more likely scenar-

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\textsuperscript{62} Quoted in \textit{Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages, Vol. 86}, February 20, 1974 (Bonn: Heger, 1977), p. 5256. Due to illness, Birrenbach’s report was read by Mertes.

\textsuperscript{63} Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 3.

\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Konrad Adenauer, \textit{Erinnerungen 1959-1963: Fragmente}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Stuttgart: DVA, 1978), p. 200.

\textsuperscript{65} See “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on German ties with the United States, September 19, 1973,” p. 28.

\textsuperscript{66} Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 47.

\textsuperscript{67} See “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on German ties with the United States, September 19, 1973,” p. 28.
io that Moscow limited itself to political pressure against Bonn in order to gain influence over West German elites through a process of “Finlandization” that alienates Bonn from its allies.68

The resulting partial trust, though, which the NPT opponents had in the United States, was based critically on the high importance of West German freedom for U.S. security during the Cold War. Thus, Adenauer was convinced that West European security constituted a fundamental premise for U.S. freedom under conditions of bipolarity.69 Starting with the Kennedy administration, however, he grew alarmed that leading U.S. decision makers may no longer understand the high intrinsic value of West Germany: Said Adenauer in 1965, “One has to tell the Americans forcefully that after the loss of Europe, the United States will be doomed as well.” Or else, he argued, U.S. leaders could simply “overlook” Europe’s importance, as they were “completely incompetent to understand anything about Europe.”70 Mertes also stressed the shared transatlantic interest in Germany’s freedom. During a closed meeting in early 1974 he maintained that “if the President of the United States […] should ever face the situation in which he puts Chicago and New York at risk in order to defend Europe, then he can only do this because he is convinced that to rescue Cologne and Paris he must put American lives at risk because the rescue of Cologne and Paris is in the fundamental U.S. interest.”71

These statements demonstrate that the NPT opponents were well aware of the reliability-enhancing effect of Germany’s high intrinsic value for the United States and that they regarded this effect as essential for their—partial—trust in their U.S. protector. And without even this limited trust in U.S. reliability to defend Bonn, the NPT opponents’ consent to West Germany’s NPT accession was out of the question. Hence, even for the NPT opponents, Germany’s intrinsic value acted as a necessary, yet not sufficient condition for joining the NPT.

(2) Preservation of the treaty-based character of the U.S.-German alliance

The theoretical argument that is normally invoked in support of this variable argues that, first, the leaders of U.S.-allied nations only give up their country’s nuclear weapons activities if they fully trust U.S. pledges of protection and, second, that these pledges of allied protection are only fully reliable if an alliance is grounded in a mutual defense treaty.72 Again, though, in

68 See “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” pp. 66-67. “Finlandization” means preventing or weakening a state’s membership in a US-led alliance through massive Soviet intimidation. Finland during the Cold War is the prime example for this phenomenon.
71 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 65-66.
my psychological account, the reasoning is different: I hold that for West German leaders to consent to a nuclear reversal, holding considerable doubt in U.S. reliability was not a deal-breaker as long as the leaders had at least partial trust in their U.S. protector. And this incomplete trust of German leaders was based upon the belief that Washington was still committed to the essentials of the shared U.S.-German identity, one element of which consisted in maintaining the treaty-based nature of the U.S.-German alliance. In the case of West Germany’s nuclear reversal, preservation of the treaty-based character of the alliance played a particularly important role because its continuing survival then seemed at risk: Starting in 1969 every NATO member state could withdraw from the NATO treaty on one year’s notice, which gave rise to the question of whether Washington would continue its formal alliance with Bonn.

Consequently, when testing for necessity, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for a particular German leader if, at the time when the leader approved Germany’s NPT membership, the United States still entertained a formal alliance with West Germany. As this requirement was being met in spring and fall 1973, when the NPT supporters and critics respectively agreed to Germany’s NPT accession, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for both these groups. Furthermore, the hypothesis also passes the congruence test for the NPT opponents. For the continuing survival of the formal U.S.-German alliance is congruent with the opponents’ rejection of German NPT membership if preserving this formal character is tested as a necessary (and not a sufficient) condition for approving Germany’s NPT accession.

Testing again for necessity, the hypothesis passes the process-tracing test for a particular West German political leader if there is evidence showing that the leader regarded preserving the treaty-based nature of the U.S.-West German alliance as a prerequisite for joining the NPT because in his opinion the U.S. pledge of protection would not be reliable without the mutual defense treaty. Substantiating this assurance motive for the formal character of the alliance is crucial here since preservation of the formal U.S.-German alliance could also be exclusively driven by the requirements of deterring Soviet aggression against West Germany.

As for the NPT supporters in Bonn, there is plenty of evidence linking their consent to German NPT membership to the preservation of the formal U.S.-German alliance. For example, in April 1968 Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz instructed the West German embassy in Washington to make it clear to U.S. leaders “that there is an inseparable link between the existence of the Atlantic Alliance and the acceptance of the commitments of the NPT by the non-nuclear NATO partners.”73 Besides, when the Social-Liberal coalition government, which was

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led by Brandt and Scheel, signed the NPT in November 1969, it issued a signing statement declaring that Bonn signed on the premise “that the security of the Federal Republic of Germany will remain guaranteed through NATO [...].”74 The same statement was issued again in May 1975, when West Germany deposited the instruments of ratification for the NPT.75

However, these statements about the key role of the formal alliance could have been solely motivated by the need to preserve the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence toward the Soviets—and not by the assurance-oriented goal of inducing the United States to keep its pledges of protection toward Bonn. Additional evidence shows, though, that the NPT supporters’ focus on preserving NATO was indeed driven by assurance motives: In November 1969, Scheel stated in the Bundestag that the security-related requirements for joining the NPT were fulfilled as West Germany’s security was “guaranteed through solid alliance arrangements.”76 The reference by Scheel to arrangements that are internal to the alliance and thus cover the relationship between the allies addresses exactly the assurance mechanism tested here—and it ignores the deterrence relationship between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. In a similar vein, Duckwitz detailed in a confidential memo in April 1968 that ensuring West German security over the long run so as to allow it to join the NPT did not necessarily require an enhanced formal security guarantee because even reaffirming the existing NATO guarantee “could have the effect of politically and psychologically stabilizing the alliance.”77 Duckwitz’ allusion to a positive psychological effect of the NATO treaty nicely addresses the assurance effect of formal alliances, and both his and Scheel’s statements demonstrate that the treaty-base assurance provided by NATO was in fact a precondition for the NPT supporters’ approval of the NPT.

Turning to the NPT critics, the available evidence likewise suggests that preserving the formal character of the U.S.-German alliance acted as a necessary condition for the critics’ consent to West Germany’s NPT membership. For instance, when Chancellor Kiesinger and President Johnson met in Washington in August 1967 for a confidential exchange, Kiesinger argued forcefully that Bonn would be forced to withdraw from the NPT if the United States were to withdraw from the NATO treaty.78 By the same token, during a trip to the United

States in spring 1968, Birrenbach told U.S. officials that NATO’s continued existence was an absolute prerequisite for West Germany’s accession to the NPT.

As they stand, however, these statements do not prove that the demands to preserve the NATO treaty were driven by assurance needs and not exclusively by deterrence motives. Other documents show, however, that assurance did play a role in the considerations of the NPT critics on NATO survival: To give just one example, Kiesinger stated in a closed meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in January 1968 that in his view the high intrinsic value of West Germany’s freedom to U.S. security alone was not sufficient for U.S. pledges of protection to be reliable and that, consequently, the treaty-based U.S.-German defense cooperation within NATO was also necessary: “The proposition that the Americans would have to intervene in Europe—with or without NATO—if an attack from the East came about … To this I can only respond that this is logically correct, but […] one cannot just count on that if this happens, that will automatically follow. Everywhere politics is done by humans that make mistakes, and humans who also depend on parliamentary support, and parliaments that in turn depend on peoples’ moods. Thus, in my view we are still well advised to strengthen our ties and our friendship [with the United States] through NATO.” Against this backdrop, the Kiesinger and Birrenbach quotes mentioned above reveal the fundamental role of NATO’s assurance effect for the support of the NPT critics for West German NPT membership.

Finally, while they had only partial trust in their U.S. ally, even the NPT opponents in Bonn deemed preserving the NATO treaty indispensable for joining the NPT. Thus, in April 1968 Ambassador Grewe stressed in a lengthy memorandum “that accession to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) must not compromise the existing foundations of German security policy.” And among these foundations of German security Grewe listed in first place the “continued existence of NATO.” Moreover, the CSU, which was then led and dominated by NPT opponents, repeatedly demanded that the formal U.S. security guarantee within NATO must be made nonredeemable before German NPT accession. And this implies that the NPT opponents of the CSU similarly viewed the preservation of the existing rescindable U.S. security guarantee as a necessary—though certainly not as a sufficient—condition for joining the NPT.

Once again, though, other sources are needed to substantiate that, in attempting to preserve the NATO treaty, the NPT opponents were not only interested in advancing deterrence,

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79 See Taschler, *Vor neuen Herausforderungen*, p. 228.
but also in preserving one source of their (partial) trust in the U.S. pledge of protection. Thus, Adenauer had tried hard from early on to formalize the U.S.-German alliance: In May 1950, after tireless efforts, Adenauer had managed to get a formal declaration from the foreign ministers of the United States, Great Britain, and France that West Germany for all intents and purposes belonged to the territories protected by NATO—although West Germany was then not a NATO member state. The fact that Adenauer, according to the minutes of the meeting, had happily welcomed this formal commitment of the Western powers as an important accomplishment for Bonn even though the agreement was at first not publicized—and, hence, could not in any way deter Soviet aggression—proves his assurance-based motive for formalizing the U.S. pledge of protection. Hence, for Adenauer, the formalization of the U.S.-German alliance meant a major increase in his trust in the U.S. pledge of protection, and this (still limited) trust was necessary for the opponents’ consent to Germany’s NPT membership.

(3) Protection of the West German economy

The idea behind this variable is the simple argument that political leaders will not agree to the U.S. wish that their nation undertake a nuclear reversal if this negatively impacts the domestic economy. For, from a psychological perspective, a U.S. demand toward an ally entailing such consequences would signal that the United States is no longer committed to the essentials of the identity it shares with its ally, thus depriving Washington of any chance to influence the ally. While from today’s perspective the idea that giving up nuclear weapons activities might be economically disadvantageous seems odd, this has not always been the case. In the 1960s and 1970s, the prospect of renouncing nuclear weapons by joining the NPT raised substantial worries among nations with advanced civilian nuclear programs. For these nations feared that the inspections of nuclear plants and the trade restrictions under the NPT might damage their competitive position vis-à-vis nonmembers of the NPT. Besides, during the early negotiations over the NPT, developed nations suspected that the NPT might, due to the dual-use nature of nuclear technology, also ban all civilian applications of nuclear energy. As a country with an advanced civilian nuclear program, West Germany was strongly affected by these concerns.

When testing for necessity, then, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for a particular political leader if at the time when the leader approved Germany’s NPT accession he no longer feared that NPT membership would negatively impact the German economy. Also testing for necessity, the hypothesis passes the process-tracing test for a certain political lead-

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er if there is evidence indicating that the leader considered preventing negative economic side-effects of the NPT for Germany a precondition for joining the treaty.

The NPT supporters in Bonn pass both these tests. Beginning with the congruence test, when the supporters gave the treaty their final approval in April 1973, they no longer held any doubts that NPT membership would damage Germany’s competitive position on world markets. This became apparent in an April 1973 memorandum on NPT ratification from Foreign Minister Scheel for the Cabinet: Scheel reported that now, after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) had concluded the long-awaited agreement on verification procedures, the last economic problem surrounding German NPT accession had come to a “satisfying solution.” Frank and Moersch conveyed exactly the same view during the Bundestag hearings on the NPT in late 1973.

As to the process tracing, several documents reveal the crucial importance that the NPT supporters attached to preventing the NPT from negatively impacting the German economy. In February 1967, during his first visit to the United States after seeing the first draft of the NPT, Brandt made it clear that to him ensuring continued German civilian use of nuclear power was “of greatest importance.” Also in February 1967, Scheel asserted during a Bundestag hearing that preventing negative side effects of the NPT for the German economy was, “over the long term, the most important aspect […] on which the [NPT] negotiations should concentrate.” That the NPT supporters considered protection of the German economy an absolute prerequisite for their assent to NPT accession was finally proven when the SPD/FDP government, on the occasion of Bonn’s signing of the NPT, even released a diplomatic note declaring that it would “not submit the NPT for ratification unless the negotiations between the Commission [of the EC] and the IAEA have led to an agreement” and thus solved the last remaining problem involving the NPT’s economic impact on nonnuclear member states.

Regarding the NPT critics, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for this group, as at the time of their approval of Germany’s NPT accession in fall 1973, its members no longer feared harmful economic consequences from the NPT. After EURATOM and the IAEA had

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84 Quoted in “Draft bill from the Foreign Office for consideration by the Cabinet, Re: Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons of July 1, 1968 (NPT),” p. 25, Records of the German Chancellery (B 136), Vol. 6904, BAK.
reached an agreement on verification procedures in April 1973, the NPT critics scrutinized the accord through a special CDU/CSU-commission on the NPT and in September 1973 concluded that the German economy had nothing to fear from NPT membership: As the author of the commission’s final report, Birrenbach in October 1973 summarized the critics’ view that if Bonn joined the NPT, it would be “ensured that the Federal Republic of Germany, as a non-nuclear-weapon state, would not be discriminated vis-à-vis the nuclear-weapon states with which she competes on the world market in applying nuclear energy to peaceful uses.”

The hypothesis also passes the process-tracing test for the NPT critics, as they considered averting negative economic side effects of the NPT an essential premise for joining the treaty. That became apparent in early 1967, when the NPT draft did not yet take the economic interests of non-nuclear-weapon states like West Germany fully into account: In a letter to his friend John McCloy, Birrenbach called the possible economic discrimination of non-nuclear-weapon states “the fundamental problem of the treaty” that had to be resolved. Stoltenberg likewise told U.S. Ambassador McGhee that the economic issues constituted the major stumbling block for a German decision to join the NPT. In front of CDU/CSU deputies, Barzel also made this point forcefully: Regarding the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the NPT, he said, “[…] we must be strict and clear that there can be no rotten compromises! Here we must reject whatever threatens our rank as an industrial nation and could make the peaceful uses impossible or more difficult.” Years later in early 1969, Kiesinger likewise told leading members of the CDU/CSU that resolving all doubts over possible economic discrimination of Germany remained a nonnegotiable condition for approving the NPT.

Lastly, the hypothesis also passes the congruence test for the NPT opponents in Bonn. For at the end of the German domestic NPT debate in spring 1974, even the treaty opponents did not worry anymore about damaging economic effects of the NPT. For instance, in a September 1973 letter to all CDU/CSU deputies, Strauss characterized the April 1973 agreement between the IAEA and EURATOM as “thoroughly negotiated and relatively satisfying.”

89 “Memorandum from Birrenbach, Re: Scientific, technological and economic aspects of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the verification agreement (VA), October 19, 1973,” p. 1, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 175, BAK.
90 Quoted in Hans-Peter Ernst Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber: Kurt Birrenbach und die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 2002), p. 351.
93 “Memorandum from Barzel, Re: Kiesinger’s remarks to the leadership of the parliamentary group, February 10, 1969,” p. 1, Records of Rainer Barzel (NL 1371), Vol. 81, BAK.
94 “Strauss to Carstens, September 12, 1973,” p. 1, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 175, BAK.
Mertes agreed in early 1974, declaring all economic questions to be “satisfactorily solved” under the NPT.\textsuperscript{95}

Turning to the process tracing, I must analyze a counterfactual scenario, as the NPT opponents have never approved Germany’s membership. Hence, when testing for necessity, I must ask: \textit{If the NPT had remained discriminating against the West German economy, is it inconceivable that the NPT opponents would ever have acquiesced into joining the treaty?} The available evidence suggests that the question must be answered positively. This assessment stems in part from the central role that leaders like Adenauer and Schnippenkötter attached to preventing negative economic consequences for Germany in their criticisms of the NPT.\textsuperscript{96} Moreover, other NPT opponents explicitly made protecting the German economy a prerequisite for approving the NPT: Thus, in April 1967, Friedrich Zimmermann avowed that the CSU would evaluate the acceptability of the NPT based on three criteria, one of them being that “research, development, and use of peaceful applications of nuclear energy would not be hampered” under the treaty.\textsuperscript{97} Likewise, in July 1968, the CSU party convention approved a resolution from the NPT opponents surrounding Strauss which determined that the CSU Bundestag deputies oppose even bringing about a decision over joining the NPT unless the issue of economic discrimination was fully resolved.\textsuperscript{98} Based on this evidence, an economically discriminating NPT would most likely not have won the treaty opponents’ approval.

And such a scenario, in which the NPT would have remained discriminating against the German economy, must be considered plausible:\textsuperscript{99} For in 1970 and 1971, conclusion of the verification agreement between EURATOM and the IAEA was in serious doubt and could easily have failed due to Paris’ efforts to free France from EURATOM inspections.\textsuperscript{100} If these verification talks had collapsed, Germany could have been discriminated under the NPT while the treaty opponents in Bonn would still have had to make a decision over joining the NPT because it had already entered into force in March 1970. Given the plausibility of this coun-

\textsuperscript{95} Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 8.


\textsuperscript{98} See Bischoff, \textit{Franz Josef Strauß, die CSU und die Außenpolitik}, pp. 201-202.


terfactual scenario and the evidence that the NPT opponents regarded protection of the economy as crucial, the hypothesis passes the process-tracing test for the treaty opponents.

Now I turn to those two variables which did not have an effect on all three groups of German political leaders and which, thus, explain the variation in the attitudes of German leaders toward NPT membership: the international social pressure on Bonn to join the NPT and German leaders’ conceptions of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States.

(4) International social pressure to join the NPT

This variable draws on the social psychological insight that humans usually try to avoid isolation and, therefore, go along with the majority opinion of their social environment even if this contradicts their preferences.101 Applied to the phenomenon of nuclear reversal, this theory holds that political leaders agree to abandon their nation’s nuclear weapons activities because these activities have the effect of isolating their nation from the states that it interacts with.102 In the German case, the reactions of Bonn’s Western partners are crucial in this regard as isolation from its Eastern European neighbors was then the normal state of affairs.

When testing for necessity, hence, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for a particular political leader if at the time of the leader’s approval of German NPT accession he felt the social pressure of Bonn becoming isolated internationally due to its reluctance to join the NPT. The hypothesis also passes the process-tracing test for a political leader if there is evidence showing that the leader did in fact agree to West Germany’s NPT membership in order to avoid West Germany’s isolation within its international environment.

The hypothesis passes both these tests for the NPT supporters in Bonn. As for the congruence test, these elites sensed a looming threat of Germany’s diplomatic isolation in spring 1973 over its still unfulfilled commitment to join the NPT: During the Bundestag hearings in late 1973 and early 1974 on NPT ratification, Frank declared that he had felt for a long time that Bonn’s rejection of NPT ratification would lead to deteriorating relations with the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, and Denmark. Since Bonn’s refusal to join the NPT would furthermore destroy EURATOM, Frank argued, it would also alienate Germany from its partners within the EC.103 Responding to a question if Bonn could not somehow shun the NPT, Moersch likewise stressed Germany’s pending isolation, stating that “all our partners expect that, once a deal on the verification agreement is

102 Rublee, Nonproliferation Norms, pp. 16-21.
reached—this has recently been achieved—, the NPT will be ratified by us." In short, the supporters were well aware of the looming social costs of rejecting the NPT.

Moreover, there is strong evidence that directly links the NPT supporters’ decision to join the NPT to their desire to avoid a diplomatic isolation. For example, in April 1968, Bahr sent then Foreign Minister Brandt a confidential memorandum recommending that the Federal Government sign the NPT in fall 1968 if a majority of the countries with a developed civilian nuclear industry (which mostly represented Germany’s Western partners) had indicated their intention to sign. According to Bahr, Bonn’s signing of the NPT must not wait even until after the treaty had come into force one year or so later, because “by then this position would have already isolated us diplomatically.” Brandt also argued in favor of signing the NPT by highlighting Germany’s looming isolation. According to the confidential minutes of the meeting, he told the government’s key foreign policy makers in May 1968 that “Should the Non-proliferation Treaty be opened for signature, then he, Brandt, recommends acting in pursuance with the majority of civilian nuclear powers. Should the majority sign, then we could not stay away.” In August 1968, Scheel similarly based his demand for Germany to sign the NPT on the costs of international isolation should Bonn waver any longer. That this evidence refers only to the act of signing the NPT, and not to the act of ratification, is irrelevant, though. For in the end, the fact that the NPT supporters approved German ratification of the treaty only in 1973 despite Bonn’s looming isolation in the late 1960s proves the claim made here that the international social pressure to join the NPT constituted only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the supporter’s approval of NPT membership.

Besides the supporters, the international social pressure on Bonn also moved the German NPT critics toward acquiescence to NPT membership. With the critics sensing in the fall of 1973 that Bonn’s unfulfilled commitment to join the NPT threatened to isolate Germany within NATO, the hypothesis passes the congruence test: Birrenbach repeatedly stressed the expectation of Germany’s allies that Bonn would join them in acceding to the NPT. In a letter to Grewe in January 1974, Birrenbach sadly explained that “a rejection of the treaty does not

104 Quoted in ibid., p. 488.
105 See the list of countries with a civilian nuclear industry in 1967 in Häckel, Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Atomwaffensperrvertrag, p. 94.
106 “Memorandum from Head of Department Bahr, Re: Further handling of the NPT, April 24, 1968,” p. 5, Classified records section (B 150), Vol. 125, PA/AA.
fit into today’s landscape” of Transatlantic politics.109 Moreover, rebuffing the idea that Germany could shun the NPT and merely agree to inspections under the verification agreement with the IAEA, Birrenbach made it plain in a hearing that the other EC states held “the expectation that all future parties to the verification agreement also ratify the NPT.”110 In the same vein, Stoltenberg wrote Carstens in October 1973 that the CDU would have “no allies, neither domestically nor abroad,” for rejecting the NPT.111 Marx, the foreign policy spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, also told his colleagues in early 1974 that during the previous months “Nowhere [abroad] have I found a single person who would agree with us that we should reject the treaty” or “who would give us political support in this question.”112

Yet the NPT critics did not merely feel the rising threat of Germany’s isolation over the NPT. There is also strong evidence that their decision to approve Germany’s NPT membership resulted from this social pressure. Thus, when Carstens explained to the Bundestag in February 1974 why he and the other NPT critics had finally consented to Germany’s accession, he underscored the importance of “the fact that presumably none of our partners within NATO and the European Communities will reject the treaty, except for France, which takes a fundamentally different stance on this issue that obviously cannot be transferred to the situation of the Federal Republic of Germany.”113 Birrenbach and Kiesinger also tied the need to join the NPT directly to Germany’s pending diplomatic isolation: In summer 1968, upon concluding “with a heavy heart” that Bonn would have to join the NPT,114 Birrenbach explained to friends that “Rejection of the signing [of the NPT] would isolate the Federal Government to a life-endangering extent.”115 Kiesinger shared this view. When Germany’s isolation over its reluctance to sign the NPT reached new heights in early 1969, Kiesinger told the leaders of the CDU/CSU in a closed meeting that Bonn had to reduce its NPT-related demands to a minimum: As Barzel summarized Kiesinger’s point, “Pursue only what can be achieved. Insist upon this. But beyond this: nothing or life-endangering isolation!”116 International social pressure was surely indispensable in moving the NPT critics toward approving NPT membership.

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109 Quoted in Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, p. 542.
110 Quoted in Hölscher and Wintzer, eds., Der Auswärtige Ausschuss des Deutschen Bundestages, p. 489 (emphasis added).
111 „Stoltenberg to Carstens, October 29, 1973,” p. 2, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 175, BAK.
112 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 37.
115 Quoted in Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, p. 369.
The same cannot be said about the German NPT opponents, though. Nonetheless, even they recognized Germany’s looming international isolation over its stance on the NPT. Thus, only days after the NPT had opened for signature in July 1968, Strauss painted a lively picture of the pending social costs should Germany refuse to join the NPT: In this case, Strauss said, Bonn would march “against the wind” of majority opinion on a “path” that was “thorny and rocky”, would meet “opposition” and “sometimes become bitter.”

In a confidential memo, Grewe in September 1968 similarly diagnosed Germany’s isolation within NATO: Washington and London had pushed the NPT, the smaller allies would also join it, France did not support Bonn and Italy had abandoned its resistance against the treaty. “The solidarity of the EURATOM partners proved insufficient […]”, Grewe complained.

Statements from 1973 and 1974 likewise reveal that the NPT opponents were aware of Bonn’s isolation. Against this backdrop, the hypothesis passes the congruence test because, when testing for necessity, the presence of international social pressure is consistent with rejecting the NPT.

For the hypothesis to also pass the process-tracing test there must be evidence indicating that if the treaty opponents had approved German NPT membership, then international social pressure would have been indispensable for this outcome to occur. In other words: Is it inconceivable that the NPT opponents would have acquiesced into joining the treaty without Germany being isolated over the issue? As it stands, this question cannot be answered reasonably, because the described counterfactual scenario of Bonn not being isolated is not plausible. It is implausible because creating this scenario requires changing the détente policies of most NATO countries and thus several significant changes of history and not just the minimal rewrite that is permitted for a counterfactual to remain plausible. However, another counterfactual addressing the role of isolation is plausible: One could analyze the scenario that the NPT opponents acquiesce into joining the NPT due to material U.S. pressure while international social pressure is also present and argue that the latter was not needed for the decision to accede to the NPT. This scenario is plausible since creating it requires only a small rewrite of history, namely undoing President Johnson and Secretary Rusk’s secret, and unforeseen, decision in early 1967 not to apply material pressure on Bonn to join the NPT.

As altering this fact would have left Johnson’s overall NPT efforts intact, this counterfactual is plausible.

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117 Quoted in Bischoff, *Franz Josef Strauß, die CSU und die Außenpolitik*, p. 201.
120 Lahti, *Security Cooperation as a Way to Stop the Spread of Nuclear Weapons?*, p. 334. Johnson had also put material pressure on Germany before: in 1966 to induce it to balance the costs of the U.S. troop presence there. In this regard, he had told an aide, “There’s only one way to deal with the Germans. You keep patting them on
In this counterfactual scenario in which the NPT opponents would have approved the NPT in the presence of both U.S. material pressure and international social pressure, it is conceivable that the social pressure would not have played a role in the opponents’ approval. For the NPT opponents had let it repeatedly be known that they—in stark contrast to the NPT critics—did not regard Germany’s isolation as something that could change their attitude toward the NPT: In a February 1967 letter to Kiesinger, for example, Strauss had insisted that Bonn must not sign the NPT “out of fear of ‘world opinion.’”\(^{121}\) Schnippenkötter and Mertes were equally unimpressed by social pressure, considering the entire isolation argument pointless.\(^{122}\) Grewe claimed that even if the NPT would collapse due to Bonn’s refusal, then, with clever tactical maneuvering, Germany could still “weather” the resulting diplomatic storm. If, however, the NPT entered into force without Germany, Bonn would face social pressure for years. According to Grewe, though, even such enduring isolation was no reason to join the NPT.\(^{123}\) Clearly, international social pressure would not affect the opponents’ NPT calculus.

Finally, to substantiate that international social pressure was not necessary to sway the opponents’ attitude, one needs to demonstrate that, in contrast, material U.S. pressure would have caused the NPT opponents’ acquiescence to the treaty. There are two pieces of evidence that directly support this claim: First, in the above-mentioned memo that played down the significance of international social pressure and demands to reject the NPT, Grewe also stated that Bonn could still reconsider its refusal “if the price for not signing becomes too high.”\(^{124}\) As Grewe had just ridiculed the isolation argument, this statement can only mean that Germany may only join the NPT if the costs of abstaining go beyond the social sphere and enter the domain of material coercion. Since the memo focused exclusively on the NATO context,\(^{125}\) Grewe must have had in mind non-economic aspects like decreasing U.S. support for Bonn’s policy of unification. The second statement comes from Consul Wilhelm Hartlieb. In early 1969, Hartlieb sent a letter to Duckwitz suggesting tactical measures in case that “after a maximum of stalling, our signature to the Nonproliferation Treaty had to occur as a result of pressure from both superpowers.”\(^{126}\) As Hartlieb played down the relevance of diplomatic isola-

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\(^{121}\) Quoted in Taschler, *Vor neuen Herausforderungen*, p. 91.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 1097.
\(^{125}\) Ibid., pp. 1094, 1097.
\(^{126}\) "Hartlieb to Duckwitz, Februar 11, 1969,” p. 1, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 570, BAK (emphasis added).
tion in the very same letter,\textsuperscript{127} the quote certainly refers to material pressure. Moreover, in his scenario of “pressure from both superpowers”, Hartlieb’s focus was clearly on the United States, for Soviet pressure on Bonn was then still the normal state of affairs.\textsuperscript{128}

Besides these direct allusions to the conditions under which the NPT opponents would join the NPT, there are two pieces of indirect evidence: The first one concerns the efforts of CSU deputy Walter Becher who, together with Strauss’ personal assistant Marcel Hepp, clandestinely traveled to Washington in April 1969 to influence the NPT ratification debate in Congress in favor of the German treaty opponents. Upon his return, Becher not only proudly reported to Kiesinger that Germany would face “no reprisals”\textsuperscript{129} from Congress if it rejected NPT membership, but furthermore argued that under these circumstances, Germany no longer needed to join the NPT.\textsuperscript{130} Conversely then, Germany could not avoid NPT membership if the United States would apply material pressure on Bonn, according to Becher. The same link is implied in a September 1968 secret memorandum from Schnippenkötter on the consequences of continued German abstention from the NPT: According to Schnippenkötter, with adroit tactical maneuvering “the objective consequences” would be “relatively minor. […] In the United States, no weighable reactions would occur, except for a certain irritation among Democrats.” Moreover, although the indignation of the smaller NATO allies would at first be intense, it would be unlikely “that more than atmospheric troubles would occur.” Only Moscow and its allies would surely “increase the propaganda drumfire.”\textsuperscript{131} Under these conditions of minor “objective” pressure from the East and merely social pressure from NATO partners, Schnippenkötter saw no problem at all with Germany continuing her abstention from the NPT.\textsuperscript{132}Conversely then, according to Schnippenkötter, Bonn could not afford to stay away from the NPT once it faced significant “objective”, i.e. material, consequences within NATO.

To recapitulate this scenario, Grewe, Hartlieb, Becher, and Schnippenkötter would probably have acquiesced to NPT membership only in response to material U.S. pressure against Bonn. And though international social pressure would have been part of this scenario, these social costs would have been unnecessary for the opponents’ NPT approval to occur.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{128} See his view of constant Soviet pressure in “Hartlieb to Carstens, April 24, 1969,” pp. 2-3, Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 570, BAK.
\textsuperscript{129} These words are not from Becher, but from Bischoff (who could draw on Becher’s written report): Bischoff, \textit{Franz Josef Strauß, die CSU und die Außenpolitik}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} „Ambassador Schnippenkoetter to Head of Department Ruete, September 6, 1968,” pp. 3-5, Classified records section (B 150), Vol. 134, PA/AA.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., pp. 6-7.
The idea behind this variable is that political leaders’ reaction to a request from their U.S. protector to give up all nuclear weapons activities is driven by their individual intuitive conception as to how high their nation ranks vis-à-vis the United States. If a leader conceives of his nation as on par with the United States, he will view Washington’s request as illegitimate and resist it. If, on the other hand, a leader accords his nation a status below that of the United States, he will consider the demand of his protector legitimate and follow it.

To determine leaders’ individual conception of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States, I draw on the qualitative interpretative literature on the foreign policy of the Bonn Republic. Notably, the qualitative data for measuring leaders’ status conception vis-à-vis their U.S. ally excludes all material directly related to the U.S.-German discussions over the NPT. For otherwise, a leader’s attitude toward German NPT membership could impact the coding of his status conception vis-à-vis the United States, thus introducing endogeneity.

In allusion to the early 1960s debate within the CDU/CSU over the appropriate level of autonomy from the United States, the qualitative interpretative literature distinguishes between two conceptions of Germany’s status vis-à-vis the United States: Atlanticist and Gaullist (which today is typically termed Europeanist). Within this framework, the Atlanticist conception accords Germany a status well below that of the United States, and it is typically associated with a desire to avoid political confrontations with Washington. The Gaullist conception, meanwhile, accords Germany a status on par with that of the United States, and this view is normally associated with a greater readiness to stand up to Washington and confront it over issues of political importance. Significantly, German elites holding a Gaullist conception do not automatically share an anti-American approach, nor do Atlanticist leaders necessarily hold passionately pro-American views. The camps only differ in how they envision the nature of the German-American relationship: whether it is an alliance of equals or a relationship in which one partner leads and the other follows.

Drawing on the literature on the Atlanticist-Gaullist debate, both the NPT supporters and the NPT critics must surely be accorded a status conception that conceives of Germany as...
a nation of inferior rank compared to the United States: From the early 1960s onward, the entire SPD and the whole FDP clearly belonged to the Atlanticist camp. Moreover, within the CDU/CSU, the leading NPT critics—e.g. Birrenbach, Carstens, Schroeder, and Erhard—were also the most prominent advocates of an Atlanticist foreign policy orientation.¹³⁶ And while Kiesinger and Barzel can be labeled neither Atlanticists nor Gaullists, as they had remained neutral during this debate, the literature clearly accords both of them a status conception in which Germany ranks naturally lower than the United States.¹³⁷ On the other hand, according to the interpretative literature, the NPT opponents in Bonn evidently held a status conception that envisioned Germany on par with the United States: Adenauer and Strauss had acted as leading proponents of German Gaullism during the early 1960s, Grewe had never avoided any confrontation with Washington, and Mertes had likewise been willing to stand up to the United States and fight for German interests.¹³⁸

Consequently, when testing for necessity, the vision that German leaders held regarding their nation’s status vis-à-vis the United States was perfectly consistent with their final decision on German NPT membership. Hence, the hypothesis passes the congruence test for all three groups of political leaders in Bonn: According to the literature, both the supporters and the critics of the NPT conceived of Germany’s status as being lower than that of the United States, and both these groups approved NPT ratification. Meanwhile, the literature associates the NPT opponents with a status conception that views Germany and the United States at the same rank, and these leaders rejected the NPT.

For the hypothesis to pass the process-tracing test there should be evidence that—although Washington refrained from threatening coercion—the NPT supporters and critics deemed it impossible that Bonn confront the United States by dismissing the request for Germany to join the NPT. Further confirmatory evidence would show that the NPT supporters and critics based this assessment on the belief that West Germany was merely a second-rank power and, therefore, could not stand up to the U.S. superpower. Regarding the NPT oppo-

nants, on the other hand, confirmatory evidence should demonstrate that these leaders considered it perfectly possible to challenge Washington and oppose the NPT because Germany was an important power that did not need to be submissive to the United States.

Starting with the NPT supporters, there is strong evidence supporting the hypothesis. In November 1967, for instance, Brandt told the German Cabinet that in his view Germany would in any case not be able to permanently stay away from the NPT. For abstaining would not merely irritate the East, but also isolate Germany from its Western allies and at the same time damage its alliance with the United States. Brandt’s belief that Bonn could not avoid the NPT if only for the harmony within its alliance with Washington speaks volumes to his readiness to defer to U.S. priorities. That Brandt accorded his nation only an inferior status had become even plainer in a Bundestag hearing in January 1967. There he had demanded that Bonn make it clear to the French that Germany could not stand up to Washington, because, “in contrast to them [i.e. the French], we are not a great power” but merely “a European middle-power. We are also a divided nation. We have Atlantic commitments […]”.

And for Brandt this basic requirement to be in line with the United States was all the more essential if Germany had no international support for its position. Thus, in July 1968, when Germany’s European partners were about to sign the NPT, he urged Kiesinger to follow suit. For abstaining, he warned, would put Bonn under social pressure “from East and West” while “No one will be prepared to show solidarity with us and defend us. We remain alone.” Hence, for Brandt, losing European support necessitated deference to U.S. demands.

Bahr likewise sensed that West Germany had no choice but to adapt to and follow the policies of its American ally since it was weak and dependent upon U.S. protection and diplomatic support. As Bahr noted in a 1969 planning study, “The Federal Republic of Germany does not belong to the world’s great and leading powers.” From this minor international status and its location at the frontline of the Cold War, Bahr concluded that West Germany must “attempt, whenever possible, to swim not against but with the political current” of Western diplomacy. In this regard, he said, the most important reference point was the United States because “in the end, our security depends upon our relationship with it [i.e. the United States].” The status-related necessity to follow “the current” of Western and especially U.S. détente policy also became apparent in Bahr’s view that joining the NPT was inevitable for

\[\text{139 See Martin Winkels, } \text{Die Deutschland- und Ostpolitik der ersten Großen Koalition in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1966-1969) (PH.D. dissertation, University of Bonn, 2009), pp. 206-207.}\]

\[\text{140 Quoted in Wintzer, ed., Der Auswärtige Ausschuss des Deutschen Bundestages, p. 318.}\]


Bonn: As he privately told Strauss in May 1968, “no one [in Germany] will be able to avoid signing the NPT once the majority of civilian nuclear powers goes ahead” and, consequently, Bonn becomes isolated within NATO in its resistance to Washington’s NPT efforts. For this situation, as Bahr warned in a memo, “would put a heavy strain on our ties with the United States […]. The consequences for the German-American relationship would be fatal.” In Bahr’s view, therefore, at least from an isolated position within NATO, Bonn could not resist the U.S. request for Germany to join the treaty.

The status-related assessment of Brandt and Bahr that, in the end, West Germany could not confront the United States over the NPT was a shared premise among German NPT supporters. In February 1968 Erhard Eppler likewise called for an early German signing of the NPT because if Bonn adopted a wait-and-see approach, it would still have to “move toward signing the Nonproliferation Treaty one day, yet then with its foreign policy in shambles.” For when it came to the NPT, “not merely our policy toward the East is at stake here, but also our relationship with the United States […].” Hence, according to Eppler, Germany could delay signing the NPT—and damage its foreign policy in the process. Once its refusal to join the NPT would turn into a German-American dispute and strain the alliance, though, Bonn’s signing of the NPT would become inescapable. Moersch explained this inevitability of NPT membership with an even more explicit reference to Germany’s second-rank status: Looking back in a January 1974 hearing, Moersch asserted that, given West Germany’s vulnerable and dependent situation as a front-line state in the Cold War, “we could not elude the treaty [i.e. NPT] efforts of the great powers, and least of all those of the Americans.”

What is notable about the conclusion that Germany had to defer to U.S. priorities and join the NPT is the supporters’ calm response to it, especially if compared to the furious reaction of the NPT opponents. The treaty supporters simply displayed resignation, which is a typical by-product of sadness stemming from losses beyond one’s own control. From the beginning of the German NPT debate, the supporters seemed to have accepted that they never even had a choice to reject the NPT. Resigned to this view of inevitability, the majority of the Social Democrats—which represented the NPT supporters—regarded “lengthy soul searching” over the NPT as useless, according to a February 1967 cable from the U.S. Ambassador

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143 Bahr, Zu meiner Zeit, p. 214.
146 Quoted in Hölscher and Wintzer, eds., Der Ausswärtige Ausschuss des Deutschen Bundestages, p. 511.
As the negotiations over the treaty automatically confronted these leaders with their country’s inferior rank, many of them apparently wanted to close the depressing German NPT file sooner rather than later.

The NPT critics in Bonn, although outright objecting to the treaty on several grounds, reached similar conclusions on the impossibility of rejecting NPT membership. That this was due to their view of Germany as a weak nation with an inferior status compared to the United States became apparent in a conversation between Kiesinger and de Gaulle in January 1967: Although Kiesinger agreed with de Gaulle that Europe could not be just a follower of U.S. policies, he also explained that Germany, as a divided nation at the front-line of the Cold War, was “to a certain extent an object of international politics.” Therefore, Kiesinger argued, Germany did “not possess the same room to maneuver” as France and consequently did not have, for instance, “the option […] to criticize American policy toward Vietnam.” The notion of Germany as a mere second-rank power vis-à-vis the United States also took hold on Kiesinger’s attitude toward the NPT: In late 1966, before seeing even the first U.S.-Soviet draft of the NPT, Kiesinger had already commented privately on Germany’s room to maneuver that “We cannot reject a Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty […].” To infer from this remark that he did not mind deferring to U.S. priorities would be a mistake, though: In a confidential meeting of CDU/CSU leaders on the NPT in February 1969, Kiesinger lamented that West Germany was “a virtual protectorate of the USA.” However, holding a status view that ranked Germany lower than the United States, Kiesinger did not get angry over the protectorate-like status of Germany, but seemed rather resigned and sad: In the end, Kiesinger “did not want any trouble with Washington” over the NPT, according to nuclear physicist Karl Wirtz, who advised the Chancellor on the treaty. To Kiesinger, rejecting the NPT was impossible because for Bonn such “posturing” toward Washington was too “dangerous.”

The same resigned stance became plain in early 1974, when Kiesinger argued in favor of NPT membership in a closed meeting of CDU/CSU deputies: Reacting to Strauss’ protest that this step would degrade Germans to helots, or slaves, of the United States, Kiesinger stressed that,

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149 Quoted in “Memorandum of a conversation between Chancellor Kiesinger and President de Gaulle in Paris, January 14, 1967,” p. 12, Classified records section (B 150), Vol. 94, PA/AA.
154 Quoted in Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, p. 386.
for the choice of joining or rejecting the NPT, “The crucial question is our relationship with our allies. […] Helots, well, helots—we are not helots, but sadly we are in fact wards! Wards! And [we] cannot retain our freedom by any stretch of the imagination without the protection by the alliance, and this means, in fact, without the protection by the United States.”155

And this view of Germany’s lesser, ward-like status made it intuitively imperative for Kiesinger to comply with U.S. requests on the NPT once Germany lacked diplomatic backing from other NATO partners. Hence, in September 1968, when Italy’s suspension of its planned NPT signing had temporarily rescued Germany from losing its last supporter on NPT matters, Kiesinger felt the mounting social pressure, thus fend[ing off requests from NPT opponents to openly reject the treaty: Behind closed doors, he declared that in terms of personal preferences he was “on the side of the CSU. […] However, as Chancellor”, Kiesinger argued, he had to “act cool-headed” because “there is one thing we cannot afford under any circumstances, namely being isolated.”156 However, this is what happened in January 1969 when Italy signed the NPT. Although Kiesinger had received early pledges from incoming President Nixon that his administration would be appreciative of further delays before Bonn joined the treaty,157 Kiesinger now realized a looming danger for Germany if Nixon lost his patience: In a confidential NPT discussion of CDU/CSU leaders in February 1969, he cut down the list of remaining German demands on the NPT: As Barzel annotated Kiesinger’s order, “Pursue only what can be achieved. Insist upon this. But beyond this: nothing or life-endangering isolation!”158 It was this fear of becoming the lone dissenter against Washington that was driven by Kiesinger’s view of Germany’s inferior status vis-à-vis the United States.

Birrenbach displayed the same instinctive deference to U.S. nonproliferation priorities. Despite his many concerns about the NPT, chief among them Germany’s indefinite dependence on U.S. nuclear protection,159 Birrenbach considered joining the NPT inevitable, confidentially telling CDU/CSU deputies as early as February 1967 that “We can hardly reject the treaty in any case.”160 Birrenbach’s dispirited assessment that, in the end, Bonn could not escape NPT membership was, like Kiesinger’s view, driven by the fear of alienating Germany from its allies. As he sadly explained to friends in summer 1968, “Rejection of the signing [of

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155 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” pp. 52-53 (emphasis added).
159 Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, pp. 119-120, 317, 532.
the NPT] would isolate the Federal Government to a life-endangering extent.”¹⁶¹ In this respect, Birrenbach focused mainly on the United States, agreeing with Kiesinger that Germany’s ability to wait and pursue further improvements on the NPT issue was ultimately dependent on how long Washington deemed these German efforts legitimate: Thus, upon returning from official trips to the United States in September 1968 as well as February and June 1969, Birrenbach each time advised that seeking further improvements was still responsible because Washington had displayed understanding for Bonn’s situation. That Birrenbach nonetheless feared the end of U.S. patience and an ensuing U.S.-German dispute over the NPT became apparent through his concurrent warnings to honor Washington’s goodwill with active and constructive efforts toward resolving the outstanding German issues with the NPT.¹⁶² For any other approach toward the NPT would not be tolerated by the United States and thus be “highly dangerous” for Bonn.¹⁶³ This strong inclination to avoid a bilateral confrontation with Washington is most consistent with Birrenbach’s inferior status conception for Germany.

Other West German NPT critics displayed the same predisposition to avert turning the NPT into a German-American conflict. Erhard’s attitude toward the NPT, for example, clearly reflected his general foreign policy belief that Germany needed the United States “more than anyone else.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, when Henry Kissinger told Erhard in a private conversation in January 1966 that he did not believe that West Germany would be able to refuse joining the NPT, Erhard did not react angrily but, in contrast, he reportedly sighed and said he entirely agreed with this assessment.¹⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter, Kissinger noted his impression that although the Erhard government was still asking for a share in a multilateral nuclear force, it would be easy for Washington to argue them out of such efforts since the Germans leaders were “so eager to be agreeable.”¹⁶⁶ This exemplary description of a perceived inferior German status vis-à-vis the United States also applies to Erhard’s Foreign Minister Schröder: As early as summer 1966, before the first U.S.-Soviet NPT draft had even been reached, Schröder already stated privately that, in the end, Bonn would not be able to reject an American request for Germany to join an NPT.¹⁶⁷ And this attitude had not changed a bit until February 1974, when Schröder privately argued strongly in favor of joining the NPT, stressing that this was necessary for Germany to remain close to and keep the support of its NATO allies and, first and foremost,

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, p. 369
¹⁶² Taschler, Vor neuen Herausforderungen, pp. 294-299, 307-311, 357-361.
¹⁶³ Quoted in ibid., p. 357.
¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Osterheld, Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard, p. 198.
¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Lahti, Security Cooperation as a Way to Stop the Spread of Nuclear Weapons?, p. 316.
¹⁶⁷ See Hinrichsen, Der Ratgeber, p. 176.
of the United States. For, in the end, Schröder said, Germans “will only be able to achieve our political goals […] if the Alliance, [with] the power of the United States of America in the lead, really stands strong.” Consequently, for Schröder and Erhard, confronting Washington over the NPT was out of the question.

The same held true for Carstens. Although he had held strong reservations against the NPT from the beginning—one of them being, notably, that permanently renouncing nuclear arms would accord Germany a second-class status vis-à-vis France and Great Britain—Carstens did not dare rejecting an NPT that Washington considered important: During a Cabinet meeting in February 1967, Carstens argued against rejecting the treaty because, if the NPT would later come into being, he warned, then Germany and the United States would stand on opposing sides of the issue—a scenario which he clearly regarded as unbearable. That Carstens also regarded the inevitability of an NPT membership as conditioned by Bonn’s diplomatic isolation vis-à-vis the United States was revealed in his memoirs: There, he explains that after Italy’s signing of the NPT in January 1969 had deprived Germany of its last source of allied support against U.S. requests to join the NPT, “we had to content ourselves with a few significant improvements of minor aspects of the first [U.S.-Soviet] draft” of the NPT. In short, whereas Carstens feared being relegated to a second-class status vis-à-vis France and Great Britain, German deference to the United States seemed normal to him.

Lastly, Rainer Barzel and Helmut Schmidt, too, regarded German NPT membership as unavoidable. In a February 1967 meeting with Kiesinger, they both agreed with the Chancellor that Bonn would have to consent to the NPT because rejecting it would involve Germany in a political conflict with its allies in which Bonn would have no diplomatic support at all. This appraisal was driven by the two leaders’ inferior status conception vis-à-vis the United States. As Schmidt had stated privately regarding Vietnam in 1968, “We cannot turn against the United States. That must be said.” And to Barzel, not even the EC countries combined were on par with the United States—“be it foreign trade, be it defense matters”—let alone

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168 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 31.
169 See „Carstens to Hallstein, April 27, 1967,” Records of Karl Carstens (NL 1337), Vol. 561, BAK.
172 Ibid. (emphasis added).
173 See Marx, ed., Die CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag, p. LXXV.
West Germany on its own, which he regarded as “in terms of foreign policy not even a middle power.” With a rejection of the NPT, then, Bonn would be punching way above its weight.

In contrast, the NPT opponents envisioned Germany on par with the United States. As a result of this status conception, they refused to defer to U.S. priorities and, instead, strongly favored challenging Washington over the NPT. Thus, Adenauer publicly called on Europeans not to succumb to U.S. demands to join the NPT, even appealing directly to their status feelings: As he proclaimed in Madrid in early 1967, non-nuclear Europeans “must not become controlled objects of the reigning nuclear [weapon] states.” During the same month, Adenauer privately criticized Kiesinger’s NPT stance as “weak” and submissive to U.S. orders. In response, Kiesinger, who had then just concluded with the other NPT critics that Bonn could not avoid deferring to U.S. priorities regarding the NPT, began to wonder “if Adenauer aims at a permanent rift between Germany and the United States.” With both Adenauer and Kiesinger objecting to the NPT, their divergent views on the appropriate response to Washington’s NPT efforts reveal their distinct status conceptions: While Kiesinger viewed Germany as a weak “object” of diplomacy and, therefore, tried to avert confrontations with the United States, Adenauer intuitively listed Germany among the European great powers that could certainly resist U.S. policies: As Adenauer had asked in 1963, when he rejected Washington’s opposition to increased Franco-German defense cooperation under the Élysée Treaty, “Why shall we always act so well-behaved [toward the United States]? De Gaulle has gotten pretty far with his independent approach and his denials [of cooperation].” Notably, Adenauer considered Bonn well-armed for a limited political confrontation with Washington because, as he had proudly stated in 1964 in allusion to the United States, “We are the second strongest economic power in the world.” It is exactly this notion of being on par with the United States that gave Adenauer the confidence to disobey U.S. orders regarding the NPT.

Like Adenauer, Strauss publicly challenged U.S. efforts on the NPT. Speaking in Madrid in October 1967, he called on Europeans to resist “new global arrangements analogous to Yalta” like the NPT. And behind closed doors in February 1967, Strauss reportedly shouted...

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176 Rainer Barzel, „Die weltpolitischen Rahmenbedingungen, in die die Bundesrepublik Deutschland eingefügt ist (speech given in Bonn on February 2, 1981),“ p.1, Records of Rainer Barzel (NL 1371), Vol. 258, BAK.
179 Quoted in ibid., p. 167.
180 Quoted in ibid., p. 322.
181 Quoted in Geiger, Atlantiker gegen Gaullisten, p 491.
wrathfully at British Prime Minister Wilson that he, Strauss, was “an enemy of this treaty, and I can tell you I will fight against it”, declaring the NPT a humiliation, “a new Versailles, and one of cosmic proportions.” Meanwhile, in a defiant letter sent to Kiesinger in the same week, Strauss stressed that a German isolation over the NPT was no reason to back down: After acknowledging the prospect of a diplomatic isolation and the risk that Washington could sever its supplies of fuel for German nuclear power plants, Strauss still denied any need to compromise: “Neither out of fear of world opinion nor under the pressure of American extortion must we sign a treaty that irrevocably reduces Germany to a divided object of a super cartel of the world powers. […] For reasons of honesty, I announce in advance that I will not under any conditions yield to a Cabinet decision on this issue reached under God-knows-what circumstances (‘In the end, we cannot help but sign!’).” That the refusal to bend to U.S. policies was tied to Strauss’ ambitious vision of Germany’s natural status became apparent when the letter to Kiesinger proceeded with allusions to national sovereignty: Wrote Strauss, “A German government that is still aware of notions like nation and history can and must not sign this treaty. A government signing this treaty surrenders the most fundamental sovereign right out of weakness or out of blindness for the consequences.”

The same link between Strauss’ contempt for the isolation argument and his view of Germany’s rank was obvious in early 1974, when he angrily argued against joining the NPT in a closed meeting. After demanding that Germany must “finally cease defining our interests as a function of how worthy of praise they are for our Western friends,” Strauss tied this point to his status conception for Germany: To Strauss, referring to Bonn’s isolation over the NPT “is the argument of helots [i.e. slaves], not the argument of free men. We in the Federal Republic—[…] as the second largest or maybe even the largest trading nation in the world and as the strongest economic partner in the Atlantic area behind the United States—have our own interests […]. The British have chosen their [nuclear] option, the French have chosen their [nuclear] option, and the rest of the Europeans have in any way quit world history some time ago […] but the key nation, the destined nation [for Europe’s return to greatness as a federal entity] is the Federal Republic of Germany.” Therefore, if Bonn does not free itself from “the Nazi-complex that Germans, due to their past, consider themselves inferior and let themselves be treated accordingly, neither our country nor Europe will ever get its act together again.”

According to Strauss, then, Bonn could definitely reject the NPT, if only it would have the

184 Quoted in Taschler, Vor neuen Herausforderungen, p. 91.
185 Quoted in ibid.
186 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” pp. 21-22.
stomach to stand up to the United States and act in accordance with its status as an important nation. This, Strauss said, would generate “greater prestige, respect, and a more guaranteed future than cowardly accommodation, petty wobbling, and opportunistic submission.”

While Strauss restricted such plain criticism to private letters and closed meetings, his personal assistant Marcel Hepp was able to openly voice the opinion of his boss and the CSU. In a book against the NPT, Hepp made it clear that the NPT opponents’ criticism was status-related: He claimed that Germany could easily endure a diplomatic isolation and the popular outrage of world opinion just as de Gaulle and the Kremlin had not been harmed by years of international criticism. That Hepp intuitively compared Germany with France and the Soviet Union unmistakably reveals that he accorded Germany the status of a great power. And this self-perception impacted his willingness to confront the United States. According to Hepp, if Washington would risk a trial of strength with Bonn over the NPT, then Germany also had economic and diplomatic tools at its disposal to face down the United States: For it was “unimaginable […] that the United States would abandon its most faithful ally because of its ambitions in Geneva [i.e. the NPT], if it [Germany] raises fierce objections. The United States counts on our tendency to fall in line like a model student. But the erstwhile model student has come of age.” Hence, while the NPT critics feared a bilateral confrontation with Washington and, thus, deferred to U.S. requests, the NPT opponents were not only willing to face up to the United States, but even optimistic that Bonn would prevail in a bilateral showdown.

Grewe similarly favored a confrontational approach toward Washington’s NPT efforts. Considering the NPT a “degradation of the Federal Republic”, he boldly pushed in January 1967 to respond to the first U.S-Soviet NPT draft with a “very resolute and unequivocal reaction” in order to force the superpowers to permit the participation of non-nuclear states in multilateral nuclear forces under the NPT. To this end, Grewe even recommended dropping threatening hints toward Washington that “our future policy toward NATO (e.g. our readiness for integration) will depend upon U.S. decisions regarding the Nonproliferation Treaty.” Thus, Grewe responded to the U.S. NPT requests with angry defiance and a readiness to risk a bilateral confrontation. To him, the deference of the NPT critics was mere “anxiousness.”

Even if Germany would become completely isolated within NATO after rejecting the NPT,

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187 Quoted in Bischoff, Franz Josef Strauß, die CSU und die Außenpolitik, p. 201.
188 Marcel Hepp, Der Atomsperrvertrag: Die Supermächte verteilen die Welt (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1968), pp. 116-117.
189 Ibid., p. 120.
192 Grewe, Rückblenden, p. 695.
Grewe argued, this would amount to a “serious test of stamina”, but one which could certainly be passed. 193 A psychological need to be in line with Washington was notably absent here.

Mertes and Wörner displayed the same readiness to endure a diplomatic isolation over rejecting the NPT. Mertes furiously discarded the entire isolation argument as meaningless since Bonn’s allies consisted only of legitimate nuclear weapons states under the NPT and several non-nuclear states all of which Mertes considered “relatively irrelevant in geopolitical terms.” 194 Hence, Mertes also placed Germany in a higher-ranked class of states than the other non-nuclear NATO members. 195 And as they accorded Germany a high status within the alliance, both Mertes and Wörner considered confronting the United States over the NPT a feasible option, even from an isolated position: As Mertes asserted in a closed meeting in February 1974, rejecting the NPT in the face of U.S. disagreement was possible because any truly damaging political fallout would be contained by Washington’s powerful self-interest in a functioning alliance with a free Germany. To Mertes, this was the lesson for Germans to learn because “As a result of 20 years of alliance ties with the United States, we, the CDU, have gotten used to a false form of deference to this good and reliable ally.” 196 Wörner shared Mertes’ assessment on NPT rejection: “A nay to this treaty is responsible,” he argued, because even in this case “the German-American relationship would certainly remain intact […]”. 197 As for the gap between an “intact” and a “harmonious” U.S.-German alliance, however, this space comprises exactly the kind of political tensions and uncertainty which the NPT opponents in Bonn were willing to bear and which the NPT supporters and critics feared so badly.

**Alternative Explanations**

In studying Germany’s nuclear reversal, I have not only tested my own argument, but also several alternative explanations. I will briefly discuss why I have found them unconvincing.

One explanation in the literature holds that Germany acquiesced into joining the NPT due to the threat of U.S. material pressure. However, both the Johnson and the Nixon Administration decided early on to refrain from pressuring Bonn into accepting NPT membership. 198 Besides, there is ample process-tracing evidence showing that German leaders did not feel

195 For an early statement along these lines, see “Memorandum from Mertes, Re: The NPT and Germany’s share of nuclear responsibility in the Atlantic alliance, December 30, 1966,” p. 2, Classified records section (B 150), Vol. 93, PA/AA.
196 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 66.
197 Quoted in ibid., pp. 50-51.
coerced by the United States to join the treaty.\textsuperscript{199} Finally, this theory cannot explain why only some—but not all—German leaders consented to NPT membership.

Another theory claims that the creation of NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) in the late 1960s “solved” West German doubts over the reliability of U.S. pledges of protection, and this newly-found trust allowed Bonn to permanently renounce nuclear arms and join the NPT. This account is inconsistent, though, with the fact that those German leaders who finally approved the NPT—i.e. the NPT supporters and critics—had constantly placed full trust in the U.S. security guarantee: before the creation of the NPG and also afterwards.\textsuperscript{200} Therefore, an increase of allied assurance definitely had no role in Germany’s NPT accession.

A third explanation holds that anti-nuclear sentiment among a new generation of German leaders caused Bonn’s approval of NPT membership. To be sure, the NPT supporters deemed German control over nuclear forces unnecessary—though not morally wrong—, thus following a non-moral “logic of appropriateness.” However, this theory fails to explain why the NPT critics in Bonn, who strongly desired German control over nuclear arms, also came to approve Germany’s NPT accession. Moreover, several NPT opponents, like Wörner, Mertes, and even Strauss, were then quite young, so the notion of a generational change is rather weak. Instead, ideas of national status were crucial, and the “old” status view of Germany as a great power on par with the United States also held some sway among younger leaders.

Finally, one might argue that the German NPT supporters and critics were part of an internationalizing domestic coalition whose dependence on export-led growth forced them to join the NPT.\textsuperscript{201} However, while the NPT supporters and critics were proponents of internationalization and economic liberalization, this orientation was not a prerequisite for their approval of Germany’s NPT membership. They recognized that rejecting the NPT could endanger German access to U.S.-produced nuclear fuel for civilian power plants in Germany. As for the NPT supporters, though, this aspect did not enter their personal calculus regarding the NPT.\textsuperscript{202} From among the NPT critics, only some of them based their argument for joining the NPT on the economic risks of abstaining. And even in these cases, it is often not clear whether their references to the need for nuclear fuel reflected their private motivation or rather con-

\textsuperscript{199} See, for example, the statement from Frank in “Minutes of a meeting of the Bundestag Defence Committee, December 5, 1973,” p. 17, Records of the Defence Committee (B 3119), Vol. A7/12-16/17, Bundestag Archives, Berlin or the 1978 statement from Kiesinger in Kroevel, \textit{Einen Anfang finden!}, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{200} See the section above on “West Germany’s high intrinsic importance for U.S. security.”


stituted an effort to sway the NPT opponents toward approval. Thus, Carstens told CDU/CSU deputies in 1974 that rejecting the NPT would cause trouble because Germany was dependent on U.S. nuclear fuel and these supplies would become illegal if Germany stayed out of the NPT. His private notes reveal, though, that the trouble he anticipated was not a cutoff of U.S. nuclear fuel supplies for Germany, but U.S.-German political tensions resulting from continuing U.S. fuel supplies that would be difficult to justify for Washington. Hence, Carstens’ status-based fear of U.S.-German disagreement seems to be the explanatory factor here.

Lastly, the internationalization-based explanation is inconsistent with the fact that the NPT opponents also advocated integration into the world economy. Yet these elites disputed that the United States would dare to deny Germany its nuclear fuel supplies if Bonn rejected the NPT. As Strauss furiously argued, “This is […] the argument of the slave, if on the next day he will still get the hand-full of rice that he is supposedly entitled to. If we [Germany] are written off in this context, one can write off Europe as well as the entire Atlantic community.” Here again, Strauss’ status conception vis-à-vis the United States was the key variable.

**Conclusions**

In this case study, I have made two claims of causal sufficiency: First, I have argued that German leaders holding an inferior national status conception vis-à-vis the United States agreed to Germany’s nuclear reversal because four additional conditions were being met: (1) Germany enjoyed a high intrinsic importance for U.S. security; (2) the treaty-based nature of the U.S.-German alliance was maintained; (3) the nuclear reversal had no negative effects for the German economy; and (4) Bonn faced concerted international social pressure to abandon its nuclear weapons activities. Second, I have claimed that German leaders holding a status view that ranks Germany on par with the United States would have acquiesced into a nuclear reversal if four additional conditions, three of which are identical to those listed above, had been fulfilled: (1) Germany was accorded a high intrinsic value for U.S. security; (2) the formal character of the alliance was preserved; (3) the reversal did not negatively impact Germany’s economy; and (4) Bonn faced material U.S. pressure to give up its nuclear weapons activities.

If we are to draw implications from these findings for the world of today, we need to determine first how idiosyncratic the above-mentioned conditions were. I argue that the third

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203 “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 33a.

204 Other NPT critics, in confidential memos or private notes, likewise did not pay much attention to the prospect of a U.S. nuclear fuel cutoff, treating it as a minor question that, in Barzel’s words, “might come up” and would then have to be solved. See the highly confidential “Memorandum from Barzel, Re: On the Nonproliferation Treaty, February 11, 1969,” p. 1, Records of Rainer Barzel (NL 1371), Vol. 81, BAK.

205 Quoted in “Minutes of a special meeting of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the NPT, February 12, 1974,” p. 23.
additional condition was an artifact of the vagueness of the early NPT drafts which only became relevant because Germany already had an advanced civilian nuclear industry at this time. Besides, I hold that the first and second additional condition can be summarized as “The existing level of U.S. allied protection was maintained.” I am not more specific here because the requirements for successful allied assurance are highly context dependent.\(^{206}\) (In the words of my psychological argument, the three essentials of the shared identity to which Washington must commit itself to make its ally receptive to U.S. wishes reflect the existing structure of the alliance at hand and not the structure of another alliance, real or imagined.) Thus, it would be a mistake to infer from the German case that a formal alliance treaty is always a prerequisite for a nuclear reversal. If this is true, then my theoretical argument becomes simpler and—with the usual caveat that it does not apply to states that already possess nuclear weapons\(^{207}\)—goes like this: \textit{If the United States maintains its existing level of protection for an ally engaged in nuclear weapons activities, Washington can get the ally to conduct a nuclear reversal by mobilizing concerted international social pressure against the ally if its leaders hold an inferior status conception vis-à-vis the United States. If, on the other hand, the leaders of the ally envision their nation as being on par with the United States, then Washington can still get their acquiescence to a nuclear reversal by exerting material U.S. pressure on the ally.}

Since putting material U.S. pressure on an ally—e.g. withdrawing U.S. troops from its territory, cancelling weapons sales or suspending missile defense cooperation—would be extraordinarily difficult to push through in Washington, the first part of the argument is crucial. According to this first part, the success of future U.S. efforts to make its allies abandon their nuclear weapons activities will be determined by the U.S. ability to mobilize international social pressure and by the presence of allied leaders who rank their nation below the United States. And this seems to be a promising conclusion: For, on the one hand, the United States is still an effective organizer of international coalitions in nonproliferation diplomacy. And on the other hand, at least at this time, most of those U.S. allies which might be tempted to “go nuclear” in the future (namely South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or the United Arab Emirates) are led by leaders who seem to rank their nation clearly below the United States and should thus be highly susceptible to concerted U.S.-led social pressure. Therefore, according to the causal claims that I have presented above, there would still be reason for optimism if—a big if—these U.S. alliance partners were to start nuclear weapons activities.
