Sanctions, Statecraft, and Nuclear Proliferation

Some states have violated international commitments not to develop nuclear weapons. Yet the effects of international sanctions or positive inducements on their internal politics remain highly contested. How have trade, aid, investments, diplomacy, financial measures, and military threats affected different groups? How, when, and why were those effects translated into compliance with nonproliferation rules? Have inducements been sufficiently biting, too harsh, too little, too late, or just right for each case? How have different inducements influenced domestic cleavages? What were their unintended and unforeseen effects? Why are self-reliant autocracies more often the subject of sanctions?

Leading scholars analyze the anatomy of inducements through novel conceptual perspectives, in-depth case studies, original quantitative data, and newly-translated documents. The volume distils ten key dilemmas of broad relevance to the study of statecraft, primarily from experiences with Iraq, Libya, Iran, and North Korea, bound to spark debate among students and practitioners of international politics.

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Edited by
Etel Solingen
To Ruby and Benjamin, who master the art of positive inducements
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This book seeks to illuminate dilemmas of statecraft in the prevention of nuclear proliferation. It focuses largely – but not uniquely – on experiences in the last two decades, primarily with Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Libya. These dilemmas make it clear that we are far from reaching a final word on the subject and that our efforts to unpack the paths and effects of external inducements within target states may introduce more questions than can be answered in this salvo. Far from seeking to reach unanimity on a subject ridden with quandaries, the primary aspiration of this volume is to reflect on those cases and experiences with an eye on improving our knowledge of the scope conditions, processes, and causal mechanisms that link inducements to specific outcomes. This entails a better understanding of the domestic distributional costs and benefits of external inducements on target states. At the very least, the effort to concentrate on those causal mechanisms connecting sanctions and positive inducements to outcomes broadens a more typical focus on whether or not such inducements “work.” Not only can assessments of outcomes be overly simplistic but too narrow a focus on outcomes often comes at the expense of a deeper and productive inquiry into why different instruments may or not yield expected effects under particular circumstances.

The main objective was thus not to take sides in the sanctions pessimism–optimism debate. Although there is plenty of that here as well, there is also ample divergence among authors over whether or not comprehensive sanctions work, targeted sanctions are less or more effective, positive inducements are any more efficient than negative ones, what should a right mix of both consist of, and whether or not all types of inducements may have proven futile. We aim not at definitive conclusions – given contested readings of the evidence – but rather at redirecting attention to the anatomy of inducements, the causal processes they unleash in the domestic politics of target states, and the intended, unintended, and unexpected outcomes inducements can yield.
That focus helps clarify what this book is not. First, it is not primarily a study of motivations and justifications for acquiring nuclear weapons, although it does build on conceptions of the “demand-side” for nuclear weapons analyzed in previous work. The focal theme here, however, is the “supply-side” of inducements, or instruments used by international actors (individual states, groups of states, international institutions) to persuade those states that violate international nonproliferation commitments to comply with them. Second, neither is this a study of nuclear restraint, or why states with adequate capabilities nonetheless chose to forgo nuclear weapons. In other words, the “non-demand” side is also beyond our focus here, for the most part, although it is briefly discussed in the context of “selection effects” in the study of sanctions. Third, this is not an exhaustive study of nonproliferation statecraft over the last six decades, which would have entailed many more cases than the focal ones addressed in this volume: Iraq, North Korea, Libya, and Iran. The world has changed in significant ways, particularly after 1989, and our spotlight is on the last twenty years. Over that period there was a surge in the belief in the power of comprehensive sanctions initially, and targeted sanctions subsequently, as alternatives to war. Circumscribing the analysis to this period also enables a more controlled comparison of those four cases under a world-time that differs significantly from the Cold War era. Fourth, this is not a comprehensive exploration of all strategies vis-à-vis proliferating states, including military action, deterrence, containment, and others. Although some chapters address those strategies, in some cases tangentially, the heart of the analysis relates to sanctions and positive inducements primarily – but not solely – of the economic type. One chapter does examine military threats more directly but even there the focus is on domestic distributional consequences of such threats on target states, the volume’s leitmotif.

Our main audiences are scholars, students, and practitioners with an interest in international relations, international studies, national and international security, international political economy, international security institutions, nuclear proliferation, international sanctions and economic statecraft, comparative politics, the inner workings of autocratic regimes, the links between domestic and foreign policy, and East Asian and Middle East politics. The different chapters place the study of statecraft within a broader framework, taking stock of contemporary theoretical and empirical work on sanctions and positive inducements beyond the area of nuclear proliferation, relying on different methodologies and speaking to a wide audience of experts and non-experts.

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1 Solingen (2007a).
From that perspective, the dilemmas of statecraft identified here can hopefully contribute to a broader understanding of causal mechanisms linking external inducements to changes in state behavior in various issue areas, including human rights.

I am indebted to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, particularly to Steve Del Rosso, who helped fund two meetings, and to Carl Robichaud. This support enabled a group of contributors and discussants to gather in Laguna Beach in March 2009 to discuss a preliminary memo on distributional effects of external inducements by Etel Solingen and Albert Wolf. Participants met as a group for a second time in Washington, DC in September 2010. I am especially grateful to Robert S. Litwak, Vice President for Programs at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, for hosting a discussion of findings with an audience of Washington, DC scholars and practitioners. Together with Joe Pilat, Rob Litwak offered both very useful substantive advice and warm hospitality.

The project would have hardly been the same without the extraordinary commitment of Wilfred Wan and Celia Reynolds, graduate students at the University of California Irvine and nonproliferation experts in their own right, who helped steer the process along while contributing an original chapter of their own. As Dean of Social Sciences, Barbara Dosher provided the proper research environment for collaborative projects and for graduate student participation; I am especially grateful for her support and encouragement. I also thank the University of California Irvine’s Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and the Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies, and their respective directors Kristen Monroe and Cecelia Lynch, for hosting the project and supporting student participation as research assistants. Wilfred Wan, Celia Reynolds, Helen Klein, Adam Martin, and Albert Wolf were involved in different capacities and I thank them all for their contributions.

I would also like to acknowledge the comments and suggestions of participants at workshops in Laguna Beach, the Woodrow Wilson Center, and a panel at the 2010 American Political Science Association meetings, especially Miles Kahler, Steve Krasner, Jim Lebovic, and Kim Elliott. I also benefited from participation at seminars and Track Two meetings sponsored by the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. My special thanks to Susan Shirk and T.J. Pempel. The volume also benefited from helpful observations from audiences at the University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia University, Fudan University, Peking University, Oxford University’s Centre for
Preface and acknowledgments

International Studies, Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Doha (Qatar), ETH-Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, University of Hong Kong, Keio University, Fundação Getulio Vargas, the East Asia Institute in Seoul, and the 2011 ASAN Plenum sponsored by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul. For their valuable recommendations and helpful advice on different aspects of this project I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for the Press and David Baldwin, Steve Brams, Jeff Richelson, Shelly Bennett-Burns, Natalie Cook, and Gillian Cummings.

It has been a particular pleasure to work with John Haslam at Cambridge University Press. A thoughtful editor with a clinical eye, John steers the arduous process of transforming a manuscript into an actual book with a reassuring and cheerful smile. Particularly helpful at the production stage were Gillian Dadd, Gail Welsh, and Rob Wilkinson.

As always, I owe my family the most, for their love, encouragement, and support, which makes anything possible and everything worthwhile.