

# Optimists and Pessimists

William Spaniel

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### **Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes**

Matthew Kroenig

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818312000367>

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#### *Research Note*



### **Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail**


Todd S. Sechser, Matthew Fuhrmann


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# Debating the Benefits Nuclear Superiority for Crisis Bargaining, Part I

2013-03-25 / DANIEL NEXON / 9 COMMENTS

Editor's Note: Back in February I [riffed](#) on a [post](#) by Erik Voeten in which Erik discussed two articles in *International Organization*. One, by our colleague Matt Kroenig, [argued that nuclear superiority gives states advantages in crisis bargaining \(PDF\)](#). Another, by Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, [rejects this claim \(PDF\)](#).



# Debating the Benefits of Nuclear Superiority for Crisis Bargaining, Part II

2013-03-25 / DANIEL NEXON / 3 COMMENTS

Editor's Note: Back in February I [riffed](#) on a [post](#) by Erik Voeten in which Erik discussed two articles in *International Organization* (IO). One, by our colleague Matt Kroenig, [argued that nuclear superiority gives states advantages in crisis bargaining \(PDF\)](#). Another, by Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, [rejects this claim \(PDF\)](#).



# Debating the Benefits of Nuclear Superiority, Part III

2013-03-28 / DANIEL NEXON / REPLY

Editor's Note: Back in February I [riffed](#) on a [post](#) by Erik Voeten in which Erik discussed two articles in *International Organization* (IO). One, by our colleague Matt Kroenig, [argued that nuclear superiority gives states advantages in crisis bargaining](#) (PDF). Another, by Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, [rejects this claim](#) (PDF).



# Debating the Benefits of Nuclear Superiority for Crisis Bargaining, Part IV

2013-03-29 / DANIEL NEXON / REPLY

Editor's Note: Back in February I [riffed](#) on a [post](#) by Erik Voeten in which Erik discussed two articles in *International Organization* (IO). One, by our colleague Matt Kroenig, [argued that nuclear superiority gives states advantages in crisis bargaining](#) ([PDF](#)). Another, by Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, [rejects this claim](#) ([PDF](#)).



# The Debate Persists

- Kroenig working paper: nuclear armed states initiate crises more often
  - Conditional on crisis, they also lose more often
  - But they are more likely to force concessions overall

# Problem of Redundancy Problem

- If the problem is that one system might malfunction or there will be agency slack, why not solve the problem with redundancy?
- Diffusion of responsibility



# List of nuclear close calls

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A nuclear close call is an incident that could lead to, or could have led to, at least one unintended nuclear detonation/explosion. These incidents typically involve a perceived imminent threat to a **nuclear-armed country** which could lead to retaliatory strikes against the perceived aggressor. The damage caused by international nuclear exchange is not necessarily limited to the participating countries, as the hypothesized rapid **climate change** associated with even small-scale regional nuclear war could threaten food production worldwide—a scenario known as **nuclear famine**.<sup>[1]</sup>

Despite a reduction in global nuclear tensions after the end of the **Cold War**, estimated nuclear warhead stockpiles total roughly 15,000 worldwide, with the **United States** and **Russia** holding 90% of the total.<sup>[2]</sup>

Though exact details on many nuclear close calls are hard to come by, the analysis of particular cases has highlighted the importance of a variety of factors in preventing accidents. At an international level, this includes the importance of context and outside mediation; at the national level, effectiveness in government communications, and involvement of key decision-makers; and, at the individual level, the decisive role of individuals in following intuition and prudent decision-making, often in violation of protocol.<sup>[3]</sup>

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# Problem of Redundancy Problem

- If the problem is that one system might malfunction or there will be agency slack, why not solve the problem with redundancy?
- Diffusion of responsibility

# War Inference Problem

- The number of wars featuring nuclear states on opposite sides is extremely small
- Estimates therefore sensitive to coding rules