
**Reviewed by** Olin Walters (Air University, Air War College)

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Since the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) came into force in 1970, its ability to successfully deter nations from developing nuclear weapons has remained tenuous at best. Many analysts and pundits have viewed the regime of nonproliferation countries with skepticism and a healthy fear that the agreements were on the brink of collapse. Jeffrey M. Kaplow's book *Signing Away the Bomb: The Surprising Success of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime* conducts a deep dive into why the NPT has been successful despite lacking many of the characteristics seen in other effective international institutions. The author's book describes the genesis of the nuclear nonproliferation regime and how the NPT has beaten the odds, defied the skeptics, and found unlikely success. This book would be a worthy addition to any policymakers or nuclear security scholar's library.

In the first chapter of the book, Kaplow describes the origins of the NPT. The end of World War II saw the first use of a nuclear weapon and with it, ushered in an era of unprecedented uneasiness. By the 1950s and 1960s the outlook for nuclear nonproliferation was pessimistic. Policymakers at the time feared that without an arms control measure, many new states would acquire nuclear weapons. President John F. Kennedy famously stated in 1963, “I see the possibility in the 1970s of the President of the United States having to face a world in which 15 or 20 or 25 nations may have these weapons” (p. 1). To address the growing fears of the world's armies building nuclear arms, the NPT came into force in 1970. Although creating the NPT was an international effort, policymakers and even some of those involved in the NPT negotiations had significant doubts about its likely effectiveness. The reason for their reservation lies in the NPT's lack of characteristics expected to be present in successful international institutions, above all an enforcement or adjudication mechanism. Second, members can choose to opt out of the agreement without repercussions. Last, the NPT requires members to bear significant cost for both implementation monitoring and verification mechanism in forgoing significant military capabilities. With so much working against the NPT, Kaplow dedicates a large portion of the book explaining how such an agreement became a success.

Kaplow's book makes the success of the NPT hard to deny. With 191 members, the NPT is one of the most widely ratified international agreements. Despite the dire predictions of policymakers, the NPT has seen only a handful of countries successfully develop nuclear weapons. The author makes three assertions as to why the NPT has succeeded where so many other international agreements
failed. First, members of the NPT look to the behavior of other members in the agreement to strengthen the resolve of the organization. Strong commitment by NPT members strengthens the resolve of all members and enhances the desire of other nations to join. Second, the level of commitment members have toward the NPT has led to the development of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. This regime is made up of treaties, agreements, conventions, formal and informal grouping, rules, and norms that seek to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. Although the NPT lacks penalties for violators, the nonproliferation regime does not. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is charged with governing, reporting, inspecting, and safeguarding nuclear sites. It also has the incentive of a sizable multilateral aid effort to share nuclear technologies with well-behaved, less-developed states. The opportunity for countries to gain access to such technologies is a powerful motivator to follow the rules. The third benefit to joining the nonproliferation treaties and like-minded agencies is the belief that countries within the organizations will monitor and apply controls to feuding neighbors. If neither country has nuclear weapons, then neither country needs to go through the high cost of developing the weapon. Although the regime has seen a marked increase in nuclear-capable countries, the number of nuclear-armed countries has remained low. Kaplow argues that it is for these reasons that the NPT has successfully deterred the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Perhaps Kaplow's most compelling evidence for value of the NPT is in the volume of quantitative analysis and predictive analytics he developed using declassified data. Throughout the book, Kaplow illustrates how countries that seek nuclear technologies are also more likely to be associated with nonproliferation regimes like the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The more groups and treaties a country is a part of, the more scrutiny they put themselves under, and the more likely they are to follow the rules. Those countries that have greater potential of exhibiting bad faith toward nonproliferation tend to be countries that avoid entering into agreements with other nations in the first place. Kaplow's statistical analysis shows countries entering treaties like the NPT, CTBT, and FMCT and agencies like IAEA and ACDA are more likely to be seen as trustworthy and therefore rewarded with nuclear technology sharing. In contrast, countries who desire nuclear weapons tend to avoid these treaties, resulting in their self-isolation. This isolation impedes the countries' access to the very weapons technologies they seek. Kaplow acknowledges that the strength of the nuclear nonproliferation regime tenuously lies in the resolve of the countries that make up the organizations. One critique Kaplow has for the NPT regime is the uneven way the treaties tend to correct the member states for cheating. His belief is that members are reassured when the treaty imposes penalties judiciously. Although the future of the nuclear nonproliferation regime is uncertain, the agreements will continue to see success if the members are committed to its fair enforcement.

Kaplow's graphs and predictive statistical analysis provides a measure of hope for a world without nuclear weapons proliferation. The key to this optimism centers around international trust and confidence in the nonproliferation treaties and agencies. If countries continue to enter into good-faith agreements and hold each other accountable, the unlikely success of the nuclear nonproliferation regime will continue.
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