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Public Opinion, Commitment Traps, and Nuclear Weapons Policy

Center on Contemporary Conflict

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PASCC

PROJECT ON ADVANCED SYSTEMS AND CONCEPTS
FOR COUNTERING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

The Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD

(PASCC) is run at the Center on Contemporary Studies (CCC) and sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. PASCC awards and supports strategic studies and dialogues that anticipate and try to reduce the threat of WMD capabilities.



The CCC has a respected track record for providing research and timely analysis on a variety of topics to leading decision makers in the U.S. national security community. Located in the Naval Postgraduate School, the CCC is the research wing of the Department of National Security Affairs.

Research in Progress describes ongoing PASCC research. For more information, please contact pascc@nps.edu.

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Public Opinion, Commitment Traps, and Nuclear Weapons Policy

Performer: CISAC, Stanford University

Principal Investigator: Scott D. Sagan

Cost: \$100,000

Fiscal Year(s): 2014-2015

Objective:

Policymakers and scholars widely believe that there is a deep public aversion to nuclear weapons. But there is no empirical evidence on the strength of “antinuclear instincts” and the conditions under which they operate in the United States and other countries. This is especially relevant in light of current debates over “red lines” for military intervention, concerns about non-combatant immunity, and escalation dangers in military conflicts.

The project will evaluate how three factors influence public support on the possible use of nuclear versus conventional weapons: (1) the impact of specific threats made by leaders; (2) the kind of adversary targeted; and (3) the importance of protecting soldiers and the “principle of proportionality.” Findings will inform policymakers on the potential public views for and against the use of force and on the principles of just war doctrine.

Approach:

The Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University will create and conduct public survey experiments in the United States and India to illuminate similarities and differences between public opinion and government policies on the use of force. CISAC will employ YouGov/Polimetrix polling techniques. This project is also partially funded by the MacArthur Foundation.