Negative security assurances

A **negative security assurance** is a guarantee by a nuclear weapon state (a state that possess nuclear weapons) that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states (states that do not possess nuclear weapons).

A **positive security assurance** is a guarantee by a nuclear weapon state that it will come to the aid of a non-nuclear weapon state if it is attacked by another state with nuclear weapons.

No international legally-binding treaty or resolution containing negative security assurances exists, despite repeated calls by a number of non-nuclear weapon states. This undermines a sense of security for states that have renounced nuclear weapons and reinforces the misconception that the possession of and right to use nuclear weapons will deter aggression and increase security.

**History of negative security assurances**

In 1968 the UN Security Council adopted [resolution 255](https://www.un.org/disarmament/resmo/255/255.htm), “Question Relating to Measures to Safeguard Non-Nuclear-Weapon States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.” This resolution offered positive security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states that were concerned that by joining the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which prohibits them from acquiring nuclear weapons, they would be more at risk from a nuclear attack. Resolution 255 “Welcomes the intention expressed by certain States that they will provide or support immediate assistance, in accordance with the Charter, to any non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons that is a victim of an act or an object of a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used.”

Although this positive security assurance was designed to encourage non-nuclear weapon states to join the NPT, after this resolution the non-nuclear weapon members of the NPT began pushing for legally-binding negative security assurances, which they felt offered more protection.

The first legally-binding negative security assurance was contained in the [Treaty of Tlatelolco (1969)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Tlatelolco), which made Latin America and the Caribbean a nuclear weapon free zone. The United States was very supportive of this Treaty and signed an agreement promising not to use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against the Treaty signatories. However, the United States said it was exempt from these conditions if it was attacked by a contracting party of the Treaty working in conjunction with a nuclear weapon state.

In 1978 the **final document** of the First Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament asked nuclear weapon states to "pursue efforts to conclude appropriate, effective arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons."

Beginning in 1980, the **Conference on Disarmament (CD)** began discussing the topic of negative security assurances annually from 1983–1994 in an ad hoc committee. In 1998 the CD reconvened this committee but it did not make any progress. The CD has not convened any ad hoc committees since 1999, although many states continue to press for action on NSAs in the CD.

Since 1990, Pakistan has annually introduced a resolution on NSAs to the **UN General Assembly**. Unchanged in recent years, both in terms of substantive content and level of support, the resolution urges active "intensive negotiations" in the CD on effective international arrangements. NATO and the European Union...
have traditionally abstained from this resolution. The most recent version was adopted in 2011 with a vote of 120-0-57.

In 1995, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 984, which moved towards protecting non-nuclear weapon states. The resolution says that non-nuclear weapon members of the NPT would receive assurances that “the Security Council, and above all its nuclear-weapon State permanent members will act immediately in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations” to protect non-nuclear weapon states against attacks or threats of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used. Again, these assurances are positive assurances rather than negative assurances; thus countries in the Non-Aligned Movement in particular were disappointed that the Security Council did not take stronger action.

While negative security assurances are regularly addressed at the Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), these meetings have not made progress on making them legally-binding. The final document of the 2000 Review Conference made no mention of a possible international treaty on negative security assurances, but reaffirmed the role of the NPT as a forum for dealing with them and called upon the Preparatory Committee to make recommendations to the 2005 Review Conference. The 2005 NPT Review Conference failed to adopt a final document so the issue was pushed off again to the next review cycle. The final document of the 2010 Review Conference contained two action items on security assurances calling for immediate discussion on international arrangements on negative security assurances in the CD; and for respect for existing commitments.

Unilateral declarations by the NPT nuclear weapon states

The five NPT nuclear weapon states have made several pledges regarding negative security assurances. Ahead of the NPT Review Conference in 1995, the nuclear weapon states circulated renewed pledges on NSAs to the UN General Assembly and Security Council.

China: China has a strict policy to never to be the first to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. It has also pledged not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states or nuclear weapon free zones at any time or under any circumstances. {S/1995/265}

France: France pledged not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that belong to the NPT, except in invasion or attack on it or any of its territories or its armed forces, its allies, or a state toward which it has a security commitment, if it conducts or sustains this attack in alliance with a nuclear weapon state. After requests by many different countries, France sought to make its negative assurances similar to the Russia Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. {S/1995/264}

Russian Federation: Like France, the United Kingdom is committed to not using nuclear force unless it or any of its allies or territories is invaded or attacked in any other way by a non-nuclear weapon state in conjunction with a nuclear weapon state. {S/1995/261}

United Kingdom: Like France and Russia, the United Kingdom is committed to not using nuclear force unless it or any of its allies or territories is invaded or attacked in any other way by a non-nuclear weapon state in conjunction with a nuclear weapon state. {S/1995/262}

United States: Like France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, the United States is committed to not using nuclear force unless it or any of its allies or territories is invaded or attacked in any other way by an non-nuclear weapon state in conjunction with a nuclear weapon state. {S/1995/263}

The US Nuclear Posture Review in 2011 reserved the right to use nuclear weapons in the case of a biological or chemical weapons attack as well. The revised posture released in 2010 states:

- The United States will continue to strengthen conventional capabilities and reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks, with the objective of making deterrence of nuclear attack on the United States or our allies and partners the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons.
- The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.
- The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations.