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(Rethinking) Proliferation: Predictions, Pathways, Prospects

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OBJECTIVE: Provide the conceptual context to help explain why STATES seek or forego nuclear weapons

- **Why Theory Matters**
- **Landscape of Competing Theories**
- **Future Proliferation Pathways**
- **Proliferation Prospects**

Why Theory Matters

Policymakers' assumptions about the world tend to influence their responses to it

- **Theorizing about Proliferation**
 - Definitions
 - Information scarcity
 - Small n
- **Three Different Approaches**
 - Qualitative Case Studies
 - Quantitative Analysis
 - Historic Comparative Analysis



Landscape of Theories: Conventional Wisdom and Sampling of Other Ideas

- **Structural Power**
 - Realism / Neo-realism
- **Neoliberal Institutionalism**
- **Constructivism (Identity, Beliefs, Norms)**
- **Domestic/Bureaucratic Politics**
- **Psychological Approach**





Structural Power: Realism and Neo-Realism

Realism: States will seek nuclear weapons when they face a significant military threat to their security that cannot be met through other alternative means

Neo-Realism: States will seek every means to secure their vital interests; Fear of abandonment by allies may spur interests in nuclear weapons. “Proliferation begets proliferation.”

CASES BEST EXPLAINED: Russia, China, Pakistan; Neo-realism China, Britain, France (medium sized powers chose to develop own weapons despite being allied with one of two superpowers)



Realism and Neo-Realism (cont.)

CRITIQUE:

- **Sampling bias – observe a nuclear weapons decision and then working backwards to find the security threat**
- **Doesn't explain why certain states forgo despite technical capabilities and security threat**

IMPLICATIONS:

- **Look for ways to ensure security guarantees to allies; Look for ways to manage disarmament activities in a way that assures allies (nuclear versus other forms of deterrence)**
- **Persuade states that nuclear weapons development is not an effective use of resources for medium sized powers (shift from bi-polar to multi-polar world)**



Neoliberal Institutionalism: Rules Matter

Key states in the international system use institutions and regimes to pursue their interests. States seek to maximize cooperation and absolute gains. Cheating is the greatest threat to cooperation.

CRITIQUE:

Potential for conflict is overstated by realists

- **Countervailing forces, such as repeated interactions, propel states toward cooperation to overcome security dilemmas**

IMPLICATIONS:

- **Emphasis on compliance and enforcing rules; Do states think that the costs of acquiring nuclear weapons have increased or decreased vis-à-vis enforcement?**

Constructivism: Identity, Beliefs, Norms

States acquire or forego nuclear weapons for normative reasons (deep norms and shared beliefs about what actions are legitimate and appropriate in international relations). Nuclear weapons may serve as important symbolic functions that both shape and reflect a state's identity.



CASES BEST EXPLAINED: France; Montenegro, East Timor, Kosovo

CRITIQUE:

Does not explain why states acquire nuclear weapons outside of the regime (e.g., Pakistan, India, Israel) or why some states break regime rules and norms even after signing on to them (e.g., North Korea, Iraq, Iran); Over predicts forbearance; Under predicts acquisition (reverse critique of realism)

IMPLICATIONS:

**Recognize that norms have a strong influence on other states; Reinforce them
Contradicts recommendations from other theories**

Domestic / Bureaucratic Politics: All Politics are Local

Nuclear acquisition may serve the parochial interests of individual actors within a state, including the nuclear-energy establishment, the military and certain political leaders.



CASES BEST EXPLAINED: India, South Africa

IMPLICATIONS:

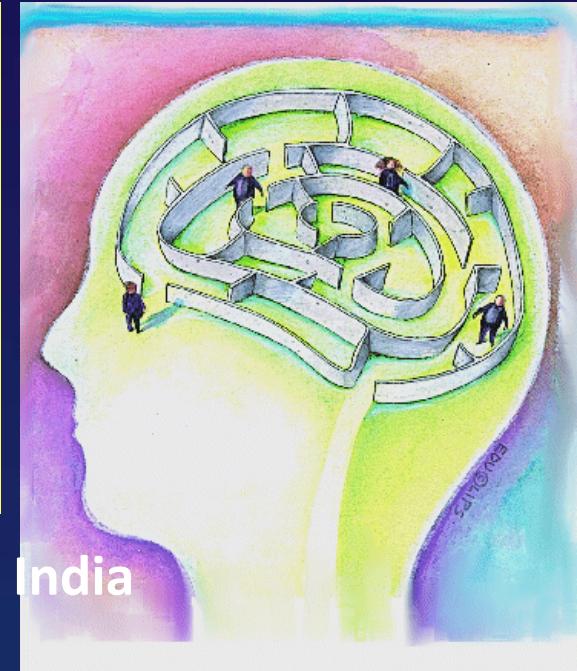
Security threats are not the central cause of weapons decisions; they are “merely windows of opportunity through which parochial interests can jump.”; Limited options for U.S. influence domestic factors in other countries

Psychological Approach: Individuals Matter

Decisions to develop or forgo nuclear weapons reflect the psychology of the leaders who make them. “Going nuclear” is a big decision and it takes a certain personality type known as “oppositional nationalists” who are driven by fear (us vs. them) and pride (we are equal if not superior to others).

CASES BEST EXPLAINED: France, Australia, Argentina, India

IMPLICATIONS: Has compelling explanatory power for past cases, however, may be difficult to apply this approach to current proliferation challenges such as Iran due to information collection problems.



By the Numbers: A Quantitative Approach

WHY THIS APPROACH:

- Previous theories ignore or underemphasize large number of states that forgo nuclear weapons; they overemphasize the explanatory power of security threats
- Qualitative theories are focus on mono-causal explanations for proliferation decisions

RESULTS:

Proliferation is strongly associated with:

- Level of economic development
- External threat environment
- Lack of great power security guarantees
- Low level of integration in world economy





Historical Approach: What the Past Tells Us About the Future

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Past proliferation is not incremental
2. Latent weapons potential is high and possibly growing
3. Proliferation is not inevitable
4. Proliferation pressures have a ripple effect
5. Possible to moderate nuclear ambitions
6. Proliferation takes time

Selected Finding: Capabilities Categorization for 2007

Assessment of Technical Capabilities for Developing Nuclear Weapons

Serial Weapons Production Potential	India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan
High Weapons Potential	Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Iran, Japan, Netherlands
Modest Weapons Potential	Algeria, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan
Nil Weapons Potential	Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria , Turkey

Notes: "Nuclear Proliferation: A Historical Overview," Institute for Defense Analysis.



Landscape of Theories: Unsatisfied?

- **Lots of Theories, No Consensus**
- **What Shapes Your Views Also Shapes Your Perception of Available Options**

“Theories should be seen as heuristic devices for thinking about tough problems, but not necessarily as accurate predictors of the future.”

Proliferation Pathways: Several Destinations Down the Yellow Cake Road

“Going Nuclear” May Take Several Forms in the Future

- Relying on Dual Use Facilities
- Hedging with Infrastructure and Trained Personnel
- Settling for Less; Capability without Testing
- Maintaining Ambiguity



Five Developments to Watch: Point of View Matters

- Nuclear Energy Renaissance
- U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Deal
- Iran's Nuclear Ambitions
- Disarmament Debate
- Emerging Nuclear Order





Thank You!