



# PSYCHOLOGY OF NUCLEAR CHOICE

## The Decision to Proliferate in the Non-Proliferation Regime

### Abstract

Despite the widespread knowledge of the seemingly infinite destructive effects of nuclear weapons, some states have chosen to retain or acquire them. Conventional theories on nuclear choice have been insufficient to explain proliferation and restraint in the NPT era. A more comprehensive model would interpret nuclear weapons decisions by integrating traditional theories of foreign relations with analysis of human psychology. This paper will explore applicable principles of social and individual psychology, ways in which they drive nuclear behavior, and how the understanding of these psychological factors may be leveraged to evolve policy that dissuades state actors from proliferation.

Arielle Shahid  
December 2015

## Table of Contents

---

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
The Pre-NPT World: Rise and Fall of the Deterrence Regime .....	2
The NPT World: The Non-Proliferation Regime .....	3
Understanding Nuclear Decision Making.....	4
Traditional Models of Nuclear Choice .....	6
State Psychology and Nuclear Choice .....	8
Group Dynamics: States and Global Norms.....	8
Regime Type and Nuclear Ambition .....	14
Individual Psychology and Nuclear Choice.....	18
Psychology of Citizens .....	18
The Psychology of Leaders.....	24
Conclusion .....	26

## Introduction

---

“Beneath the atomic bomb's monstrous mushroom cloud, human skin was burned raw. Crying for water, human beings died in desperate agony. With thoughts of these victims as the startingpoint, it is incumbent upon us to think about the nuclear age and the relationship between human beings and nuclear weapons.”

-Mr. Takashi Hiroka<sup>1</sup>

Given the boundless destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, it is difficult to understand why some states choose to acquire or retain them today. Traditional theories construed nuclear ambitions as predominantly deterrent tools to protect national security. While this may have been true, in whole or in part, during the Cold War, this theory is largely outdated. In the aftermath in the Cold War, nuclear weapons have gone from a tool that debatably helped to ensure a nation's safety, to an eradicable hazard. While the circumstances of the world have changed, the theories to explain nuclear choice have largely remained the same, highlighting security as the primary motivator for retaining a nuclear arsenal. Conventional wisdom dictates that a state is most likely to seek nuclear weapons when there is a direct threat to security. In truth, this is only a small part of the story.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) sought to prevent new states from obtaining nuclear weapons, while inspiring the reduction of stockpiles in nuclear weapons states. The success of the Non-Proliferation Treaty has been debated, along with the enhancements needed for nuclear policy to achieve these goals. In order to further progress NPT ideals, we must update our understanding of the reason behind nuclear weapons acquisition and retention.

Substantial research has been done as to the political components of these decisions, both domestically and internationally. Unfortunately, such theories provide limited insight. First, they

---

<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Mr. Takashi Hiraoka, Mayor of Hiroshima, and Mr. Iccho Itoh, Mayor of Nagasaki, before the International Court of Justice, 7 November 1995 (22-39), available at [http://www.nuclearweaponslaw.com/Hiroshima\\_Nagasaki.doc](http://www.nuclearweaponslaw.com/Hiroshima_Nagasaki.doc)

are reactive, rather than predictive, and thus do little to inform constructive policy. Second, insofar as they provide models by which to predict future nuclear decisions, they have been largely unsuccessful. Ultimately, many of these theories failure to account for certain intangible differences between states and the situations that drive their nuclear choices.

Just as people that are in identical situations often react differently, so do state actors. It is this principle that guides the psychological approach to understanding nuclear proliferation set forth in this paper. Various psychological components are involved in the decisions regarding nuclear weapons acquisition. Principles of social psychology help in understanding the role of domestic and international relations. Likewise, theories in cognitive and personality psychology help to gain clarity as to the goals and behaviors of state leaders. This paper explains the impact of these psychological factors on nuclear proliferation, and suggests how an understanding of these factors may be leveraged to improve the NPT.

## Background

---

### The Pre-NPT World: Rise and Fall of the Deterrence Regime

When the United States used the atomic bomb against Japan on August 6, 1945, the world was forced to understand the catastrophic damage that nuclear weapons cause. In the wake of the destruction, nuclear stockpiles grew and nuclear testing increased, despite the UN General Assembly disarmament resolution. The Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb in 1949, ending the nuclear monopoly held by the United States. The Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrated how quickly nuclear tensions can escalate. Yet, once again, despite the Partial Test Ban Treaty and growing anti-nuclear sentiment, the United States continued to further develop its nuclear weaponry, citing their deterrent value as crucial to national security amidst the

ongoing arms between the United States and the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, other states followed suit, aggressively developing expanding their nuclear weapons stockpiles. As a result, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was opened for signature in 1968, with the aim of stopping proliferation and promoting disarmament.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, nuclear proliferation over course of the Cold War led to the practical end of the deterrence era. With the de-polarization of nuclear weapons technology, fears of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) no longer renders nuclear weapon use unlikely. Rather than embracing the opportunity, amidst aging technologies of Cold War nuclear arsenals, to alter its nuclear posture, the United States, has remained determined to maintain nuclear supremacy.

### **The NPT World: The Non-Proliferation Regime**

The reality of the post-Cold World is that nuclear weapons themselves pose the greatest threats to security. Nuclear deterrence as it war is obsolete and even counterproductive in defending against that threat. Self-assured destruction has replaced its mutually-assured predecessor, with modern nuclear weaponry capable of bringing about catastrophic environmental impact. The possibility for nuclear accidents has also evolved to include the danger of cybersecurity breaches. These possibilities aside, deterrence relies on the assumption that the fear of destruction—either mutually-assured or self-assured—control State behavior. This may have been true in the Cold War, but in the current world of numerous State actors with their own varied agendas, is this an assumption we are willing to make? Terrorist organizations have demonstrated that achieving their goals is worth definitive, self-imposed self-destruction.

---

<sup>2</sup> Chris Peloso, Crafting an Updated Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Applying the Lessons Learned from the Success of Similar International Treaties to the Nuclear Arms Problem, 9 Santa Clara J. Int'l L. 309, 312 (2011)

At the very least, this is convincing evidence that what motivates or controls the behavior of one actor may differ greatly for another.

The demise in effectiveness of traditional deterrence policy is a reality, and one that must be accepted by states that choose to retain or seek nuclear weapons. This does not mean, however, that security is unattainable. Rather, the fact that States have different motivations is encouraging as it pertains to achieving stability. If, for example, each nation were to be as intent on military supremacy—or perhaps more accurately, primacy—as the United States, it would be impossible to achieve any semblance of peace or accord. As evidenced by the vast amount of states that have joined the NPT, most seemingly value stability over supremacy. Upon the adoption of the NPT, reports claimed that more than 20 new nuclear states could emerge in the coming decades. In actuality, for approximately four decades, almost all states chose to remain or become non-nuclear. The treaty has 191 members, and only four known new nuclear states have emerged: India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea. Clearly, despite lingering skepticism, the NPT has had a substantial effect on discouraging nuclear proliferation. Further, the NPT was the first formal acknowledgement that nuclear weapons are not “good” and should not be sought after. From this message, the “Non-Proliferation Regime” was born.

### Understanding Nuclear Decision Making

Ultimately, in order to fill the gaps left by the NPT as currently written, it is crucial that we develop an understanding of nuclear decision making by states today. We cannot develop more effective nuclear policy without first comprehending what drives nuclear ambition. The question that must be answered is this: why do states, knowing the unconscionable destruction that nuclear weapons are capable of, still choose to acquire, retain (or modernize) nuclear weapons?

Many academics have sought answers from political theory and international relations. These theories have provided insufficient explanations as to why states desire nuclear weapons. Many of these theories are limited in utility, providing presentist interpretations of historical events. This risks placing a contemporary gloss on events of the past, rather than developing an understanding in light of the contemporaneous circumstances. Further, in relying on reactive analysis of past decisions, such models have not been incredibly useful in guiding predictive determinations. Where those decisions concern nuclear proliferation, this is too little, too late. Finally, some of these theories depend on accounts from politicians regarding their nuclear decisions. These “choreographed” accounts provide little clarity as to what actually influenced their behavior.

Psychology is the missing piece of the puzzle, enabling us to build upon these traditional theories and develop actionable findings. This is not to say that traditional areas of focus have no place in understanding nuclear decisions. Nuclear choice is not only based in how a state is situated as it pertains to security, economy, military and geography, but also in their perceptions, beliefs and feelings about these considerations. Accordingly, the most holistic interpretative model for nuclear decision making would revisit traditional models, analyzing them in light of the psychological underpinnings.

By understanding patterns of human thought and behavior, we can improve our ability to both understand and respond to decisions of states appropriately. My proposed theory suggests analyzing nuclear decisions by looking to the psychology of both the state and the individual. The psychology of the state is comprised of cultural, social, and political factors. Individual psychology will focus primarily on the leaders of states with regard to their personality, motivation, behavior, and cognition. From understanding the psychological factors at play for

both leaders and citizens of a state, we can discern the influence of traditional factors and on nuclear decision making, and, in turn, how policy may be tailored to induce increased cooperation with NPT objectives.

## Traditional Models of Nuclear Choice

---

While the psychological factors at play were fairly well-understood with regards to traditional deterrence, the same cannot be said for the factors driving proliferation. Recently, scholars have started to develop theoretical models of psychology as to what drives nuclear choice. Cold War deterrence was less complex in its psychological underpinnings. Truly, it was not concerned with what drives nuclear choice, but with what drives nuclear use under a particular condition. In the non-proliferation regime, there are far more psychological factors that contribute to decision making.

Conventional beliefs about why states seek and retain nuclear weapons proposed that states sought nuclear weapons primarily to protect national security.<sup>3</sup> This has not necessarily been the case. In actuality, by retaining and modernizing nuclear weapons stockpiles at the end of the Cold War, the United States likely *caused* increased threats to national security, rather than averted them. Other theories have sought to correlate political regime type with nuclear proliferation, suggesting that dictatorships were more likely to acquire nuclear weapons. This has not proven to be accurate. India has a particularly strong democracy, and yet has abstained from joining the NPT, choosing to develop nuclear weapons. An additional view is that conventional military is the best predictor of nuclear ambition<sup>4</sup>. This seems to be correlative, not causal, at

---

<sup>3</sup>Zachary Keck, Why Countries Build Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century, *The Diplomat* (2015) available at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/why-countries-build-nuclear-weapons-in-the-21st-century/>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*



best. In other cases, however, it is the *lack* of adequate conventional weaponry that may drive nuclear acquisition decisions.

More recently, scholars have begun to challenge the traditional notion that military and strategic ambitions drive proliferation. Scott Sagan proposes a more robust theory of proliferation.<sup>5</sup> He suggests that nuclear weapons are “political objects of considerable importance” and sets forth three models to explain nuclear proliferation.<sup>6</sup> The “security model” describes states that build nuclear weapons as protection against foreign threats, especially nuclear in nature.<sup>7</sup> The “domestic politics model” depicts nuclear weapons as instruments for advancing domestic and bureaucratic interests.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the “norms model” theorizes that some nuclear weapons decisions are made by a state as normative symbols of their “modernity and identity.”<sup>9</sup>

While Sagan’s model is a tremendous improvement over traditional realist beliefs, adding a truly psychological layer could help to answer some lingering questions. Specifically, the “norms model” elicits an interesting question: why do some states see nuclear weapons as a positive normative symbol of modernity, while other states see them as negative symbols of archaic brutality? The answer lies within the realms of psychology, which can help to provide explanations for differences in perception.

Other academics have sought to add to Sagan’s theory, describing additional factors that contribute to nuclear decisions such as “normative factors relating to nuclear weapons as symbols of ... political identity, and... hegemony; security interests concerning the balance of

---

<sup>5</sup> **Scott D. Sagan**, *Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb*, 21 *Int'l Security* 54. (Winter 1996-97)

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 58.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 63.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 70.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 79.

military power; and the comparative economic implications of nuclear weapons development versus restraint.”<sup>10</sup> Grotto concedes, however, that to better understand these motivations, we must “examine governments' private motivations.”<sup>11</sup> This is an apt observation, but rather than relying on government officials to provide accurate statements on why they do what they do, psychology can provide a framework by which we may interpret their actions.

## State Psychology and Nuclear Choice

---

The psychology of a state involves social, cultural and political dynamics and beliefs. The scope of influence of these factors includes domestic and foreign decision making. One portion of understanding state psychology involves grasping the general principles and behavioral tendencies of groups and members of groups. The other portion of the analysis concerns how the psychology of a particular state might relate to nuclear choice.

### Group Dynamics: States and Global Norms

Perhaps the most valuable effect of the NPT was the development of a new norm of Non-Proliferation. Prior to the NPT, nuclear weapons were perceived as symbols of power, enhancing the identity of a state. After the NPT, the perception that nuclear weapons were a source of non-verbal “bragging rights” began to dissipate. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, states that were “born nuclear”, even opted to get rid of their existing nuclear stockpiles. The non-proliferation norm had substantial influence decisions to acquire or forego nuclear weapons.

---

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Grotto, Why Do States That Oppose Nuclear Proliferation Resist New Nonproliferation Obligations?: Three Logics of Nonproliferation Decision making, 18 *Cardozo J. Int'l & Comp. L.* 1, 6 (2010)

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

One theory of the non-proliferation norm describes how nuclear weapons went from a symbol of power to a normative taboo. The theory also discusses the fluctuation of perception of nuclear weapons between “taboo” and “myth” whereby the nuclear “myth” describes the image of nuclear weapons as symbols of prestige. Karsten Frey outlines four components to the process by which a nuclear taboo norm was created: “societal pressures stigmatizing nuclear weapons, the instrumentalization of norms for power politics, the moral considerations of individual decision makers, and the iteration of non-use over time until it develops into convention.”<sup>12</sup>

It would be naïve to think that this norm achieved a dramatic transformation in the way all states perceive nuclear weapons. Social psychology suggests that there are a number of reasons that a state might choose to comply with a norm. Maria Rublee theorizes that the NPT gave parties that were interested in non-proliferation something to “activate” by presenting a formal document outlining this ideal.<sup>13</sup> In that, parties considering proliferation were confronted with the norm, realizing that they would be held accountable for defying it. This gave the norm credibility and persuasive power.

She describes compliance with the new non-proliferation norm in the context of three models: persuasion, identification, and conformity. “Persuasion” is defined as “behavior resulting from genuine transformation of preferences.”<sup>14</sup> This describes situations in which a state truly changed their nuclear preferences in the wake of the NPT. “Social conformity,” on the other hand, results from “the desire to maximize social benefits and/or minimize social costs without a change in the underlying preference.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, “identification” is driven by the

---

<sup>12</sup> Karsten Frey, *The psychology of nuclear choice*, 9 *Journal of Genocide Research* 369-387 (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Maria Rost Rublee, *Taking Stock of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime: Using Social Psychology to Understand Regime Effectiveness*, 10 *International Studies Review* 420-450 (2008), Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2008.00799.x>

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

“desire or habit of following the actions of an important other.”<sup>16</sup> Signatories to the NPT would have fallen into one of these three categories.

This provides more context around the widespread adoption of the NPT. It also, however, implies that states following a “social conformity” model will be more likely to remain near-nuclear since their adherence to the norm is more of a manifestation of acquiescence than agreement with underlying ideals. Similarly, states that fall under the “identification” category may also remain near-nuclear or seek to acquire nuclear arms if the state they are mirroring does not seem to be abiding by that norm.

For example, the United States claims to support nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and yet has maintained and modernized its nuclear stockpiles, a state that seeks to “identify” with the United States may not be able to reconcile these two facts, and ultimately decide that because the strong country they are mirroring sees nuclear weapons as important to national security, their state should do so as well. Additionally, states that complied with the NPT with an understanding that they will fall under the “nuclear umbrella” of the “nuclear haves” clearly have done so in the interest of perceived benefit, poorly disguised as solidarity. Coercion by way of economic sanction and social repudiation has also undoubtedly played a part in persuading states to join and comply with the NPT. This is an action taken in the interest of “social conformity.” Also, it is a basic principle of psychology that humans, and as a result, their states of residence, will act as to increase pleasure and avoid pain. Accordingly, some of the states that became parties to the NPT found economic strain and sociopolitical shunning too “painful,” leading them to take the path of least resistance.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

Dr. Jerome Frank also examined the social psychological foundations of obedience.<sup>17</sup> He begins with the observation that “obedience is rooted in the fact that humans can only survive in organized groups” which “provide protection against hostile environments.”<sup>18</sup> His analysis of obedience, however, takes a less optimistic approach than that of Rublee. Rather than citing obedience as a driving factor for nuclear non-proliferation and adherence to norms, he considers it a “dangerous form of human behavior.”<sup>19</sup> He illustrates this by mention of the Milgram experiment, where normal American adults administered what they believed to be potentially lethal electric shocks to “test subjects.” The findings of this experiment, conducted to gain insight into the horrendous actions committed by ordinary individuals during the WWII holocaust, were quite telling. Humans tend to justify actions that they would otherwise believe to be wrong if they perceive that they are obeying legitimate authority and that their culpability is shared. Further, the more psychologically remote the victim is, the more we are able to absolve ourselves of responsibility. Frank then points out that “when the commander of a Polaris submarine was asked how it felt to be the man whose act could unleash the submarine's destructive power, he replied: "I've never given it any thought, but if we ever have to hit, we'll hit and there won't be a second's hesitation.”<sup>20</sup>

This experiment helps understand what might drive those that develop, prepare, and operate nuclear weapons to do so. Further, for the same reasons, society might be less likely to see anything wrong with nuclear weapons acquisition. This is especially true when an authority, such as the government, reinforces their importance to national security. Even those who are

---

<sup>17</sup>Jerome D. Frank, *The nuclear arms race--sociopsychological aspects.*, 70 Am J Public Health 950-952 (1980).

<sup>18</sup>*Id.* at 950.

<sup>19</sup>*Id.* at 951..

<sup>20</sup>*Id.*

morally opposed to nuclear weapons are likely to accept them as a necessary evil if they believe that they are needed for protection. As it pertains to responsibility, leaders of nations are able to share responsibility with one another. These leaders may justify nuclear acquisition or retention by looking to other nuclear haves, and alleging that it is because of those states that they must have their own stockpiles. Ultimately, while obedience is desirable in promoting normative goals, it is dangerous if those norms are misguided.

While a majority of states have complied with the NPT, there have of course been outliers. Bertrand Russell, philosopher, social critic, and a staunch advocate of non-proliferation, declared that “Humans are more anxious to kill their enemies than to stay alive themselves.”<sup>21</sup> This troubling critique sheds light on an important aspect of nuclear decision: how a state perceives the enemy. If a state perceives their enemy as malevolent, Frank states that “a nation’s only recourse is to confront them with superior force in the hope that this will deter hostile acts.”

Emotions play a tremendous role in the perception of the enemy or “antagonist other.” Karsten Frey cites theories of cognition, explaining that “An important feature of an actor’s perception is his stereotypization of the imagined other. Oversimplification and demonization, both intrinsic features of stereotypes, cause people to reason along the simple terms of absolute good and absolute evil.” If such a perception is held by a state about their enemy, “[a]s the Indian case shows, once the decision in favour of acquiring the bomb has been made, the affirmative position is vigorously defended and any defectors within the domestic arena are categorically ignored.”<sup>22</sup> In Indian nuclear discourse, this “demonization” is evidenced by the use of the term “the West” to describe the United States and the rest of the nuclear haves. Frey explained that “[t]his perception was aggravated by the explicitness of American nonproliferation rhetoric,” noting that before 1998, domestic nuclear debate in

---

<sup>21</sup> Jerome D. Frank, *The nuclear arms race--sociopsychological aspects.*, 70 Am J Public Health 950-952 (1980).

<sup>22</sup> Karsten Frey, *The psychology of nuclear choice*, 9 Journal of Genocide Research 369-387 (2007).

India was dominated by the desire to “teach the West a lesson.”<sup>23</sup> Reminiscent of the sentiment in Bertrand Russell’s aforementioned quotation, India considered the “potential mass killing of the civilian population...intrinsic to the bomb’s symbolic value as the “ultimate weapon,” making it particularly attractive as a symbol for its national identity.”<sup>24</sup>

There is a subtle distinction that is important to make between non-conformity and anti-conformity. Non-conformity occurs when a state that associates with a group does not adhere to a norm promoted by that group. Anti-conformity involves a deliberate departure from group norms by a state that does not perceive itself as associating with the larger group. India’s abstention from the NPT is rooted in nonconformity. By not signing the NPT they believe to be “reject[ing] the discrimination inherent in the NPT, contributing to their power in the eyes of other state actors, and increasing their status and respect.”<sup>25</sup> The exclusionary nature of the NPT irritates India, who wishes to join as a nuclear power. It would appear that India is “identifying” with the “Nuclear Haves” and is frustrated by not being afforded legitimacy.

North Korea and Iran, on the other hand, are examples of anti-conformity.<sup>26</sup> Neither perceive themselves as part of the larger international community and are dissatisfied with the “status quo.” These “minority” states are not influenced by the same persuasive pressures that guide nuclear decisions of those who perceive themselves to be part of the global community.<sup>27</sup> Differences in fundamental ideology, such as religious or cultural beliefs and practices further disincentives compliance and cooperation. Instead, non-proliferation pressure is likely to

---

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 383.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> Jan Ruzicka & Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The puzzle of trusting relationships in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*, 86 *International Affairs* 69-85 (2010).

<sup>26</sup> Rublee at 430.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 431.

backfire. North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT, and Iran's violation of it are, therefore, manifestations of their anti-conformity.

### Regime Type and Nuclear Ambition

It would appear that regime-type is in some way correlated to nuclear decisions. Traditional theories that dictatorships are more prone to proliferation, however, have not proven to be true.<sup>28</sup> In reality, democracies may actually be more prone to develop or retain nuclear weapons because the public is involved in nuclear weapons discourse. India is a prime example of this.<sup>29</sup> Frey explains that “[t]he crucial factor behind the strategists’ communicative power is the democratic framework in which it functions. In no other country has the nuclear question been so openly, intensely, and emotionally debated among the public than in India.”<sup>30</sup> Public opinion on the perceived inequality of the NPT developed a narrative of “good and evil,” where India was “good” and the nuclear powers that sought to exclude them were “evil.”<sup>31</sup> Further, India’s leaders took advantage of the elevated emotions to gain public support by promising “pursuit of status and prestige” through its nuclear policy.<sup>32</sup> The more people and organizations that are involved in the nuclear discourse, the more money there is likely to be available to pursue these ambitions.

On the other hand, depending on the nature of a dictatorship, public support may not be necessary when making the decision to acquire nuclear weapons. Christopher Way and Jessica Weeks present a compelling theory for the types of regimes that are prone to proliferation.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Way & Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation*, 58 *American Journal of Political Science* 705-719 (2013).

<sup>29</sup> Karsten Frey, *The psychology of nuclear choice*, 9 *Journal of Genocide Research* 369-387 (2007).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> See *Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation*, 58 *American Journal of Political Science* 705-719 (2013).



They critique current literature on the subject for ignoring important distinctions between authoritarian regimes and what they call “personalist dictatorships.”<sup>34</sup> They claim that dictatorships vary greatly in the “extent to which the leader faces institutionally induced constraints on his rule,” or “veto players.”<sup>35</sup> In “personalist dictatorships” a leader “enjoys enormous personal discretion over government decisions to an extent unseen even in other dictatorships” because “nominal institutions such as the military or political parties have little independent power.”<sup>36</sup> The lack of constraining institutions allow leaders to gain “enrichment and power” that other leaders would not have access to in a regime with a stronger institutional environment.<sup>37</sup>

In order to maintain this, however, leaders must focus on strategically “emphasize rooting out enemies and disrupting coordination,” rather than promoting popular interest.<sup>38</sup> This is because most dictators lose power “at the hands of regime insiders or their own security.”<sup>39</sup> As a result these personalist leaders must protect their rule not only against foreign nations but against their own military. The institutional weakness allows the leader to “restrict important government and military positions to relatives and trusted cronies” and to have relatively unfettered access to funding.<sup>40</sup> Also, by implicating these insiders in regime atrocities, or threatening their families, and by depriving the military of the training, weapons and “organizational autonomy necessary to fight effectively,” he is able to further secure his rule.<sup>41</sup> The authors distinguish these dictatorships from nonpersonalist regimes “which feature

---

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 708.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 708.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 709.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 710.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

significantly greater domestic constraint on leaders.”<sup>42</sup> In these personalist regimes leaders typically fear that foreign interference will undermine the security of their rule, and because expanding conventional military power would also put their rule at risk, nuclear weapons seem especially attractive.<sup>43</sup> The authors cite Libya, North Korea, Iraq and Syria as personalist dictatorships, suggesting that in order to decrease the likelihood of nuclear acquisition efforts by these states, we should deemphasize public international calls for regime change by lowering their leaders’ perception of a threat.

Based on these analyses, it seems that the correct answer is not that one type of dictatorship is more or less likely than another to seek nuclear weapons. Rather, it appears that what differs is the motivation behind nuclear weapons goals. In a sense, the United States continues to modernize their nuclear weapons to maintain supremacy for similar reasons that India seeks them to promote their prestigious self-perception. We may perceive their nuclear ambitions differently based in the way we envision the “other” party, our beliefs about existing norms, and any existing ethnocentric bias. In the United States, for example, we view India as somewhat “rogue” in their refusal to conform to the NPT. We condemn their non-conformity as an act of defiance. India, on the other hand sees the “exclusive rights” given to the nuclear weapons states, and thinks of these weapons as “currency to measure international status.”<sup>44</sup> Both democracies have a vocal public with institutional stakeholders applying pressure in favor of nuclear acquisition, so the result is unsurprising. Their nuclear ambitions both originate at least partially by the desire to “achieve positive group distinctiveness.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> *The Psychology of Nuclear Choice* at 377.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

In dictatorships, nuclear ambitions vary between personalist and nonpersonalist vary less in their motivation, and more in their social constraints.<sup>46</sup> For example, a nonpersonalist dictatorship is not necessarily less likely to seek nuclear weapons, but he is more likely to be susceptible to pressures of public and institutional opinions.<sup>47</sup> He may try to influence the public to support nuclear weapons through emotional tactics, such as developing a public image of these weapons as a strong guarantee of protection. In turn, the pressure applied by the public is ultimately in his favor. In other cases, however, he may be constrained where strong institutions and other veto players do not share the same nuclear desires. Motivations are often similar for both types of dictatorships, involving concerns about “territorial integrity, incentives to stoke nationalism, or...prestige.” Personalist dictators, aside from their lack of constraints, may weigh the costs and benefits differently than nonpersonalistic regimes because of their self-perception as outsiders of the global scheme.<sup>48</sup> As an example, their perceived (and usually accurate) fears of likely foreign intervention bolsters fears about “territorial integrity” and creates a lack of

---

<sup>46</sup> Lack of institutional support may also limit his access to funding. *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> Examples provided of non-personalist dictatorships include Brazil and Argentina, controlled by a “military junta.” “These regimes often feature term limits or regularized turnover of rulers, as well as consultative councils among the services that direct policy. In both civilian and military regimes, elites are able to limit any attempts on the part of the leader to shore up power by disrupting military hierarchy. In sum, whether the regime’s structure is civilian or military, institutions in nonpersonalist regimes ensure that regime insiders depend to a much lesser extent on the incumbent’s survival for their own political futures and are also better able to coordinate to oust incompetent or unresponsive rulers. Thus, nonpersonalist regimes, like democracies, tend to feature two characteristics with important implications for their decisions to pursue nuclear weapons: a greater number of constraints or “veto players” and relatively professional military organizations.” Christopher Way & Jessica L. P. Weeks at 712.

<sup>48</sup> The authors explained their methodology for measuring personalism. “From this information, we create an index of eight variables that capture the extent to which the leader is free of constraints on his personal rule: (1) Does access to high government office depend on the personal favor of the leader? (2) Do country specialists view the politburo or equivalent as a rubber stamp for the leader’s decisions? (3) Does the leader personally control the security forces? (4) If there is a supporting party, does the leader choose most of the members of the politburo-equivalent? (5) Was the successor to the first leader, or is the heir apparent, a member of the same family, clan, tribe, or minority ethnic group as the first leader? (6) Has normal military hierarchy been seriously disorganized or overturned, or has the leader created new military forces loyal to him personally? (7) Have dissenting officers or officers from different regions, tribes, religions, or ethnic groups been murdered, imprisoned, or forced into exile? and (8) If the leader is from the military, has the officer corps been marginalized from most decision making?” See Christopher Way & Jessica L. P. Weeks at 712.

concern for the norms of their perceived enemy. In these circumstances, personalist dictators are likely to accept certain costs of proliferation that a nonpersonalist regime might reject.

In sum, regime types is not, independently, a predictive measure of nuclear tendencies. Rather, regime dynamics provide context for how these states weigh costs and benefits of nuclear weapons. Social psychology then allows us to gain insight around this weighing process by connecting “individual emotions such as self-esteem to the group level of social identity.”<sup>49</sup>

## Individual Psychology and Nuclear Choice

---

After assessing the social psychology factors at play in nuclear weapons decisions, the final portion of the analysis delves into the mind of the individual. I will call this “individual psychology” to encompass principles of emotion, personality, motivation, cognition, and behavior. There are two sections to this analysis: general principles of psychology that influence the members of the populace pertaining to nuclear weapons decisions and the psychological profiles of the leaders of states. Social psychology gives us insight into how people in states relate to one another and to other states in terms of social identity. Individual psychology, on the other hand, provides greater perspective on individual thought processes that underlie those relations.

### Psychology of Citizens

Little literature exists on the psychology of individual citizens within a state as it relates to nuclear weapons proliferation. Social psychology explains the effects of the “aggregate” by attributing emotions to the larger group. The dynamic that allows for this aggregation is the

---

<sup>49</sup> Frey at 377.

“conformity” of citizens within a society to their own domestic norms. This varies across states, most prominently depending on types of regimes. Where social psychology is concerned with how individuals perceive their state in relation to other states, individual psychology is concerned with how citizens of a state perceive themselves within their own state.

As mentioned by Frank, emotions are crucial in one’s assessment of their enemy. These images “mirror each other...each side attributes the same virtues to itself and the same vices to the enemy.” He explains that these perceptions of the enemy contribute to a sense of ethnocentricity, whereby they perceive their ethnic group as ethically superior. Similar dynamics that drive the compliance of states, also drive compliance of the individual. As established, humans believe that group membership is crucial for survival. This promotes a tendency toward obedience. When a human being perceives that his own safety is at risk or the security of his “morally-upright group” is compromised, he could conceivably accept that nuclear weapons are necessary to defeat or deter the “evil” enemies. Of course, in many cases, this perception of the enemy is catalyzed by government efforts to gain support for nuclear initiatives by exploiting the emotions of the public. Humans are willing to deviate from the norm in the interest of survival. They are also likely to deviate from accepted norms when their emotions run high, as is the case when they perceive that they are threatened by an enemy.

One emotion is particularly controlling as it pertains to nuclear weapons: fear. Leaders of all regimes know this, and have been known to leverage fear to garner support. While the above model explains emotions of a citizen that supports his nation’s nuclear ambitions, there are also many states in which the majority of citizens do not agree with the government’s goals. This is where regime-type has a particularly compelling influence. In a democracy, much more than in a dictatorship, the public has the opportunity to voice opinions and concerns. The other side of this

equation is that the government in some democratic nations may have more substantial influence on the beliefs of state citizens. Government in democracies with strong patriotic sentiment are likely to be more “trusted” or perceived as more “transparent” than the leaders of other regimes. Therefore, if that leader were to ensure the public that nuclear weapons are critical for safety, the people may be much more willing to accept it as a “necessary evil.”<sup>50</sup>

In dictatorships, especially personalist ones, the public is unlikely to have an opportunity to voice opinions in support of or in opposition to nuclear weapons. In some of these states, leadership may have successfully convinced citizens that these weapons will prevent unwanted foreign intervention. Even in a state with a tyrannical leader, citizens are still apprehensive about the thought of foreign occupation. In others, the public may not know about the initiatives, or quite frankly, may have more imminent concerns regarding safety. In the worst cases, voicing their disagreement would be punishable by death. The common thread across all types of regimes, and all types of people, is that for citizens, fear is typically the most influential factor in determining attitudes of nuclear support or acquiescence. It is easy to conceive of how a person might even be morally opposed to nuclear weapons, but support his state’s efforts to acquire or modernize them. After all, history has shown us repeatedly that government rhetoric, ethnocentricity, and fear can produce unthinkable outcomes.

---

<sup>50</sup>Again, using India as an example: “The moral objection to the possession of nuclear weapons was thus overridden by two morally positioned counterarguments: first, opposition to the unjust international nuclear order was displayed as India’s moral duty; and second, the responsible safekeeping of its nuclear arsenal was viewed as proof of India’s moral integrity. India’s strategists successfully reversed the public mood from a strong moral objection to nuclear weapons into a widely shared pro-bomb attitude within a relatively short range of time because they were able to reframe the moral dilemma of nuclear choice. The trade-off was no longer between keeping moral integrity as a non-nuclear weapons state on one side, and the pursuit of power politics on the other. They now framed it as a tragic trade-off between the moral integrity of non-possession, and the achievement of noble goals such as international justice and equity.” Frey at 380.

A 2007 poll on American, German, French, and British sentiment about nuclear weapons provide support for this theory.<sup>51</sup> Another poll conducted in 2008 shows that only 39% of the United States agreed with the idea of total disarmament. In Iran, 50% of those surveyed supported disarmament, and in China, 60%.<sup>52</sup> It seems that the “nuclear haves” are not as opposed to nuclear weapons as one might expect. A CNN poll conducted in 2010 produced slightly different findings, with citizens in the United States finding “that preventing terrorists from getting nuclear weapons is more important than reducing the number of nuclear weapons controlled by government that are unfriendly to the U.S.”<sup>53</sup> These results suggest that in the United States, viewpoints held by citizens on nuclear weapons are predominantly based in fear and desire for safety. These emotions are quite likely shared by citizens of similarly situated nations. In states that support non-proliferation, citizens are apt to feel safer with fewer nuclear weapons in the world, including in many cases, in their own country.

Another factor that influences support for nuclear weapons is that people may simply not be sufficiently informed on the issues. In some personalist dictatorships, access to media may be restricted or severely manipulated. Even in other regime-types, however, mass media does not emphasize issues pertaining to nuclear weapons as much as it emphasizes security and safety

---

<sup>51</sup>“Adults in the United States are more likely to condone the use of nuclear weapons during a conflict than their British or French counterparts, according to a six-country poll by The Simons Foundation and Angus Reid Strategies. 24.9 per cent of respondents in the U.S. think the use of nuclear arms in the context of an actual war is justified, while only 16.9 per cent of Britons and 15 per cent of French concur.” Nuclearfiles.org, Nuclear Files: Library: Opinion Polls: Nuclear Weapons: Global Poll Finds Varied Views on Nuclear Weapons (2005), <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/library/opinion-polls/nuclear-weapons/global-poll-nuclear-weapons.html> (last visited Nov. 14, 2015).

<sup>52</sup>Nuclearfiles.org, Nuclear Files: Library: Opinion Polls: World Publics Eliminating Nukes (2008), <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/library/opinion-polls/nuclear-weapons/world-publics-eliminating-nukes-2008.pdf> (last visited Nov. 14, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Steinhouse, CNN Poll: Public divided on eliminating all nuclear weapons Politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com (2010), <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/04/12/cnn-poll-public-divided-on-eliminating-all-nuclear-weapons/> (last visited Nov 14, 2015).

risks. Psychologically-speaking, people also tend to ignore information that causes them discomfort. This concept originates in the theory of “cognitive dissonance.”

Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person experiences uncomfortable tension from holding two conflicting viewpoints.<sup>54</sup> Their distress about the disconnect may be relieved by attempting to justify their actions by reducing the importance of the conflicting belief, focusing on supportive beliefs, or changing their beliefs. In this case, a person may believe that nuclear weapons are bad. They might also believe that their state should have nuclear weapons. This person may become more open to discourse that supports the notion that nuclear weapons are necessary for security, thereby justifying that conflicting belief. Alternatively, they may change their belief entirely by accepting nuclear weapons as a “necessary evil.” They might even begin supporting humanitarian efforts to feel less culpable for their support of nuclear weapons. People experiencing this type of dissonance are likely to either avoid or limit their exposure to information that increases these feelings of discomfort. This could explain why some individuals are not fully informed about nuclear issues in their respective states.

It is still surprising, given their dangerousness, that people are not more fearful of nuclear weapons. Some additional considerations may help to understand why people are not diametrically opposed to nuclear weapons. As previously mentioned, the Milgram experiment explains that humans are less likely to feel responsible when they have received instruction from authority, when the victim is remote, or when responsibility is shared. This is rooted in the way humans process information generally.

---

<sup>54</sup>Christoph Bluth, *The Irrelevance of ‘Trusting Relationships’ in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Reconsidering the Dynamics of Proliferation*, 14 *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 115-130 (2011).



Humans typically are better equipped to understand things that they can directly relate to.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, nuclear destruction is psychologically “unreal” to most people. This is essentially a defense mechanism that humans invoke to avoid feeling uneasy. There are a few such methods that people subconsciously apply to deal with their emotions about the unknown. First, denial allows individuals to cope with sources of anxiety that “cannot be eliminated.” Rather than fear nuclear destruction, humans have conditioned themselves to avoid processing the danger. Second, humans adapt to ignore stimuli if they do not result in realizable damage. Since most people have not experienced a nuclear weapon attack, they have learned to ignore the existence of these weapons. Finally, when faced with a new stimulus, humans assimilate it with a familiar one in order to better understand it. In terms of nuclear weapons, this means relating them to conventional ones and adjusting their thoughts and attitudes accordingly. These “coping” mechanisms are part of a much larger range of heuristics and cognitive biases that help people efficiently make decisions. Jeffrey J. Rachlinski elaborates, theorizing that “...people rely on simple habits of the mind when thinking about moral issues,” and “do not adhere to principles of deductive logic.”<sup>56</sup> Rather than doing a comprehensive analysis of the facts, people often look for simpler “rules of thumb.”<sup>57</sup>

These notions of emotion and cognition are only a fraction of the factors that influence decision making. They do, however, underscore different attitudes that people hold about nuclear weapons, and how those attitudes might translate into behaviors that promote nuclear proliferation. Ultimately, people are part of a larger group: the state. That state is part of other larger groups, such as “the nuclear club” or “the West” and ultimately the global community.

---

<sup>55</sup> Frank at 951.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey J. Rachlinski, “Heuristics, Biases, and Philosophy” (2008). *Cornell Law Faculty Publications*. Paper 1080. <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/facpub/1080>

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* Jacques E. C Hymans, *The psychology of nuclear proliferation* (2006).

Understanding the way in which people think about nuclear issues is a necessary predicate to convincing them to accept and advance non-proliferation ideals.

### The Psychology of Leaders

When discussing the nuclear decisions of a state, it is natural to think of these decisions as the aggregate sentiment of the citizens of that state. We look to characteristics of their culture, individual fears and ideals, and the state's larger position. In reality, these nuclear decisions are typically made by one or a small group of people who are subject to varying degrees of outside influence. Truly, in order to develop a clear picture of why states seek to acquire or maintain nuclear weapons, it is essential to understand what motivates the leaders of a state.

Generally, leaders share some important common characteristics pertaining to personality and patterns of cognition. First, while individuals in a society seem to be primarily motivated by fear, this does not hold true for their leaders. Individuals in positions of power are naturally less fearful. This implies that they are also inherently less risk-averse. Logically, it makes sense that people who have advanced to high positions of power need take risks in order to do so. This means that the destructive nature of nuclear weapons is not in itself a persuasive reason to eliminate or avoid them. Additionally, leaders are naturally motivated by pride, which they seek through power, status, and prestige. The interplay of these two motivations varies across a leader's perception of situations.

Prospect theory, as described by Frey, suggests that the actions of leaders "tend to be risk-averse in situations where the status quo is considered somewhat acceptable, and risk acceptant in situations where the status quo is considered to be in the loss frame."<sup>58</sup> Essentially, "actors dissatisfied with the status quo are more willing to defect even if the likelihood of being

---

<sup>58</sup> *The psychology of nuclear choice* at 382.

worse off afterwards is high.”<sup>59</sup> Determining what a leadership thinks about the status quo requires an understanding of cognitive factors, since leaders may “have a view of their circumstances that has few connections to reality.”<sup>60</sup>

Jacques Hymans proposes the most thorough psychological premise of nuclear proliferation to date by examining the driving factors behind leadership decisions on nuclear proliferation.<sup>61</sup> His theory analyzes nuclear ambition by crafting a matrix of potential “national identity conceptions,” (NICs).<sup>62</sup> NICs measure a leader’s perception of his own state in relation to other state actors. Leaders are then characterized by their relative positions regarding “solidarity” and “status.” Solidarity measures whether a leader is “sportsmanlike” or “oppositional.”<sup>63</sup> A sportsmanlike leader perceives a significant commonality between his state and others. An oppositional leader practices an “us-vs.-them” mentality. Status refers to whether a leader is nationalist or subaltern. A nationalist leader will feel that his state is equal or superior to others, while a subaltern leader believes his nation to be inferior. Ultimately, he characterizes the two dimensions of the matrix as representative of “fear and pride.” Hymans concludes that “oppositional nationalists” are the most likely to strive for nuclear weapons acquisition because their adversarial nature and desire to achieve heightened status makes them most susceptible to nuclear myth.<sup>64</sup>

The theory that Hymans proposes is revolutionary in many ways. It combines theories of psychology with accepted notions of international relations to suggest a model by which nuclear decisions may be understood. It serves as a tremendously useful foundation for interpreting

---

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> Jacques E. C Hymans, The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy (2006).

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at 22.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

nuclear ambition. What is lacking, however, is sufficient explanation for the causes and origins of these NICs, which he concedes are “complex.” Additional layers of psychological consideration could add substantial predictive value to his theoretical model.

For example, these personalist dictators share common personality traits. Namely, they are often “sadistic, antisocial, paranoid, narcissistic, schizoid, and schizotypal.” Further, this pattern of common traits likely develop from common experiences or by exposure to similar environments. Additionally, while his model provides insight into nuclear proliferation, it does less to clarify the desire of NPT “nuclear haves” to modernize their arsenals. In sum, Hymans’ theory is significant but incomplete, and possibly oversimplified. A closer look at the past of these leader, within his proposed framework and through additional lenses of psychology, may help us gain a clearer perspective on the future.

## Conclusion

---

The intrinsic challenge in unpacking nuclear choice is the complex nature of human decision making. Psychology offers us various tools to understand the types of factors that influence these decisions. A state’s decision to acquire, retain, or modernize nuclear weapons depends on not only their own self-perceptions, but on their calculations of the costs and benefits involved pertaining to their relations with other states. Accordingly, principles of social and individual psychology are necessary in understanding their decisions. Fear and power are particularly influential, but the balancing equation invoked by a state is contingent on a plethora of other considerations. Ultimately, nuclear decisions are in the hands of leaders of the states, whose influence varies depending on regime-type and institutional influence.

Ukraine presents an interesting case to interpret under this framework. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly-formed states relinquished their nuclear weapons pursuant to the launch of the Nunn-Lugar funding program which provided funding to enable nations from the former USSR to dismantle chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.<sup>65</sup> While it seems that this shows that financial incentives can trump military ambitions, this might be an incomplete deduction.

Ukraine's narrative is much more based in normative dynamics. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ukraine asked to become a member of the NPT as a non-nuclear state. Domestic sentiment was particularly anti-nuclear in response to the recent events of Chernobyl. This attempt was undermined by Moscow, who did not want to increase the perception of decentralization.<sup>66</sup> A failed coup by Soviet military led to Ukrainian realization of their defenselessness. After declaring their independence, they needed to establish their identity in the global forum.

Accordingly, they attempted to declare ownership of the nuclear weapons on their territory. Vyacheslav Chornovil, the leader of the Ukrainian national-democratic party, issued a statement stressing that Ukraine was the "rightful heir to all the material and technical resources, including weapons, of the former Soviet Union." He calculated that since Ukraine wished to rid themselves of nuclear weapons anyway, this could be leveraged as "a good incentive" for creating independent military forces and recognition "as a fully-fledged subject of international law."

---

<sup>65</sup> Charles J. Moxley, *Nuclear Weapons and International Law in the Post-Cold War World* 1018 (2015) (Second edition of book originally published in 2000).

<sup>66</sup> William Potter, *The Politics of Nuclear Renunciation: The Cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine*, Occasional Paper 13 (1995)

This was not the case, however. Tensions continued to grow, prompting the Ukraine to resist signing the Lisbon Protocol despite a prior commitment it had made to relinquish the weapons along with the other Soviet subsidiary states.<sup>67</sup> This decision was due to their perception of the unwillingness of the United States to provide sufficient security guarantees, despite protections provided in the CFE treaty. Finally, with pressure at an all-time high, the Ukraine Rada signed START and the NPT in 1994<sup>68</sup>. Despite this, it was not until 1996 that they physically relinquished the weapons with assistance provided by Nunn-Lugar. Incidentally, both the removal of the Ukraine's nuclear weapons and agreement to an amendment providing for increased protection in the CFE were announced in a Presidential Statement to the European Political Collective in 1996.<sup>69</sup> One might surmise that Ukraine's official decision to relinquish weapons was not made until they received additional security guarantees, and additional funding that they can use to improve their own domestic military capabilities.

What conclusions can we draw from this? These events give rise to a few observations. First and foremost, normative pressure was high for the Ukraine to sign the NPT, but not responsible for their anti-nuclear sentiment. In fact, despite nuclear fears, Ukraine's leadership refused to join the NPT. Second, based on this, it seems that security concerns were more pressing than ideology. This is due to the direct threat the state perceived from Russia. Third, Ukraine's initial request to join the NPT was a preemptive effort to establish identity

---

<sup>67</sup> Armscontrol.org, Looking Back: Ukraine's Nuclear Predicament and the Nonproliferation Regime | Arms Control Association (2015), [https://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2014\\_12/Features/Looking-Back/Ukraine-Nuclear-Predicament-and-the-Nonproliferation-Regime#note32](https://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/2014_12/Features/Looking-Back/Ukraine-Nuclear-Predicament-and-the-Nonproliferation-Regime#note32) (last visited Dec 2, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> See State Department Telegram 11322 to European Political Collective, "Presidential Statement: Removal of Nuclear Warheads from Ukraine and Agreement on CFE Flank Issues," June 1, 1996, available at [http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB447/1996-06-01%20Cable.%20State%20Department%20to%20European%20Political%20Collective.%20Presidential%20Statement%](http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB447/1996-06-01%20Cable.%20State%20Department%20to%20European%20Political%20Collective.%20Presidential%20Statement%20)

independent from that of Russia. Their “disobedience” was due to dissatisfaction with the Soviet status quo, and desired acceptance by the larger global network. Finally, by not recognizing Ukraine’s claims to ownership, the NPT states further aggravated the insecurity the Ukraine had about their international recognition as Russia’s equal.

While these observations are useful, to increase their value, it is helpful to translate them into a conceptual framework. During the time immediately following its declaration of independence, Ukrainian government was loosely composed, comprising of various bodies with diametrically different viewpoints. The decisions that were made, while not evidence of accord by all parties, are a good indication of the “least common denominator” values shared by these parties. These common values seem to revolve around the ideas of fear and security and independent identity; or in the words of Jaques Hymans as “fear” and “pride.”

These types of analysis lead to findings that may inform future policy. First, public threat of foreign intervention is likely to catalyze proliferation for states that are already debating nuclear acquisition. It would be wise to avoid making these public declarations to avoid promoting a belief by those states that acquiring nuclear weapons is needed to deter occupation or regime overthrow. Second, the NPT “nuclear haves” must make visible steps toward disarmament in order to preserve the integrity and credibility of the NPT. Failure to do so will not only result in proliferation among non-NPT members, but eventually also among near-nuclear states that have complied in the interest of “identification” or “conformity” rather than true attitudinal shift. In short, these “nuclear haves” must “practice what they preach.” Also, because imposition of economic sanctions may only serve to aggravate states that already perceive the NPT as discriminatory, a policy of incentives rather than punishment may be more

effective. As an example, it may be productive to offer conventional military protection for states that choose to eliminate existing nuclear stockpiles.

From a normative perspective, in order to remain effective the NPT must powerfully reiterate the sentiment that nuclear weapons are not a form of “currency” only available to the elite. The pressure of “nuclear taboo” must be extended to the “nuclear haves,” to the extent that failure to make strides toward disarmament results in stigma. This includes the explicit establishment of “deterrence” as unlawful and illegitimate. This will be challenging in light of the consistent lack of steps toward disarmament taken by the United States.

The NPT has been successful in containing proliferation, but it has already maximized its potential, as written. The underlying ideology must be revamped. A policy of “haves’ and “have-nots” will never be universally accepted because of the antagonistic effect it has on states that hold certain perspectives. Perhaps equally as dangerous, such a policy promotes states to remain near-nuclear, rendering them substantially more likely to acquire nuclear weapons in the future. The defining norm for the NPT can no longer be limited to non-proliferation, and must hold states accountable to their commitments to disarm. Until then, the NPT risks relinquishing its standing as one of the most successful multi-national treaties, in favor of becoming perceived as a coercive measure endorsed by “the West” to both induce fear and subvert pride.