

STATE MOTIVATION AND NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Abubakar Jika Jiddere

Department of Political Science, Bayero University, Kano – Nigeria

abubakarjiddere@gmail.com

Abstract

The International Community is increasingly concerned about global security. This concern is as a result of events that range from natural disasters, such as global warming, desertification, draught, Tsunami, hurricane, earthquake, landslide, endemic disease etc, to man-made disasters such as wars, terrorism, and the threat of weapons of mass destruction, just to mention a few. In addition, rapid spread of technology has transformed the world into a global village where the security situation of one member state attracts a collective response by the international community as a whole. The growing proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (such as chemicals, biological and nuclear weapons) has generated serious debates on what motivate states especially middle power states acquire nuclear weapons. Opinions are divided on the issue of nuclear technology proliferation. Some scholars argue that nuclear technology proliferation would help reduce or even prevent an escalated international war and consequently foster international peace and security. Others contend that nuclear technology proliferation especially if acquisition by autocratic regimes as well as terrorist organizations would pose serious threat to international peace and security. Yet some group of scholars maintained that some states acquire nuclear technology simply for national prestige and economic purposes. Whatever is the argument nuclear technology would continue to proliferate in the international community so long as the nuclear super power states continue to maintained the hegemony of the their nuclear arsenals.

Key words: States, Nuclear Technology, Nuclear Weapon, Proliferation and Motivation.

Introduction and Background

A number of scholarly studies described nuclear weapon as instrument of state power or motivation for international prestige. Some section of the literature however sees nuclear weapon as a means of political bargain. None the less, nuclear weapons are open seen as threat to global peace and security. This paper therefore, focuses on the thematic approach to the understanding of the debate. Such an

approach is clearly intended as a critical analysis of the various viewpoints by comparing them based on their strengths and short comings. To begin with, opinions are divided on the question of proliferation of nuclear weapons. While some realist scholars contend that the spread of nuclear weapons will help in preventing the outbreak and escalation of world war and simultaneously maintain international peace and security, others

argue that the spread of nuclear weapons, especially into the hands of unstable states, radical leaders, fundamentalist and terrorist regimes, would only further pose serious security threat to the international system.

The position of the first category of scholars is premised on the assumption that the international system is, by its very nature, anarchic, and that there is a need for a supra-national authority with the right to make and enforce international law on all members of the international community. This supra national authority does not exist in the international system. Hence, states have no option but to acquire nuclear weapons to protect themselves against other nuclear states or deter others from attacking them or their allies. In other words, states must seek to acquire more power if they wish to survive and remain invulnerable to other states wishing to control or dominate the system. The acquisition of nuclear weapons gives state power preponderance over non-nuclear states. However, in a situation where other states equally possess nuclear weapons, they would be able to deter any kind of threat of destruction with such nuclear weapons. Morgenthau captured this when he states that:

The threat of all-out nuclear violence implies the threat of total destruction. As such, it can still be a suitable instrument of foreign policy when addressed to a nation, which cannot reply in kind. The nation armed with nuclear weapons can assert power over the other nation by saying: "Either you do as I say, or I will destroy you". The situation is different if the nation so threatened can respond by saying: "If you destroy me with nuclear weapons, you will be destroyed in return". (1985:33)

In a situation like this, mutual threat of annihilation could lead to mutual security in a situation where the decision-makers in both nations did not miscalculate by assuming that neither would actually attack the other with a nuclear weapon and went ahead with an act of aggression. Where nuclear weapon threat is ignored, security situation would highly be at risk. It is also believed that "the drive for national prestige and sense of independence that the possession of nuclear weapons was thought to bestow might prove irresistible to some countries" (Daugherty, and Pfaltzgraf, 1981:397) E.J. and,

Corroborating Daugherty, and Pfaltzgraf arguments, Alkali states that:

States struggle to protect their people, defend their territorial integrity and preserve their national sovereignty against foreign attacks, incursions, domination or any form of threat. On the other hand each state aspires to increase its power over other states to command more international prestige and respect and thus influence world opinions and events. (Alkali, 2003:397).

Thus, the feeling of insecurity and domination by others lead weaker states to aspire to increase their defensive capabilities to deter external aggression and achieve a greater sense of independence. For deterrence purposes, states are inclined to go nuclear if they feel threatened or insecure. This desire for security further encourages states to seek to acquire effective means of deterring any would be aggressor especially a nuclear power state. This is perhaps a major cause of nuclear proliferation (Alexandra, 2004). This singular factor explains why the then USSR immediately started developing nuclear weapons after the World War II, owing to USA's possession of

an atom bomb, essentially to deter the USA from contemplating any attack on her or any of her allies. "Consequently, each state tries to increase the level of its security by means of threatening the adversary" (Davies and Frankel in Alexandra 2004: 6). Spiegel and Wheling observe that:

The anarchic nature of world politics leads to a situation known as the security dilemma arises when a state feels insecure and decides that its best policy is to increase its military strength. Its objective in so doing is not to enhance its aggressive power, but only to increase its ability to defend and deter against possible attack (Spiegel and Wehling 1999:9)

It therefore shows that, states enhance their military capabilities not merely to threaten the international system as a whole, but rather to maintain a kind of stability by restraining or deterring other great powers from launching any attack on them or their allies. Through this, war would be avoided, or at worst minimized and consequently international peace and security would be achieved Deutch and Singer (1964 :315) captured this rightly when they posit that:

...systems stability means that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive and that large-scale war not occur (in Rosenau, 1969: 315)

Therefore, from the above background, the states motivations for nuclear program which results in nuclear proliferations would be critically looked at thematically in the following sections:

Nuclear Weapons as means of State Power

It is highly plausible, then, that Middle Power states such as Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan and North-Korea to mention a few in their quest for national defense and security in an anarchical world find it necessary to acquire nuclear weapon as a means of self-reliance and national security. Several arguments can be made in this regard. In the first place, a number of world leaders see the necessity for nuclear proliferation, as it would guarantee international peace and security. Thus, "...acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional countries might help stabilize power relationship "(Rose and King in Jensen (1988:125). Secondly, the history of the world has shown that the nuclear age, in particular 'nuclear détente', has produced a long period of peace in the world, especially judging from the fact that from 1949 when the then Union of Soviet Socialists Republic (U.S.S.R) acquired nuclear capability and ballistic missiles to date, no major international war especially of nuclear weapons confrontation was recorded in the international system.

Power preponderance between states could tempt the stronger to attack the weaker states. However, when two states are relatively equal in power, neither can be certain of victory, and they would therefore, deter one another from war. To this end, states must strive to increase their defensive capabilities and have trust in what they can do to defend themselves. "The first approach to security relies on countries arming themselves as best as they can to deter or repel aggressors" (Rourke and Boyer 1996:209).

The connection between nuclear weapon capability and state power has equally attracted strong adherence amongst some statesmen notably Saddam Hussein of

Iraq and Kim of North-Korea. Nuclear weapons could help states maintain dominance in world politics an example is the United States of America. At the moment, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council with a veto power possess nuclear weapons and are the only states recognized by the International Atomic Energy Agency as having the right to acquire nuclear weapons. These states are regarded as super-powers and cannot be easily attacked; due largely to their effective deterrence. Nuclear weapons, since they deter attacks.... also enhance the international prestige of nuclear powers. Prestige serves two important political functions. First, it makes any government less willing to oppose the prestigious state. Second, A low-cost foreign policy that brings compliance by other states...Those confronting a nuclear state would certainly be more cautious, accommodating and respectful.

It is essentially for the above reasons that the Super-powers who are also the only permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, oppose any other state from acquiring nuclear weapons under the regime of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (N.P.T). For decades, the five major powers tried to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. This was done in part for political reasons. If the "big five" could keep their club exclusive, they would retain a unique advantage over other countries.

To the realist, the spread of nuclear weapons would further enhance international security. Nuclear weapon proliferation is currently common to Asia, even though the state of Israel never openly declared her possession of nuclear weapon. "It is widely believed to have a hundred or more nuclear warheads on combat airplanes and medium

range missiles" (Golstein and Pevehouse 2006:240). India and Pakistan both possesses nuclear weapons, North Korea recently test-exploded nuclear weapon. It is perhaps significant at this point to stress the fact that Iran, though consistently denied her ambition to develop nuclear weapon, however, has nuclear technology which is claimed to be essentially for peaceful purposes. Even though, Iran may not be too far from producing nuclear weapons if it so wishes. The irreconcilable conflict between Israel and the Arab world can instigate other Arab states such as Syria to develop nuclear weapons. Even though, Israel has carried out a raid and destroyed the Syrian nuclear facilities.

Nuclear Weapons as a Threat to International Security

On the other side of the debate are those who strongly maintain that nuclear proliferation would only create a situation of instability in the international system. They argue that such weapons could fall into wrong hands who would not hesitate to use them against others. "They fear that, with more and more nuclear actors, miscalculation or accident or fanatical terrorism could lead to the use of weapons of mass destruction on a scale unseen since 1945" (Paul et al in Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2006:238). Corroborating this view point John H. Herz (1969) posits that:

Thus we are warranted in anticipating a world of nuclear proliferation, with increasing number of both greater and lesser nuclear powers. This will certainly involve great instability and growing risks of actual nuclear war. (in Rosenau (ed) 1969:82)

Corroborating Herz, Rourke argued that:

Nuclear proliferation is dangerous. The more nuclear countries and nuclear

weapons there are, the greater is the chances of a nuclear weapons accident, to terrorists seizing or being given a weapon, and of an unstable leader having a nuclear to use (Rourke, 1991:510).

While it is a possibility for nuclear weapons to spread among nation-states, their being into the hands of terrorist is unlikely. The sophistication and high cost of producing and delivering nuclear weapon would for long be beyond the reach of terrorist organization. Furthermore, history has shown that nuclear deterrence between the United State of America and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, which is commonly referred to as Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D), had helped in preventing not just nuclear war between them, but even conventional war.

In recent times, the former President of the USA, George W. Bush has been in the forefront against nuclear proliferation. In his remarks at West Point Academy commencement ceremonies on June 1, 2002 he stated;

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the perilous crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missiles technology – when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations (in Hutcheson, 2002:2).

Echoing the position of his president, the former U.S Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton maintained that:

Every nation in our coalition must take seriously the threat of terror on a catastrophic scale – terror armed with biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. Dictators in hostile states such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea already possess some

WMD and are developing others; their terrorist allies are in search of such weapons... (in Hutcheson, 2002:5)

The US Assistant Secretary of State for Non-proliferation, John S. Wolf states that:

Some states that sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction.... We also must be concerned by the increase in regional instability that comes from the spread of WMD and their delivery systems. It is true in the Middle East; it is true in East Asia; and it is most clearly true today in South Asia, (in Hutcheson 2002:7).

The position of Bush, Bolton and Wolf is essentially to protect U.S. security interests and those of her ally in the Middle East, in particular the state of Israel. This is evident from their deliberate pretension and absolute silence over Israel's nuclear capability. In essence, their opposition to proliferation is informed by national security rather than the security of the international system as a whole. From the realist standpoint, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by more actors, especially nation-states, would create a situation of balance of terror and consequently wars would be limited or even avoided for fear of mutual annihilation.

Deterrence as a means and strategy of preventing war cannot work in a situation where only a few states possess the capabilities of inflicting unimaginable damage to others. The United States and her allies would not have attacked Iraq if the latter had test-detonated a nuclear weapon and possessed the capability of delivering it on either the USA or her allies, just like the US can no longer do anything militarily against North-Korea, primarily because North-Korea had test-exploded nuclear weapons as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles

capable of hitting Israel and other U.S. interest in Asia.

Nuclear Weapons for Political Bargain

The third position on the debate of nuclear proliferation sees economic inequality between the great and middle power states as instigating the latter to develop nuclear programmes for peaceful purposes in order to reduce the ever increasing cost of energy in the international system. Secondly, as argued by Finlay and Hovet:

...the increasing disparity between the developed and developing states, the ultimate limitation of nonrenewable resources, and the increasing consumption of the world's food and other resources by the superpowers with their superior military strength, the temptation of the have-nots to opt for military devices to get their proportional share increases as the population pressures continue. (1975: 241-242).

The point here is that if the economically weaker states acquire nuclear weapons, the tendency of the developed states to adopt a policy of containment with the former is very high. The ongoing six party talks in respect of the North Korean nuclear programme demonstrate a clear example. Therefore, Nuclear weapons have natural deterrence. It is for this reason some states, especially the middle power states, seek to acquire nuclear weapons. Some scholars such as, Howlett in Alexandra, (2004) maintain that occasionally states are inclined to acquire nuclear weapons because they can be used as bargaining instrument of some sort of economic advantages. That by acquiring nuclear weapons other states would be compelled to make some economic concessions (Howlett in Alexandra, 2004). Howlett quickly argued otherwise that this may not be a rule, an

exceptional case is Iraq "which had military and economic sanctions imposed by the west as a result of the discovery of Iraqi's nuclear weapons program" (In Alexandra, 2004).

Nuclear Weapons and State Prestige

For political reasons, some states would choose to develop nuclear weapons in order to bolster their international image and prestige. This point is buttressed by Alexandra.

This line of reasoning suggest that nuclear weapon enhance a nation's prestige and status not only in military terms, but also in other ways (political), states possessing these arms will be given greater weight in the entire range of foreign policy matters. It is asserted that nuclear weapons have been associated with global power status and nuclear status of the permanent members of the United Nation's Security Council has been the most obvious reflection of this (Clausen, in Alexandra, 2004: 6).

However, in international relations no single factor is wholly responsible for enhancing a state's prestige among the members of the international community. Other factors, such as the level of economic development, technological advancement, and diplomatic capabilities, to mention a few, play important roles in bolstering a state's image and prestige in the international arena.

Leader's disposition could be a strong driving force for state's quest for nuclear weapons. Alexandra posits that:

The perception of decision-makers plays an important role in any policy choice, nuclear choice not being any different. This is specially stated in the context of Indian and Pakistani nuclear decision involving the attitudes of Indri Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto respectively. In the Middle-East the leadership roles of Ben Gurio of Israel, the

Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein of Iraq have been specifically associated with Israeli, Iranian and Iraqi nuclear weapons programs respectively. (Alexandra, 2004: 10).

Nuclear as Technological Prowess

Another salient factor that motivates states to go nuclear is to be found in their struggle to demonstrate the level of their scientific/technological advancement. Owing to their scientific and technological advancement, in addition to the availability of nuclear materials, states may be tempted to go nuclear initially for peaceful purposes but which may likely create a spillover effect of nuclear weapon production.

Whatever could be the motive of middle power states for the development of nuclear weapons, it cannot be foreseen if any of them, be it India, Pakistan, North Korea or Iran or even the combination of two or more of them would possess the capability to attack any nuclear weapon-state, especially the super powers. However, nuclear weapons would remain attractive to these middle power states as a generalized symbol of prestige states, influence as well as instrument of dialogue and negotiation in international politics.

It is therefore a false alarm from the super powers over the nuclear programme of Middle power states. To begin with, it is doubtful if the Middle power states would be able to develop sufficient nuclear weapons with sufficient first-strike penetrability against the defensive capabilities of the super powers. Secondly, the Middle power states do not have sufficient defense capabilities to survive the super powers second strike or retaliatory capabilities, considering the place of technological disparity between them, an example; between Iran and United States or Britain. As such if deterrence capabilities of super powers are not contemplated, it is not necessary for either the

middle power states to attempt to keep pace with them in nuclear sophistication. However, the desire of regional power states, in the case of Iran in the Middle East, would remain a driving motive for nuclearization if it wishes to develop it.

Thirdly, the extent to which the knowledge of nuclear technology is spreading worldwide, no doubt offers new states an opportunity to demonstrate their "arrival" to the club. Today, there are thousands of graduates world-wide in the field of nuclear science and technology as well as easy means of producing nuclear fuel. But even though there is wide spread knowledge of nuclear technology, it is still not possible for individuals or even terrorist groups to produce these devices as is being exaggerated by super power media propaganda.

The fourth argument is that it is difficult to establish with facts that nuclear enrichment means secrete production of nuclear weapons. To suggest so would simply be a matter of political judgment probably based on intelligence report in the case of Iraq which later proved to be false. The Non-Proliferation Treaty technical safeguards may not even be helpful in this regard, if a state is bent on producing weapons. Besides, it is not necessary for any potential proliferating state to evade its legal obligations under the N.P.T. since a party to the N.P.T. may denounce the Treaty on three months' notice. A state with a capable nuclear power industry could simply and quite legally go through all the steps involved in weapon production, beside the actual fabrication of weapons-grade materials such as cascade, prior to denunciation and quickly produce such materials after the expiration of the three month waiting period. For instance, North Korea gave notice of its withdrawal from the N.P.T. on 12 March

1993. Then on 11 June 1993, only a day before its notice was due to take effect, it suspended the effectuation of its withdrawal.

As to whether or not proliferation poses any potential threat to international security now and in the future largely depends on likely changes in the structure of the international system as well as the opportunities that exist to individual states within the system.

More importantly, different ideological perspectives characteristically carry with them differing images of the direction in which the international order is evolving. A state like Iran with Islam as the state ideology would have different if not opposing perspectives of the image and direction of international order from capitalism. Secondly, the power relationships that exist between the super powers and the small power states such as Iran would determine the pace of nuclear proliferation especially in the latter. If the super power especially the United States of America continue with its hostile position against Iran and North Korea, the possibility of these states to denounce their nuclear ambition is unlikely. This is a possibility with other states especially regional power states such as; Venezuela, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa to mention a few.

Conclusion

It is no doubt that nuclear weapon is dangerous of immeasurable destruction if only one looks at its devastating result on Heroshima and Nagasaki (Japan). The debate as to whether or not its proliferation would positively or negatively affect international peace and security will be a continuous academic discourse. To argue that nuclear weapon is means of state power will only encourage global nuclear arms race which would consequently further endanger international peace and security. It is however, conceded that nuclear weapons no matter how small their quantity poses serious threat to the international system. To also acquire nuclear weapon for the purpose or means of political bargain would also be of threat to the global system, since there is the possibility of some ambitious, careless and dictatorial regimes may decide to use it. It is also accepted that those nuclear power states such as the United States of America, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China enjoy some kind of prestige in the international community. And it is on the note that nuclear weapon give states prestige and serves as a mean of deterrence that this paper maintained that nuclear technology will continue to be attractive to other non nuclear states.

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