How successful has the NPT regime been in curbing nuclear proliferation?

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The Second World War saw the first development and indeed the first use of nuclear weapons. The dropping of atomic bombs by the United States Air Force on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 remains the only aggressive use of nuclear weaponry the world has seen. The other great powers of the time soon followed the United State's example and developed their own nuclear weapons. A period of peace followed the war, which many believe was down to the initial spread of nuclear weapons and the risk of mutually assured destruction (Sidhu 2008, 361). Of course, the post war period of peace really only counts as a peace if you count peace as the lack of war between the world's major powers; a realist view (Sagan and Waltz, 1995, 2). However, it was soon realised that the spread of nuclear weapons to more and more states could potentially destabilise regional security dynamics and increase the risk of the weapons getting in to the wrong hands (Khan 2002, 7) Thus the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty was opened for signature in 1968 and came in to force in 1970, its aim being to prevent the spread of nuclear weaponry outside of the 5 declared Nuclear States: the United States, the Soviet Union, the UK, France and China (http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/). Whilst 187 states have signed and ratified the treaty, this essay will argue that its success is questionable and will critique the NPT using case studies and historical evidence.

In the immediate post war years nuclear proliferation did take place, but it was very much divided between the two world blocs. The Americans and the British co-operated with their nuclear programmes, as did to a lesser extent the Soviets and the Chinese. (Zarzecki 2002, 10). Nuclear weapons acted as a barrier to full scale conflict between the major powers but did little to prevent smaller conflicts between the other states that had signed the NPT and did not possess nuclear weapons (Sheehan, 2010, 176). The apparent stability that nuclear weapons provided lead many less powerful states to consider developing them and many started clandestine programmes, notably India and Pakistan. The world had long been suspicious of India and Pakistan, who had never signed the NPT, but many did not believe they did yet had the technology to develop an offensive nuclear capability and so for the time being they were left to pursue their

The end of the Cold War in 1990 brought about a whole new series of problems for the NPT and for nuclear proliferation in general. The disintegration of the Soviet Union added the worry of nuclear bombs going missing in the former Soviet Union. Many worried about a so called "brain drain" of nuclear scientists from the former U.S.S.R. in to states willing to pay them the highest price (Pilat 2007). However, the initial period at the end of the Cold War proved a successful period for the Non Proliferation Treaty. Three former Soviet Satellites; the Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan had been "born nuclear" (Sagan and Waltz, 1995, 1), but rather than choose to keep their nuclear arsenals they chose to sign the NPT and give up the weapons (Sidhu 2008, 362). It could be argued that this choice was not as a direct result of the NPT, but rather as a result of the new states desire to carry favour with the world's new hegemonic power, the United States, which had supported the newly created states' independence and had assisted their fledgling militaries (Carter and Johnson 2001, 68). In a similar fashion Brazil, which had been run by the military until the mid 1980's and Argentina which had been run by a military junta until after the Falklands War, denounced and abandoned their secret nuclear programmes and invited in the International Atomic Energy Agency (Beinhart 1998). Even more pleasing for those supporters of the NPT was the decision by South Africa, which had developed a nuclear deterrent in the 1970's, to give up its weapons. In doing so it became the first state to give up nuclear weapons that it had developed for itself (Sidhu, 2008, 362). Although it undoubtedly had some impact, just

how important the NPT treaty was in these three cases is debatable. Brazil and Argentina's decision to denounce their nuclear programmes was more about a transformation from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracy; whilst South Africa's decision to give up its weapons coincided with its transition from apartheid to majority rule (Beinhart, 1998).

If the early 1990s brought some success for the NPT, then the second half of the decade and the early parts of the 21st century brought it a great many problems. In May 1998 India successfully tested a nuclear weapon in the Rajasthan desert and a few weeks later Pakistan followed with its own successful nuclear test (Beinhart, 1998). These tests confirmed what had been feared for many years, that there were nuclear powers outside of the original five. It also seriously undermined the NPT and destroyed the myth that nuclear weapons would be less significant in the post cold war world (Glinksy 2001, 3). India's choice to develop an offensive nuclear capability can be said to be based on its desire to acquire both more prestige within the international system and a greater level of security within its region (Khan, 2002, 95). India wished to gain the benefits those others in the nuclear "club" receive (Johnson, 2010). It realised that China was not treated with great respect by the West until it developed a nuclear weapon and felt its bargaining power would be increased against Pakistan and other rivals in the region (Khan, 2002, 95). Once Pakistan realised India was attempting to develop a nuclear programme, urgently began work to develop its own. A history of war with its larger neighbour India, lead to the then prime minister of Pakistan Benzair Bhutto to declare that the development of nuclear programme was a matter of "survival" for the country (Sagan and Waltz, 1995, 41). The Pakistan-India situation is a classic example of arms racing and of a regional security complex between regional powers. India sought to gain regional hegemony, which in turn caused Pakistan to fear for its security and develop its own programme.

The last 15 years have also been characterized by an increasingly irrational and determined North Korea. Whilst it had long considered developing a modern nuclear programme, the fall of the Soviet Union meant that North Korea became increasingly isolated within international society leading it to further pursue nuclear development in order to ensure its own security (Sidhu 2008, 368). It's apparent diplomatic brinkmanship and disregard for international protocol have been characterized by its various threats to leave the NPT and it carrying out limited nuclear testing on the Korean peninsula (Mazaar 1996, 103). Whilst it has made itself even more isolated, North Korea has indeed successfully increased its security; it has been treated with a degree of respect by the United States that Iraq, for example, was not given. According to Siegfried Hacker, a prominent scientist and nuclear expert who has visited North Korean nuclear facilities, "the extent and sophistication of North Korea's centrifuge program demonstrates how poorly the NPT and export controls limit a determined proliferator" (Hacker, 2006). The increasing complexity of the North Korean nuclear programme has lead the United States to consider redeploying more of its forces to the region, which would undoubtedly worsen relations with both Pyongyang and Beijing (Krepon, 2001). As this essay is being written relations between the North Korea and the South and its U.S. ally have sunk to an all time low, with artillery fire being exchanged across borders and provocative military exercises taking place.

So if all this seems very bleak for the continued success of the NPT, then another problem that it faces poses a much more complex threat. The NPT was specifically designed to stop states from acquiring nuclear weapons; they key word being 'states'. The NPT is state centric, born out of an era of *real politik* and realism. Kenneth Waltz noted in his analysis of nuclear weapons that "nuclear weapons deter nuclear weapons…the temptation of one *state* to war with another is lessened if its opponent can raise the ante" (Waltz 1979, 188). Increasingly, the problem the NPT faces come in the form of non state actors and its suitability to deal with such problems is at best debatable (Pilat, 2007). A non state actor is much harder to deal with through large multilateral agencies like the IAEA and worryingly in the case of trying to acquire nuclear weapons; they are usually but not always terrorist groups (Sidhu 2008, 368). There is a genuine worry amongst the international community that nuclear missiles in Russia (which are continuously being moved around the countryside) could easily fall in to the hands of Chechen rebels who would use the weapon indiscriminately; without fear of a nuclear retaliation (Allinson 2004). There is also great fear that a weak state which possesses nuclear weapons; such as Pakistan, will be unable to control its nuclear materials. A larger risk is that materials from Pakistan could fall in to the hands of a trans-national terrorist network such as Al-Qa'ida (Johnson 2010 and Sidhu, 2008, 368). Pakistan and especially its former top nuclear scientist A.Q Khan in fact present a very interesting case study on how just one person can be proliferator and cause problems for international society.

A.Q Khan was the nuclear physicist who first developed Pakistan's nuclear bomb, his enemy at the time was India. Like most Pakistanis, he wanted to develop the bomb in order to secure Pakistan's future in the region (Langewiesche 2004). After developing Pakistan's nuclear programme, he freely traded nuclear ideas and technology to the highest bidders. These included Iran, North Korea and Libya. A.Q Khans proliferation network did immeasurable damage to the NPT, and was a startling example of dangerous nuclear technology being available in the private sector, free from state control (Correra, 2004, 5). These discoveries prompted Mohammed El Baredei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency to write in the New York Times that "recent nuclear disclosures show that the system put in place at the height of the cold war to contain nuclear weapons technology has ruptured and can no longer control the new nuclear trade" (Sagner and Broad, 2004). Whilst historically state to state proliferation has existed, Khan presented an entirely new problem as he was willing to proliferate to the highest bidder (Correra, 2004, 5). A rogue, casual and irresponsible proliferator such as Khan is difficult to deal with under the current non proliferation regime, and has perhaps caused it more damage than any other individual.

It is clear then that the Non Proliferation Treaty has enjoyed some success in curbing nuclear proliferation; most states have signed and abide by the rules of the NPT. The number of declared nuclear states has increased only slightly (Sidhu, 363, 2008). Concerns remain about those who have not signed; notably Israel, whose "opaque" nuclear programme causes a problem to the regional security complex in the Middle East (Cohen and Miller, 2010). Regions suffering from prolonged conflict will continue to pose problems for the NPT, as states are more likely to proliferate when they are worried about their security needs. Iran for example is seen as a likely proliferator due to its dual conflicts with Israel and historically with Iraq (Khan, 2002, 283). North Korea continues to play a game of cat and mouse with weapons inspectors and if its clandestine nuclear programme were to improve, Japan, a key non proliferator, may seek its own bomb. The NPT failed to prevent India and Pakistan gaining the bomb; it could all too easily fail again. Whilst some could point to the success of the NPT in the cases of Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, these success were all more to do with regime change (Beinhart 1998). The example of the A.Q Khan network as a non-state actor taking an active role in proliferation is a classic example of how the NPT is not effective at dealing with the problems the post cold war world faces. Article X of the NPT allows states to leave the treaty in case of "extraordinary events", (http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html), and as more and more countries pursue nuclear power, mastering the correct use of uranium, article X could easily see them develop weapons quickly should the situation require it. The NPT has been moderately successful to date, but the range of challenges it faces is now so vast, that the only option is for it to be redesigned.

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