Assessing the Arguments For and Against Nuclear Proliferation

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Nuclear Proliferation in the modern day is one of the most heated topics as a result of, not only the various schools of thought on the topic, but also the fact that the subject has in the end become a critical matter of international security. This paper will aim to explain that, though both views on the proliferation and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons hold very strong arguments, both have weak spots in their claims as well. In order to properly assess the arguments, the paper will surround itself on key issues such as the safety of nuclear deterrence and the effectiveness of disarmament treaties to show the strengths and weaknesses both sides withhold. To start off, the proliferation argument supporting nuclear deterrence will first be briefly explained through the views of Kenneth Waltz. Following, it will then be shown that the views of a nonproliferation advocate, such as Robert Fischer, could easily debunk such a claim. Further on, the weaker nonproliferation argument on the effectiveness the role of nonproliferation treaties has within the international community will be discussed and examined. Finally, this nonproliferation based-argument will then be rebuked by the stronger, John Mearsheimer's case supporting the selective proliferation of nuclear weapons. Essentially, this essay will show that although specific disputes on issues concerning nuclear proliferation can be assessed based upon which one is side is more effective with their argument, the general debate over nuclear disarmament is a more slightly ambiguous one to answer.

For proliferation advocates, such as Kenneth Waltz, nuclear deterrence is one of the greatest, if not one of the best, ways to bring about peace. Nuclear deterrence is seen by Waltz as a state's ability to withhold the means to cancel the gains of an attacker.[1] Waltz basically argues that a deterrent strategy makes it unnecessary for a country to fight for the sake of increasing its security, and that this removes a major cause of war. Henceforth there is the argument that the Cold War is a prime example of how nuclear deterrence brought about one of the longest eras of peace the world had ever seen. The world observed two nuclear powers at their best; not attacking one another, learning to adapt to other nuclear powers, and helping other states evolve into nuclear powers with deterrent strategies, essentially promoting peace through fear. It is the general assumption of Waltz that no matter the number of nuclear states, a nuclear world becomes tolerable when they are able to send deterrent messages out.[2] To Waltz and other proliferation advocates, a select few should not be held above the rest when give nuclear capabilities. In fact, Waltz criticizes Westerners for fearing nuclear weapons will reach the hands of leaders in the Third World. He states that the all rulers want a state to lead and as a result would not threaten that goal by bringing about nuclear war.[3] To sum it up, Waltz argues that nuclear deterrence should be seen as a form of peace that should be available to all states to obtain through the possession of nuclear arms.

Nuclear deterrence can be loosely defined by nonproliferation advocates, as unstable and unreliable way for a state to protect itself through obtaining nuclear weapons. A deterrent strategy is simply a marginal means for pariah states, or states unsuited for their regional environment, use which under vast amounts of regional aggression.[4] 'Prospects for peace in the Middle East would not be enhanced if Iraq as well as Israel both possessed nuclear arsenals, nor would the stability of the Korean Peninsula if both Koreas were nuclear weapon states, and if all were engaged in the inevitable race to get more and better warheads and missiles than their adversaries.'[5] The Cold War itself is not even seen as a time of peace but rather a time of heightened aggression and unbearable anticipation on the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. History even shows that possessing nuclear weapons has hardly prevented a country from attacking another. For example, America's nuclear weapons did not deter Chinese forces from attacking

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American forces at Yalu River, Britain's nuclear weapons did not deter Argentina from seizing the Falkland Islands, nor did the possibility of Israel's possession of a nuclear arsenal prevent Egypt from attacking in 1973.[6] Most importantly the latter shows that miscalculation and fear of nuclear possibilities does not necessarily prevent a country from attacking another.

It is the fact that few of the countries that hold the potential to be a nuclear weapon states (i.e. Iran, Nigeria, Syria) would take the proper precautions against an accidental firing or a terrorist hijacking.[7]This is supported by the fact that many of the potential nuclear weapon states are ruled by capricious autocrats and henceforth hold unstable governments and may not even hold national authority over the entirety of the state. Hence, it is not a question of a Third World state obtaining nuclear weapons rather it is a matter of securing nuclear arms and handling them responsibly. In addition, states in regions such as the Middle East and Southern and Eastern Asia are hardly to be trusted with nuclear capabilities.[8] Unlike states in the Western world who have proved a certain responsibility (implementing nuclear command, control cooperation), states in these regions are considered such a threat not because of deficient technologies or unstable governments, but because these states tend to rely international policies on history, racism, religious fanaticism, and land disputes to justify war.[9] For example, the Pakistani-Indian dispute over the Kashmir region is not at all considered to be a stable one, mostly due to the fact that the two states have rejected the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)[10] and withhold nuclear weapons; thus creating an international dispute rather than an isolated regional matter. Henceforth this only goes to debunk Waltz's theory that rulers will act in the best interests of their people and the future of their nations.

When discussing international institutions and the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, treaties such as the NPT and the Treaty of Tlatelolco immediately come to mind. From a nonproliferation point of view, it is treaties like these that form the 'Nonproliferation Regime,' formed to forever abolish the use of nuclear weaponry.[11] The nonproliferation treaty is seen by nonproliferation advocates as a step towards a nuclear-free world and furthermore confirming that nuclear weapon-free states remain as so. The treaty of Tlatelolco is viewed as a concrete framework for regional treaties on nonproliferation, as it is widely praised for being the first treaty to forever declare a nuclear weapon free zone.[12] Nonproliferation supporters find that international treaties have proven to be more effective than anything else. With International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards monitoring transfers of nuclear weaponry material and inspecting all nuclear activities of member states, nuclear development not only becomes harder to obtain but also less of an international norm to desire to have.[13] In addition, the Nonproliferation Regime itself puts huge restraints on the P5 (United States, United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia) and their future of nuclear development. Nonproliferation theorists see the regime as the reason why the US, UK, and France are slowly starting to dismantle their nuclear arsenals and slowly changing the status quo. Obviously to nonproliferation backers, the treaties created have obviously left a quite positive impact on the international system.

However, these treaties can easily be discredited as being effective in the long run through simply showing observances on the structure of the treaties themselves. For example, the combined facts that not only have not all proliferated states signed the NPT, but the treaty even accepts nuclear proliferation for some states.[14] This ultimately furthers the status quo by retaining a global hierarchy of proliferated states and as a result, makes states question as to why a select few are entrusted with such disastrous means. 'As long as nations maintain nuclear deterrence as essential for protection, it will hard to deny the right to other countries.'[15] In modern day, the world sees that such institutions that promote a status quo to be maintained will always have its dissenters who wish to change the global order. North Korea's indigenously created nuclear capabilities are a testament to the ineffectiveness international institutions will hold over its signatories. Henceforth, the nonproliferation attempts to see global cooperation can only be seen effective when complete disarmament on the account of all states is seen.

In addition, through a more proliferation-bias, these international institutions have done little to ease the spread of nuclear weapons in the world. Besides pressuring superpowers to encourage nonproliferation and to disarm their already massive arsenals,[16] the treaties are simply institutionalizing the concept of selective proliferation into an international norm.[17] Selective proliferation advocates find that nuclear powers should act as models for the 'inevitable spread' of nuclear weaponry as opposed to disarming themselves.[18] Nonproliferation supporter Robert Fischer claims that 'even in the unlikely event of total disarmament, nuclear weapons would hold the existential threat over states deterring nations from resorting to conventional war.'[19] Thus to proliferation advocates, such as

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Mearscheimer and Waltz, such treaties are a waste of time and are simply delaying the inevitable as opposed to helping states learn to live side-by-side with international nuclear proliferation.[20]

As it had been shown through the assessment of specific issues such as nuclear deterrence and international institutions, the argument claiming that nuclear proliferation should be a permanent part of the international community is as well defended and as inconsistent as its counter. It is seen that defending international nuclear deterrence as a reliable and trusted form of peace can be easily deflated by nonproliferation arguments. Entrusting governments throughout the world with heightened nuclear offences is not a form of peace but an escalated tension which brinks on nuclear war. On the other hand, it has been shown that nonproliferation treaties are not exactly preventing such a nuclear war from happening. It is obviously not possible to endorse nuclear nonproliferation through allowing a few to maintain nuclear privileges and to refuse the right to others based upon previously accepted status quos. Henceforth, the point of the assessment of such specific issues was ultimately to show that deciding between proliferation and nonproliferation in the world is not as simple as putting one argument over the other; rather, it is seeing both the strengths and weaknesses of each case that finally shows that the presence of nuclear weapons in the world may not be so one sided.

[1] Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better* (London: Adelphi Papers, 1981)

[2] Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better* (London: Adelphi Papers, 1981)

[3] Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better* (London: Adelphi Papers, 1981)

[4] John Baylis et al., *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217-219

[5] David Fischer, *Towards 1995: The Prospects for Ending the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1993), 3-17

[6] David Fischer, *Towards 1995: The Prospects for Ending the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1993), 3-17

[7] David Fischer, *Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 1992), (8-21)

[8] David Fischer, *Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 1992), (8-21)

[9] David Fischer, *Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 1992), (10-21)

[10] "Nonproliferation Treaty" (The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons), http://www.un.org/events/npt2005/npttreaty.html

[11] Frank Blackaby and Tom Milne, eds. *A Nuclear Weapon-Free World: Steps Along the Way* (New York: St Martin's Press, LLC., 2000), (220-225)

[12] David Fischer, *Towards 1995: The Prospects for Ending the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1993), (81-109)

[13] David Fischer, *Towards 1995: The Prospects for Ending the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1993), (90-110)

[14] "Nonproliferation Treaty" (The Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons), http://www.un.org/events/npt2005/npttreaty.html

[15] David Fischer, *Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 1992), (180-185)

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[16] Christopher Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy* (New York City: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), (145-147)

[17] Gary T. Gardner, *Nuclear Nonproliferation* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), (50-55)

[18] John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," in *International Security* (The MIT Press, 1990), 15

[19] David Fischer, *Stopping the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (London: Routledge, 1992), (174-190)

[20] Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Better* (London: Adelphi Papers, 1981)

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